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Figure 1. Le CERFI

top row: Michel Rostain, Anne Querrien, Numa Murard from left to right; beneath: Patrick Zylberman, Luc Rosenzweig, Gérard Grass, Claude Harmelle; beneath: Claude Rouot, Florence, Pétry, (X the girl friend of Gerard Grass at that time), Hervé Maury; at bottom in front of the group: François Fourquet (Guattari is not there and was perhaps in the USA at that moment).

Author: Simone Brott

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A year ago, I became aware of the historical existence of the group *CERFI—Le centre d'études, de recherches, et de formation institutionnelles*—The Study Center for Intuition Research and Formation. CERFI emerged in 1967 under the hand of Lacanian psychiatrist and Trotskyite activist Félix Guattari, whose antonymous journal *Recherches* chronicled the group's subversive experiences, experiments, and government-sponsored urban projects. The group today will no doubt be viewed as a singularly bizarre meeting of French bureaucracy with militant activist groups, the French intelligentsia, and architectural and planning practitioners at the close of the '60s. Nevertheless, CERFI's analysis of the problems of society was undertaken precisely from the perspective of the State, and the Institute acknowledged a "deep complicity between the intellectual and statesman . . . because the first critics of the State, are officials themselves!"¹ CERFI developed out of *FGERI* (The Federation of Groups for Institutional Study and Research), started by Guattari two years earlier. While FGERI was created for the analysis of mental institutions stemming from Guattari's work at La Borde, an experimental psychiatric clinic, CERFI marks the group's shift toward urbanism—to the interrogation of the city itself. Not only a platform for radical debate on architecture and the city, CERFI was a direct agent in the development of urban planning schemata for new towns in France.² CERFI's founding members were Guattari, the economist and urban theorist François Fourquet, feminist philosopher Liane Mozère, and urban planner and editor of *Multitudes* Anne Querrien—Guattari's close friend and collaborator. The architects Antoine Grumbach, Alain Fabre, Macary, and Janine Joutel were also members, as well as urbanists Bruno Fortier, Rainier Hoddé, and Christian de Portzamparc.³

CERFI was the quintessential social project of post-'68 French urbanism. Located on the Far Left and openly opposed to the Communist Party, this Trotskyist cooperative was able to achieve what other institutions, according to Fourquet, with their "customary devices—the *politburo*, central committee, and the basic cells—had failed to do."⁴ The decentralized institute recognized

¹ François Fourquet, "L'accumulation du pouvoir, Ou le désir d'État," *Recherches* no. 46 (1982). My Translation.

² Anne Querrien, "Interview with Author," 18 September 2010. Anne Querrien, "Cerfi 1965-1987: Centre D'études, de Recherches et de Formation Institutionnelles," *Critical Secret.com*, no. 8-9 (Paris 2002). Until recently, there was almost no literature on CERFI apart from the journal *Recherches* itself—as Anne Querrien revealed, "this story is largely oral."

³ Liane Mozère, "Foucault et le CERFI: Actualité et instantanés," *Le Portique: Revue de philosophie et de sciences humaines* (2004).

⁴ For the quotations from this paragraph, see Fourquet, "L'accumulation du pouvoir, Ou le désir d'État." My Translation.

that any formal integration of the group was to “sign its own death warrant; so it embraced a skein of directors, entangled, forming knots, liquidating all at once, and spinning in an unknown direction, stopping short and returning back to another node” Allergic to the very idea of “party,” CERFI was a creative project of free, hybrid-aesthetic blocs talking and acting together, whose goal was none other than the “transformation of the libidinal economy of the militant revolutionary.” The group believed that by recognizing and affirming a “group unconscious,” as well as their individual unconscious desires, they would be able to avoid the political stalemates and splinter groups of the traditional Left. CERFI thus situated itself “on the side of psychosis”—its confessed goal was to serve rather than repress the utter madness of the urban malaise, because it was only from this mad perspective on the ground that a properly *social* discourse on the city could be forged.

Genealogy of Collective Equipments

In 1972 CERFI held a seminar, *Généalogie des équipements collectifs: les équipements du pouvoir*, as part of its contract with the Ministry of Urbanism to investigate urban questions such as, What is urban? What is desire in the city? What are power relations in public services in cities? A transcript of the intoxicating, four-way discussion between Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, François Fourquet, and Guattari appeared in *Recherches* 13, and was later published as “Equipments of Power: Towns, Territories and Collective Equipments.”⁵ Foucault was central to this little-known, anarchic dialogue which is said to have directly contributed to the culture of *politique de la ville* (urban policy) for deprived neighborhoods in Paris.⁶

In this philosophers’ studio, “collective equipments” is a refrain always on one’s mind, a song which each philosopher sings in a different key. But more than this, “equipments of power” was an important philosophical model for the city which contributed to the *imaginaire urbaine* of France after ’68. Of the four, Foucault is the most lucid. Guattari and Deleuze contribute their anti-oedipal concept of the city as a *corps-sans-organes*—the very year that *Anti-Oedipus* was published, giving rise to the enduring model of the decentralized city-state and of postwar capitalism itself. Fourquet emerges as the outsider.

Deleuze is the first to speak: collective equipments constitute “structures of investment, structures of public service, and structures of assistance or pseudo assistance” in which

⁵ Michel Foucault, Félix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze, and François Fourquet, “Equipments of Power: Towns, Territories and Collective Equipments,” in *Foucault Live: Michel Foucault Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and trans. Lysa Hochroth and John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1996), 105-12. Lion Murard et François Fourquet, “Les équipements du pouvoir,” *Recherches* 13 (1973).

⁶ See Mozère, “Foucault et le CERFI: Actualité et instantanés.”

antagonistic relationships may obtain⁷ The highway, as the equipment of power par excellence, is an investment structure that requires police assistance, but that is policed itself (for Deleuze the “pseudo-assistance” of equipment conceals its primary function of surveillance). Guattari adds further examples: “a thoroughfare, rooms facing a director’s office, the conception of an entranceway, a courtyard.” Yet, “in and of itself, there is no such thing as an equipment: there is a constellation of equipments: just as, in and of itself, there is no such thing as a city, but a constellation of cities.” Collective equipments in the plural form, given by the English translation of Lysa Hochroth, captures Guattari’s and Deleuze’s notion that the city is always multiple, it consists in aggregate structures such as highways, schools, and city buildings. But with Guattari’s caveat, an equipment of power is irreducible to spatialized form. What determines an equipment of power is the production of subjectivity obtained, the “personologization of fluxes,” or in other words, the production of subjects under the reign of equipments.

The title “Genealogy of Equipments” comes from Foucault’s “genealogical method,” borrowed from Nietzsche.⁸ Foucault divorces himself from Hegel’s instrumental model that links historical institutions to an inevitable metaphysics of progress by refusing to assign the birth of a thing, a body, or an institution to its *utility*, to the fulfillment of a need. Rather, Foucault believed that an institution is born by “the takeover by force which generated it, the takeover by force which breaks with all the prevailing systems of use up to that point.”⁹ It is by the chain of processes of subjugation that begins with the christening of a category of *rebutts sociaux* (social rejects), or “*les outsiders*”—thus separated from a population and from normative subjectivity—that a city and its equipments of power take shape.

In Foucault’s soliloquy, “the road” as a collective equipment of power *in extremis* holds urban subjects as prisoners of its signifying regime, defining who will be *legal* and who will be *illegal*. The first function of the road, he states, is to ensure a profit or a surplus of production, which it accomplishes by staging a dangerous face-off between two characters. The first of these is “the agent of power, the tax collector, the payment agent or ‘fiscal agent.’ Facing him, like an antithetical character is the bandit, someone who also subtracts fees, but against the agent of power—the looter.”¹⁰ These are the hostile subjectivities that populate the road as equipment.

⁷ For the quotations from this paragraph, see Deleuze in Michel Foucault, “Equipments of Power: Towns, Territories and Collective Equipments,” 105-6.

⁸ There was also the Genealogy Group which included Foucault, Fourquet, Querrien, Murard, and others. See Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Horace Barnett Samuel (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2003).

⁹ Mozère, “Foucault et le CERFI: Actualité et instantanés.”

¹⁰ For the quotations from this and the subsequent six paragraphs, see Michel Foucault, “Equipments of Power: Towns, Territories and Collective Equipments.” 106-111.

The second function of the road is to produce maximum demand in response to the surplus of production. A road leads to the bazaar, it begets a market place, it transports buyers, sellers, and merchandise. All the rules of sale for Foucault are connected to this function: the location of sale, the prices of commodities, and, most importantly, what can be bought and sold. Here again, two actors face off: on one side “the inspector, the controller, the customs and tollbooth agent,” and “on the other side, the smuggler of contraband goods, the peddler.” We could extend this to the violation of borders in other equipments, such as the delivery of goods and persons into or out of a prison or a building, or across an international border. Evidently, the figure of the pirate or smuggler is not marginal but, rather, essential to Foucauldian equipments. The road emerges as the social borderline incarnate. What quickly manifests is that equipments of power can and must be reversed, and thus activated in this perverse mode that nonetheless sustains equipments. Obversely, in the case of fiscal disobedience, tax evasion, or securities fraud, equipments of power and their codes are hacked by a subject who is no longer a Foucauldian “abnormal,” or accidental outsider, but a willful agent for the reversal of equipments.

Foucault finishes with the third function of the road, which is to “normalize subjects” in order to control production and demand. “The highway ‘consumes’ the cars whose production it ensures” and it thereby installs a chain of stupefied subjects caught in the overall circuit of production. “At one end of the roadway, there is the engineer from Public Works—a regulator, agent, and subject of normality,” represented by the engineering school—“and at the other end, the one who is cut off or ‘off-circuit,’ either because he is ever on-the-move, the vagabond who goes nowhere, or because he is the ‘laggard,’ immobile in his spot, an archaic and wild relic predating the roadway: in both cases, abnormal.” Ergo, the road as equipment divides subjects into normals and abnormals, instituting the line separating the human and the nonhuman, which for Foucault is the real purpose of equipments of power. The separating “line” in Foucault’s terminology does not refer to eviction from the road—in fact, the vagabond’s entire existence is given over to the line. The irony of equipments of power is that by their very discursive mechanism, they project what might be called a *posthuman* architectural subject, who even in his or her privative mode wages a vain yet definitive war against equipments.

Foucault’s 1972 statement on “the road” in 1972, stands in stark contrast to the parallel American architectural discussion surrounding the Venturis’ iconic study of the highway in *Learning from Las Vegas* published the same year. Both texts ostensibly pursue structuralist semiotics but their methods could not be more different. While the Venturian highway parades on the postmodern surface of empty signifiers (i.e., ducks and billboards for Foucault it is the grim subject, rather than the road, who has to wear the signifying coat. And while the American rides the highway in a dream-like, cinematic vessel, locked out of reality—capitalism’s weary spectator—the French group-subject is inseparable from equipments. The contribution of Foucault and Guattari-Deleuze to this discussion is the violence and logic of equipments, in which subjects are physically encoded and embedded within capital itself. Concrete affects and

corporeal fluxes are the very substance of Foucauldian equipments and not merely linguistic signifiers to be decoded by a subject. Equipments such as the Road *turn humans into code* to service (hold up), and not merely serve, state capitalism.

Act Two: The City

The second act of “Equipments of Power” opens, “Is the City a Productive or Anti-Productive Force?” Guattari proffers, “the city is a point in time where there is a density of equipments . . . it is a body-without-organs-city.” At a certain threshold of equipments, the fluxes, flows of capital, and bodies crystallize in an economic center (a “capital”) or a “city-military town,” these being the first two organizing types and purposes of cities. The city-military town is reached at a threshold of territoriality wherein equipments are realized; it is what Guattari calls the reterritorialization of fluxes in the making of political power. For Guattari “collective equipments are the social unconscious” of the city.

Fourquet, silent until now, says the city “joins all these fluxes,” as if it was a film editing machine, and “cuts them and re-cuts them every which way.” In his mind, the function of collective equipments is to record and fix, and therefore paralyze the fluxes: “There is no other social machine.” In Guattari’s mind, however, only in the “despotic city” are equipments anti-productive in an “overcoding” that seeks to master or freeze the productive fluxes. The anti-productive politics of the despotic city, Guattari adds, “soon explode into a thousand pieces which are productive entities, collective equipments.” Anti-production, in other words, is still production, because the reterritorialization of power is always reversed by these micro-subjectivities that deterritorialize the center.

Fourquet describes the insatiable hunger or “excess of the despot who measures the fluxes . . . After the emergence of the city, we only see the monstrous body of the State (Egypt, Sumeria) and its military bulimia.” For Guattari, it is indigestion rather than bulimia: “the city is a spatial projection, a form of reterritorialization, of blockage. The original despotic city is a military camp where soldiers are enclosed to prevent the flux of soldiers from spreading out.” As we learn from Guattari, the city always fights back: “the activated fluxes begin to function, to turn around. These are collective equipments. They start working all by themselves. They disperse and swarm about. The collective equipment is there to hold something that, by its very nature, cannot be held.” The repressive regimes which attempt to convert the fluxes into equipments backfire because under the despotic rule of subjects, equipments take revenge on the system, liberating a non-sentient subjectivity irreducible to the despot, the socius, the architect, or the philosopher—that lies in the newly deterritorialized equipments.

Three positions on urban subjectivity can be identified from this genealogy. For Foucault, it is a duel between the normative, *capitalist* subject who respectively pays or collects money in relation to an equipment (like the road), and the *vagabond* who we might imagine both sleeps

under and has fallen off the road, thus becoming pathological. To these we add the *smuggler* on the wrong side of the state who is engaged in a daily code war. For Deleuze and Guattari, urban subjectivity is a multitude of troops, each molecule of the army captured within its military container, its equipment. But at a certain density of troops, equipments begin to mobilize against the state, permitting the fluxes to circulate unobstructed. It is at this point that a city establishes itself: its citizens are former troops. For Fourquet, the city-military town is a carnivorous extension of the city-state in which equipments are ineluctable, and the fluxes irretrievable. Deleuze's and Guattari's alternate vision encapsulates both these processes in the city's circuitry: territorializations in the formation of the state, and deterritorializations by the reversal of flux, toward a decoded subjectivity.

The End of CERFI

Querrien describes CERFI as having “exploded” by the mid-eighties, heralding the death of the radical micro-institution—and the end of '68 and its social project as *epistème*—not only in France, but in North America and the world over. The span of CERFI coincides with that of the New York Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS)—both began in 1967 and ended in 1985; and both were premised on concrete urban and architectural activism.¹¹ “Equipments of Power,” however, never made it across the Atlantic.

In March of 1982, *Skyline*, IAUS's serial, published the landmark interview of Foucault on architecture and power by American anthropologist Paul Rabinow. The role of IAUS in introducing European theorists and architects to an American audience is well known, as is the architectural circulation of Foucault's ideas in the North American academy. The reception of the concept “heterotopia” from “Des espaces autres: Hétérotopies” in 1967, subsequently analyzed by Georges Teyssot, gave voice to Foucault's radical philosophy on architecture and urbanism, and its complicity in the state-control of subjectivity. Yet the translation of Foucault via IAUS contributed to the dominant Italophilic American version of Foucauldianism, with its connections to the Venice School of Manfredo Tafuri and the Italian Marxists. Their efforts to deconstruct architectural history and its utopian fantasies were largely sustained by semiotics and language, as manifested in the pages of IAUS's journal *Oppositions*.

Foucault was aware of this dialectic that his work generates: in the Rabinow/*Skyline* interview, he states that in his theory of the “spatialization” of knowledge and power, architecture is not a signifier for power but the *technè*—set of techniques for practicing “social organization.”¹² This elaborate architectural enactment, the betrayal of Foucault's radical project in the dominant

¹¹ Nevertheless, they were still very different institutions. For more on IAUS, see Sylvia Lavin, “IAUS: Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies,” *Log* 12/13, New York: Anycorp (Fall 2008): 154-58.

¹² Michel Foucault, Paul Rabinow, and Translated by Christian Hubert, “Space, Knowledge, and Power,” *Skyline* (March 1982).

American reception, not only eclipsed the French work of CERFI, but also the other lesser-known Italian *Autonomia* movement.

In Italy, Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari were developing the idea of architecture as “equipment” and substituting the prevailing postmodernist discourse of architecture as “the space of representation” with *agencements collectif*—collective arrangements or “machines” for the creative generation of subjectivity.¹³ The question is as relevant now as it was twenty years ago with the contemporary evacuation of the question of subjectivity. The hegemony of digital formalisms, and the neo-Darwinian, architectural strains based on Deleuze emptied of the subject, makes all the more pressing the enterprise of architectural subjectivization begun by Foucault. If the iconic project of the last ten years is a mirror for the dominant subjectivities of twenty-first-century capitalism, on the other side of the mirror are non-human equipments of urban surveillance, incarceration, and biological control, whose sinister genealogy is not only the military takeover of cities and civilian life, but the terrifying Deleuzo-Guattarian agencies of the equipments themselves as they self-actuate, propelled, like a selfish gene. For under the thrall of liberalism *now* and the haze of a resurgent modernism, violent urbanism and its equipments thrive.

¹³ For a history of *Autonomia*, see Simone Brott, “Deleuze and the Intercessors,” *Log*, no. 19, New York: Anycorp (Winter 2010).