CAPITAL

Julie Pagis

May '68

Shaping Political Generations

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May '68

Shaping Political Generations

Julie Pagis

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Laboratoire d'Excellence
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Transformation de l'Etat
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To Agnes and Jean-Jacques,
my parents

Table of contents

List of text boxes, figures and tables

Tables

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List of acronyms and political organisations

1986 movement	Student movement protesting against the reforms to the university system proposed by the then Minister for Higher Education Alain Devaquet. They were concerned that the proposal would mean entry selection, an increase in tuition fees, and a double standard university system. Jacques Chirac, the President, ultimately withdrew the bill and Devaquet resigned.
1995 movement	1995 saw the most significant strikes since May'68. They were held in protest against the then Prime Minister Alain Juppé's plan to reform the retirement system, pensions and social security. These strikes affected public transport, as well as major public administrations (the postal service, telecom services, electricity and gas, national education, hospitals, finances etc.). At its height, the movement attracted two million demonstrators.
ACO	Action Catholique Ouvrière. (Catholic Workers Action). The ACO is an organisation that aims to bring Catholicism to the workers through grassroots evangelism. It was founded in 1950.
AEAR	Association des écrivains et artistes révolutionnaires (Revolutionary Artists and Writers Association). This association of Communist writers and artists was founded as the French section of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers established by the Soviet Comintern in 1930.
Antifa	Action Antifasciste (Antifascist action) This is an extreme-left current of "autonomous" collectives that organise demonstration, reflection and sometimes violent action against fascism.
Attac	Association pour la Taxation des Transactions financières et pour l'Action Citoyenne (Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions and Citizen's Action) is an activist network that opposes neo-liberal dominance in globalisation.
CAL	Comités d'Action Lycéen (High-school Action Committees) Committees based in secondary schools (Lycées) responsible for organising demonstrations, barricading and sit-ins. They played an important role in May 68 in mobilising younger students.
CFDT	Confédération française démocratique du travail (French Democratic Confederation of Labour). One of the five major national trade unions in France, it is left-wing, and was born of the secularisation of the CFTC (French Confederation of Christian Workers) in 1964.

CGT   Confédération générale du travail (General Confederation of Labour). One of the five major national trade unions in France, with historical links to the Communist party.

CLEOP   Comité de liaison étudiants ouvriers paysans (Student workers peasants' liaison committee)

CPE   Contrat première embauche (First employment contract). In Spring 2008, then Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin attempted to push through the introduction of an employment contract specifically for young people that would have seen made it easier to fire a young employee in the first two years. It provoked widespread opposition and demonstrations particularly among young people. The government ultimately withdrew the proposal.

CVB   Comité Vietnam de Base (Rank and File Vietnam Committees). Radical grassroots action groups aiming to raise awareness about the situation in Vietnam through posters, placards, brochures, and selling the "Vietnam Courrier" newspaper in marketplaces.

CVN   Comité Vietnam National (National Vietnam Committee) Trotskyist committees (linked to the JCR and more visible than the CVB due to meetings that attracted public and media attention.

DAL   Droit au logement (Right to housing) A non-profit organization created in 1990 to defend housing rights for the homeless and those in poor housing, in the name of the legal right to housing inscribed by French law.

EE   The Ecole Emancipée (Emancipated School) movement claims to be the oldest current in French unionism, dating back to 1910. More recently, it has been an important current in the FEN teachers' union. It combines extreme-left positions with alternative pedagogy (Freinet) in the goal of changing society through the school system.

FEN   Fédération de l'éducation nationale (Federation for National Education) A federation of teaching unions that existed between 1929 and 2000. There were a number of factions within it, particularly "Unity independence and democracy," close to the Socialists, "Unity and Action," close to the Communists, and the "Emancipated School" close to the far left.

FGEL   Fédération des groupes d'études de lettres (Federation of Humanities Study Groups) Groups that brought together activists from the UNEF student union particularly at the Sorbonne. Contributed to the formation of the MAU.

FGERI   Fédération des groupes d'études et de recherches institutionnelles (Federation of institutional relations study groups). A collective of

	interdisciplinary research groups in different disciplines, inspired by Félix Guattari's approach in the experimental clinic La Borde. It was founded in 1964 and in 1967 it was replaced by an association named the Centre d'étude, de recherche et de formation institutionnelles (CERFI), which still exists today.
Francas	Fédération Nationale des Francas (The national federation of Francas) A popular education non-profit youth organisation founded in 1944, designed to complement the school system through holiday programmes, and out of school hours activities, in order to provide opportunities for children from all backgrounds and thus work towards social justice.
FSU	Fédération Syndicale Unitaire (Unitary Union Federation). This is one of the major unions in the education and public sectors today. It was formed in 1992 out of a schism within the FEN.
FUA	Front universitaire antifasciste (Antifascist University Front). Founded in reaction to the putsch in Algiers in 1961, this group was organized by Trotskyist students from the Sorbonne, federating various antifascist action committees among high school and university students that had been set up since the 1950s. It advocated radical opposition to the extreme-right, including the use of violence. It paved the way for the JCR that would emerge in 1966.
GP	Gauche prolétarienne (Proletarian Left) A Mao-spontex movement established in 1968, inspired by the May 22 anti-authoritarian movement and the UJC(ml), when these two organisations were banned by government decree in 1968.
JAC	Jeunesse Agricole catholique (Rural Catholic Youth) Founded in 1929, initially intended to evangelise rural and farming milieus, it also allowed farmers to organise themselves professionally (health insurances, cooperatives, unions). It was replaced by the MRJC in 1965.
JC	La Jeunesse communiste (Communist Youth) is the political youth group of the French Communist Party/
JCR	Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire (Communist Revolutionary Youth). Born of the expulsion of "entryist" far-leftists from the UEC in 1965. Involved in the anti-Vietnam war committees, high-school action committees (CAL), and antifascism. They were also motivated by anti-colonialism and internationalism. JCR activists were very much involved in the March 22 Movement, and on the barricades and in confrontations during May '68. It was officially disbanded by government decree on June 12, 1968 as part of the law against radical and armed political groups.

JEC   Jeunesses étudiante chrétienne (Young Christian Students) The group
                         originated in France but is now a worldwide movement. It encourages
                         Christian students to associate social responsibility and faith.
                         During the 1960s the JEC criticised France's opposition to Algerian
                         independence and the use of torture.

JOC   Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne (Young Christian Workers) Originating
                         in Belgium in the 1920s, this movement spread to a number of
                         countries including France. The goal was to reconcile the Church with
                         the industrial workers of the world, and to bring Catholicism to the
                         working classes.

Larzac   The fight for Larzac was a ten-year long protest movement which
                         began with farmers opposing an extension to a military base on the
                         Larzac plateau (in the south of France). From 1973 it attracted support
                         from a much wider group of activists, with rallies in 1974 numbering
                         up to 100,000. The movement became a symbol of wider resistance
                         to the Pompidou government and ended in 1981 when François
                         Mitterrand announced the project would be abandoned.

LCR   Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (Communist Revolutionary
                         League) A Trotskyist political party in France, it was the French
                         division of the Fourth International. It was formed after the JCR
                         was banned in 1968. It published a weekly newspaper called
                         "Rouge" (Red). It officially abolished itself in 2009 to form the New
                         Anticapitalist Party.

Lip   The Lip factory was a watch and clock company that was shut down
                         in the late 1960s due to financial problems. After strikes and factory
                         sit-ins, the factory was taken over by workers as a project in workers'
                         self-management in 1973. The factory was liquidated again in 1976
                         which led to a second round of protests.

LO   Lutte ouvrière (Workers' Struggle) A Trotskyist political party. Due to
                         tensions between this group and the PCF, the LO (and its predecessor
                         Voix Ouvrière, VO, Workers' Voice) adopted semi-clandestine tactics to
                         distribute bulletins in factories. The LO was established after the VO
                         was banned in the wake of May '68. It continues to run presidential
                         candidates today.

March 22 movement A student movement that began at the University of Nanterre on
                         March 22, 1968 and led to a prolonged sit-in of the administration
                         building. It was led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, among others, and
                         brought together anarchists, situationists, and Trotskyists. Based
                         both on opposition to the Vietnam War, demand for greater everyday
                         autonomy among students, and an end to sex-segregation in dorms, it

was one of the key elements that led to the events of May '68. It was also banned in the presidential decree of June 1968.

MAU	Mouvement d'action universitaire (University Action Movement). Created by activists from the FGEL at the Sorbonne which felt that traditional union structures were no longer appropriate after the March 22 movement. It attempted to provide a unified framework for immediate action, in order to move beyond traditional organisational structures. They sought to move from "a critique of politics to critical politics."
MLAC	Mouvement pour la liberté de l'avortement et de la contraception (Movement for free access to abortion and contraception). Created in 1973, this organisation aimed to legalise abortion in France. It was dissolved in 1975 after the Veil law legalised abortion.
MLF	Mouvement de liberation des femmes (Women's liberation movement) Formed in the wake of the American Women's Lib movement and May '68, this movement aims to gain access to reproductive rights for women, as well as the fight against misogyny and all forms of oppression of women.
MRJC	Mouvement rural de jeunesse chrétienne (Rural Christian Youth Movement) A movement run by young Christians aged between 13 and 16 years old. It claims to be motivated by goals of social justice and equality. It is one of the only movements to be entirely run by and for young people.
NRP	Nouvelle resistance populaire (New Popular Resistance) Created as the armed wing of the GP following the death of an activist killed during an intervention in a factory in 1972. However, the GP refused the use of violent action and the NRP remained nonviolent until the GP was banned in 1973.
OCI	Organisation communiste internationale (International Communist Organisation) Born of the Trotskyist International Communist Party in the 1967, it was also banned in the wake of May '68 but later revived.
OG	Opposition de Gauche (Left Opposition) An organisation founded by Félix Guattari around anti-psychiatry.
Panthères Roses	(Pink Panthers) This is an international LGBT organisation created in Montreal in the 2000s. It fights against homophobia, sexism, transphobia, racism and classism.
PCF	Parti communiste français (French Communist Party) The PCF remains a strong political force in France, although it has declined in recent decades. During May '68, the PCF supported the workers' strikes but were critical of the revolutionary student movements.

PLR	Prolétaire ligne rouge (Proletarian Red Line) A Maoist group founded in 1970.
PSU	Parti socialiste unifié (Unified Socialist Party) This party was formed in 1960 through the union of two socialist autonomous parties. Unlike other socialist parties at the time, it supported the student movements during May '68. As self-management was part of its platform it also supported the self-management movement at the Lip Factory.
Ras l'Front	This is an extreme-left antifascist network created in 1980 to combat the rise of the Front National in France.
RESF	Reseau education sans frontières (Education without borders network) A support network for undocumented immigrant families with children enrolled in French schools, as well as for young adult undocumented migrants.
Scalp-Reflex	Section carrément anti-Le Pen (Completely anti-Le Pen Group) An anti-fascist and anarchist group that developed during the 1980s and was associated with violent actions (or attempted actions). It published a revue called REFLEX which is an acronym for the French of 'study network on fascism and the fight against xenophobia and the extreme right'.
SGEN-CFDT	Syndicat Général de l'Education nationale – CFDT (National Education Sector General Union) A union federation affiliated with the CFDT, drawing its membership base from all kinds of employees within the national education system (teachers, researchers, lecturers, but also ministerial personnel, librarians etc.)
SNECMA	Snecma is a French public aeronautical company that has been subject to a number of strikes, with workers protesting against insufficient pay increases and dismissals of workers.
SNI	Syndicat National des instituteurs (National Primary School Teachers Union) Between 1920 and 1992 this was the main union for primary school teachers in France.
Socialisme ou barbarie	(Socialism or Barbarianism) A French non-Stalinist Marxist group founded in 1948 whose members included workers as well as intellectuals such as Cornelius Castoriadis, Guy Debord and many others. They produced a journal of the same name from 1949.
SUD	Solidaires Unitaires Démocratiques (Solidarity, unity, democracy) A trade union federation favouring progressive views and working with the anti-globalization movement, created in 1981. It operates unionism based on struggle, in opposition to the more reformist unions like the CFDT.

UCMLF	Union des communistes marxistes léninistes de France (Union of French Marxist Leninist Communists) A Maoist group between 1963 and 1985, it was opposed to other far-left groups of the time, including the GP.
UEC	Union des étudiants communistes (Union of Communist Students) Independent of but close to the PCF, particularly on student issues. In 1965 the UEC expelled a number of members, accused of being "entryists," extreme-left activists, who were excluded for refusing to support François Mitterrand's candidacy for the presidential election and for their support of Trotskyism. This expulsion led to the creation of the JCR (trotskiste) on one hand and the UJCml (maoïste) on the other.
UGE	Union des Grandes Ecoles. This union was established in 1974, independently of the major student union, UNEF, to specifically address students from the elite universities, management and business schools known in France as the Grandes Ecoles. After May '68 the UGE was entirely integrated into UNEF.
UJCml	Union des jeunesses communistes marxistes-leninistes (Union of Communist Marxist-Leninist Youth) A maoist organisation born in 1966 of the expulsion of the maoïsts students of the UEC, the UJCml absorbed most of the UEC's members at the Ecole Normale Supérieur in Paris. Banned in 1968 by government decree, it led to the emergence of the GP.
UNEF	Union nationale des étudiants de France (French National Student Union) is the main national students' union in France, working to present the interests of students in both the national and European political spheres.
Vie nouvelle	Vie Nouvelle (New Life) is an independent popular education organisation, founded in 1947. Its objective is to help its members achieve self-fulfilment while working to improve society. Its philosophy is based in Christian humanism and it works towards equality, justice, inclusion and an end to poverty.

Introduction

"Let's stop everything!
Let's think about it!
And it'll be a blast!"[1]

Why do we so rarely think about what preserves the social order? Perhaps the cost of such reflection is too high, perhaps it is better to not think about it, rather than have to face one's own powerlessness. And yet, if we all simultaneously stopped doing what we are doing – and followed the utopian instructions of *l'An 01* in the epigraph above – this order would be brutally thrown into question, and each of us would realise how much we contribute to maintaining it. The social world does not lend itself to the kind of experiments that are popular among physicists, which momentarily suspend a particular force in order to analyse its nature and effects. But there are rare historical moments that come close to this, during which the established order trembles, ordinary time and social laws are temporarily suspended, and everything that is ordinarily self-evident is thrown into question. These situations constitute veritable experiments, spyholes into the wings of the social world, which reveal the arbitrary and habitually hidden nature of its foundations. During such events, the present and the future are no longer the simple continuation of the past: everything becomes – temporarily – possible. This is particularly true for those participants who share the feeling that they are making history, that they are historical actors and no longer simply bystanders. In these moments, the dialectic between biography and history – do we shape history or are we shaped by it? – takes an unusual turn; it becomes disjointed, as the event destabilises the course of individual and collective destinies.

Is that what an "event" is? A "de-fatalizing" conjuncture that shakes the established order and modifies the course of existence, to the point where one or several cohorts are transformed into "political generations?" This is one of the questions that motivated my work on the events that took place in France during May and June of 1968, and on the biographical consequences for those who participated in them. Who are the people who brought about

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1   Gébé, *L'An 01*, Paris, Éditions du Square, 1972. This comic was originally published as a regular strip in the alternative newspapers Politique Hebdo and then Charlie Hebdo. It traces a popular utopian project, the first resolution of which is "We stop everything". It became an emblematic reference for this period and was later made into a film (1973).

May '68? Why and how did their individual trajectories resonate with history? Did the course of their existence change as a result? Do they still bear the marks of these events? Did their children inherit these marks?

In more prosaic terms, the goals of my exploration into the effects of May '68, are also rooted in my own personal experiences as the daughter of *soixante-huitards*[2] ('68ers). I should have grown up in a middle-class inner-city family, but instead I had a country life, complete with goats' cheese and the rejection of consumerism. I learnt to write "farmers" on the school forms asking for my parents' professions, understanding only later that they were not ordinary farmers.

The autobiographical origins of my research

I am a daughter of the "neo-rural" shift (Léger, 1979), born in 1980 on a farm at the foot of Mount Ventoux in Provence. My parents, both agronomical engineers, resigned in 1974 from the departmental services in Marseille where they worked, to move to a farm in the Drôme region in south-east France.[3] From urban engineers, they became apprentice peasants in a rural village of five hundred people. They raised goats there for nearly twenty-five years. This professional and biographical sea change can be imputed – among other factors – to the events of May '68. Agnes[4] (my mother), was then a student in Toulouse, close to the situationists[5] and active within the Students Workers Peasants Liaison Committee (CLEOP). In the years that followed she participated in various post-'68 movements (environmentalism, the anti-nuclear movement, feminism, the protest movement in Larzac[6] etc.). She also adopted the "critical renovation of everyday life" (Mauger, 1999,

2   In French, the people who participated in May '68 are referred to as "soixante-huitards", literally "sixty-eighters". Here we will refer to them as '68ers.

3   My father (born in 1944) and my mother (born in 1948) had worked for several years for the Departmental Facilities Service (Direction départementale de l'équipement – DDE) and the Departmental Agricultural Service (Direction départementale de l'agriculture DDA).

4   I call my parents by their first names, a trait that I share with half of the children of '68ers interviewed for this study (see Chapter 5).

5   The situationists movement was an international revolutionary movement prominent in France between the late 1950s and early 1970s. The most famous books associated with this movement are Guy Debord's The Society of Spectacle, and Raoul Vaneigem's The Revolution of Everyday Life.

6   This was a resistance movement that began in 1971 in opposition to the commandeering of a large portion of the Larzac plateau in the south of France for the extension of a military training base, which took on a "back-to-the-land" alternative lifestyle dimension.

p. 235) by living in a commune in Marseille in the early 1970s. That was where she met Jean-Jacques (my father), who had watched the events of May '68 from a distance, and who only became political in the years that followed, via anti-imperialist movements, and a period of cooperation in Nicaragua. Their dream of taking political action through their profession was rapidly quashed against the rigidity of the institutions in which they worked, and their project of going "back-to-the-land" stemmed in part from the disconnection between their aspirations and the actual possibilities of satisfying them.[7] As children of the intellectual bourgeoisie,[8] my parents were therefore among those whose post-'68 experiences have been referred to as the "betrayal of the inheritors," who, unable to change life in general, at least managed to change the course of their own (Léger and Hervieu, 1978, p. 69). In their case, this reconversion marked a durable and definitive break from their probable destinies, and as a result, a break from those of the 'second generation.'

My brother and I went to the local village school where, for many of our classmates, we were 'hippy kids'; we were dirty, we smelt of goat, we slept with the pigs and brought lice to school. My own investment in school can be seen as a way of rebelling against this form of stigmatisation that we were subject to. Academic excellence enabled me to more or less consciously take revenge for my stigma of illegitimacy and my marginalisation. I only found the words to express this experience much later, particularly in reading the novels of Annie Ernaux, who as a child rebelled against domination through academic excellence[9] (Ernaux, 2003, p. 66-67).

I always loved school and it repaid me well because I was always the top of my class – all the way to my entry into the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Paris, in biology. Although this acculturation socialised me to the dominant academic norms, in the family sphere I had interiorised a system of countercultural dispositions, a veritable rejection of conformity and of the bourgeoisie. These two dimensions of a fractured habitus found

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7   Jean-Jacques tried in vain to incorporate environmental questions into urban development, and Agnes dreamed of participating in the agrarian reform in Cuba, and living her politics through agriculture.

8   My paternal grandfather, a left-wing Catholic, was a high school principal. My maternal grandfather, a Hungarian Jewish refugee, met my grandmother (who was a Resistance fighter and came from the bourgeoisie in Lyon), during the war. After several professional failings, he created a successful business (in office supplies). This success however did not prevent him remaining close to the intellectual spheres of former resistance members and communist sympathisers.

9   In my case however, these early experiences of stigmatisation were less directly linked to class differences than to cultural differences between the established and outsiders (Elias et Scotson, 1965).

no room for expression at the ENS, where I felt that I did not fully belong, and where I progressively experienced the prospect of a scientific career as a kind of symbolic amputation. The ENS Diploma was a symbol of successful social revenge, but it by no means shed any light on 'my place', nor on the possible coexistence of these dissonant dispositions. Moving into sociology and undertaking a PhD on the biographical consequences of activism during May '68 was probably a way of pursuing my academic trajectory whilst reconciling myself (with myself) by putting my academic and intellectual abilities at the service of a subject dear to my heart.

Partially unsatisfying representations of May '68

My academic interest in May '68 evolved on the basis of a surprising dissonance between my experience of '68ers, being a "child of '68ers" myself, and the representations of these categories that emerged in literature, the media, but also in academic work. Here, I will provide a brief critical synthesis of these representations of May '68.[10]

With the exception of a recent rise in interest and studies in this area, the rarity of empirically founded academic research on May '68 is in stark contrast to the plethora of essays and interpretations of the events. This contributes to progressively burying the historical and social reality of this period under successive layers of interpretation.[11] Thus the fight for the monopoly over the legitimate definition of May '68 began immediately after the events, and would continue to be constantly fed, with peaks of interest and production at each ten-year anniversary (Rioux, 1989). Over the years, the reconstruction of the history of the events and the solidification of a genuine doxa on May '68 became founded on an opposition between the much-exalted version of the events, "the lovely month of May, peaceful and painless," and the excoriated extreme-left version and its Marxist ideology (Sommier, 1994). This denunciation – and de-legitimisation – of the political extreme-left thus contributed to a final reading of the history of May '68 that proposed (imposed) an amusing, pacified representation, constructed around several mediatised figures.

10   An exhaustive presentation of this literature would constitute a research programme in its own right – already partially accomplished elsewhere (cf. Gobille, 2003, Chapter 1; Gruel, 2004, Chapter 1; Mauger, 2008).
11   Philippe Bénéton and Jean Touchard had already documented more than a hundred different interpretations in 1970 (Bénéton and Touchard, 1970).

Something similar happened in the United States when a number of former activists from the 1960s were depicted in the media in the 1970s and 1980s as "yuppie opportunists." Figures like Jerry Rubin, Eldridge Cleaver or Tom Hayden – or Serge July, André Glucksmann and Olivier Rolin in France – cast a long shadow on the destinies of all those activists who, because they did not become famous and did not rise to prominence in publishing or journalism, did not attract public attention (Gitlin, 1987). For Doug McAdam, these media figures were taken up in the collective imagination because they helped to more easily disqualify a particular version of the past (McAdam, 1989, p. 745). Similar ways of justifying de-politicisation, by reducing radical activism to "non-serious" or "youth" activities also occurred in the context of May '68 in France.

During the 1980s, this work of reconstructing the memory of May '68, founded on the selection of certain events and destinies, and the relegation of others, was reinforced around the invention of a "generation '68." The publication of *Génération* (Hamon and Rotman, 1987, 1988) contributed to the banalisation and mediatisation of this label, effectively erasing the experiences of more ordinary participants. It also reinforced the representation of an opportunistic generation, uniformly and successfully converted to liberalism-libertarianism (Thibaud, 1978), and which now occupied powerful positions in politics, the media, and literature.[12] In the face of such broadly unsatisfying literature, one of the initial motivations of this research was to deconstruct the "generation '68" category. To do this, I wanted to use empirical evidence revealing the different micro-units within the generation, which could not be reduced to a univocal interpretation.

In the academic sphere, after twenty-five years during which the events of May-June 1968 provoked scant scientific interest,[13] historians began to make it a subject of their research from the beginning of the 1990s (Mouriaux, Percheron, Prost and Tartakowsky, 1992; Dreyfus-Armand, Frank, Levy and Zancarini-Fournel, 2000). In the early 2000s there was renewed interest and an increase in scientific work in this area, primarily produced by young researchers.[14] Xavier Vigna's work provided a welcome

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12   This characterisation of "generation '68" was to durably mark the representations of this event, feeding both the hagiographic essays, but also pamphlets such as the "Open letter to those who went from Mao to the Rotary Club": "*Lettre ouverte à ceux qui sont passés du col Mao au Rotary*" (Hocquenghem, 2003 [1986])

13   Except for a few interpretations "in the heat of the moment" and some rare later works (Mauger and Fossé, 1977; Lacroix, 1981).

14   Although she is not a member of this younger generation, Kristin Ross also participated in this renewed attention. See in particular the book by Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

remedy to the historiographical deficit on the workers' movement in May '68 (Vigna, 2007), and Ivan Bruneau's study on the Peasants Confederation (Confédération Paysanne) shed new light on the participation of peasant workers in these events (Bruneau, 2006). These studies allow us to question the connections made between students, workers and peasants, which had previously been more objects of fantasy than of empirical study. Boris Gobille's PhD thesis provided precious material concerning the writers of May '68 and his theoretical approach provided a renewed perspective on this past more generally. Gobille encouraged the production of a socio-history of the short term (Gobille, 2008) that does not reduce the short term (events) to the long term (trajectories), and that is the approach this book also adopts. Finally, several collective books published for the fortieth anniversary of May '68 provided new material for this field of research.[15]

At the beginning of my investigation, the term "child of '68ers" had not (yet) been coined, and no academic study had focused on the question of the family transmission of the memory of these events (see, however, Birnbaum, 2005), or the destiny of these "children of." I was not, however, surprised to see a range of essays, articles, novels, documentaries, and films emerge on this subject for the anniversary of the events in 2008.[16] In the vast majority of these productions, we find a certain number of over simplistic clichés, once again built on a handful of trajectories set up as the legitimate inheritors of this past. Although Virginie Linhart denies that she sought to 'settle the score' with her parents,[17] this is not the case for many authors who have been publishing pamphlets on their parent's generations for a decade now, accusing them of every ill imaginable. For example, they accuse them of disavowing their past ideals, stealing their children's childhoods, refusing to transmit anything to their children, and bringing them up without limits (Taillandier, 2001; Buisson, 2001; Bawin-Legros, 2008). Often fuelled by the resentment of their authors, these publications present an image of the children of '68ers as being disenchanted, sacrificed, depoliticised, individualist, or even simply as an unremarkable generation. This was an image with which I could not identify at all.

15   See, in particular, three collective contributions, which provide both empirical elements and a new perspective on the events of May-Jun '68 for the 20th century (Damamme, Gobille, Matonti and Pudal, 2008; Artières and Zancarini-Fournel, 2008; Savoir/Agir, 2008).

16   I myself participated in this movement by co-authoring a documentary entitled, "The Children of Utopia", (*Les Enfants de l'utopie*), which screened on French television on 15 April 2008.

17   Virginie Linhart is the daughter of Robert Linhart, who was the Maoist leader of the Union of Communist Marxist-Leninist Youth (UJCml). In 2008, she published a novel on her childhood, and that of a dozen other children whose parents were friends with her father (Linhart, 2008).

The biographical consequences of activism in May '68

Two important issues underpin the reflection in this book: on one hand, the encounters between individual trajectories and political events, and on the other, the impact of participating in the events of May '68 on two generations within a family. Both of these issues are rooted in the sociology of (political and familial) generations and the relations between generations.

By what processes, and in what socio-historical conditions, do one or several cohort(s) become a "political generation?" For Karl Mannheim, the driving connections within a generation lie in its members' shared exposure to the "social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic destabilisation" (Mannheim, 1972. [1928] p. 303). This definition raises a number of questions however. Were the different participants all exposed to the political crisis of May '68 in the same way? Are the shifts that have occurred in their trajectories dependent on what they were before the event? Do they still bear the marks of this past engagement thirty-five years later? If they do, how can we account for this?

Answers to some of these questions provide the context for this research perspective, which follows Doug McAdam's approach in his study of American civil rights activists, which led to the publication of his book Freedom Summer.[18]

Generating the 'generations of '68'

It would be impossible to account for the biographical impacts of activism without firstly going back to what this activism is the product of. In other words, any study seeking to outline the form of a (hypothetical) "generation of '68" cannot ignore the analysis of the joint effects of life cycle, cohort, and period.[19] The articulation of these factors prior to 1968 contributed to the modes of "generating generations" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 373-427; Sayad, 1994). Yet the sociology of generations often has difficulty disentangling

18   This book is based on a corpus of former American civil rights activists who went to Mississippi (or who applied to go but did not) during the summer of 1964 to help the Black population register to vote (among other things). Doug McAdam first traces the "roots of activism", then looks specifically at the forms of participation in this 'Freedom Summer', and finally analyses what became of these activists in the 1970s and 1980s (McAdam, 1988)

19   The life cycle effect refers to the individual's age and position in the life cycle. The cohort effect refers to the socio-historical and cultural context in which all members of an age group grow up. Finally, the period effect refers to the impact of a particular conjuncture on those who are involved in it (Kessler and Masson, 1985, p. 285-321).

these different effects. The genealogical and longitudinal approach adopted here allows us to move beyond this limitation and go back to the multiple matrices of participation in May '68. Several distinct "generations as actuality" (Mannheim, 1972 [1928], p. 302) which had experienced distinct forms of primary socialisation (political, familial, and academic) – and therefore modes of generation – prior to 1968, will be brought to light.

Siméant has shown that "evoking socialisations liable to structure attitudes towards politics does not imply anything about their activation" (Siméant, 2003, p. 177). It is therefore important to analyse the processes by which socialisation is converted into action (particularly the conversion of religious commitments into political commitments) in the context of the Algerian and Vietnam wars. Indeed, the period effect brought about by the participation in the struggle against the Algerian War produced a genuine "generational unit"[20] which was characterised by specific characteristics (age, form of politicisation, place of activism, etc.) that were only shared by some future '68ers. Those who were slightly younger, and who were politicised in the context of the Vietnam War, or later, during May '68, did not have the same frames of political socialisation as their elders[21] – either in the family or in school. They thus formed different generational units.

However, was participation in May '68 simply a confirmation of the interviewees' prior characteristics, or did it have a lasting impact on them? And if that is the case, who does this participation affect and in what way? In order to answer these questions, we must shift our attention towards the forms of participation, and the specific modalities of the encounters between habitus and crisis.

Political socialisation and events

The role of events in the process of political socialisation has attracted little academic interest.[22] Where this relationship is taken into account,

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20   A generational unit "represents a much more concrete bond than the actual generation as such", and is generated by shared participation in a given historical event and by adopting similar positions (Mannheim, 1972, p. 304).

21   Even just a few years apart, academic trajectories are sometimes incomparable. Those interviewees who were born at the end of the 1930s did not experience the "first democratisation of the school system", unlike those born at the beginning of the 1940s – to give just one example that will be discussed further below.

22   With the exception – for the case of France – of one article which remains essentially programmatic (Ihl, 2002). There is slightly more Anglo-Saxon literature, see notably Sears and Valentino (1997) and Tackett (1997).

associations between participation in political events and politicisation effects are made based on statistical data collected several decades after the event. Therefore, these correlations almost never allow us to determine whether activism is the effect or the cause of politicisation (or both), nor to understand by what processes participation in a political event impacts on politicisation. If a given event is liable to play a role in the political socialisation of its participants, its influence cannot be seen as mechanical or univocal. Rather, it occurs through the bias of militant practices, interactions, collective dynamics in situations of crisis, exposure to the media etc. This is why it is so important to return to the event itself and to what is happening in its short-term context. The fluid conjunctures specific to political crises (Dobry 1986) and the general strikes in May and June of 1968 put a (relative) hold on ordinary time and habitual social relations (Bourdieu, 1984b, p. 207-250). This in turn provoked uncertainty and a logic of action that could not be reduced to the previous predictable logics. The event seems to be extraordinary and Eric Fassin and Alban Bensa encourage us to see it as a 'break in intelligibility', in order to avoid the 'double pitfalls of reduction by context or by construction' (Fassin and Bensa, 2002, p. 8). Apprehending the dynamics of the encounters between habitus and crisis situations therefore requires us to take into account what happened prior to the crisis, conjointly with what occurs during the course of the events.

In order to do this, and so that we might account for the distinct forms of politicisation brought about by participation in the events of May-June '68, this book proposes a typology. This typology is constructed to articulate the different factors linked to trajectories prior to 1968 on one hand, with factors linked to short-term situations during the event on the other (such as biographical availability or the degree of exposure to the event). We will therefore demonstrate that an event such as this can bring about *socialisation by maintenance*, which maintains actors' previously established dispositions and convictions. It can also lead to *socialisation by reinforcement* of these convictions, by *raising political awareness,* or finally, by *conversion*. These different socialising effects of the event will be systematically considered in relation to the socio-political characteristics of the actors, as well as to the different forms of participation in May '68.

A sociology of post-'68 trajectories

How can we bring to light the specific – and durable – effects of participation in these events? The heart of this book is dedicated to this question. In order to provide a response, we developed statistical indicators of biographical

change. However, to avoid falling into the mechanistic trap of many Anglo-Saxon studies, we will pay particular attention, through the analysis of life histories, to the social processes which produce these effects. Just as in biology the belief in the notion of "spontaneous generations" has been long since rejected, this research argues against a mechanistic acceptance of "spontaneous political generations" seen as produced by an inaugural, foundational or causal event outside social, historical, and biographical time. Rather than multiplying statistical demonstrations to isolate the "specific effects of the event,"[23] qualitative analysis of post-'68 trajectories will be used to understand the mechanisms by which the event impacts on biographies.

What is particularly interesting about the corpus constructed for this study is the fact that it combines both those who continued as activists over the years, but also all the "former" activists, who gave up their activism, either immediately after May '68, during the 1970s, or in the decades that followed.

By including those who subsequently demobilised, we can therefore follow and compare what became of these '68ers, their futures, and account for their various responses to the twin constraints of social reintegration and loyalty to their past commitments.[24] We will be paying close attention to the individual and contextual logics of engagement (Siméant and Sawicki, 2009, p. 109) as well as the imbrication of different spheres of life. This will enable us to reproduce the constraints and possibilities (in terms of profession, affect, and maintaining self-integrity) that affect the ex-68ers interviewed here.

Finally, we will bring the different puzzle pieces together and connect what happened before, during, and after May '68, in order to construct a social space made up of the "micro-units of generation '68."[25] We will also question the influence of gender on the formation of political generations. In the final part of the book, our reflections will lead to an investigation into the ways in which the heritage of the '68ers has been transmitted to the next generation.

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23   Such analyses are fastidious and often disappointing, when, after pages and pages of statistical tables, they conclude that "the generation of citizens born between 1947 and 1960 (i.e. those who were 21 between 1968 and 1981) appear significantly more left-wing" (Favre, 1989, p. 307).

24   The work of Annie Collovald and Érik Neveu on the "new thriller" genre (Collovald and Neveu, 2001) sheds light on one of these responses.

25   This notion was constructed on the basis of Mannheim's concept of "generational unit", along with that of the activist "micro-cohort" (Whittier, 1997) to describe groups of similar trajectories.

History of the study

The task laid down at the beginning of the study was clear: I wanted to work on May '68 using solid, first-hand, empirical data. I did not want to limit this data to just political leaders, or students, or Parisians, and I wanted to construct it in such a way as it could be controlled and situated in social and political terms. The search for a fieldwork site and a sample population was much more complicated: how could I find former actors who had never spoken publicly about May '68? Given that there is no directory of "ex-68ers," how could I gain access to this population?

A specific and controllable corpus

Accessing potential participants by targeting one or several political organisations (and finding former activists through their archives) meant overlooking those who were not affiliated with any organisation – who made up the majority of those participating in the events of May '68. That approach would have also made it impossible to compare the effects of the events according to the registers of participation. In order to be able to study the transmission of dispositions for activism, I then considered entering the field via the "second generation." This idea consisted in constructing a population of "children of '68ers," who were activists in a political organisation or association at the time of the study (such as the Sud trade union, the activist organisation Attac or the Communist Revolutionary League, LCR). I would then be able to contact their parents. Although this research approach had the benefit of accessing a greater diversity of the parents' registers of involvement in May '68, it sacrificed the families (the majority) in which none of the children were activists at the time of the study.

It was by reformulating the object in generational terms, rather than in terms of the transmission of family memories of May '68, that the idea and opportunity to access the field through primary schools arose. Indeed, several people contacted during the exploratory phase of this research mentioned the experimental Vitruve school where – according to them – "generations of children of '68ers have gone to school." The Vitruve school (in the 20th district in Paris) still exists and when I went there I had a decisive encounter with Gégé, who has been a teacher there since 1976. Repeated and in-depth interviews with this former '68er, who converted his dispositions for protest into the realm of education, confirmed the relevance of this school for my study and the specificity of its recruitment in the 1970s and '80s. Gégé told me, "there were the local children, and those

who came from elsewhere, mostly children of '68ers."[26] Of course, I still needed to access the records of former students, an essential requirement for the methodical construction of a corpus of interviewees. After several unsuccessful attempts,[27] I was eventually able to access and photocopy all these records for the period between 1972 and 1980.

In order to avoid the trap of becoming overly centred on Paris, and to enlarge the spectrum of families in the study, I then sought to broaden the research to include a comparable school outside the capital. This second school therefore had to be a public, primary, alternative school, and likely to have enrolled children of '68ers during the 1970s and 1980s. It also had to still be operating. There were not that many candidates and the choice for the second field work site finally fell on the Ange-Guépin open school. This school was founded in a working-class neighbourhood in Nantes in 1973 and is associated with the Cooperative Institute for Modern Schooling (ICEM).[28] There was no difficulty obtaining access to the records of former students for this period, although these records were less detailed than those in Paris (see below).

Beyond the fieldwork opportunities, this particular approach was also justified through the originality of the materials it gave me access to. Firstly, choosing these schools was a way of getting around the inevitable self-proclaimed spokespeople of the events of May '68, of having access to anonymous figures, and a heterogeneous population of '68ers. This also meant that the study did not have to be based on pre-existing and poorly-controlled samples, or groups of individuals labelled '68ers. It would have indeed been perilous to try and deconstruct the '68er category with a population based on a historically constructed form of that category.

Moreover, this approach through the school was also a way of further specifying my research object. The study was no longer about '68ers in general, but rather about certain '68ers who were characterised by specific educational strategies. I abandoned my fantasy of a representative population and gained in return the possibility of generalising certain results because of the construction of the population. This construction was both coherent and methodical and it ultimately led to a final population of participants that was neither ego-centric, nor Paris-centric; nor was it based

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26 Excerpt from the first interview conducted with Gégé, at Vitruve school, on 8 June 2004
27 Part of the records were archived in a secondary school that initially refused to allow me to access them.
28 This Institute covers the primary schools in which the teachers practice the pedagogy of Célestin Freinet.

on high-profile figures from these events, which meant the research could contribute original and controlled elements to a scientific study of May '68.

Finally, approaching the fieldwork through the second generation, and through institutions which themselves owed much to the political crisis of May '68,[29] was a way of selecting interviewees who had transformed their anti-institutional mood into educational practices during the 1970s and 1980s. I was operating on the – broadly confirmed – hypothesis that the decision to send their children to experimental schools was related to their participation in the events of May '68. Indeed, the school system was for some a favourite target for overall criticisms of social domination;[30] for others, it was a political weapon for social transformation. As a result, the school as a field site meant the selection of former activists characterised by significant biographical effects linked to their involvement in May '68.

Recruiting participants...

At the time, gaining access to the records of former students seemed to me a great victory, but it was just the beginning. I then had to find the families concerned and select those in which one parent – at least – had participated in the events of May '68. Two questionnaires (one for the parents, ex-'68ers, and one for their children, former students at my two schools) were ready to be sent out. I used a number of channels and tools to perform my detective work in contacting the families: word-of-mouth, alumni associations, private contacts of teachers who had kept in touch with families. But none could entirely replace the fastidious and time-consuming search through the telephone directory. Over a period of two years (2004-2006), I made more than three thousand telephone calls. Some were more pleasant than others; sometimes confronted with a curt reply that the person I was looking for had died, or the exasperated remark that I was not really planning on calling all the Mary Smiths in the phonebook to find the right one, was I?! More generally, they regularly took me for yet another commercial call selling double glazed windows... I was obliged to be quite obstinate in order to find the people I was looking for, particularly the women who had changed their names[31] (after marriage, or for the older generation, after divorce, which was quite common).

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29   The history of these two experimental schools is not reproduced in this book but is analysed in the preliminary chapter of the doctoral thesis (Pagis, 2009, p. 81-109).
30   Because of its role in childhood socialisation to social relations and attitudes towards authority, through the educational relationship between students and teachers.
31   At the Vitruve school the mother's maiden name was recorded in the archives, which was not the case at Ange-Guépin. This difference had an important impact on the rate of families

Initial contact was therefore made by telephone. I asked my respondents about their possible participation in the events of May '68, or about their parents' involvement. In order to capture people who were involved in the events in different ways, I chose to adopt a broad notion of involvement: the minimal requirements were having participated in demonstrations in support of the movement, or attended political meetings during the months of May and June 1968. In this way, I did not immediately exclude less audible or visible forms of participation (particularly common among women), and I did not impose an arbitrary definition of the category I set out to deconstruct. During this telephone call, I also asked my contacts to reply to an anonymous questionnaire to be sent to them by the post.

I then sent out 666 questionnaires, to all corners of France (as well as a few overseas), of which 350 were sent back completed.[32] Among them there were 182 "parent" questionnaires, and 168 "children" questionnaires. A number of telephone call-backs over this phase of the study allowed me to ascertain some of the reasons for the non-responses. All the conversations were transcribed in an electronic field notebook, which provided valuable qualitative data concerning attitudes towards the study (and the investigator) among all the individuals contacted.[33] The corpus was finally made up of 169 families, with a decidedly uneven distribution between the two schools Vitruve and Ange-Guépin.[34] This would have been problematic for a comparison between the two schools, but that was not the objective here. Instead, the respondents from Nantes, more working-class, were included to broaden and diversify the overall spectrum of the trajectories of the '68ers analysed here.

that were successfully located and contacted, and consequently contributed to the imbalance between the two field sites.

32   This corresponds to a response rate of 53%, which is quite high given the length of the questionnaire (approximately 250 questions). By comparison, Doug McAdam sent out 556 postal questionnaires and received 348 responses, of which 212 were from ex-participants of the Freedom Summer, and 118 were from no-shows (interviewees who ultimately decided not to participate in Freedom Summer) (McAdam, 1988, p. 8-10).

33   Excessive and/or incomprehensible reactions during the first contact could thus be explained afterwards, and integrated into the analysis of representations of May '68, or intergenerational relations (see below).

34   Indeed, of the 350 questionnaires received, 291 came from the Vitruve school. This imbalance is due to several factors: this school has roughly three times as many students per year than Ange-Guépin, and the proportion of non-sector students intentionally sent to these experimental schools is much higher at Vitruve (less than 20% of students at Ange-Guépin, but between 30-50% at Vitruve).

Alongside this questionnaire-based approach, I also conducted interviews within a number of the families. These families were selected in order to diversify as much as possible the parents' profiles of activism, social origin, age, types of post-'68 reconversions, the political futures of the children, and so forth. Between 2004 and 2008, I conducted 89 life history interviews (of which 51 were from former '68ers, and 38 from children of '68ers).[35] These interviews lasted between an hour and a half, and one whole day, and were recorded and re-transcribed for the most part. Wherever possible they were conducted at the interviewee's home in order to enrich their remarks with in situ observations on their relations to May '68, either in the mobilisation of personal documents and archives, in the content of their libraries, in the posters and decorations of their living spaces, or even in their bodily *hexis*.

This study is situated within a retrospective longitudinal approach, and its originality lies in the fact that it covers two family generations, and articulates the statistical analysis of the questionnaires with a comprehensive approach based on the life histories.

Articulating statistics and life histories

The genealogical approach taken here allows us to go back to a heterogeneous population of ex-'68ers, and include all those who disengaged at different times. By not studying only the "rest of the cohort" (Offerlé, 1987, p. 75), coexisting at a given time, this research can escape the main pitfall of synchronic cross-sections. However, it cannot escape the weight of questionnaires,[36] nor the sometimes-incomplete reconstructions of militant, professional and familial chronologies. Wherever possible I sought to complete the dates using other materials I had at my disposal (interviews, questionnaires by other family members, histories of militant organisations etc.). The statistical approach is therefore only one aspect of a processual analysis proposed over two generations in a family (Fillieule, 2001, p. 200). Sticking to the

35   The list of interviews that are quoted in the book can be found in the appendix. Although the questionnaires and interviews constitute the main part of the study apparatus, various additional documents were collected over the course of the study and used more specifically. These were primarily archives preserved in the two schools (press articles, photographs, pedagogical documents, students' journals, films etc.). Several books written by students and teachers from the Vitruve school also constitute valuable archival sources.

36   In order to be able to precisely analyse long cycles of involvement, as well as professional and familial trajectories, the questionnaires included more than 240 questions, and many of these were open-ended. The questionnaires were entered and processed with the programme SPAD. Only the logistic regressions were conducted using another programme (SPSS).

objectification of the positions successively occupied by the activists, would mean overlooking the subjective motivations, the way they constructed the meaning of their involvement, as well as the processes of identity (re)negotiations which accompanied and made the different biographical instances of activism possible. A comprehensive analysis of these trajectories thus helps to contextualise and enrich the statistical results by introducing the dynamic and temporal depth of the processes analysed. But this extremely rich qualitative material nevertheless poses other problems. Collecting accounts of practices and memories of the events of May-June '68 forty years after the event confronts the investigator with the limits of memory and the problem of biographical illusion (Bourdieu, 1986). Here, this was further reinforced by the interview situation and the research. Indeed, Doug McAdam has shown that intense activism during a political crisis is a rare opportunity to reconstruct one's biography into a "before" and an "after" (McAdam, 1992, p. 1231). Moreover, the high number of interviewees who have turned to psychoanalysis, and their clear propensity for self-reflection, make the analysis of their life histories extremely complex. Finally, beyond their personal aptitudes for speaking easily – and at some length! – some interviewees used the study to rehabilitate a non-official memory of May '68. Their comments were therefore marked by issues of interpretation about the nature of the events. Various methods are used over the course of the book to cope with, circumvent, or analyse this accumulation of interpretative layers, and to make controlled use of the life histories. Combining different points of view within a particular family proved to be particularly efficient. We were also able to reinforce the ethnographic approach with statistics (Weber, 1995) by confronting data from interviews with that obtained from the same people in the questionnaires – or from their (ex)partners, their children, or their parents,[37] or through comparison with statistical results obtained over the corpus as a whole. More generally, this book advocates the constant articulation of efforts for objectification (through statistical analysis) and efforts for comprehension (through analysis of life histories).

Finally, we must ward off against the inevitable question of the study corpus being compared to a "control group." Ideally this would have been constituted from a population that was perfectly comparable to our group on the eve of May '68, but which did not participate in the events. Such a corpus is quite simply impossible to establish (because it does not exist); however, the results obtained will be compared to contextual data from national studies. Above all, within our corpus, the sub-group of people most

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37   Of course, all the participants were assured as to the anonymity of their participation.

active in May '68 will be regularly compared to the sub-group that was the least actively involved, in order to identify effects that are specific to intense activism for example. This is, in fact, one of the key benefits of not having imposed a restrictive definition of '68ers' at the outset of the study.

This book is constructed chronologically and composed of seven chapters. It moves from the origins of activism (Chapter 1), to the forms of participation in May '68 (Chapter 2), and the various biographical consequences of this participation (Chapters 3, 4 and 5). It then provides a contribution to the history of social trajectories of '68ers (Chapter 6) and analyses the family transmission of activism (Chapter 7).