

The student movement of May 1968: activist photography, self-reflection and antinomies

MAY 1968 in Paris conjures up black-and-white photographs of students demonstrating, occupying universities, constructing barricades; setting fires on street corners, throwing flaming Molotov cocktails and fighting with the police. During the events, all these photographs became available to the public through the mainstream press and the communication systems that served the movement. Nevertheless, as the events accelerated the public showed a growing mistrust towards mainstream mass media, as discussed in Part I. The student newspapers not only became then a source of information within the ranks of the movement, but were also disseminated in the occupied Sorbonne and the surroundings, reaching out to a wider public.

The student newspapers, which were published during the events namely *Action*, *Barricades*, *L'Avant Garde Jeunesse*, *Servir Le Peuple*, *Le Monde Libertaire* and *Lutte Socialiste* were, to a great extent, ephemeral publications.¹ For the period of the events, they formed the platform for the dissemination of the movement's demands. The photographs published within this context are important not least because they were chosen by the participants themselves, reflecting on their own view of the events. In this instance, photography was employed to promote the movement's vision as well as to fight back to either the absence of images in the public domain or the ambiguous imagery published in the different mainstream newspapers. It is significant to note that the majority of these photographs were not attributed to a photographer, with the exception of few instances, which urges us to focus on the decisions made about which photographs were published and the juxtaposition of these photographs with texts and headlines.

This chapter provides an analysis of the photographs published in student

newspapers during May and June 1968, considering these photographs not simply as an 'exercise in nostalgia',² but as a path to re-explore, rethink and discuss the French May '68. The photographs chosen to be discussed are not the only pertinent examples, but they are indicative of the main recurrent themes. The discussion sheds light on the emphasis given to particular themes and the lack of emphasis given to some others, opening up the discussion about the contradictory character of the May movement and the failure of the student movement to connect with the workers' movement in an effective way.

The student movement and its publications

The events of May '68 started as a large-scale student protest. The movement was born at the Nanterre campus in March 1968 and expanded to the Sorbonne and other branches of the university on the 3 May, when a general meeting had been called to discuss the closure of Nanterre by the administration. As is well known, the government's tactics and the increasing brutality of the police contributed to the explosion of public meetings, organised action committees, vigorous demonstrations along the boulevards and the narrow streets of the Latin Quarter, widespread occupations that culminated in the highly symbolic 'night of the barricades' on the 10 May.³

The movement was organised by various groups and Committees and was lacking formal leadership, hierarchy and centralised structure. After the war in Algeria, the *Union des Étudiants Communistes* (UEC), the student organisation of the orthodox *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF), and the main component of the *Union Nationale des Étudiants de France* (UNEF) had gradually lost its strength and failed to attract a great number of the activist student youth.⁴ Various revolutionary and sometimes conflicting groups, affiliated with Maoism, Trotskyism, anarchism and looser forms of revolutionary socialism, the *enragés*, filled the void.⁵ At the dawn of the student mobilisation in May '68, the main groups were the two Trotskyist groups, *Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire* (JCR) and *Fédération des Étudiants Révolutionnaires* (FER), the Maoist group *Union des Jeunesses Communistes Marxistes-Léninistes* (UJCML), the *Fédération Anarchiste* (FAF) and the small socialist group *Étudiants Socialistes Unifiés* (ESU). The newspapers run by all these groups and by *comités d'action* became the mouthpieces of the movement and circulated information about its evolution, political ideas, goals and strategies.

The movement's main paper, which became very popular and was widely disseminated during May, was *Action*. *Action* represented the *comités d'action*,

which consisted of the UNEF, the *Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur* (National Union of Higher Education, SNEsup) and the 22 March movement.⁶ It often had a detachable front page that could be used as a street poster, and was notable for the absurdity, eccentricity and humour of its slogans and cartoons, frequently by Siné.⁷ Siné was a French political cartoonist, well-known for his anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism, whose numerous sarcastic cartoons appeared in *Action* and *L'Enragé* during the events. *L'Enragé*, published by Siné and the French publisher Jean-Jacques Pauvert, was the 'official bulletin' of the movement.⁸ *Action's* popularity grew rapidly during May and June and provided daily information about the evolution of the events. After the decline of the movement, in the second half of 1968, *Action* 'was one of the outlawed publications particularly pursued by the government, in part because of its rapid growth from 100,000 printings of each issue to 550,000'.⁹

Barricades was published by the high-school student organisation, *Comité d'Action Lycéens* (CAL) and was circulated during May. CAL was created shortly before the May crisis as a combination of *Comité Viêt Nam de Base* (CVB) and *Comité Viêt Nam National* (CVN), both organisations opposing the Vietnam War.¹⁰ Most of the members of the CAL were 'militants of far Left youth movements who had broken with young Communists because of the soft attitude of PCF towards the Vietnam War'.¹¹ The Trotskyist part of the movement was represented by the monthly circulated journal *L'Avant Garde Jeunesse*, which was the mouthpiece of the JCR, one of the two Trotskyist groups. The JCR exercised the greater influence on the movement, as it 'proved more open in its theoretical approach, more flexible in its tactics, more aware of the specific problems of the student movement, and as such was to exercise a greater influence during the crisis'.¹² It was among the initiators of the 22 March movement in Nanterre and without doubt played an important role in the student movement.¹³ *L'Avant Garde Jeunesse* stopped being circulated in June 1968, when the group was declared illegal by the government. Smaller minorities within the movement were the Maoist, anarchist and 'socialist' groups. The Maoist group's (UJCML) journal was published by both students and workers and was called *Servir Le Peuple*.¹⁴ The anarchist part FAF, published a newspaper called the *Le Monde Libertaire*, while the ESU, a small socialist party, and their equivalent workers' groups, published *Lutte Socialiste*.

Whereas before May these groups numbered only a hundred or so members, their numbers swelled during the events.¹⁵ Although their initial membership might have been small, their dynamism not only significantly influenced the majority of the students, but also contributed decisively to the movement's

momentum and finally to the explosion of events. Acknowledging their political divergences and ideological nuances, this part draws on the predominant student iconography and examines how the movement was self-reflected in this iconography.

Photography and self-reflection

The students' demands were not restricted to the democratisation and decentralisation of the French educational system and the subsequent ending of class bias, the modernisation of an outdated curriculum and the decrease in unemployment. Their critique moved from a critique of the university to a critique of society.¹⁶ Their demands for radical reconstruction and democratisation touched upon every sphere of life. The students critiqued capitalism, the culture of consumption and the mass media, and questioned the oppression of women, discrimination against minorities and segregation of youth. Although their demands covered a broad range, it is this chapter's main argument that they all derived from a common basis, that is 'destructive critique'.¹⁷ By 'destructive critique' is meant a critique that operates outside the rules, norms and limitations of liberal parliamentary democracy and seeks to demolish the status quo and all its structures of inequality, subordination and power. The student movement was ignited by the explosive power of 'destructive critique' and its characteristics, namely doubt, negation, irony and destruction. Indeed, the motto 'De omnibus dubitandum' (doubt everything) was omnipresent within the movement. The movement doubted the existing 'system of order' and therefore demanded its destruction. Nevertheless, this critique was not accompanied by a developed model for a new society. The movement's future vision was abstract as described by George Katsiaficas: 'a vision for the future where nations, hierarchies of domination, boredom, toil, and human fragmentation no longer would exist'.¹⁸

The target of the students was any form of power and repression as exercised and experienced in factories, schools, universities and the whole of society. Within this range of repressive forces, the police had a predominant position, personifying the oppressive and authoritarian nature of the existing government. The images of the police that were repeatedly reproduced in student publications portray them in a disapproving light. As an example from the *L'Avant Garde Jeunesse*, the two series of photographs on the edges of the two pages show policemen in aggressive positions, being violent and using tear gas. The atmosphere in most of the pictures is chaotic and the policemen are depicted either in groups ready to confront the demonstrators or individually in aggressive attitudes. In most of the

photographs, the demonstrators are not seen, although their presence is implied. In the only pictures where a demonstrator is present – the first photograph of both series – the demonstrator is shown as having fallen on the street, a victim of the police's violence.

In a similar way, *Action* made the police the target of its criticism. In the first issue of the newspaper, published on the 7 May, the front page was covered by a photograph that depicted policemen blocking the entrance of the Faculté de Lettres (figure 12). The headline 'Repression: Faire Face!' (Repression: Stand up!) equates police with repression. The following article entitled 'Pourquoi nous nous battons' (This is why we fight) explains the reasons for the uprising, arguing against the misrepresentation of their mobilisation by television and radio. In the issues that followed, the police became the personification of an authoritarian



12 *Action*, No. 1, 7 May 1968, p. 1

and repressive state. Photographs of policemen brutally beating protesters with truncheons appeared in almost all the issues of *Action*.

In many cases, photographs were seen together with cartoons, most of which were explicitly ironic towards the police. Indicative is the photograph published in *Barricades* that shows a group of armed policemen beating a demonstrator. The headline 'Les Voyous' (the hooligans) creates an ironic inversion. Although the article that follows refers to the protesters who performed acts of violence during the events, the immediate connection that can be made is to relate the headline to the policemen's thuggish behaviour. This irony becomes even crueller if one takes into account the coverage by the mainstream press both of the Right and Left that accused the students for their insults, violence and irresponsible acts.¹⁹ In contrast to these accusations, the article that accompanies the photograph in *Barricades* gives reasons for the insulting behaviour of a section of the students, presenting it as an unavoidable outcome of the social and economic inequalities of capitalist society. The cartoon underneath extends the sarcastic character of the page.

In fact, there were many examples of photographs of police being juxtaposed with cartoons that commented on their brutality. An interesting example is a photograph that was published in the first issue of *Action* (figure 13). The photograph shows policemen lined up and is taken from the back so that their faces are not visible. One cannot see any violence or conflict depicted, but only some smoke on the right of the photograph. Nevertheless, the cartoon by Siné, just above the photograph, depicts the arrest of an injured student. The drawing of one policeman with a moustache like Hitler's and the ironic dialogue 'Il était armé? Oui, chef ... d'un diplôme' (Was he armed? Yes, sir ... with a degree) are caustic comments on the police's extreme brutality against the students.

While negation and irony as characteristics of the students' destructive critique are depicted in many photographs, as shown in the examples from *Action*, *Barricades* and *L'Avant Garde Jeunesse*, photographs depicting violence are very rare. While there are many photographs taken by photojournalists, that show students in violent and destructive gestures, similar images are absent from student publications. An exception is a photograph published in the newspaper *Le Monde Libertaire*, where an open air meeting of high school students is depicted. The meeting numbers only a few participants and looks like a spontaneous gathering of students rather than a well-organised meeting. Although the young people seem to look in different directions, there is a speaker among them. Nevertheless, neither the gazes of the students depicted nor the focus of the photograph directs our attention to the speaker. Instead,

AU NOM DE LA CIVILISATION OCCIDENTALE,
VIVE TOI ! SALE ÉTUDIANT BÉGN,
SI TU ES FILIERS-MAÎTRES DE
SLURP NOTRE MONDE " L'UNIVERSITÉ, LA JUSTICE,
L'ÉGLISE, L'ARMÉE...



CAR ENFIN, GRÂCE À TOI
ET POUR LA PREMIÈRE FOIS,
NOUS SOMMES TOUT D'ACCORD
SUR CE QU'IL CONVIENT DE
FAIRE...



... AU SUJET DE TON AVENIR.



WOLINSKI

Alain Geismar "nous ne maintiendrons pas l'ordre"

Mais l'Université dans son ensemble continue d'apparaître aux étudiants les plus conscients comme une institution primée. Ceux qu'elle forme seront, pour une part importante, des chômeurs s'ils obtiennent un diplôme ou des ratés s'ils n'en obtiennent pas. L'Université reste une institution intégrée à l'ordre social établi : de surcroît, son fonctionnement a lieu dans les plus mauvaises conditions, étant donné les restrictions budgétaires prévues par la dernière loi de finances.

Institution qui diffuse une idéologie liée à la classe dominante et dont les produits, dans leur grande majorité, s'intègrent naturellement à l'ordre bourgeois, l'Université apparaît donc dans une large mesure comme un élément de répression. Quand elle ne parvient plus à jouer ce rôle, le pouvoir lui substitue les gardes mobiles et les mousquetaires. Si les universitaires ne peuvent partager les modes d'action des étudiants — en particulier des éléments les plus avancés — ils deviennent pourtant conscients de la crise générale de l'institution. Quand la police entre à l'Université, leur solidarité apparaît nettement : face à la répression, la solidarité ne se divise pas. La place des professeurs se trouve à côté des étudiants. Assurément ils ne participent pas toujours toutes leurs analyses et, en majorité, s'inquiètent des formes parfois prises par leur action. Mais il leur semble décent et inimaginable de renvoyer dos à dos étudiants et policiers ou d'émettre à ce moment-là des réserves sur la solidarité. Les problèmes posés sont des problèmes de fond. La police ne les résoudra pas. La répression élargira le mouvement.

Les étudiants mettent en cause l'Université et, à travers elle, l'ordre social. Qu'une large partie de la presse tente de les discréditer, cela est banal. Que le ministre de l'Éducation Nationale du régime reprenne les arguments de Springer, cela est dans la logique du système. Qu'il fasse venir la police à l'Université, cela est de sa part une faute politique.

En ce qui concerne l'attitude du recteur Roche, nous rappellerons seulement qu'après avoir recouru à la police, le vice-recteur de l'Université de Madrid a démissionné sous la pression des enseignants au mois de février dernier. De son côté, le professeur Tejero, doyen de la faculté de droit, démissionna pour protester contre la présence des forces de l'ordre dans sa faculté.

Le syndicat appelle à la Grève. Sa direction a pris ses responsabilités. Il n'était pas concevable pour des syndicalistes que l'Université accepte la situation faite aux étudiants.

Chiens de garde

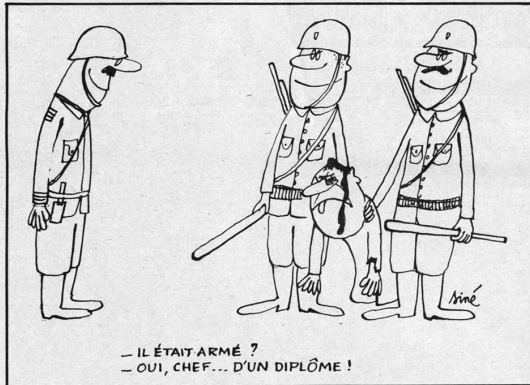
Savez-vous comment y vivent les étudiants ? au milieu de bidonvilles ou croupillent un sous-prolétariat, la bourgeoisie a installé toutes les commodités dues à ces fils...
« Lorsqu'ils sont fatigués, les résidents de Nanterre vont se reposer dans leurs chambres. Bien modestes à leur avis. Vous savez le genre de chambre qui code à trois mille cinq cent anciens francs la nuit dans un hôtel : grandes baies vitrées, panneaux de liège pour afficher ce qu'on veut, cabinet de toilette séparé par une cloison, eau chaude, eau froide, prise pour le rasoir

électrique. Sur le palier salle de douche. Téléphone et petite cuisine avec réfrigérateur et cuisinière, et ascenseur bien sûr. Comme se sont des intellectuels, des femmes de charge s'occupent de nettoyer chaque jour chaque chambre... Le confort cinq étoiles » (Paris-Jour) Mais aux dires du doyen Grappin, cette expérience reste un échec.

« Le mariage d'une résidence et d'une faculté s'est révélé malheureux à l'expérience. Le campus est devenu, je n'ose pas dire un chaudron de sorcière, mais un espace clos replié sur lui-même où toutes les rumeurs se sont dévotées... » (L'Aurore).

Les « fils à papa » méconnaissent le problème, ils insistent à la mémoire de leurs aînés qui ont tant fait de sacrifices pour leur assurer ces conditions de vie paradisiaques.

« J'ai été étudiant, moi aussi, il me semble qu'aujourd'hui



— IL ÉTAIT ARMÉ ?
— OUI, CHEF... D'UN DIPLÔME !

d'hui les étudiants ont la vie facile. Nous n'avons pas nous — sauf quelques privilégiés de résidence universitaires — nous vivons le plus souvent dans des chambres sans feu. Nous n'avons pas de ces restaurants corporatifs où l'on peut aujourd'hui faire un repas convenable pour 1,50 F. Vos chères, pour nous, c'était été le paradis. Alors travaillez et tenez-vous tranquilles. (Camille Leduc - Paris-Jour)

Mais parfois les chahuts peuvent dégénérer en drames. Les tribulations s'en moquent. Ce ne sont pas eux qui paieront les vitrines cassées. Le peuple est profondément désorienté, mais les bons Français veillent : ils dénoncent avec force les provocateurs qui prennent leurs directives à l'étranger.

« Certains groupuscules (anarchistes, trotskystes, maoïstes) composés en général de fils de grand bourgeois et dirigés par l'anarchiste allemand Colin Bendit, prennent

(Suite page 4)



Un autre bruit :
ROCHE avant
de démissionner
ferait appel aux C.R.S.
pour corriger
les examens.

the picture focuses on another student who is lifting an object into the air. The student looks profoundly irritated and his gesture implies that he is under inordinate stress. There is nothing in the picture that indicates what the student is pointing at. Nor does he seem to be confronting the police or any other material forces. Instead, he seems to be performing an act of violence without an immediate recipient. What caused this compulsive behaviour is not indicated. The photograph shows only the externalisation of repressed anger. The focus is on the violent gesture, which, compulsive, dramatic and aggressive as it is, functions as a signifier of violence.

While one can without difficulty assume that this violent gesture is the result of the repression of living with capitalist injustices and exploitation, destruction as such did not seem to be valued in the May movement. Violence was seen only as a response to police repression in street fighting and barricades. In a very well-known text entitled 'Aminstie des Yeux Crevés' ('The Amnesty of Blinded Minds') written on the 13 May by a student committee called 'Nous Sommes en Marche' ('We are on the way'), posted on the walls of the Sorbonne and later distributed as a leaflet, it was written: 'If our situation leads us to violence, it is because the whole society does violence to us.'²⁰ Feenberg and Freedman cite text from other leaflets that were distributed in the movement justifying protesters' violence. One, written by students to workers, states:

Workers ... You know that violence is in the nature of the existing social order. You know that it strikes down those who dare to challenge it: the batons of the CRS answered our demands, just as the rifle butts of the Mobile Guards answered the workers of Caen, Redon and Mans.²¹

Nevertheless, while violence may have been justified verbally, there were no visual representations of the protesters' violence as opposed to numerous photographs that depicted police violence.

What is also significant about the *Le Monde Libertaire* picture is the depiction of the meeting. As in many other pictures that showed student meetings, such as the photograph published in *Action* that depicts a meeting at the occupied Sorbonne (figure 14), the meeting is not hierarchically structured. The student speaking is just one of the participants and he does not seem to have a leading role within the movement. It is true that the movement was fiercely resistant to any kind of leadership and hierarchies within the university, society and in mainstream party politics. In the student meetings, anyone could have the floor and no order or opinion was imposed. This practice was also a negation of traditional politics as

S'ORGANISER

(Suite de la première page)

organisé, deux fois par jour, dans divers salons d'une commune de banlieue des séances de classes révolutionnaires, etc.

De façon générale, les comités d'action visent à renforcer l'union étudiants-ouvriers, à organiser partout — dans la rue — le mouvement d'opposition au régime, à battre, dans les facultés, les tenants du réformisme universitaire et à éliminer de la scène ceux qui veulent dévier dans un folklore apolitique le combat engagé le 3 mai et si magiquement exploité par les barricades du 10 et les occupations d'univers.

L'assemblée de dimanche, outre la désignation d'une coordination générale comportant notamment une commission organisation, une commission agitation-propagande, et une commission information, a pris une décision capitale : elle a lancé un appel à tous les comités d'action, fondé sur une base politique de lutte contre le régime qui ne sont pas encore coordonnés avec elle, ainsi qu'aux comités d'action du mouvement du 22 mars, ou à ceux coordonnés par d'autres instances pour qu'ils se réunissent JEUDI 23 MAI en une vaste assemblée constituante du mouvement des comités d'action. A cette assemblée, qui réunirait en un mouvement unique tous ceux qui étaient le vendredi 18 aux barricades, pourraient être déterminées les bases de l'action commune à entreprendre et mis en place des formes de coordination de cette action.

CULTURE SUR LE TAS

L'action directe, remettant pratiquement en cause le système, a touché à son tour le milieu culturel. Cela a commencé par le coup de semonce de l'Odéon occupé dans la nuit du 16 au 17 mai. Puis, comme une trinité de poëtre, théâtre, cinéma, les cinémas vident fleurir des comités d'action occupant des locaux parloirs, ateliers, salles de cinéma, etc.

Une société apparemment saine, mais profondément décomposée. Au Théâtre de France, symbole de l'avant-garde culturelle officielle du régime, le débat quoque, à trois vites touché à la racine des choses : au ballet synodé de ceux qui veulent démocratiser l'ordre existant est en train d'opérer une contestation de tout ce que « la Culture » elle-même signifie dans une société de consommation pour l'exploitation. La culture, produit de consommation, à mériter les lois, est la trinité ration d'une soumission au travail, à l'exploit, au régime du travail. Elle participe donc elle-même de la soumission.

De ce débat confus, une ligne étroite ressort : chaque homme doit pouvoir créer sa propre culture. La culture de l'Université, ces fêtes mortes de l'après, il faut opposer une culture vivante qui prend racine dans la vie quotidienne.

SABOTER LE SPECTACLE

Les événements qui se sont déroulés depuis le 3 mai donnent un exemple spectaculaire des bouleversements idéologiques et scientifiques qui secouent la vie quotidienne. Assaili par ces bouleversements et leurs contradictions, l'homme d'aujourd'hui veut changer le monde et se changer lui-même. Projeté en quelques jours dans son futur, l'homme qui vient de créer, se voit responsable de son devenir. Il est laurage, violent, il veut construire un monde meilleur que celui que la société lui impose. Le monde révolte les des barricades (même quand il n'y a pas participé) exprime une idée sur la culture à travers l'un des places d'Armand Gatti et Les Treize Soeurs de la rue Saint-Blaise : « habillants, coléreux, gendreuse, avec la parcelle de vérité transmise à trouver chaque jour pour reconquérir un peu de chaleur dans l'indifférence et la froideur d'un monde qu'on ne connaît pas ».

C'est dans cette optique que les étudiants, les travailleurs du spectacle ont travaillé au théâtre d'Occident. Malgré les critiques qui ont été portées à cette occupation (faible participation d'acteurs, etc.), il est intéressant de noter que le Comité d'Action Révolutionnaire qui maintenant dirige le théâtre, a précisé dans un tract que ses buts étaient « le sabotage systématique de l'industrie culturelle et le particulier de l'industrie du spectacle afin de laisser place à un véritable création collective ». C'est aussi dans cette optique que les comités d'action du théâtre se sont créés, chez les étudiants, chez les jeunes travailleurs, chez les artistes afin de promouvoir un art révolutionnaire représentant les véritables aspirations du prolétariat. Ces camarades ont déjà prévu des actions concrètes telles que présenter des spectacles sur les événements des



Nuit et jour, la démocratie directe dans la Sorbonne occupée.

quinze derniers jours aux ouvriers en grève de chez Renault. Soulignons aussi que dans certains théâtres, les acteurs, techniciens et personnel administratif se sont regroupés pour créer des comités de gestion révolutionnaires, afin de mettre l'activité théâtrale au service du peuple. Dans le domaine du cinéma, la réaction, la prise de conscience a été tout aussi vive. D'un seul coup, des réalisateurs, des acteurs, des techniciens du film ont pris leurs destinées en main en créant partout où cela était possible des comités. Ces groupes s'organisent, réfléchissent sur la fonction du cinéma dans une société révolutionnaire. Ils ont déjà accompli un gros travail d'information dans tout le milieu cinématographique. Mille professionnels du cinéma ont défilé dans la nuit de vendredi à samedi le boycott du festival de Cannes. Cette manifestation représentait « le seul indice d'une manifestation de culture de consommation ».

MAQUETTES DE PEINTURE

Sans vouloir décrire l'ensemble des comités d'action existants dans le secteur culturel, il faut indiquer ici le travail particulièrement intéressant qu'un certain nombre de jeunes peintres ont entrepris à l'intérieur du comité d'action des Arts plastiques. Dans ce secteur jusqu'à la complémentation, désorganisé (aucun mouvement, aucun syndicat), ils ont réussi grâce à leur comité, à regrouper un grand nombre de gens intéressés par des réformes fondamentales de l'art dans une optique révolutionnaire de leur participation dans la société future. Vingt-quatre heures sur vingt-quatre ils tiennent un forum permanent dans un amphithéâtre de l'École des Beaux-Arts. Des maintiens ils envisagent pour participer concrètement au mouvement, d'abord, en vendant leurs œuvres (ce qui profitait du mouvement, d'autre part en mettant leur art au service de cette révolution naissante (pour faire des affiches, etc.). Certains d'entre eux ont aussi décidé de retirer leurs œuvres de tous les musées et galeries.

Maintenant que ces groupes existent, maintenant qu'une position commune commence à se dessiner, ces comités doivent opposer à la notion de loisir culturel, celle d'agitation culturelle. C'est-à-dire créer une culture sur la base de la connaissance et de la discussion qui brase les idées au niveau de l'action quotidienne et s'empare de toutes les manifestations du monde moderne. A partir de maintenant, l'homme doit créer une culture qui lui corresponde sans abandonner la tradition, celle qui doit l'armer pour le libérer de ses prisons.

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O.R.T.F. LOCK-OUTÉ ?

Le pouvoir ne peut laisser s'engager à l'O.R.T.F. un mouvement de contestation comparable à celui de l'Université. Pourtant une bataille est commencée. Vaid les obstacles auxquels elle se heurte.

Le mouvement qui agit l'ensemble du personnel de l'O.R.T.F. n'a abouti ni à une grève totale ni à une occupation des lieux de travail. A l'origine ce mouvement est parti de journalistes, de producteurs et de réalisateurs d'émissions d'information (30min, Caméra 3 et Cinq colonnes). Ils ont recouru à une sorte d'action directe : menacer d'empêcher le passage de plusieurs émissions à l'antenne si le numéro de Zoon consacré à la lutte étudiante était interdit. Le mouvement s'est étendu aux journalistes de France-Inter qui ont refusé toute autorité du Service de Liaison de l'information, organisme par lequel s'exerce la tutelle des ministères de l'Intérieur, des Finances et des Affaires Étrangères.

A ce moment-là, les directions syndicales sont intervenues. Une assemblée générale du personnel de l'O.R.T.F. a été réunie. Ceux qui avaient lancé le mouvement essayaient de contenir radicalement l'organisation et le contenu de la radio et de la télévision. L'assemblée générale, quant à elle, s'est bornée à proposer une bataille pour l'objectivité de l'information.

La division du travail et la division syndicale rendent très difficile toute entreprise de contestation à l'O.R.T.F. Le personnel est divisé artificiellement en trois grandes catégories : les artistes, les techniciens et les administratifs. Pour prendre un exemple simple, une équipe de reportage comprend trois hommes dont le statut chevronné sur plusieurs catégories : le réalisateur peut être journaliste, le cameraman peut être réalisateur, tandis que le premier de son est considéré comme un simple technicien. Tout empêche-t-on donc hier à des frictions entre syndics. De plus, alors que dans le travail les réalisateurs sont les patrons, ils ont, sur le plan syndical, des positions plus avancées que les techniciens.

A la complexité de la division du travail correspond une invraisemblable division syndicale : syndics autonomes de journalistes, de réalisateurs, des producteurs ; syndicat des techniciens regroupant tout le personnel qui contrôle l'appareillage électronique ; syndics C.G.T., P.O., C.F.D.T. et C.F.T.C. des scripts, assistants, magasiens, ouvriers de plateau, monteuses, chauffeurs, administratifs ; syndicat artistique des journalistes de radio et de réalisateurs affiliés à la C.G.T., syndicat de cadres, etc.

Les membres de l'assemblée générale se sont réunis dans deux studios reliés en duplex. Les débats se sont déroulés dans la plus grande confusion. Pour dissoudre toute tentative de remise en cause radicale de l'O.R.T.F. les techniciens chargés du duplex sont allés jusqu'à menacer de couper la liaison entre les deux studios.

Ce mouvement de contestation s'est heurté à deux obstacles. Les syndicats d'administratifs et de techniciens ont montré leur désintérêt habituel pour ce qui concerne le contenu de la radio-télévision, y compris le problème de l'objectivité.

L'argument selon lequel les circonstances présentes (grèves et négociations entre Hanoi et Washington) expliquent que la mission de l'information soit remplie a fait pression sur la conscience professionnelle des journalistes. D'où la résolution prise : privè de la production artistique et des employés de l'administration ; maintien d'un journal par et télévisé d'un magazine hebdomadaire ; commission de garantie de l'objectivité ; de se informer ; menace de grève totale en vue d'assurer cette objectivité. Ainsi les grandes formations de la radio-télévision et de la majorité restent devant l'opinion publique les seuls partisans du débat politique. Roger et de Gaulle nous parlent.

Nous n'avons pas encore commencé la lutte pour le droit d'expression de la minorité contestatrice extra-parlementaire sur l'antenne. Le mouvement pour une radio et une télévision critiques et populaires n'est pas amorcé. Déjà à l'O.R.T.F. un « comité républicain » sort des tracts. On y retrouve les mêmes hommes que ceux du comité de salut public du 13 mai 1958.

understood within the participatory organisational structures of the old labour and Communist movement. The students' originality was the break with the old world and especially with the habits of the political establishment. The photographs reproduce exactly this refusal of any kind of leadership, hierarchy or traditional political organisation.

This lack of visually represented hierarchy is obvious when contrasted with photographs of workers' meetings which were published in trade union publications such as *La Vie Ouvrière*, the weekly newspaper of the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) the largest French trade union grouping, which took the largest part in controlling the workers' strikes during May '68. The photograph published here is the same photograph that was published in *L'Humanité* (figure 2). The photograph reproduces a specific stereotype about the hierarchy of workers' organisations and their structured meetings.

Another novelty of the student movement that is also evident in the photographs is the focus on the youthfulness of the participants. Contrary to the old labour movement's beliefs that the working class was the only agent of social change, the pictures in student publications demonstrate the young challenging the status quo and attempting to change the world. In many photographs, the students are depicted as passionate, full of revolutionary ardour, and often seem to be acting on a sudden irresistible impulse. This impulse is possibly directly linked to the youthfulness of the protesters. In fact, there were hardly any photographs of older people and specifically of workers in these publications. A careful examination of student publications during the events show that photographs of workers occupying factories or marching along with the students did not appear in the student publications, even when the students had made an alliance with the workers.

The movement's antinomies

The movement soon went far beyond its university origins to unite students, workers and professionals in a common struggle against de Gaulle's regime. On 13 May, the students took a decision of decisive importance, to allow the workers to enter the Sorbonne.²² On the same day, the two main unions, the CGT and the CFDT, following the student mobilisation decided on a general workers' strike.²³ Although the strike was initially small in scale, it provoked a chain of reactions and within a few days seven-and-a-half to nine million workers went on strike.²⁴ By this time, almost all universities and schools were occupied. The workers entered the struggle in great sympathy with the student

movement. On the 13th, students and workers demonstrated together in Paris, in a march led by both student leaders and trade unions. The following weeks saw extended occupations in schools and universities and strikes in factories, department stores, banks, public transportation, gas stations and even those working in newspapers and television all over the country.²⁵ The majority of the intellectual and literary world also expressed their support for and solidarity with the movement.²⁶ By the 24 May, France was paralysed by the biggest strike that France and probably any other European country had ever known up to that time.²⁷ This student–worker juncture was exceptional, as in no other major Western country did the student and worker movements intersect as they did in France.

It seemed then that the slogan of the demonstration ‘Students–Workers–Solidarity’ was taken seriously for the first time. Soon student leaflets began to draw a parallel between student and labour demands. ‘Between your problems and ours there are certain similarities: jobs and opportunities, standards and work pace, union rights, self-management’ read one of the student leaflets.²⁸ As soon as the strike was announced, silkscreen posters by the Atelier Populaire promoted student–worker solidarity. On 14 May, the first posters that supported the student–worker alliance appeared with the slogans: ‘Usines, Universités, Union’ (Factories, Universities, Union), ‘Ensemble: Etudiants, Travailleurs’ (All together: Students, Workers), ‘Le Même Problème, La Même Lutte’ (The same problem, the same struggle). The slogans became more concrete particularly at the Renault Factory at Flins, such as ‘Ouvriers, Etudiants, Population, Liaison Effective Flins’ (Workers, Students, The People in Effective Liaison at Flins), ‘Solidarité Effective, Étudiants, Travailleurs’ (Students, Workers, Effective Solidarity).²⁹

Although the alliance between students and workers was verbally articulated in student posters and publications, there was no photographic equivalent of these statements. An indicative example is the photograph on the cover of *Action* of the 21 May, which depicts a student demonstration (figure 15). The caption underneath gives us the time and the place: ‘Le vendredi 17 mai, pour la première fois en France, une manifestation étudiante a pris le chemin d’une usine occupée par les travailleurs: Renault’ (Friday, 17 May. For the first time in France, a student demonstration went to a factory occupied by the workers: Renault).³⁰ The students are presented in a frontal view, demonstrating outside Renault. What is worth noting, however, is that although the presence of the workers is implied, there are no actual photographs of the workers in the publication. The only reference to the workers is the industrial background, against which the

ACTION

21 MAI 1968

n° 3

Prix minimum : 0,50 F



Le vendredi 17 mai, pour la première fois en France, une manifestation étudiante a pris le chemin d'une usine occupée par les travailleurs. Renault.

camarades

S'ORGANISER

Une semaine d'affrontements avec l'Etat et sa police, le recul du gouvernement huit jours en mai ont réveillé le pouvoir de la rue. L'Etat fort gaulliste a craqué. Pour intimider le mouvement, pour le casser, il a déployé son arsenal policier, dévoilant au grand jour sa nature répressive. En refusant de plier, le mouvement étudiant a trouvé un écho puissant chez les travailleurs et notamment les jeunes, provoquant l'entrée en action des syndicats et entraînant ainsi la plus grande démonstration de force du mouvement ouvrier depuis le début de la V^e République. La classe ouvrière a mesuré sa puissance, placé à cette hauteur ses objectifs, ajusté ses formes de lutte.

Jusqu'à présent, le rythme de la vie politique

suivait le rythme des alliances électorales, à quelques décalages près. Les présidentielles et le gouvernement de la gauche unie, voilà la perspective sur laquelle les partis « démocratiques » et les syndicats ont fait jusqu'ici les grandes journées annuelles de lutte. L'accumulation des tensions sociales, contenues jusque-là dans certaines limites ou débordant lors d'explosions partielles (Rodhacéra, Redon, Le Mans, Caen) vient brusquement d'éclater. La lutte étudiante a débloqué les verrous parce que le mouvement a heurté de front le pouvoir et a su lui résister. Reprenant conscience que la lutte était payante, la vague ouvrière a déferlé : six millions de

LES PLANS DE L'ENNEMI

« La question du pouvoir est posée. » Il y a une semaine la presse bourgeoise et réformatrice n'y croyait pas. Aujourd'hui chacun répète la formule — il faut préciser quel pouvoir ? Il ne s'agit plus du pouvoir de tel ou tel ministre. Plus personne ne s'intéresse aux idées qui se bousculent dans la tête de M. Peyrefitte : il ne compte plus. Il ne s'agit pas du pouvoir de tel ou tel premier ministre gaulliste. Pompidou a parlé ; s'il s'appelait Giscard ce serait la même chose. Deux « questions du pouvoir » se posent maintenant : la question du pouvoir gaulliste et la question du pouvoir de la bourgeoisie. La bourgeoisie française vivait tranquille, elle

possédait « ses » usines. Elle pouvait prétendre « construire » l'Europe, c'est-à-dire organiser un concours avec la bourgeoisie allemande, italienne, etc. : qui exploiterait le mieux « son » ouvrier ? Aujourd'hui, elle n'a plus, quand la classe ouvrière occupe les usines, la question décisive n'est plus : qui est premier ministre ? (gaullisme ou pas gaullisme), mais : à qui appartient les usines ? (capitalisme ou socialisme). La bourgeoisie va manœuvrer pour masquer le problème, retarder l'échéance. Mais elle aussi veut aller vite : pour que ses affaires « reprennent », pour qu'elle puisse investir en

(Suite page 2)

(Suite page 3)

spontaneity and the impulsiveness of the students appear as a visual disruption. The background seems theatrical and overly contrived, and the sky and the banner are retouched heavily, so that the scene, although it may not be, seems constructed.

One of the very few, if not the only photograph of workers that appeared in *Action* on 11 June 1968 depicted the workers standing on the balcony of their factory. The workers do not face the camera and it is not known where they look. There is no action shown in the picture or any visual reference to their factories' occupation or their strike. The photograph could have been taken on a normal working day. Only the caption reminds us that the photograph was taken at Sud-Aviation in Nantes, the first factory that was occupied by the workers on 14 May. This photograph is similar to photographs of workers published in *La Vie Ouvrière*, the only trade union publication circulated during the events. These photographs that showed workers posing in front of the occupied factory are symptomatic of the different all-embracing iconography that excluded photographs of workers demonstrating. In two photographs from *La Vie Ouvrière*, it is clear that the workers are not unaware of the camera's presence. The workers seem to have posed in total control of the factory. Nevertheless, they seem static, in contrast to the students, who appear militant.

The gap between the students as bearers of new ideas and demands and the working class persisting in the old form of struggle is omnipresent in the photographic representations of the period. The absence of photographs portraying students and workers together was expected due to the spatial separation of the groups, a separation that was favoured by both the trade unions and the government, as discussed in part I. In the few images of workers, they were depicted as either static, posing in front of their occupied factories, or participating in a hierarchically structured meeting that resembled mainstream politics. In contrast, photographs of students reproduced a specific idea about the movement, being a spontaneous, impulsive youth movement. Therefore, student publications only represented one face of the movement. The other face was that of the workers and their unions. According to Feenberg and Freedman this alliance was at odds. In their words:

A movement built on this alliance inevitably had two contrary faces. The one embodied the energy of student leaders, diffused and avowedly immoderate; this student energy had driven the police to commit brutalities that inspired a popular demonstration unequalled in the history of the Fifth Republic. The other aspect, that of the Communist Party and France's

major union, the General Confederation of Workers (CGT), presented a reformist, almost moderate face.³¹

The students rejected the old ideas and organisational structures of the labour movement, and challenged the existing hierarchies in their political praxis, and especially in the student sit-ins and open meetings.³² These anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian demands did not ever gain the support of the communist-oriented CGT. The workers' initial demands, which prior to the May events were not fundamentally different from those of their unions, were soon re-articulated, to include not only wage increases and a reduction of working hours, but also structural changes in industry, such as a reduction in hierarchies, worker self-administration and reorganisation of decision making.³³ But that applied only to a minority of workers. The major workers' organisations, and consequently the majority of the workers, were not actually influenced by the goals of the student movement, continuing for the most part to restrict their demands to improvements in wages and working conditions and to the forging of electoral alliances.

The main trade union CGT not only attempted to prevent the alliance between students and workers, it discouraged the student demonstration at Renault, refused to support the students in public and declined to meet with representatives of the UNEF.³⁴ In reality, the CGT struggled to keep students out of the factories on strike, calling them the 'children of the big bourgeoisie' and tried to isolate the student movement.³⁵ The CGT also aimed to direct 'the protest into the orderly channel of a mediated settlement'.³⁶ Therefore, in the middle of June after a gradual decay of the movement, the workers' unions decided on a general return to work and agreed to resolve the conflict in reformist ways. The students were promised a democratisation of the educational system, and although occupations, demonstrations and barricades continued for a while, the movement lost its strength and vitality, was isolated and easily suppressed by force. De Gaulle's electoral victory at the end of the month came as no surprise to most people.

It is true that when the students allied with the workers they 'had accomplished what the major unions had considered practically impossible, what the Communist Party had declared theoretically absurd, and what the government had never imagined'.³⁷ When the student mobilisation was extended to the working population, student leaflets drew parallels between the student and worker demands. While student texts celebrated this alliance, the photographs failed to represent it. An examination of the student movement's self-reflection reveals

an iconography of impulsive and young students demonstrating, participating in anti-hierarchical meetings and expressing their 'destructive' critique against the state. Photographs depicting police violence were omnipresent, while images of the striking workers were absent.

The problematic nature of the alliance, which was proclaimed in student texts was reflected in this iconography. As Feenberg and Freedman correctly pointed out, the student activists 'could not overcome in a few weeks the effects of the years of mutual ignorance'.³⁸ The fact that the trade unions did not fully support the student movement and their difficulty in embracing the students' demands for the transformation of every day life and culture kept the workers enclosed in their occupied factories. It is where photographs of posed and static workers were taken, but were not published in student publications. Their resemblance to photographs of old labour movements and mainstream politics was at odds with the students' rejection of conventional Leftist perceptions of revolutionary practice and denunciation of the political status quo. This is not to argue that workers did not join the students in the barricades, committees and demonstrations, but that the photographs in student publications failed to represent the student-worker alliance with its strong points and weaknesses.

Notes

- 1 The chapter draws upon unpublished material extracted from *The Bibliothèque d'Histoire Sociale Du XXe Siècle* (Université Paris I, Pantheon Sorbonne) and the May Events Archive at Simon Fraser University.
- 2 F. Ritchin, '1968: Unbearable Relevance of Photography', *Aperture*, 171 (Summer 2003), pp. 62–73.
- 3 For accounts of the events, see particularly: K. A. Reader, *The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), pp. 1–19; D. Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2002), pp. 37–206.
- 4 M. Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004), p. 24.
- 5 As Daniel Singer explains, the UNEF was in the hands of various radical Leftist groups after the mid-fifties. Although in its heyday during the Algerian war, after the war UNEF gradually lost its strength. The Gaullist government contributed to its decay, since it deprived it of its subsidy and sponsored a non-political union, which definitely weakened the UNEF. Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, p. 55. For a similar discussion, see also: P. Seale and M. McConville, *French Revolution 1968* (London: Penguin Books, 1968). Also, Robert Daniels argues that the UNEF moved towards the radical Left, under the militant president Jaques Sauvageot. In March 1968, UNEF joined the anti-Vietnam campaign proving its radical orientation. See: R. V. Daniels, *1968: The Year of the Heroic Guerrilla* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 155.

- 6 A. Feenberg and J. Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets: The French May Events of 1968* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 43. Also for more details on the 22 March movement, see: D. Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (Edinburgh, London, San Francisco: AK Press, 2000), pp. 46–53.
- 7 K. Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 114–15, footnote 123. Examples of Siné's slogans include: 'Debout les damnés de Nanterre!' (Arise, wretched of Nanterre!), 'Les Chiens de Garde Aboient Toujours de la Même Façon' (The Guard Dogs Bark Always in the Same Way), 'La rue vaincra!' (The Street Will Win!)
- 8 Since *L'Enragé* never published photographs, it is not directly studied in this chapter, although examination of its twelve issues was crucial for my understanding of the movement.
- 9 Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, pp. 114–15, footnote 123.
- 10 Ibid., Abbreviations, p. 217.
- 11 Ibid., p. 217.
- 12 Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, p. 58.
- 13 The JCR, which was later renamed *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (LCR), a Trotskyist group that was formed in 1966 as a splinter from the orthodox *Union de Étudiants Communistes* (UEC), was among the initiators of the 22 March movement in Nanterre and without doubt played a decisive role in the student movement in May 1968. See: Reader, *The May 1968 Events in France*, pp. ix, 6, 22; Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, p. 57.
- 14 The *Union des Jeunes Communistes Marxist-Léninistes* (UJCML) along with the JCR (see footnote above) split from the orthodox *Union des Étudiants Communistes* (UEC, Union of Communist Students). Singer argues that the UJCML was quite successful among the younger generation. In his words: 'Quotations from the little red book and the cult of Mao were not the ideal means of attracting critical students, but they were attracted by China's cultural revolution, with its anti-bureaucratic message and its appeal to youth. Their ideological enthusiasm and personal abnegation enabled the young Maoists to make substantial gains among the university and high school students.' Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, pp. 56–7.
- 15 As Michael Seidman stresses 'During the 1967–1968 academic year, a handful of *groupuscules* gathered between thirteen and 140 students or a little over 1 percent of the student population, who were mostly in the humanities and social sciences. At the height in 1968, the activists never exceeded 12 percent of the student body.' See: Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, p. 23.
- 16 'De la Critique de l' Université à la Critique de la Société' was one of the slogans of the movement.
- 17 I owe the term to Johannes Agnoli, who provides us with a very interesting analysis of both the role of intellectuals in the contemporary age, and the terms 'constructive' and 'destructive' critique. See: J. Agnoli, 'Destruction as the Determination of the Scholar in Miserable Times', in W. Bonefeld (ed.), *Revolutionary Writing* (New York: Autonomedia, 2003), pp. 25–38.
- 18 G. Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1987), p. 102.
- 19 Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, pp. 122–3.
- 20 Feenberg and Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets*, pp. 77, 83.

- 21 Ibid., p. 124.
- 22 R. Viénet, *Enrages and Situationists in the Occupation Movement: France, May 1968* (New York and London: Autonomedia and Rebel Press, 1992), p. 44.
- 23 Reader, *The May 1968 Events in France*, p. 117.
- 24 I. Gilcher-Hotley, 'May 1968 in France', in C. Fink, F. Gassert and D. Junker (eds), *1968: The World Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 263.
- 25 For a detailed overview of the various sectors' strikes, see: Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, chapter 4, pp. 161–214.
- 26 Singer, *Prelude to Revolution*, p. 159.
- 27 Ibid., p. 156.
- 28 Feenberg and Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets*, p. 124.
- 29 Atelier Populaire, *Posters from the Revolution, Paris, May 1968* (Usine Université Union, 1969), p. 39.
- 30 *Action* (21 May 1968), p. 1.
- 31 Feenberg and Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets*, p. 28.
- 32 C. Castoriadis, *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 49.
- 33 I. Gilcher-Hotley analyses how the workers' demands evolved from requests for increase of wages and reduction of working hours to more complicated demands. The new term *autogestion* coined mainly by the CFDT embraced demands of an anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian nature. See: Gilcher-Hotley, 'May 1968 in France', p. 263.
- 34 Feenberg and Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets*, pp. 49–50.
- 35 Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left*, p. 110.
- 36 Ibid., p. 265.
- 37 Feenberg and Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets*, p. 36.
- 38 Ibid., p. 126.