40 Years is Enough:
Myth and Memory in French Commemorations of May 1968

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For LP, CMP and DNM – Be a Realist: Demand the Impossible

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This page is not about history, it is about memory. It is not an exhaustive and proportional list of everyone who has contributed to the completion of this thesis, it is rather a recollection of impressions and influences that have stayed with me over the year-and-a-half that it took to finish this work. As such, it is perhaps more valuable.

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French sources are cited in translation, unless otherwise noted. All factual, interpretive and translation errors are my own.

MAY 1968 GRAFFITI

"Be young and shut up"
One interpretation of De Gaulle's relationship with the French youth

"CRS=SS"

The CRS are the French Riot Police. They were in charge of pacifying the streets of Paris during the May 1968 revolts.

"We are all Jews and Germans"
Daniel Cohn-Bendit, one of the leaders of the student revolts, was a German-born Jew and was deported from France by order of the government.

"*La Chienlit* – that's him!"
During the May 1968 revolts, President Charles De Gaulle responded to the demands of the students asking for greater political participation, by saying "Reforms – Yes; *Chienlit* – No". The word is a scatological pun, meaning both 'shit-in-bed', and 'chaos'. The poster exemplifies the students' response.

"Return to normality"
By mid-June, due to forceful government crackdowns on both workers and students as well as De Gaulle's decision to call for a general election by the end of June, the revolts died down and life returned to normality...

INTRODUCTION:

In May 1968, the French began to talk. For the four subsequent decades they talked about sexuality and liberation. They talked about fraternity and authority. They talked about anarchism and Gaullism. They talked about worker's rights and economic growth. They talked about education and free play. They talked about the society of the spectacle and declared a permanent state of happiness. They talked about the general will and the General's will. Above all else, they talked about May 1968.

The revolts of May 1968, a month-long craze of strikes, protests and general euphoria in Paris and number of other French metropolitan centers, have for the French public become "the most important event since World War II".[1] This is evident from a single look at the ten-year commemorations of May 1968, which have been accompanied by an explosion of memoirs, scholarly analyses, journalistic overviews, pamphlets, broadcasts and publications of all sorts.[2] The level of attention accorded to 1968 by the French media has grown with every passing decade. The three major French TV channels devoted 12 hours to the students' and workers' revolts in May 1978, 17 hours in 1988, 23 hours in 1998 and 32 hours in 2008.[3] Publishing special editions reviewing the events and effects of May has become standard practice for major French newspapers during milestone anniversaries. The presence of 1968 in university curriculums and scholarly

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[1] Robert Frank, "Introduction" in *Les Années 68: Le temps de la contestation,* G. Dreyfus-Armand, A. de Baecque, eds, Paris: Editions Complexe, 2000, 22

[2] Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968,* New York: Berghahn Books, 2004, 7

[3] cf, Appendix 1. List of TV broadcasts in French television concerning anniversaries of May 1968

publications is equally strong. Even in politics, May 1968 remains topical, having just recently been invoked by presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy during the 2007 elections. The memory of May has not simply survived for four decades, it has flourished.

Yet this memory is anything but uniform. This is evident already from the variety of terms that have become associated with May 1968. While the events of 1789 or 1871 have been canonized under the names "Revolution" and "Commune", May 1968 has been called, with equal frequency, anything from "events" to "'crisis', 'strike', 'revolt', 'revolution', 'student commune', 'civil war', '*chienlit*/dog's breakfast' [---] or the simple chronological 'May' (followed or not by '[19]68')".[4] Representations of May have changed in time and across communities. In fact, it is sometimes hard to believe that terms like "historical earthquake" and "a popular myth" could be used to describe the same event.[5] Here, then, lies the focus of this thesis - with the multiplicity of interpretations and shifts in French popular memory of May 1968. How did commemorations of 1968 portray the event they celebrated and what does that tell us about developments in French society and about the dynamics of memory construction and reproduction?

The answer to this question can only start at one place: Paris, in May of 1968. The events of May can broadly be divided into three phases. From May 2nd to May 12th the student protests and barricades dominated the events in Paris. May 13th marked the

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[4] Keith Reader & Khursheed Wadia, *The May 1968 Events in France,* London: MacMillan, 1993, 1

[5] *Histoire de Mai, pt 1*, FR3, May 7th, 1978, INA and "Mai 68 – 40 ans aprés", on *Actualités a 12 heures,* FR3, May 2nd, 2008, INA

beginning of the workers' revolt, with an opening salvo in the form of a 24-hour general strike and a large inter-union demonstration in support of the students' revolt. In the following days the strikes multiplied and spread, the number of striking workers reached a high of 7-8 million, and much of Paris, not to mention the country, was paralyzed for days.[6] Finally on May 24th, French president Charles De Gaulle made a televised speech, where he called for a referendum on university reform, promising to step down if it failed. This marked the beginning of an official response to the crisis, though one that was criticized by the right as being too soft and by the left as being woefully ignorant of the real problems underlying the strikes and student revolts.[7] The televised announcement was followed by negotiations with workers' unions at Grenelle on May 25th and 26th, De Gaulle's visit (sometimes also described as a flight) to Germany on the 29th and the dissolution of the National Assembly by the reinvigorated General on the 30th. Still, the revolts and demonstrations carried over into early June, culminating finally with a violent conflict in the Latin Quarter between the students and the police during the night of June 11th. The following week, most of the strikes as well as most protests finally came to an end.[8]

The student revolts of May, by far its most famous and celebrated aspect, originated at the University of Nanterre, an institution with a long history of student unrest. Throughout the month of April 1968, groups of radical left-wing students, from Maoists and Trostkyists to anarchists and general troublemakers describing themselves

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[6] Bernard Pudal, "Les événements de mai et juin 1968: bref récit chronologique" in *Mai-Juin 68,* D. Damamme, B. Gobille, F. Matonti, B. Pudal, eds., Paris: Les Editions de L'Atelier, 2008, 189
[7] Seidman, 183-184
[8] ibid.,250-253

with the appealing yet vague title *les enragés* (the enraged), held protests and sit-ins, disrupted classes and sometimes simply assaulted professors and other representatives of the "imperialist bourgeoisie".[9] On May 2nd, the Movement of March 22nd, a radical anarchist group led by a German-Jewish sociology student Daniel Cohn-Bendit, organized an "anti-imperialism day" on Nanterre's campus. In response, Dean Pierre Grappin, with the support of the French Ministry of Education, decided to shut down the university campus and put the anti-authoritarian students on a disciplinary hearing scheduled for May 6th. The very next day, several student organizations including the French National Student Union (UNEF) and the Young Revolutionary Communists (JCR) occupied the Sorbonne.[10] Fearing that this act of protest would lead to a similar shut down of the University's operations, Alain Peyrefitte, minister of Education, and Jean Roche, Rector of the Sorbonne, called in the police, who had traditionally kept away from university territory.[11]

This was the last straw for many students. A wave of mass protests erupted, students built barricades and drew graffiti on the streets of Paris portraying the French authorities in a uniquely pejorative and disdainful light. Next to joyous situationnist-inspired slogans, like "Beneath the pavement, the beach" or "Be a realist – demand the impossible", students drew harsh criticisms of the government and the police. Some of the more memorable, but by no means the most radical of the graffiti included lines like "CRS=SS" or "Be young and shut up!" scribbled next to a caricature of General De

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[9] ibid., 80-84
[10] Pudal, 190
[11] Reader & Wadia, 10-11

Gaulle, instantly recognizable by his oversized nose.[12] Though protests and demonstrations were happening all around France, Paris became the front and center of the student revolt, culminating in "the Night of Barricades" on May 10th, when students and their supporters closed off the entire left bank of the Seine with makeshift obstructions. The police and CRS struck back, arresting over 500 people during the night at the cost of over 250 injured policemen.[13]

Two events pushed the revolts of May to a new level of intensity. On May 13th, two big trade unions, the CGT and the CFDT, organized a general strike in support of the students. According to different sources, the workers' demonstration was attended by 200,000 – 800,000 people.[14] The next day president Charles De Gaulle left the country for a diplomatic visit to Romania, cementing the impression that the government was out of touch with the people and had no clue how to react.[15] The crisis spread: riots engulfed most Parisian universities, students occupied the Odéon theatre, strikes spread through the entire country, even journalists at the state-run broadcasting corporation ORTF stopped following orders. The French Communist Party (PCF) started organizing a unified left-wing front. Jean-Paul Sartre joined the students at the Sorbonne, while Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who had German citizenship, was issued a deportation order.

And finally, a response. On May 24th De Gaulle called for a referendum on "a renovation encompassing the university system, the society and the economy", followed by an opening of negotiations with the CGT and the CFDT the following day. By that

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[12] The CRS were the French riot police, deployed to contain the street riots and the occupation of the Sorbonne.
[13] Seidman, 117
[14] Reader and Wadia, 11; Pudal, 191
[15] Reader and Wadia, 12

time "France was paralyzed, with more than 8 million people on strike, no public transport and precious little petrol."[16] The Grenelle negotiations concluded with an outline promising a 35% increase in the SMIC (the industrial minimum wage), but the treaty was left unsigned. Leaving without a conclusive result, the workers went back on strike and the student revolts resumed.[17] On May 28th, Francois Mitterrand, leader of the parliamentary socialists, issued a statement calling for an interim government to replace the "present government, incapable of resolving this crisis" and a presidential election with himself as a candidate.[18] Ironically enough, De Gaulle nearly affirmed Mitterand's claims by leaving the country by helicopter on the 29th. For several hours, no-one in the administration or in the press had any idea of his whereabouts. The country was without a head, literally.[19]

It turned out the President had flown to Baden Baden, in Germany, to consult General Jacques Massu, an officer hardened by the Algerian War. Massu assured to De Gaulle the continued support of loyal Gaullists and the President returned a day later, with newfound energy and resolve.[20]

The same could not be said about the Left. The parliamentary left failed in forming a popular coalition that could deliver on the reforms called by Mitterand at the one end and the PCF at the other. Mitterand and other mainstream leftists were afraid to

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[16] ibid., 14
[17] Seidman, 194-195
[18] Francois Mitterand, *Déclaration de M. Francois Mitterand, 28 mai 1968,* http://www.georges-pompidou.org/epoque/documentation_diverse/pol_int/Mitt28mai68.htm, Last Accessed 03/06/10
[19] Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968,* Cambridge: South End Press, 2002, 195
[20] Seidman, 218-219

ally themselves with the radical PCF, but a coalition of the left would have been unthinkable without them. Similarly, the PCF was unsympathetic towards the moderates, who in their view advocated neo-capitalist and pro-American policies.[21] Thus, when De Gaulle returned on May 30th, he found the Élysées palace in the exact order as he had left it – nothing had changed and the Left had lost their one chance at exploiting the momentary loss of leadership.

Two things happened on May 30th. De Gaulle held a speech that soon became known as an example of masterful political oratory. He reminded the workers that they had received gains that under all other circumstance would seem unbelievably generous. He affirmed that he would not step down and would continue to carry out his mandate. He reminded that he had in powers the option of taking military action, suggested that a failure to contain the crisis might result in the imposition of "communist totalitarianism". Finally he reaffirmed the strength of French democracy and announced he would dissolve the National Assembly and call for new legislative election at the end of June.[22]

Second, a mass demonstration took place in the evening of the 30th. On the surface, it was a demonstration like many others in that fateful May: some 300 000 people marched down the Champs-Elysées, among them prominent writers and intellectuals. But this time, one thing was different: the people were marching *in support* of De Gaulle, not against him. The President's forceful speech combined with the continued paralysis of all economic activity in Paris had finally awoken the Gaullists.

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[21] ibid.
[22] Charles de Gaulle, quoted in Laurent Joffrin, *Mai 68: Histoire des événements,* Paris: Seuil, 1988, 295-296

Though demonstrations and strikes continued through the first weeks of June, they no longer had the same momentum. After nearly a full month of strikes, many workers were in debt, bored, and desperately wanting to return to work. Others felt that a 35% salary increase was not a bad result for a few weeks of strikes. Meanwhile, private and government strikebreakers were at work and ordinary French citizens were longing for life to return to normal.[23] On June 16th, the Sorbonne was cleared out by the police and the CRS and two weeks later the Gaullists scored their biggest victory at legislative elections to date, gaining over 100 seats in the parliament, mostly on the account of various left-wing parties. By June 30th 1968, May had finally ended.

The legacy of May 1968 has been assessed, reassesed, contested, overturned and reformulated countless times during the following decades. Over time, a body of literature has emerged focusing primarily on the revisionist history of May 1968, demystifying popular and scholarly accounts of May and contrasting them with novel, alternative narratives. Often these treatments focus on aspects that mainstream accounts of 1968 tend to omit or occlude. It is within this context that this thesis should be situated.

One of the first English overviews of May's legacy in scholarly and popular discourse is Keith Reader's *The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations*.[24] In addition to providing a concise account of the events of May 1968, Reader concentrates on systematizing the variety of responses and retrospectives to 1968. He reviews a variety of scholarly interpretations of May, ranging from those that saw

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[23] Seidman, 226-233
[24] Keith Reader & Khursheed Wadia, *The May 1968 Events in France,* London: MacMillan, 1993

1968 as an "enterprise of subversion" to those that considered it "a rush of blood to the head, a youthful revolt".[25] Significantly, Reader notes, cultural interpretations of May dominate all other readings, political, individualist or social. The further one gets from May, the more one tends to replace political readings of May with cultural ones, "reflecting the piecemeal replacement of revolutionary politics with radical culture that has characterized the period since May".[26]

Though the book's emphasis is on scholarly accounts of May, Reader also devotes a chapter to representations of May in fiction and film, noting most significantly a relative lack of written works dealing with the fateful month. In Reader's view, this is due to the fundamentally diffuse nature of May, one that lends itself perhaps to partisan pamphlets and cinematic experimentation (which he finds in abudance in the works of Jean-Luc Godard), but evades the narrative form.[27] By Reader's account, May 1968 in fiction and traditional film is notable mostly by its absence.

Jean-Pierre Le Goff takes a different look at the legacy of May in his 500-page heavyweight study *Mai 68: L'Héritage Impossible*.[28] The book traces the development of ideas, political movements and cultural heritage born of or matured in '68, from the philosophy of Michel Foucault to the reorganization of the French university system. Le Goff links changes in French society to their supposed origins in '68, showing how almost every aspect of French culture and society has been touched by the legacy of May. In a companion article that appeared in the Spring 2008 edition of *Le Débat*, Le Goff

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[25] ibid., 20-47
[26] ibid., 87
[27] ibid.,117
[28] Jean-Pierre Le Goff, *Mai 68: L'Héritage Impossible,* Paris: La Découverte, 2002.

situates May "between two worlds", between the youthful optimism of the *Trente Glorieuses*[29] and the end-of-century pessimism shaped by an increasingly darker view of the future and the validation of left-wing ecologists and feminists. The joyous emotions of May are, in Le Goff's view, the vehicles keeping mainstream intepretations of 1968 alive.[30]

While Reader and Le Goff concern themselves with delineating the legacy of May in literature and society, two American scholars – Kristin Ross and Michael Seidman – are interested in disspelling the mainstream accounts of May 1968 and providing alternative accounts, as well as alternative legacies. Kristin Ross argues in *May 1968 and Its Afterlives* that reading May as a cultural revolution first and foremost is at best a deeply rooted misconception and at worst a deliberate obfuscation of the true, political, nature of May.[31] The key to understanding May lies not with the students who initiated the revolts, nor with the individual destinies of a few individuals that stood tallest on the barricades, but with the collective solidarity of millions of workers looking for radical change. According to Ross, mainstream narratives of May have obscured the true goals of political activists who initiated it, leaving only the cultural accomplishments, which are often used as examples purportedly proving the "success" of the 1968 demonstrations.[32] Though Ross notes that central to her enterprise is understanding how

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[29] Literally 'The Glorious Thirty', a period from 1945-1975 in France characterized by rapid economic growth, and the transformation of French economy from an agricultural one ravaged by two World Wars to an industrial economy with one of the world's highest standards of living. The Glorious Thirty came to an end with the oil crisis of the 1970s.
[30] Jean-Pierre Le Goff, "Mai 68: La France entre deux mondes" in *Le Débat,* 149 (2008), 83-99
[31] Kristin Ross, *May 1968 and Its Afterlives,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002
[32] ibid., 5-6

this distorted narrative of May came to prevail, she seems more concerned with setting the record straight, bringing to light the true face of May; a face which happens to be that of Janus, with the face of an opressed worker on one side and a critical philosopher on the other.

Michael Seidman proposes a different revision of May's mythology. In *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968,* Seidman argues against the popular notion according to which "May changed everything".[33] In his retelling of the events of May 1968, Seidman shows their relative unimportance, in both their course and their impact. In his view, most of the social changes that May is credited with had their origins in the years far preceding '68. "The events of May did not mark a rupture but instead showed the continuity of social and political trends. No crisis of civilization suddenly erupted, and no significant attempt at workers' control emerged."[34]

Both Seidman and Ross agree that scholarly and popular perceptions of May are flawed and inaccurate in their portrayals of 1968, though for different reasons. However, neither shows great interest in how this particular perception came to prevail. Kristin Ross discusses the evolution of French philosophy and politics after 1968 at length, tracing the ways in which both became interested in revisionist accounts May that in her view occluded May's true legacy. Seidman briefly describes the changing attitudes of commemorative events through the post-May decades, but explaining their emergence is not a part of his argument. This thesis aims to fill in some of the aforementioned gaps by discussing the formation of historical memory, changes in popular narratives of May,

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[33] Seidman, 2
[34] ibid., 282

different assessments and evaluations of 1968 as seen through commemorative events, and by deconstructing some of the enduring myths about the month of barricades.

Granted we will not be the first embarking on this journey – an anniversary article in the Spring 2008 issue of *Le Débat* reviews 40 years of May's commemorations.[35] By this account, May avoided "historization" for more than two decades, fueled by the passions of individuals whose lives were shaped by 1968 and the relevance of May's symbolism to contemporary events – the reaction against president Valérie Giscard d'Estaing's poor handling of the 1970s oil crisis and Francois Mitterrand's precarious tenure as a socialist president.[36] This mythologized version of May then became ingrained in popular memory and subsequent attempts at historical revisionism no longer had the same traction as accounts provided by eye-witnesses and active *soixante-huitards*.[37]

Kristin Ross too discusses the commemorations of May both in *May 1968 and Its Afterlives* and in a 2002 article in *Critical Inquiry.*[38] In her view, the 1980s marked the establishment of a "false consensus" about May. This inaccurate portrayal linked May to the development of individualism, an affirmation market democracy and a concern about neo-liberal human rights. The highly political May got reduced to the status of a youth

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[35] Jean-Pierre Rioux, "L'évenement-mémoire: Quarante Ans de Commémorations" in *Le Débat,* 149 (2008), 4-19
[36] ibid., 13
[37] ibid., 16. *Soixante-huitard* means literally 'sixty-eighter', a term used to describe active participants of the May 1968 revolts.
[38] Kristin Ross, "Establishing Consensus: May '68 as Seen in France from the 1980s" in *Critical Inquiry,* 28/3 (2002), 650-676

revolt, a necessary consequence of generational transition, because "all young people revolt - it's a part of growing up".[39]

While this thesis adopts many of the arguments advanced by Jean-Pierre Rioux and Kristin Ross, it also tries to avoid a homogenization of May's memory and provide a more nuanced and varied account of the legacy of '68 in popular consciousness through a reading of select and specific episodes of commemoration. This thesis is not an attempt at delineating a 'consensus', it is rather an exercise in showing the various contradictions and controversies that have emerged from popular memories of May. This multifocal perspetive should also enable the reader to view the process of memory creation through a variety of theoretical lenses, incorporating elements from historical theory, discourse analysis and literary theory, to name just a few.

This thesis discusses four significant narratives about May '68 that have transformed and evolved through four decades of commemoration. By tracing and deconstructing these stories, we gain insight to the ways in which memory is molded and myths are constructed. Chapter one deals with the political appropriations of May. This is perhaps one of the easiest ways to understand how myths are created, because the actors shaping public narratives are easily defined (they are politicians associated with specific parties holding specific ideologies) and their objectives are explicit and well understood. It seems safe to assume that a politician speaking in a political context will in some form be oriented towards legitimizing his authority and cementing his power by portraying his interests and worldviews as convergent with those of his voters. It follows then that when politicians and ideologues talk about May, they are at least influenced, if not shaped by

[39] ibid., 674

the political realities of the day. A minister whose every word is dissected and discussed by the press would never say anything about a historical event that could undermine his authority in the present, or his chances for re-election in the future.[40] The first chapter looks at how the mythology of May has evolved, both on the Left as well as the Right, and connects these changes to changes in French politics. Left-wing activists saw May as a reminder of progressive failures, an image only exacerbated by the presidency of Francois Mitterrand and his cohabitation with right-wing conservatives. For the Right, May was initially proof of the Gaullists' continued success, but as the social and cultural effects of May rippled through French society and became accepted norms of behavior, the Right adopted a new narrative, portraying 1968 as the origin of everything that was wrong with French society, from a lack of moral values to the capitalist excesses of large corporations and banks.

Chapter two looks at the emergence and persistence of Daniel Cohn-Bendit as a central figure in the May 1968 mythology. This case study allows us to focus on a specific instance where memory has been appropriated and utilized for political ends. Cohn-Bendit's story additionally shows how narratives and archetypes that tap into issues and controversies already present in public memory become permanent fixtures of the collective consciousness. Though his role in the actual events of May '68 was relatively small, Daniel Cohn-Bendit has become in the following decades so closely associated with May that it is almost impossible to discuss the events of May without discussing

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[40] The use of memory as a political tool, specifically as a legitimization of the nation-state and the dominant elites has been examined in-depth in Max Paul Friedman, "Memory and the Contest for Hegemony in Politics" in *The Merits of Memory, ,* eds H. Grabbe, S. Schneider, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2008,135-138

Daniel Cohn-Bendit in the process. Chapter two looks at the emergence of Cohn-Bendit as a metonym for May at ties it to his "trickster" personality and his post-May political career as a Member of the European Parliament and a Green activist. Further, Chapter two analyzes the imagery and symbols surrounding Daniel Cohn-Bendit and argues that the persistence of Cohn-Bendit in the mythology of May is tied to a carefully crafted image portraying him as a victim of institutional anti-semitism, a deep-rooted concern in French public memory going back to the times of the Vichy government and the Dreyfus affair.

The French feminist movement and its eventual association with May '68 is the central topic of chapter three. For more than ten years, feminism in France was a taboo subject for the mainstream media, one that was not acknowledged as a legitimate topic of discussion, and by implication, not acknowledged as a concern with broad public interest. As this attitude changed, feminism became associated with the events of May '68, to the extent that the origins of radical feminism were often claimed to lie in the student revolts. Feminism, gender equality and female sexual liberation quickly became known as the greatest accomplishments of May during the 1980s and 1990s. Then a counternarrative emerged, according to which May was, if anything, chauvinist, and the (overwhelmingly male) student activists of May were not interested as much in women's liberation as they were interested in liberated women. The 40th anniversary celebration of May was colored by this conflict, the old narrative of a Feminist May still standing tall, but persistently under attack by commentators holding the more sceptical perspective. Chapter three traces these changes in feminist narratives to broader social changes in French society as well as structural patterns in memory formation. The association of feminism with May

can be seen in terms of myth-making, where all events happening in the vicinity of a large transformative milestone like May ’68 get conflated with it. The later disillusionment, on the other hand, is explained by the emergence of female voices in the public sphere who did not idealize May and the liberalization of social norms, which made the attitudes of May ’68, even in their mythological form, seem conservative in retrospect.

Chapter four looks at the perceived impact of May through the four subsequent decades. By 1978 the sudden social rupture, the break with the norm of 1968 was still fresh, leading to narratives emphasizing the violent, revolutionary nature of May. Ten years later, as the militant voices of *soixante-huitards* were dying down, the image of May became neutralized, and a parallel narrative of a non-violent, joyful youth upheaval emerged, driven largely by Hervé Hamon’s and Patrick Rothman’s immensely popular work “Generation” (published in book form and made into a documentary by May’s second decennial). The 1990s and 2000s shifted the role of commentators from journalists, eye-witnesses and *soixante-huitards* to sociologists, historians and other academics, allowing for the proliferation of different narratives of May. Nevertheless it would be wrong to say that May had left the domain of memory completely. Rather May persisted, and keeps persisting, on the border of history and memory, sustained by the interest in commemoration, kept alive by the possibility of ascribing present-day concerns onto a fluid narrative of the past.

METHODOLOGY

Let us imagine a person without memory. We might think of someone like Earl in Jonathan Nolan's short story "Memento Mori", whose retrograde amnesia prevents him from forming any new memories. Although he keeps a list of notes with directions to help him navigate his daily affairs, they eventually lead him to a tragic end, because, incapable of placing the notes in context with the past, he regularly misinterprets their meaning without even realizing it.[41] In contrast, imagine a man with perfect memory, imagine Funes in Jorge Luis Borges' eponymous short story, who remembers everything, indiscriminately, every nook and crevice of his bedroom, every emotion and experience he ever felt, every conversation he ever had. As a result, Funes is almost completely incapable of functioning in the world, since "to think is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract".[42] These two stories illustrate two key traits of memory – the inextricable link of the past to the present, and the discriminating eye towards generalization, abstraction and omission based on our interests here and now.

How then is memory different from history, one might ask? History too, as E. H. Carr has written, is stuck in the purgatory between past and present. One looks at history "through the eyes of his own time, and studies the problems of the past as a key to those of the present".[43] History too discriminates, selects and abstracts based on the concerns of the historian. Where, then, is the difference? One good answer is provided by David

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[41]Jonathan Nolan, *Memento Mori,* http://www.impulsenine.com/homepage/pages/shortstories/memento_mori.htm

[42]Jorge Luis Borges, "Funes the Memorious" in *Ficciones*, J. Sturrock, ed, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, 90

[43] E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, Hampshire: Palgrave, 1961, 21

Lowenthal, in an article on heritage, a seemingly different topic. However, since Lowenthal considers heritage to be a tangible form of memory, then we may just as well substitute the terms: "[Memory] should not be confused with history. History seeks to convince by truth, and succumbs to falsehood. [Memory] exaggerates and omits, candidly invents and frankly forgets, and thrives on ignorance and error. Time and hindsight alter history, too. But historians' revisions must conform to accepted tenets of evidence. [Memory] is more flexibly emended. Historians ignore at professional peril the whole corpus of past knowledge that [memory] can airily transgress."[44]

The case of Nolan's Earl or Borges' Funes might be of interest to literary critics and psychologists, historians on the other hand look at collective memory. By this we mean the views of the past held in the present by communities of people, the public domain or some other expression of group identity.[45] According to Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory is what makes individual memory possible and vice versa; it is the social thought that contextualizes the individual thought, one could not exist without the other.[46] The word 'collective' should not be understood to mean consensual or even coherent; on the contrary, collective memories may be contested, subject to political and ideological debate, they may be appropriated both by the state power and by informal countercultural institutions. Sometimes collective memories can be directly contradictory. But even opposing interpretations of a single event can be part of the same body of

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[44] David Lowenthal, "Fabricating Heritage" in *History and Memory* 10/1, http://www.iupress.indiana.edu/journals/history/ham10-1.html

[45]Patrick H Hutton., "Memory and Historical Identity" in *The Merits of Memory,* eds H. Grabbe, S. Schneider, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2008, 82

[46] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992, 175

collective memory, if they interact in the same interpretive community.[47] For instance both the idea of American exceptionalism and the rejection of that idea in certain socioeconomic or racial groups can still be considered equally legitimate aspect of American collective memory, since even the rejection of Tocqueville's dogmatic idea is dependent on recognizing its existence. Though one's reaction to the concept of American exceptionalism may vary depending one's background, class status, and various other structural and individual characteristics, it is nearly impossible to avoid interacting with it in an American community, which qualifies it as a staple of American historical memory.

By that token, May 1968 is as surely a part of French collective memory as the idea of exceptionalism is part of the American one. But this truism is certainly not satisfying enough to be left uninterrogated. Why has May become a staple of French identity, to the extent that it is commemorated to a degree comparable only to Bastille Day, to the extent that a French presidential candidate makes it a founding pillar of his campaign, to the extent that forty years of history have not diminished the amount of books, dissertations, theses and articles written about it? How do we study it? How does a concept as nebulous as 'collective memory' crystallize into a form that can be observed, probed and evaluated? What are the reasons that cause the memory of '68 to transform into a contested, ideological subject that has produced heated debate for over 40 years?

The first question is answered with the help of the French historian Pierre Nora. In his 7-volume *magnum opus*, *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Nora and other French historians

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[47] Hue-Tam Ho Tai, "Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory" in *The American Historical Review,* 106/3, http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/106.3/ah000906.html#FOOT34

examine staples of French national identity, such as the tricolor flag or the idea of the Sun King, from the perspective of collective memory and commemoration. According to Nora, elements as diverse as the Bastille Square, Camembert cheese, Joan of Arc and Normandy vineyards come together under the term *lieux de mémoire,* which has been roughly (and somewhat inadequately) translated into English as 'realms of memory'. According to Nora, the increasingly fast pace of modernity has caused a disjuncture between memory and history, transforming them from parallel concepts to opposing ones. Memory, this constantly reinvented, evolving, living construct of the human mind has in Nora's view become the antithesis of the fleeting reconstruction of the past also known as history.[48] This distinction has an air of romanticism to it and is perhaps not quite as radical as Nora would have us believe, but it helps in leading him to the concept of the *lieu de mémoire*. The 'realm of memory', according to Nora, is an event, object or concept that contains within itself the will to remember and a combination of functional, symbolic and material value.[49] More significantly, realms of memory "have no referent in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent. [---] In this sense, the *lieu de mémoire* is double: a site of excess closed upon itself, concentrated in its own name, but also forever open to the full range of its possible significations."[50]

It is easy enough to see how May 1968 fits all of these characteristics. An in-depth description of the mechanisms that turn May from a historical event into a *lieu de mémoire* would (and in fact does) take up the rest of this thesis, but let us begin with a

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[48] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire"* in *Representations,* 26, 8-9
[49] ibid., 19
[50] ibid., 23-24

brief summary: materially, May exists in the form of the thousands of posters, books and various paraphernalia born out of the student riots that are easily recognizable even today. Functionally May was supposed to be a break with history, a rupture that ends the rigid bourgeois rule of France and heralds in a new age of liberty and playfulness. *Sous les pavés, la plage* – under the pavement, the beach – as the saying goes. The failure of this immediate goal only solidifies May as a *lieu*, similarly like the failure of the French Revoutionary calendar in Nora's example makes it more, not less of a *lieu:* a failure, or incomplete success becomes a constant reminder of itself, whereas a success would "[melt] into our memorial landscape" and cease to exist as *lieu*.[51] Finally, the symbolic status is perhaps the most significant quality that forms it into a realm of memory. As the rest of this thesis will show, May has been used to signify everything from the persistence and effectiveness of state power to the liberalization of mores. Furthermore, this aspect illustrates the other important element of a *lieu* – its fluidity as a signifier. The staying power of May comes from being both grounded in a historical event and open to reinterpretation as the interests of succeeding generations change.

In studying May, we must pay attention to ways in which historical events are molded into narratives, in other words, how a past reality is turned into a present story. The past does not have a three-part structure, yet "to remember is always to give a reading of the past, a reading which requires linguistic skills derived from the traditions of explanation and story-telling within a culture".[52] If all history is a literary enterprise, as Hayden White has argued, then memory is doubly so, because history, after all, has

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[51] ibid., 19-20
[52] David Bakhurst, "Social Memory in Soviet Thought" in *Collective Remembering,* eds. D.Middleton and D.Edwards, London: Sage, 1990, 219f

recourse to "responsibility to the rules of evidence, the relative fullness of narrative detail, logical consistency, and the like", not to mention the self-consciousness that recognizes itself as partially illusory.[53] Memory adheres to none of these criteria, in fact it is more than happy to change, ignore or distort evidence in order conform it to a symbolic structure, a certain narrative of perceiving the world or a specific interest in the present.[54] We can expect stories of May '68 to have easily identifiable protagonists (such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit) or well delineated goals (such as sexual and social liberation), which may not agree with more rigorous, scholarly analyses of 1968. If such formations can be identified, we must then ask: How did they come about? Why those people, why those goals, and not others? What were the individual interests and structural forces that allowed certain myths about May to become ingrained while washing away others as if they had never existed? These questions are central to the entire thesis, but they become particularly relevant in discussions of literary form and structure in commemorative narratives, key arguments in chapters two and three.

We now reach the somewhat less philosophical question of methodology. How does one study an event of memory? How does a community create meaning? Where does the *zeitgeist* hide itself? As most scholars of memory, Nora and Halbwachs in particular, note, ritual plays an important role in reifying collective memory. Sociologist Patricia Leavy argues that every subsequent commemoration of September 11 has become more than just a remembrance of that tragic autumn day; it is now a

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[53] White, Hayden, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *History and Theory: Contemporary Readings,* eds. B. Fay, P. Pomper & R. Vann, Blackwell: Oxford: 1998, 30-31

[54] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1986, 210

commemoration of all the mythology and symbolism that September 11 has become synonymous with – from a rare show of patriotic unity to the War on Terror and the curtailment of civil rights in the name of security.[55] A commemoration forces us to reflect on the historical event itself and through that lens recall all the appropriations and reinterpretations of the *lieu*. Some stories that have almost been forgotten are brought once again to the fore of public discourse (the die-hard debate over the 9/11 memorial in New York is one example), and conversely, ongoing debates are more firmly tied to the symbolism of the event in question. Anniversaries and memorials function as a nexus for all the discourses surrounding the original *lieu*.

For this reason I have chosen the ten-year anniversaries of May as the focal points of my study. 1978, '88, '98 and '08 have all seen an explosion of popular and academic literature about May 68. Newspapers have run specials on May in relation to anything – politics, society, feminism, film, fashion, and the like. The anniversaries are by far the most lucrative sources of information for almost all narratives that May has been associated with. Further, they help to focus this study on a few key moments in French history that, like 1968 itself, reflect on general trends in French society at the time.

Answering the second question, how does a community create meaning, is somewhat more counter-intuitive. We normally think of memory as something uniquely personal. Our memories are our own and no-one else's, they are a product of our brain and the creators of our identity. The idea that we can study shared memory without recourse to a lot of personal autobiographies seems preposterous at first. However, Maurice Halbwachs notes that a lot of the memories we consider "personal" are in fact

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[55] Patricia Leavy. *Iconic Events,* New York: Lexington Books, 2007, 4

borrowed, from newspapers, books, conversations, observations and so on. The body of remembrances that are shared and experienced by entire communities makes up collective memory.[56] In the case of small communities – townships and congregations for example – it is easy to locate the source of the collective memories within the shared physical and mental space. Factory workers share the same the working habits, inhabit the same spaces, have similar relationships to tools, traditions and technologies. In the case of large groups, such as the nation, the idea of a shared space becomes less literal, however. Here, we speak of 'imagined communities', groups of people who never interact face-to-face with everyone else in the group, but nevertheless have a sense of group identity. They feel they are similar to a number of other people, even though they have never met them, and cannot even imagine them in their variety and difference. Still, people perceive themselves as belonging to the same group, by virtue of sharing common goals, ideals and concepts of the world.[57] This group identity is created through the use of mass media – first the printing press, then print journalism, the radio, television and finally the Internet - allowing the reading public to partake (mostly passively, although this is changing with the Internet) in community-wide discourse and to be exposed to terms, concepts and ideas that guide the minds of people in similar directions, leading to the construction of the 'imagined community'. Owing to this idea, this thesis will focus

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[56] Halbwachs, Maurice, *On Collective Memory,* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992, 48

[57] The term 'imagined community' is borrowed, of course, from Benedict Anderson, and his groundbreaking work on the modern origins of nationalism. The type of collective memory that this thesis is concerned with is very much part of this discourse on national identity, as the myths of 1968 under question are very much part of and limited to the French community. See: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* London: Verso, 1991, 6-8 for discussion of this particular definition

on the memories of May created and discussed in mass media: print journalism, television, and radio.

One obvious complication here is that mass media inevitably creates a very hierarchic framework for the dissemination of collective memory. The memories of those with access to newspapers, the television and other media will inevitably be privileged over the memories of the common people. This has led many historians, Marxists in particular, to the conclusion that mass media serves primarily as a source of legitimizing state authority and protecting the existing order.[58] Furthermore, the media provides little insight into how the dominant mythology is received – who accepts it, who rejects it, who offers competing views and who molds it into something entirely new. Any discourse moves on a two-way street, it is not simply graciously given and blindly received; it is, in fact, constantly reinterpreted at every opportunity. How could we possibly grasp all of these complexities via a simple textual analysis of a limited number of mass media outlets?

The very honest answer is: we cannot, but we can go half way. Recalling Michel Foucault, relationships of power are more complicated than orthodox Marxists would have us believe, and not every dominating discourse is necessarily one constructed by state. The mass media gives us insight – very limited and specific insight, true, but insight nonetheless – to the memories of the political opposition, the underprivileged, the workers and the students, as well as the government and its various proxies. Furthermore, these texts will allow us to see the interplays between competing memories of May, and

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[58] This is particularly evident in Eric Hobsbawms seminal essay *The Invention of Tradition*. Eric Hobsbawm , "Inventing Traditions", in *The Invention of Tradition,* eds. E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 1-15

get a better understanding of the dynamics of memory. It helps that most French newspapers are explicitly political: *Le Figaro* has a history of right-wing nationalism, *Le Monde* is known as the center-left newspaper, and *l'Humanité* functions as the courier of the communist left. The allegiances of French public broadcasting can be just as easily traced. Of course, beyond these explicit agendas lay a variety of implicit goals, constructed by class, socioeconomic status and a number of other factors. This means that often evidence linking specific myths to broad structural forces can be a tenuous and speculative process. For this reason, I have tried to stick to clearly identifiable connections based on close readings of newspaper texts and broadcast material. However, structural factors have to be taken into account, as they are often crucial in determining what sort of discourse is allowed public prominence, and what sort of discourse gets muffled and prohibited.[59] In such cases I have relied heavily on secondary sources, sociological studies on French society and culture and key works on French media and politics. The importance of such arguments is particularly apparent in chapters three and four, which relate changes in the May mythology to broad social transformations in the fields of gender equality and youth politics, respectively.

This thesis is varied and interdisciplinary in its approach. It is interested in the formation of memory at the level of literary theory and narrative studies, but also in a

[59] This idea is explained in detail and at length in Michel Foucault's seminal methodological work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972). The exact minutiae of his methodological approach are not always applicable to this thesis, nor are they always relevant, however, a key to understanding the connection between my approach and his would be to treat mainstream journalistic discourse as a *discursive field*, where certain enunciations are permissible and other are not just prohibited, they are unthinkable. The field of permitted thought in journalism is perhaps more easily defined than in other discursive fields – it is shaped by the interests of the journalists, they socioeconomic status, the perception of what counts as 'public interest' – also tied to issues of class and tradition, etc.

broader sociological context, in a relationship to political interests and class conflict. The cases studies presented below attempt to provide a multiplicity of perspectives on the commemorations of May. The biggest mistake one could make would be to repeat the strategy of the myths under analysis and portray the representations of May as homogenous, fundamentally similar phenomena. Ultimately, this thesis aims to incite in the reader a profound suspicion for clear-cut tales of historical events and provide a more complex, though not necessarily clearer, idea of the narratives of May. It is not a comfortable position to be in, but upon reflection, it is perhaps a more honest one.

CHAPTER 1:
REBELS WITH A CAUSE – THE POLITICAL MYTH

"Morality. That word does not frighten me. One cannot talk about morality after May '68"[60]. With these words, presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy introduced one of the longest philippics against May 1968. The speech, delivered at Bercy in April of 2007, opened the last stretch of the electoral campaign and became a defining moment of Sarkozy's bid for the presidency. The polarizing effect of his speech is hardly surprising, as its content revolved around the controversial promise to "liquidate the heritage of May 68".[61] Sarkozy claimed that May imposed intellectual and cultural relativism on society, dismissed authority, respect and politeness, blurred the borders between good and evil and introduced cynicism into society and politics.[62]

Yet this image of a hedonistic and immoral May was intended to stand as a metonym for the true heirs of '68, the contemporary Left, as Sarkozy himself admitted later in the speech. Since the primary actors of May were workers and *gauchiste* students, one can easily see why Sarkozy would hold the contemporary Left responsible for what were in his view the excesses of 1968. However, the idea of 1968 as a time of unrestraint, the radical rejection and demonization of the values of May, was never a permanent fixture of the Right's political rhetoric. Nor has the resolute affirmation of '68 by the

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[60] Nicolas Sarkozy, *Déclaration de M. Nicolas Sarkozy...*, http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/073001622.html,
[61] ibid.
[62] ibid.

mainstream Left in response to Sarkozy's claim always been the *status quo*.[63] From '78, when the future of France seemed to inevitably contain a Gaullist government, to '88, when the upcoming presidential elections and two years of cohabitation under the Mitterand-Chirac Goverment muddied the waters, and onwards, the political interpretation of May's memory remained a dynamic affair. This chapter looks at the development of 1968 mythology in the debate between Left and Right. I argue that prevailing interpretations were always strongly rooted in the political dynamics of the time. At both ends of the political spectrum, May was seen less as an influential cultural landmark and more as a symbol of a progressive *political* revolution. This image of '68 was colored by the growing disillusionment with the governmental Left, which caused the the conservatives to start portraying May as yet another example of reprehensible *gauchiste* morality and the far Left holding it as yet another betrayed ideal. In this context our vantage points, the 10-year anniversaries of '68, are all the more appropriate, as all but one of them were also election years.

May 1978. Two months after the French legislative elections. The right-wing Presidential Majority had retained a 87-seat lead over the Union of the Left, a loss over their 140-seat lead in the previous General Assembly, but a majority nonetheless. The politically unaffiliated economist Raymond Barre was hailed as the perfect choice for Prime Minister by the Left, Centre and Right, according to an editorial in the

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[63] See "Mai 68: La gauche tire a boulets rouges sur Sarkozy", http://tf1.lci.fr/infos/france/politique/0,,3438472,00-mai1968-gauche-tire-boulets-rouges-sur-sarkozy-.html , for a selection of responses to Sarkozy's speech. A representative example is Dominique Strauss-Kahn's "There is no reason to be ashamed of 68", a less representative, but perhaps more eloquent one is given by Daniel Cohn-Bendit: "I ask myself, was he smoking a joint before giving that speech, because that would explain the hallucinatory exclamations."

conservative Le Figaro.[64] Yet his appointment in 1976 was a product of necessity not of reconciliation – as a result of the 1973 oil crisis, France in '78 was in the middle of the first major economic crisis since World War II. Unemployment was growing and inflation was running at 9.5%. Appointing a nominally apolitical economist as Prime Minister was supposed to calm the left-wing opposition, while paving the road for a number of market-oriented reforms to bring France out of the economic slump. Yet by the 1978 election, those policies were too young to produce tangible results, while the reorientation from employment-oriented economic policy to inflation control was already angering the Left.[65] President Valery Giscard d'Estaing felt confident approaching the 1978 elections, but this view was not widely shared. The Left was consolidating its forces and the victory of the Presidential Majority at the legislative elections was considered anything but a *fait accompli*. In this atmosphere, shaped by equal parts of crisis and confidence, the first decennial of May 1968 arrived.

What better place to look for the official interpretation of May than the public media? Though no longer simply a Gaullist mouthpiece, French television in 1978 was still firmly in the hands of the government. A giscardian reform in 1974 had disbanded the national television company ORTF, whose role was best described by former minister of education, Alain Peyrefitte as the "The government in every dining room."[66] Its replacement, a decentralized network of television and radio stations, distributors and

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[64] Jean-Jacques Chevalier, Guy Carcassonne & Olivier Duhamel, *La Ve République 1958-2004*, Armand Colin: Paris, 2004, 248

[65] See: Rolf E. Wubbels, "The French Economic Miracle: What a Difference Leadership Makes," in *Financial Analysts Journal,* 35(4), 23-27 for an overview of changes in French economic policy in the Barre era.

[66] Alain Peyrefitte quoted in Aude Vassallo*, La télévision sous de Gaulle. Le contrôle gouvernemental de l'information. 1958/1969*, Paris: INA-De Boeck, 2005, 43

research archives, was supposedly more liberal, yet all of the organizations were headed by directors-general who reported directly to the Prime Minister. Adding to this a decades-long tradition of self-censorship, and the fact that French broadcast media continued to exist as a state monopoly, one cannot help but conclude that a lot of the liberalization happened in name only.[67]

The commemoration of May centered around two big broadcasts that aired on prime-time in early May 1978. A roundtable debate on Antenne 2 discussed the question "May 68: Revolt or Revolution?" and a three-part documentary presented an overview of the actual events of May. The debate, met with heavy criticism in most centrist and left-wing publications from *Le Monde* to *l'Humanité,* painted a picture of May as an unfocused, violent and ultimately failed attempt at a social revolution.[68] Although the host, Joseph Pasteur, initially introduced May seemingly positively, as a crisis that "no one has forgotten. [---] It changed the society in which we live," it soon became evident that this favorable introduction was but a rhetorical device leading to a serious condemnation. The portrayal favored by the political right was one that downplayed the social and political upheaval in favor of a narrative describing an unfocused youth rebellion that provoked a significant yet temporary political crisis, which was swiftly subdued by the protective Gaullist government. There was little question that this narrative was the one preferred by the producers of the broadcast. Echoing the perceptive

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[67] See: Sophie Bachmann, "La suppression de l'ORTF en 1974: La réforme de la "Délivrance"" in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire,* 17(1), 63-72 for a discussion of the reform and the impact on state control of the media. See 69-72 in particular for an argument on how the liberalizing efforts were only partially successful in reducing state control over broadcasting.

[68] Here and onwards, "La Crise de 68 – Révolte ou Revolution" on *Dossiers de l'Écran* Antenne 2, May 2nd, 1978, INA

observation of Alain Krivine, one of two representatives of the Left and the only guest with a significant role in the events of 68, the producers failed to invite a single socialist, communist or union leader, not even the ubiquitous Daniel Cohn-Bendit.

In an environment where the voices of conservative politicians and academics overwhelmed the single actual participant of May, the rhetoric became all the more jarring. Michel Droit, former favorite of general de Gaulle, argued that unlike the Civil Rights movement or the Prague Spring, May in France was "not a revolution. It was too vague to be a revolution, it had no movement, no goal. It did not look serious on the streets, it looked like a revolt". The openly partisan host, Joseph Pasteur suggested that a silent majority, both in '68 and '78 opposed the "incredible violence" of Cohn-Bendit and Krivine.

May as a failed, violent youth rebellion without results or a clearly defined goal appears to be one distinct part of the conservative impression. But it was hardly an uncontroversial position, otherwise why even talk about it? The three-part documentary, *Histoire de Mai,* with André Frossard at the helm, sheds some light at the motivations behind the conservative memory of May. A key feature of the documentary was the selection of interviews with the leaders of the student revolt, but also with the political actors of the time, from the ruling Gaullists, to the socialist opposition. And since the political establishment of '68 was mostly the establishment in '78 as well, the interviews provided a very clear picture of the political conjecture of the day.

The Right painted itself as completely oblivious to the events of May 1968. Jacques Chirac, Minister of the Interior in '68, former Prime Minister and head of the largest right-wing party in '78, insisted that in spite of good communication and friendly

relations with both the educational system and the labor unions, no-one in the government could foresee the events of May.[69] Michel Jobert, cabinet secretary to Prime Minister Pompidou in '68, made similar claims in both the documentary and an opinion article in *le Monde*: "And yet, what turmoil! [---] And without anticipation! Not by the by the general [De Gaulle], for whom the situation became elusive fast, not for the Prime Minister, who left calmly for Afganistan, not for the minister of education, whose universities triggered these fireworks."[70] Ironically enough, that very Minister of Education, Alain Peyrefitte, appeared in the same documentary, aptly describing the miserable living conditions of students at Nanterre, the university where the revolts started.[71]

Why did Chirac and Jobert choose to show themselves as ignorant of developments so obvious to Peyrefitte? This claim appears to be one half of a narrative of stability and order, a claim without which the rest of the narrative makes no sense. According to the governmental right, the outcome of May was ultimately as insignificant as it was ambitious: the students were pacified, the political Left failed in making a bid for the presidency, and the Gaullists returned. The Grenelle Accords – well, that was simply a meager compromise in order to appease the workers, with no real outcome.[72] The standing order won and that, in fact, was what made May significant. The moral, according to Jobert and Chirac, was that May proved the Gaullist regime capable of triumphing even against an unexpected, unforeseen crisis. The political situation at the time of the broadcast was only further proof of the stability of the successor regime.

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[69] André Frossard quoted in *Histoire de Mai, pt I,* Antenne 2, May 7th, 1978, INA
[70] Michel Jobert, "Mai 68 ou la révolution civilisée" in *Le Monde,* Mai 6, 1978
[71] André Frossard quoted in *Histoire de Mai, pt 1*
[72] See: Jacques Chirac quoted in, *Histoire de Mai, pt 3,* Antenne 2, May 21, 1978, INA

Leaving aside the obvious explanation – that politicians rarely admit to mistakes or failure – there are a number of reasons that caused the Right in '78 to gravitate towards a view of May as an example of state power and the efficiency of the Gaullist regime. The Presidential Majority's victory against the United Left was by no means a foregone conclusion. If anything, it was a surprise. The economic downturn and the unsuccessful attempts of Prime Minister Chirac to contain the recession brought considerable support to the Socialists and the Communists and disillusioned by the failure of Chirac, many saw the liberalizing policies of Prime Minister Barre as further steps down the road to perdition.

The Right was not a homogenous group either. A conservative Gaullist in bed with a president in charge of liberalizing French society, Jacques Chirac was both an ally and a rival of president Giscard d'Estaing. Chirac's portrayal of the Gaullists as the party of order and stability could be seen equally as an indictment of Giscard d'Estaing, who presided over the period of economic instability, and as an indictment of the Left, the creators of social instability. Finally, the economic downturn prompted the proliferation of many social and political anti-establishment movements that the government had to contain. Threats appeared both from the direction of counterculture movements and formal political organizations. The working class *loubards,* young rebels dressed in menacing leather jackets, were exemplary products of the oil crisis, distinctly more aggressive and malcontent than the revolutionary yet ultimately joyous generation of '68.[73] The '70s also saw the rise of the French far right, namely Jean-Marie Le Pen's

[73] Chris Warne, "La Jeunesse est-elle toujours en crise? The Social Representation of Youth under the Fifth Republic" in *Forty Years of the Fifth Republic*, M. Allison & O. Heathcote, eds. Bern: Peter Lang, 1999, 211-212

Front Nationale, and its competitor *Parti des Nouvelles Forces* in 1972 and 1974 respectively.[74] In this state of increasing anxiety, one method for maintaining an atmosphere of security was through a discourse of stability and control, a discourse that the conservative image of May helped to sustain.

At the opposite end of the political spectrum, May appeared very different. Far from considering the state's actions appropriate or even effective, the Left saw '68 as an indictment of the Gaullist regime that even ten years later could not provide an adequate response to the social and political problems that 1968 had underscored. Alain Krivine, head of the Revolutionary Communist League, started the roundtable debate *La Crise de 68* with an immediate attack on the present regime. He raised the issue of Daniel Cohn-Bendit's continuing exile, which the Giscardian government had still failed to reverse. He invoked a new "silent majority" who had opposed the conduct of De Gaulle during '68, disapproved of the failed social reforms thereafter and disliked the Giscardian administration in general. Finally, Krivine noted, the proletariat was being completely excluded from the debate – any debate – over the legacy of '68.[75] Put together, his comments formed an image of a government out of touch with the people, incapable and unwilling to tackle sorely needed social reforms, ignoring those of the underpriviliged who let themselves be ignored, and laying down the iron fist on those who would not. "What would a worker, one of those whose salaries were raised by 10, sometimes 15 percent, have said on televison? [---] But there wasn't one. Would they have opposed the

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[74] Catherine Fieschi, *Fascism, Populism and the French Fifth Republic*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007, 145

[75] "La Crise de 68 – Révolte ou Revolution"

quantitative demands with qualitative ones?" wrote an anonymous critic in the French communist newspaper *L'Humanité*[76].

The Left also rejected the claim that May was unexpected and unpredictable. "Thunder, though the first strike may shock us, is never unpredictable nor spontaneous"[77] wrote *L'Humanité* in their anniversary edition. For the progressives, May was that first thunder, itself unpredictable, but signifying a deep and important rupture in the social and political fabric of French society, one that even by 1978 was still clearly evident. The commemorative headlines in left-wing newspapers usually read something like "'68 – The Fight Continues"[78] and almost every interview with a representative of the Left – in television or in print – made reference to how, if anything, the situation of the proletariat was worse, not better, in '78 than in '68[79]. In short, this story is antithetical to the one offered by the Right – May was not resolved by De Gaulle, it was merely quelled, the problems were ignored and the deep-rooted social rupture remained, boiling under a surface of docility even ten years later.

The *Parti Socialiste* and the *Parti Communiste* had a number of reasons to believe that interpretation. How could a revolutionary movement that almost everyone on the left had participated in be resolved or even repealed without a change in power? In 1978, though they had gained a significant number of supporters, the PS were a long way from

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[76] B.F. "Mai 68 sans les ouvriers," in *L'Humanité,* May 3, 1978
[77] René Ballet, "Mai 68: Le Chant Général," in *L'Humanité,* May 17 ,1978
[78] An example is "Nous Continuons Le Combat Populaire de Mai '68" in *L'Humanité,* May 22, 1978 or "Mai 68 – La symphonie Inachevée" in *L'Humanite,* Mai 19, 1978
[79] Examples include Georges Seguy, secretary-general of the CGT in "Une Grande Anticipation sur l'avenir" in *L'Humanité,* May 18, 1978 ("There are too many democrats, too many workers in France today that underestimate the role of the working class [---] like they did in '68"); or Alain Krivine in "La Crise de 68" on Antenne 2, or Guy Hernier in "Nous Continuons le Combat Populaire de Mai 68" in *L'Humanité,* Mai 22, 1978 ("All that I have just said [---] shows how topical the questions posed by 68 still are today")

a legislative majority. Furthermore, ’68 was difficult to separate from the subsequent failures of the Left, because most *soixantehuitards* in ’78 were influential progressive leaders. Francois Mitterrand, the leader of the PS in ’78, was the voice of the anti-Gaullist opposition in ’68 and Georges Seguy was an influential union spokesperson through both decades, just to name two examples. The narrative of May’s failure created a very concrete political platform for the PS.

Fast forward ten years. The tables had turned and then turned again. In 1981 the Socialists won the presidential elections and Francois Mitterand became the first socialist president. His victory was short-lived though, two years after being elected he had to start compromising on his policies. Nationalization of major industries stopped, full employment strategy was abandoned in favor of the *franc fort* – the strong franc – and the French government drifted back towards the center. The victory of Chirac in the 1986 general elections brought about a period of cohabitation, where the country was governed by a Socialist president and a Gaullist prime minister. The twentieth anniversary of May came alongside the French presidential elections, with the incumbent president Mitterand running against his own Prime Minister Jacques Chirac. It is hardly surprising that this air of political uncertainty would end up coloring the twentieth anniversary of the largest political upheaval in contemporary French history.

Even a cursory look at the French media in May 1988 reveals that the focus of the debate over May had changed completely. The question “did May change anything” was almost totally forgotten. When it did arise, it was posed only rhetorically, to be completely disproven immediately thereafter. The introduction to a prime-time debate on TF1, *Le Procés de Mai 68* was one such example. The narrator painted a picture of 68

that would have felt right at home in the company of Chirac and Jobert circa 1978. As images of a prosperous and peaceful France were slowly replaced with footage of student riots, violence and anarchy we heard a story of a country "led by a prestiguous leader," with "little unemployment, even a shortage of workers, so much that thousands of immigrants flock in looking for jobs". As the International started playing, the narrator asked the question: "What bee stung the youth of 1968?"[80] But that was not a serious question, but rather a mockery, a satire of a hopelessly conservative attitude which by 1988 had almost completely disappeared. The idea of an unexpected, unpredictable May was now generally accepted as an "exaggeration [---] professed by those who surrended after the first cobblestone of May was thrown".[81]

Nor was the impact of May any longer under question. May *did* change France, this assumption had become implicit. The controversy now revolved around two issues: What exactly did May change and was that change good?

Even here, significant consensus existed. The discussion about May can be divided broadly into the cultural domain and the sociopolitical domain. In the cultural domain a general consensus existed, according to which May had changed the attitudes towards authority. The Right had become "the civilized Right"[82], as the Giscardian era proved. "Absolute power – even if it is paternal – is no longer tolerated. And the power knows it," wrote Bruno Frappat in an analysis in *Le Monde.*[83] Bernard Kouchner described pre-1968 France as an authoritarian France, where every social interaction was

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[80] *Le Procés de Mai 68,* TF1, May 22, 1988, INA
[81] Bruno Frappat, "Traces de Mai" in *Le Monde,* May 12, 1988
[82] ibid.
[83] ibid.

pervaded by a sense of hierarchy and rigidity.[84] Guy Hocquenhem went even further calling pre-May France something "you could not even imagine today".[85] Even the most radical critics of May, such as Michel Albert, General Commissioner of Economic Planning during the Giscard administration, admitted that the effects of the revolt had been profound and far-reaching.[86]

Whether those effects were positive or not, was a different question. The first seeds of the Sarkozy tirade were sown here. Annie Kriegel, a former communist who in '88 spoke for the Right, summarized a prominent conservative perspective of the *soixantehuitards*' goals: "The discussion was only one-sided, it only revolved around individual genius and liberty. It wanted to tear down the entire system, no more orthography, no more term papers, just let everyone express themselves!"[87] Another critic was even more harsh: "The symbol of 68 is a trash-can. On your head."[88] The 68 generation went too far, they thought they could conduct a revolution without the massacres, the violence and the social ruptures previous revolutions had always incited. And they were wrong.[89]

The left, unsurprisingly, saw things in a very different light. Culturally, the liberalization of mores and a relaxation of authority was certainly something to be celebrated. The expansion of women's rights, sexual liberation, a heightened sense of criticism towards the state were all cited by prominent socialists as victories of 1968. But even then, there was a lot of room for discontent. The inconvenient truth for the

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[84] Le Procés de Mai 68, TF1
[85] "20 Ans Apres" in *Generation,* vol 15, July 1, 1988, TF1, INA
[86] Le Procés de Mai 68, TF1.
[87] Ibid.
[88] ibid.
[89] "20 Ans Apres" in *Generation,* vol 15.

progressives was that May '68 had, for all its cultural impact, still been a political failure. The revolution had been quelled and the Gaullists remained in power for another decade, albeit in a watered-down form. Furthermore, the victory of the Socialists in 1981 had been unsatisfying. Mitterrand was a pragmatist, not an ideologue, and this was a problem for many on the far left. Henri Fiszbin, like many others, felt that "time had finally put an end to all ambitions for fundamental change".[90] His editorial in *Le Monde* amounted to a long criticism of the Left, accusing them of having far too disparate interests, far too many undercurrents and too many specific agendas preventing them from forming a coherent bloc and accomplishing any real reforms. The brief period of collaboration between the PS and the PCF fell apart only two years into the Mitterand presidency, and was never restored.[91] An entire episode of the documentary *Generations* was dedicated to the collapse of the left post-68, in which prominent leftists, from Alain Krivine to Henri Weber, of the Revolutionary Communist League, discussed the reasons why the revolution was never fully seized during May '68 or afterwards. Their arguments were fairly similar to Fiszbin's – the interests of left-wing groups were too disparate, there was no proper organization, the political movement was unfocused and too anarchic.[92] In a follow-up episode of *Generations*, Weber argued that the death of Jean Paul Sartre symbolized the death of the radical left. The later generations lacked the insight to see the causes of poverty and unhappiness in the system and the will to fight the evils of capitalism in any real meaningful way[93]. Of course, this reference was directed as much to the Mitterand administration as to the French general public – Mitterand had quickly

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[90] Henri Fiszbin, "Comptes de Mai," in *Le Monde,* May 16, 1988
[91] ibid.
[92] "La Revolution Introuvable" in *Generations,* vol 10, June 22, 1988, TF1
[93] "Larmes á Gauche" in *Generations,* vol 14, June 30, 1988, TF1

backed down from his initial agenda of nationalization and centralization, dashing the hopes of many who thought of his victory as the overdue triumph of the *soixantehuitards*.

Ironically, another interpretation, advanced by the more free-market minded commentators in the French media, argued that 1968 went in the wrong direction. The mentality of '68 was the one thing standing in the way of necessary reforms that could pull the French economy out of the slump induced by the oil crises. Because of May, French society was in a state far worse than it could have been, with unemployment skyrocketing, major industries lagging and the economy in a rigid, uncompetitive position. One proponent of the 'wrong turn' interpretation was Michel Albert, the head of the Planning Committe in the last Giscard administration. In his view, other countries innovated, while the French simply striked. The slogans that drove '68 – "Be Realistic – demand the impossible" or "Imagination to power",– turned into obstacles in the recessions of the early 70-s and early 80-s, when hard work and enterprise were needed. But all the French could give was more hedonism in return for shorter working hours. The slogan Albert would have wanted to see but didn't was: "Under the pavement - Enterprise"[94]. Or, in the words of Bruno Frappat: "May was a hoax that under the cover of communalism and friendship paved the way for the individualism and narcissism that characterized the 80s"[95]. Finally, according to writer Patrick Demerain, the human, political, ideological and social failure of '68 laid the groundwork for the appearance and relative popularity of extremist organizations, such as Jean-Marie le Pen's *Front Nationale*.[96]

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[94] Le Procés de Mai 68, TF1
[95] Bruno Frappat, "Traces de Mai"
[96] Patrick Demerin, "Les soixante-huitards et Le Pen," in *Le Monde*, Mai 13, 1988

What stands out as a remarkable contrast in the 20-year anniversary coverage of May, is the silence of the establishment. While '78 was ripe with commentary by people actively engaged in politics, from Chirac to Krivine, '88 was dominated by journalists and ideologues outside the mainstream of political establishment. One obvious explanation is the increased consensus in French public discourse. The social and cultural impact of May had become apparent and had been widely accepted, and the distance between the present generation and the *soixantehuitards* was already large enough, that the points of contention no longer made as potent political weapons. With that in mind, we still have to admit that many *soixantehuitards* were still active in the political sphere. In fact, one of them happened to be president. Their silence requires a more thorough explanation.

It is likely that the precarious political situation of the time contributed to the silence of the establishment.. The *Parti Socialiste* was doubly constrained. It had drifted more and more to the center, with the government freezing wages, adopting economic austerity packages and following a course of European integration, not to mention the party's changed orientation from Socialist to Social-Democratic in 1985.[97] It had also endured two years of *cohabitation* with the right-wing UDF and prime minister Jacques Chirac, who by 1988 had become Mitterrand's primary contender for the office of President. Mitterrand had to consider both his voters, who by 1988 were less and less likely to accept any radical statements (that Mitterrand was unlikely to proclaim in any case), and his unlikely partners in the UDF, who in the early phases of the presidential

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[97] Cole, Alastair M., "Francois Mitterand: from Republican contender to President of all the French" in *The French Presidential Elections of 1988,* J. Gaffney, ed, Brookfield: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1989, 46-48

campaign appeared far less likely to lose the presidency and the parliamentary majority as they ultimately did. It was a difficult balance to maintain, and Mitterrand's strategy was to play it safe and portray himself as a modest statesman, carrying on with his duties without polemicizing.[98] The silence of the president and his party was well in line with their timidity on other contentious affairs.

Meanwhile, those without such concerns spoke all the more loudly. Critizing the Left for overreaching with May was no longer an effective strategy, because the widespread effects of May had simply become all too evident and all too accepted. A socialist president was in power, contraception, social liberalism and feminism were the words of the day and the days of Gaullist continuity seemed long past. The alternative – blaming the rise of the Left in 1981 and the ensuing economic U-turn in 1982-1983 on ripple effects caused by the self-involved and work-averse generation of '68 – hit two birds with one stone. It cleared the hard-working, enterpreneurial conservatives of any blame in ending the French miracle of decades-long uninterrupted economic growth and it re-established the belief in authority and order that the Right perceived as being under a threat of dissolution in the sea of relativism.

The far left on the other hand was equally displeased. The policy of austerity and *rigeur* enacted in 1983 had alienated intellectuals and artists from the *Parti Socialiste*, adding their voices to a growing number of left-wing discontents that already included the yet again oppositionary *Parti Communiste*, not to mention seriously disappointed

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[98] Hayward, Susan, "Television and the Presidential Elections April-May 1988," in *The French Presidential Elections of 1988,* J. Gaffney, ed, Brookfield: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1989, 78

revolutionary organizations like Alain Krivine's Revolutionary Communist League.[99] Strong socialist reforms of the early 1980s had been replaced with economic and social pragmatism, and had led to a point where the socialist government was enacting widespread liberalizing reforms and even President Mitterrand was claiming that the French social system was too rigid for innovative entrepreneurialism.[100] The illusion of a united Left, strengthened by long years in the opposition, was shattered by the realities of governance. It is entirely understandable, that much of the criticism levied at May also reflected the criticism hurled at the Mitterrand administration and reflected the general disorder and disillusionment within the Left. The revolutionaries of '68 lacked a unifying goal, an action plan, a spirit of cooperation, a faithfulness in their ideals – just like the reformers of '88. The post-May decade of continued Gaullist rule diluted what little remained of the revolutionary spirit, culminating in the disappointing reign of the Mitterand administration. The radical left saw the university strikes of 1986 as a perfect example of the failure of revolutionary ideals. "May 68 – We change the world. May 86 – We replace our kitchens" was the ironic comment made by Henri Weber in *Procés de Mai.*[101] 1968 had become a reminder of long lost ideals, the legacy of a radical generation replaced by a complacent and docile one.

Disillusionment was still the word of the day in 1998. Another was 'paradox'. On the one hand, there was an explosion of literature, articles, televised programs and radio

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[99] For an overview of the disillusionment of left intellectuals, see Pinto, Diana, "The Left, The Intellectuals and Culture," in *The Mitterand Experiment: Continuity and Change in Modern France*, G. Ross, S. Hoffmann & S. Malzacher, eds. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, 217-228

[100] Cole, Alastair M., "La France Unie? Francois Mitterand," in *The French Presidential Elections of 1988,* J. Gaffney, ed, Brookfield: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1989, 85

[101] *Procés de Mai 68*, TF1

broadcasts dedicated to '68. Everyone was writing about '68. *Le Monde* had an section devoted to the memory of '68 every day in May. *L'Humanité* issued a 40-page special edition dedicated to May. Even the conservative *Le Figaro*, which barely touched on May in '78 and devoted significantly less space to the commemoration in '88 than its more progressive competitors ran special editions and editorials dedicated to May 1968. Yet, like a decade before, the commemorations were limited to a very select group of actors – the intellectuals, the journalists and a few on the radical left. The public and the establishment, for all intents and purposes, no longer cared. The editorials, more than ever noted that May had turned from an event of memory to an event of history. "What then has passed? Quite simply, a generation," exclaimed an op-ed in *Le Monde*[102]. And this was meant literally – by 1998 many of the "great men" of May had passed away – Georges Marchais, Francois Mitterand, Georges Pompidou and Benoit Frachon were the men who made '68 relevant, whose careers took off with May. Without them, May no longer had relevance, another *Le Monde* article stated.[103] "The Right stays silent and the majority is only a little less reticent," a third article concluded.[104]

The paradox lies in the contrast between the assessment of May's legacy and the content of what was actually written during the third decennial. Supposing – for a moment – that the articles were correct in their evaluations, and people were indeed tired of May, then the content of the articles and television broadcasts was surprisingly polemical even by the elevated standards of May's commemorations. The third decennial seemed almost like a return to the atmosphere of the first ten-year-anniversary, when the

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[102] Jacques Juillard, "Mai 68, une ruse de l'Histoire," in *Le Monde,* May 29, 1998
[103] Michel Braudeau,"Georges Seguy: La Révolution! Quelle Révolution?" in *Le Monde,* May 18, 1998
[104] Ariane Chemine, *Le Monde,* May 11, 1998

Left was cohesive and the Right content in their place of power. The roots of the 'Sarkozy interpretation' were clearly growing stronger. The consensus on the social victories of May was gone, the liberal critics had become more vituperative and the progressive inheritors of May more disillusioned. The confusion and murkiness of the Mitterand era was waning, and battle lines were being drawn again.

The 'wrong turn' interpretation that took its baby steps in the late 80s returned with a vengeance in '98. No longer did critics concede the positive social effects of May. The Gaullist Maurice Druon called May an outright disease. "Does one invite their family and friends to celebrate thirty years of menningitis?"[105] According to that interpretation, echoed by many a liberal on the pages of *Le Figaro, Le Monde* or in the course of various TV-debates, May was a chaotic rebellion, without any philosophical basis or positive result. "The cobblestones have disappeared," wrote Bruno Gollnisch, member of the far-right Front National, "but subversion has paved its way, served by the same people, exhibiting the same cynicism, imposing with the same arrogance".[106] Economically, May was criticized for opposing the 'enterprising spirit' of free-market capitalism. 1968 was destructive, rather than creative.[107] The liberal commentator Jean-Claude Casanova completed the attack, by flushing the social and cultural achievements of May down the toilet: "The universities are autonomous in theory only. [---]And morality, [---] in what way did May play a significant role in any of that? [---] Homosexuality is now accepted everywhere from Calabria to Iceland!"[108]

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[105]Maurice Druon, *Le Figaro,* May 30, 1998
[106] Bruno Gollnisch, *Le Figaro,* May 25, 1998
[107] Yvonne Gattaz, "May 68, Éffrondement économique" in *Le Monde,* May 2, 1998
[108] Jean-Claude Casanova, *Le Figaro,* May 13, 1998

The Left was disillusioned too. Two interpretations prevailed: one that claimed that May was left unfinished, was betrayed by its inheritors and left France in a worse state than before, and the slightly less apocalyptic notion that May was a utopian idea to begin with. The latter was centered mainly around a number of seemingly apolitical sociologists and the revolutionary-*cum*-ecologist Daniel Cohn-Bendit. We will explore this undercurrent in more depth in subsequent chapters. The view of May as an "unseized heritage" dominated the unions, the far left and the PS. "We are worse off now than in '68." This simple sentence, uttered by CGT activist Aimé Halberer in a TF2 news broadcast, summed up the general attitude of many leftists.[109] The people behind '68 had betrayed its cause – Mitterrand was a disappointment, Daniel Cohn-Bendit had renounced the revolution and become a politician, Alain Geismar too had become a member of the government. The revolution was simply no longer on the agenda, even though society was worse off than 30 years before.[110]

Given this state of disillusionment, the real question on everyone's mind was: Does France need another '68? The communist newspaper *L'Humanité* posed a similar question to a number of progressive philosophers in their commemorative special edition and the answer was a hesitating "yes, but not quite like that".[111] Pierre Zarka, editor-in-chief of the journal, concluded: "Put simply, the [problems raised by '68] are even more

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[109] Aimé Halberer in "May Social", *Actualités de 27 Mai a 20 Heures***,** TF2, May 27, 1998, INA

[110] See *Actualités de 9 Mai a 20 Heures,*TF2, May 9, 1998, INA or the entire documentary *Autocritique 68/98,* TF2, May 10, 1998, INA for examples of such interpretations.

[111] The question was specifically "What essential issue did '68 raise that our time still lacks?" in *L'Humanité,* May 11, 1998

acute now than they were then."[112] Meanwhile, the far Left was lamenting the lost revolutionary cause, but offering little in its place and the PS simply remained silent.[113]

The hesitation of the Left is not hard to understand. The past ten years had been turbulent – the "official" left, the *Parti Socialiste* had gone from triumph to despair, from winning a landslide victory at the 1988 elections, to an even more uneven *cohabitation* in 1990. The socialists ultimately lost the presidency to their long-time rival Jacques Chirac, and their surprise return in 1997 resulted in very few truly progressive policies. The 35-hour workweek was Lionel Jospins government's one major claim to fame, but it was hardly uncontested – its effects on rising unemployment were not nearly as evident as the Socialists had predicted.[114] Otherwise, the Jospin government was, if anything, liberal – it continued the *de facto* privatization of national industries and pursued a course of European integration. The governmental left no longer resembled the Left of the 1970s or even the 1980s, creating a feeling of betrayal and hopelessness within the radical left. The Revolution had died, both at home and abroad (after all, one should not forget that between 1988 and 1998 there was 1989 and 1991) and in spite of a long history of governance, the PS had failed to resolve many of the problems that the progressives had fought ever since '68.

The debate on the Right, meanwhile, was dominated by some of the more radical orators. As *Le Monde* correctly noted, the governmental parties stayed silent. Those

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[112] Pierre Zarka, "Les Occasions Manquées" in *L'Humanite,* May 7, 1998
[113] See Arianne Chemin, *Le Monde,* May 11, 1998 for an overview of political reactions to the 30-year anniversary.
[114] See Jean-Jacques Chevallier, Guy Carcassonne & Olivier Duhamel, *La Ve République 1958-2004*, Paris: Armand Colin, 2004, 453-454 for an overview of the effects of the 35-hour workweek, or Andrew Jack, *The French Exception,* London: Profile Books, 1999, 258-261 for a strongly journalistic, but nonetheless informative account of the reform.

members of RPR and UDF who actually spoke, such as Eduard Balladur, former prime minister during the second Mitterand *cohabitation*, were rather moderate.[115] The scene was dominated by the more radical free marketeers and the non-governmental Right, including members of the unexpectedly popular far right *Front National.* In short, given that French social and economic policy at the time had an air of compromise to it, the country was facing a growing influx of immigrants and a contentious European intergration plan, it is only natural that there would be a number of serious discontents on the Right as well as on the Left. The rise of radicalism, primarily on the Right was a permanent fixture of the late 1980-s and 90-s. It has even sometimes been associated with the legacy of May, but also, somewhat more convincingly, with a liberalization of immigration politics during the Mitterand years and a strengthening of non-French identities.[116] In this climate of conflict and radicalism, a more polemic tone on both sides of the debate was hardly surprising.

"Morality. That word does not frighten me. One cannot talk about morality after May '68"[117]. There really is no way around that speech in any contemporary debate on May. All discussions in 2008 were framed by it. Almost every other article or broadcast made reference to Sarkozy, sometimes explicitly sometimes covertly. It was perhaps incidental that almost every news story of May's 40-year anniversary on FR2 and FR3 was preceded by an unfavorable story on the hyperactive French president, but it

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[115] See *Le Figaro,* 17 May, 1998 for a review of Balladur's memoires and May.
[116] Patrick R Ireland, "Race, Immigration and Hate," in *The Mitterand Era,* A. Daley, Ed., New York: New York University Press, 1996, 259-262
[117] Nicolas Sarkozy, *Déclaration de M. Nicolas Sarkozy...,* http://discours.vie-publique.fr/notices/073001622.html

certainly lucidly illustrated the link between '68 and '08. The 40-year anniversary of May was a political event.[118]

What Sarkozy's monumental speech amounted to was in fact a restatement of the increasingly critical discourse that had been growing amongst the conservatives since the Mitterand era taken to a new level of vituperation. The 'wrong turn' themes resurfaced yet again: individualism, liberty at the expense of hard work, cynicism, undue exaltation and moral relativism, all "values of '68" that had caused evils in French society ranging from the oppression of the workers by the left to the rise of predatory capitalism and exposive financial bubbles. The Left had turned into an aristocracy that professed equality and public support, but never took the public transport and never visited the underprivileged suburbs.[119] Sarkozy's May was a catch-all term that could just as well be substituted to mean "everything that is wrong with French society".

Remarkably, Sarkozy managed to revive a debate that only ten years ago seemed to be relegated to the domain of intellectuals, academics, arm-chair ideologues and a few die-hard *soixantehuitards*. The immediate backlash from his rival, the Socialist Ségolene Royal unsurprisingly attempted to restore the idea of May as a positive force in French society. The socialist candidate called Sarkozy's speech "extremely violent" and noted the many positive outcomes of May, such as the Grenelle Accords, women's rights to contraception and a liberalization of societal norms.[120] The discussion at the break of May's 40th anniversary turned back to an affirmation of May's positive values, but not so

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[118] See *Actualités a 1920H*, France-3, April 30, 2008; *Actualités a 2000H,* France-2, May 3, 2008 or *Actualités a 1215H,* France-3, May 2, 2008 for examples
[119] Nicolas Sarkozy, *Déclaration de M. Nicolas Sarkozy...,*
[120] "Ségolène Royal rappelle "les formidables avancées de mai 68"" in *iFrance,* April 30, 2007, http://web.ifrance.com/actu/france/97770,

much in describing what May accomplished, but in affirming that May did *not* accomplish all the things Sarkozy ascribed to it. "May can be summed up in a single goal: To make the Sarkozys impossible. [---] The spirit of '68 is to think that you have to be a moron to want to become president of the Republic. It's the idea of politics as a collective invention and not as a rise to power," said the socialist philosopher Jaques Ranciére in an interview to Libération.[121] The two major broadcasts on the heritage of '68 both began by contrasting Sarkozy's speech to opposing views, usually those of Daniel Cohn-Bendit.[122]

At the same time, the currents that shaped the memory of '68 on the Left since the Mitterand times were still persistent. Grégory Marin, a journalist in *L'Humanité* lamented that the real youth activism today takes place on the right and that, in a sense, the Sarkozysts have appropriated May, while simultaneously denouncing it.[123] He, as well as others, lay the blame for diluting the heritage of May on the Left itself, from the conciliatory policies of Francois Mitterand and the failure of the socialist administration to bring about a new social order, to the "Cohn-Bendits, Sauvageouts, Glucksmanns and others who have turned it into a play on the streets of Paris that they wanted to stay the stars of".[124] Though the social and cultural effects of May were undeniable, the very

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[121] Ranciére, Jacques, quoted in Eric Aeschiman, "La célébration du quarantième anniversaire de Mai 68 - livres, émissions" in *Libération,* May 24, 2008
[122] See the introductions to *Droit de l'Inventaire,* France-3, January 23, 2008, INA or *Deshabillons-les: Mai 68, 40 ans de souvenirs,* TF1, March 28, 2008, INA
[123] Grégory Marin, "La droite détourne l'esprit de Mai," in *L'Humanité,* April 23, 2008
[124] See Eric Aeschiman, "La célébration du quarantième anniversaire de Mai 68 - livres, émissions" in *Libération,* May 24, 2008 for an example of accusing the Mitterand administration and Bernard Collot, "Mai 68 caricaturé, détourné, occulté" in *Contre Journal,* http://contrejournal.blogs.liberation.fr/mon_weblog/2008/02/mai-68-caricatu.html, for the specific quote implicating the "heroes" of '68

possibility of someone like Sarkozy claiming power symbolized for the Left the ultimate political failure of May and underlined that the battle still continued.

The political discourse surrounding the memory of May 1968 was shaped by three currents that at first may seem paradoxical and self-contradictory. Growing disillusionment within the Left brewed scepticism and weariness that made the lofty radical aspirations of May seem more and more like a utopia destined to failure, than a legitimate attempt at social change. The failure of the Mitterand administration to curb what was perceived by the Left as capitalist excesses was reflected in the progressives' reluctance to evaluate May as a success. The ascendance of Chirac and ever-increasing liberalization of the 1990s and 2000s only exacerbated these sentiments. Yet paradoxically, while post-May politics only underlined its failure, structural changes in French society made the impact of May increasingly harder to ignore. The conservative narrative changed from an outright denial of May in 1978 to a hesitating acceptance of its social effects in the subsequent decades, culminating finally in the 'wrong turn' narrative, according to which the consequences of May were wide and far-reaching, but also the source of all the ills in French society. Finally, the four post-May decades demonstrate an increasing historicization of May. 1968 has remained an integral part of public discourse, and judging solely on the number of pages published on the subject, one could argue that interest in May has, if anything, increased. However, one can also observe a change in focus as well as a change in authorship. The deeply politicized debate about the merits of May itself in 1978 turned into a discourse on its heritage held mainly by historians, journalists and die-hard *soixantehuitards* in 1998. In this light, Sarkozy's campaign speech can be seen as an attempt at a generational break, a desire to show that 40 years

later, 1968 had finally become a thing of the past and that time had come to move on. Yet, ironically, this very decision proved enough to return May to memory again (from which it had never really left). Perhaps these very contradictions, the persistence of May's social effects and the permanent reminders of its political failure, the passing into history of '68 itself and the ubiquitous presence of its heritage, that have kept May in the cycle of memory and history in French political culture.[125]

[125] See Nora, Pierre, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire"* in Representations 26 (1989), 26 for a discussion of this double identity and the process in which *lieux de mémoire* are seized again from history and made relevant again. In addition, see Chapter 4 for a more specific discussion on the social effects of May and the role of generational shifts in shaping the discourse on May.

CHAPTER 2:
COHN-BENDIT VIRUS – THE HERO MYTH

Daniel Cohn-Bendit left Paris on May 10th 1968. He was exiled from France twelve days later. "Dany the Red", the star of the May revolts, whose persona has been the front and center of almost every discussion, debate, re- and overview of May for forty years, was not even present for most of the action. Yet it is almost impossible to find a single broadcast, article or interview about May '68, where Cohn-Bendit does not occupy the center stage. Sometimes one gets the impression that he is, in fact, more important than all the events of May put together. *La Crise de 68*, a television debate aired at the 10th anniversary of May turned from a scholarly dialogue on the legacy of '68 into a heated, vociferous battle the moment Daniel Cohn-Bendit was mentioned., The panelists spent almost as much time fighting over the issue of Cohn-Bendit's continuing exile than discussing the actual topic of the broadcast – the legacy of May.[126] There like in many other debates, no matter the decade, the unfaltering smirk of Dany the Red dominated the memory of '68. Asking the question "What is the legacy of May in France ?" inevitably meant asking the question "Well, what does Daniel Cohn-Bendit think it is?"

Daniel Cohn-Bendit's status as a personification of May has become the subject of intense scholarly debate. Some see him as the archetypal rebel without a cause symbolizing the corruption of May's legacy, the deformation of a broad social and cultural movement into an aimless, meaningless rebellion against any authority. "For some, May was uniquely a student revolt, the students were just Nanterre students, Nanterre was just the "March 22nd" group and the latter was just Daniel Cohn-Bendit. [--

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[126] *Dossiers de l'Écran: La Crise de 68 – Révolte ou Revolution*, Antenne 2, May 2nd, 1978, INA

-] Wasn't it all better than that?"[127] Others suggest that Dany was a charismatic leader who brought the various threads of '68 together in one personality. He was identified with both marxists and anarchists, cultural and political revolutionaries, he was both a champion of the revolution (before he proclaimed it dead) and an embodiment of the playful, liberating slogans that have kept alive the memory of May as a month-long party on the streets of Paris.[128] He was associated with interrupting the French minister of sports and youth affairs with requests for free access to girls' dormitories,[129] but also with the unabashedly critical public outcry of "We are all German Jews", which rang through the streets of Paris after he was denied reentry to France on May 22nd.

Instead of joining the increasingly large chorus of scholars discussing whether Cohn-Bendit deserves his place in the mythology of May, this chapter will investigate how he managed to assume and maintain his mantle as the living symbol of May for four decades. His own active role in perpetuating his myth and appropriating it to serve his personal ambitions as a politician, ideologue and ultimately a leader of the European Green Movement provides a part of the answer – but only a part. The missing elements are supplied by the symbolic ties Cohn-Bendit's limited but influential role has to long-standing elements of French collective memory, most notably the revolutionary tradition and the issue of anti-semitism. By this account, Dany the Red is not simply a symbol of May, but also a reminder of the Dreyfus affair and the French Revolution. Specifically,

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[127] *Noir et Rouge* editorial, quoted in Kristin Ross, *May 68 and its Afterlives,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 200. Although she is quoting an 1969 anarchist editorial here, this attitude sums up both *Afterlives* and a substantial body of scholarship and public discourse that aims to "set the record straight".
[128] Cf. Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968,* New York: Berghahn Books, 2007, 58
[129] Margarite Atack, *May '68 in French Fiction and Film,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 27

the narrative of Daniel Cohn-Bendit as a victim of institutonalized anti-semitism has to be situated in the context of a long-standing tension between liberal reformers and die-hard anti-semites, which has colored many milestone events in recent French history, from the Dreyfus affair to the Vichy regime. Finally, we will look at Cohn-Bendit as the trickster figure in the May mythology and consider how the use of this literary archetype has further solidified his position in French public memory.

What exactly was it then, that propelled Daniel Cohn-Bendit to fame in just a few short months in the spring of 1968? As with many other *soixantehuitards*, his career began at the University of Nanterre, or Nanterre The Folly as it was colloquially known.[130] Nanterre was a depressing showcase of the development of the French university system in the 1960-s. It was meant to be the first major university in the Paris region to emulate the cohesiveness and unity of American campuses. It was meant to be the first major French insitution of the humanities to showcase the social sciences. Finally, it was meant to be cheap and big. The result was almost universally regarded as a disaster, hence its pejorative nickname. The campus was impersonal and opressive. University buildings, mostly ubiquitous blocks of steel and concrete, were windowless and drab. The lectures were overcrowded, as the student population of Nanterre had almost tripled in three years, reaching 11 000 students by 1967. There were few places for social interaction and leisure. The contrast with the prestigious universities in the middle of the historic Latin Quarter was striking. The student body was economically disparate, consisting of lower-income and middle class students, with a disproportionate

[130] *Histoire de Mai, pt 1,* FR3, 05/07/78

number of the ultra-rich creating a painful contrast.[131] These conditions easily turned Nanterre into a hotbed for various left-wing, anarchist or simply revolutionary movements.

Moving between these various radicals was Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a sociology student who quickly made a name for himself with his eloquent radicalism and consistent defiance of authority. He attained national fame in January 1968 by calling out the French minister of Youth and Sports, Francois Missoffe for ignoring the issue of sexuality in his white paper on youth problems. Missoffe, who had come to Nanterre to inaugarate a swimming pool, retorted by suggesting that Cohn-Bendit jump into it. Not one to concede the last word, Cohn-Bendit pushed back by saying: "Now there's an answer worthy of Hitler's youth minister."[132]

The issue quickly made it into national media, as minister Missoffe suggested that Cohn-Bendit be expelled from Nanterre for his radical behavior. The issue was complicated by rumors suggesting that minister Missoffe's anger was really motivated by a secret affair Cohn-Bendit was having with the minister's daughter, also a student at Nanterre.[133] While the French government debated his expulsion, and the media rumor-mill kept Cohn-Bendit in the spotlight, the young anarchist continued his involvement in subversive activities, most notably the Movement of 22 March. The radical group was a community grown out of a group of five hundred students who occupied a faculty lounge

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[131] See Seidman, *Imaginary Revolution,* 23-25 and Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World,* New York: Random House, 2005, 223-227 for a more detailed description of Nanterres in 1968. Another possibility is to visit the campus, only a train-ride away from central Paris. It has not changed much, even in 2009.
[132] *Minute*, April 4-10, 1968.
[133] Jean-Pierre Duteuil, *Nanterre 1965-66-67-68: Vers le mouvement du 22 mars,* Paris: Acratie, 1988, 117

during the night of March 22nd.[134] Cohn-Bendit's continuing defiance of authority and participation in anarchist and libertarian activities made him a student idol, even as his expulsion was being discussed at the highest level.[135]

Seen in the context of the Movement's prior activities, Cohn-Bendit's decision to organize a celebration of the "national anti-imperialism day" on May 2nd was just another rebellious adventure in a long list of transgressions. However, as it turned out, the anti-imperialism day became the opening shot in the events of the May revolt. In reaction to the popularity of the anti-imperialist day, Dean Pierre Grappin decided, not for the first time, to close down the University in order to prevent further demonstrations. The Movement, along with the French National Students Union (UNEF) decided to call a demonstration at the Sorbonne the following day. And so, May had begun.[136]

Over the course of the next several days, Daniel Cohn-Bendit emerged as one of the leading speakers for the students at the occupied Sorbonne, along with Jacques Sauvageot of the UNEF and Alain Geismar of the National Union of Higher Education (SNESup). The media focused their attention on Cohn-Bendit, who provided the material for at least two of May's iconic memes - a photograph of him laughing in the face of an on-coming police officer, and the chant "We are all German Jews" which originated as a response to questions about his non-French origin. Politically, on the other hand, Cohn-Bendit was by far the most moderate, and his influence was quickly overshadowed by the

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[134] Cohn-Bendit, Daniel et al. *The French Student Revolt: The Leaders Speak,* New York: Hill and Wang, 1968, 101-104

[135] Seidman, Michael, *Imaginary Revoution,* 60-61

[136] The specifics of the Nanterre student-administration relations are covered in some detail in Francois Crouzet, "Nanterre: A University Besieged, 1967-1969" in Political Science Quarterly, 84(2), 328-350

activism of Geismar and Sauvageot.[137] Cohn-Bendit, who had vocally expressed his discontent with the CGT, the worker's union, quickly came into conflict with both the workers' leaders and his student comrades, who were looking for ways of collaborating with the CGT.[138] Seeing his influence fade, Cohn-Bendit and his supporters in the Movement of March 22nd left Paris two weeks into the revolt, and after a brief visit to Germany Dany the Red was prohibited from entering France. This marked, to the great outrage of the student movement in Paris, the start of what would become his 10-year exile.[139]

Cohn-Bendit's contribution to the revolt was more symbolic than real. The Movement's greatest achievement was igniting the student movement with the "anti-imperialist day" that ultimately led to the occupation of the Sorbonne. But even as catalysts of May, their role did not remain uncontested. According to Maurice Grimaud, the prefect of Paris during the revolt, if Nanterre had not provoked the crisis, something else would have.[140] Furthermore, the UNEF was at least as instrumental as the Movement in ensuring that the revolt did not simply stop with Dean Grappin's decision to close down Nanterre, but continued at Sorbonne the following day.[141] Taking into consideration the relatively minor role Cohn-Bendit played in directing the course of the revolt (he was, for instance, opposed to barricading the streets), at least compared to Geismar and Sauvageot, it quickly follows that Cohn-Bendit's actual role in the student movement was not nearly as large as he made it out to be. Finally, to fixate too closely on

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[137] Reader, 24
[138] Daniel Cohn-Bendit quoted in *The French Student Revolt: The Leaders Speak*, Hérvé Bourges, ed., New York: Hill and Wang, 1968, 50-51
[139] Seidman, 174-176
[140] Maurice Grimaud quoted in *Histoire de Mai, pt 1,* 05/07/78, FR3
[141] Francois Crouzet , "Nanterre: A University Besieged, 1967-1969", 342

the personalities of the three student leaders would inevitably mean deemphasizing the spontaneous and unpredictable nature of May, an element acknowledged by almost everyone, *soixante-huitard* or scholar.

May, of course, was about much more than just the student riots. Cohn-Bendit had almost no connection to the general strike (by the time the strikes started on May 10th, Cohn-Bendit was already leaving Paris). He missed DeGaulle's absence, the schism within the Left, counter-demonstrations by the Right, the end of the revolt and the Grenelle accords. It is hard to see how, taking all of this into account, one could argue that he was the most significant personality of May. Yet it seems that in the French memory, Cohn-Bendit *is* '68.

The secret of Cohn-Bendit's continued presence in French memory extends further than just the events of May. His controversial exile continued for a decade, most of which he spent working in a kindergarten in Frankfurt.[142] After the ban was lifted in '77, Cohn-Bendit returned for a brief visit on French Television, after which the Ministry of the Interior quickly reinstated the ban.[143] The public outcry that followed was evidence that the ban could no longer be sustained, and Cohn-Bendit was allowed to return, this time for good, in 1978.

Yet Cohn-Bendit decided to stay in Frankfurt, and his influence radiated to France mainly through numerous interviews, books and articles that reflected on his role in the May revolts. The first sign of his return to public life was his decision to join the German

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[142] Reader, "Three post-1968 itineraries: Regis Debray, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Marin Karmitz," *South Central Review* 16-17/4-1, 93
[143] *Déshabillons-les: Mai 68, Quarante Ans de Souvenirs,* 03/28/08, TF1

Green Party in 1984.[144] This was, however, just the preface to his big comeback: in 1986 he published *Nous l'avons tant aimée, la Révolution,* a nostalgic look back at the personalities of 1968, simultaneously with a four-part television documentary that aired to an unsurprisingly large auditorium.[145] There Cohn-Bendit rejected the revolutionary aspirations of the '68 generation as misguided and unrealistic from the very beginning, and redefined himself as a moderate, looking to reform the European political system through a controlled free market and a few 68-inspired policies (mostly having to do with increasing the role of unions and vague notions of *autogestion* – workers' self-management).[146] This made him effectively the first prominent *soixantehuitard* to not only admit to the political failure of the revolution, but also to denounce it strongly and decisively as a false step in the first place.

In the following years, Cohn-Bendit's focus briefly shifted away from France, as he spent his time producing a television talk show in Switzerland and climbing the political ladder of the green party. He was elected to the European Parliament as a member of the German Greens in 1993, after which he made his second comeback in France as a member of the Greens. He won a seat at the European Parliament in 1999 with the highest percentage of votes ever cast for a Green party member.[147] His continued popularity and doubly controversial reputation as both a staunch pro-Europeanist and a *soixantehuitard* made him a media favorite, and his popularity was further proven by the

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[144] John Lichfield, "Danny the Green: Daniel Cohn-Bendit", *The Independent*, June 13, 2009
[145] Keith Reader, "The Anniversary Industry" in *Screen,* 1988, 122-129
[146] Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Nous l'avons tant aimée, la Revolution,* Paris: Barrault, 1986
[147] Cohn-Bendit, Daniel, *Dany Biography,* http://www.cohn-bendit.de/dcb2006/fe/pub/en/dany

unprecedented 19% electoral share of his Green Party at the 2009 European elections, losing second place to the Socialists by a margin of less than a percent.

Ascribing Cohn-Bendit's lasting popularity to his own manipulation of the media is a compelling argument – and one that we will return to further on – but certainly not sufficient to completely explain his singular role in the mythology of '68. He had little input in shaping his image in the French media until '78, given his exile, and even after then was fairly passive in shaping his image until the publication of *Nous l'avons tant aimée...*. No, we must start with his role in '68 and examine what it was that made Cohn-Bendit more memorable than other leaders of May and held him on the scene until his return in '78.

A look at the commemorations of May reveal three main themes that crop up time and again in discussing Cohn-Bendit: His vague political ideology, his ethnicity as a German Jew living in France, and his deportation on May 22nd combined with the fact that it lasted for 10 years.

First the question of ideology: Cohn-Bendit's political position has always been unclear, to say the least. Keith Reader describes the 22nd March Movement as a Leninist group of anarcho-syndicalists with a penchant for Third World models of direct action.[148] Michael Seidman uses terms like "anarchist", "libertarian" and "situationist" to describe Dany the Rouge.[149] Yes, Cohn-Bendit was clearly a radical leftist, but little else can confidently be said about his ideological position. In fact, it seems that a defiance of ideological compartmentalizing was a key element in his philosophy, alongside a

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[148] Reader, "Three post-1968 itineraries: Regis Debray, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Marin Karmitz," 91-92
[149] Seidman, *Imaginary Revolution,* 59-60

persistent distaste of authority and a call for *autogestion.* Calling him an anarchist is perhaps then quite apt.

Cohn-Bendit's fuzzy ideology played to his advantage in a number of ways. The Gaullists and conservative historians found it easy to interpret vagueness for vacuity, and paint a picture of May as a classic case of barbarians at the gate, with Cohn-Bendit leading the horde. "When civilizations reach a certain point of self-centeredness, the barbarians come," narrated André Frossard in a 1978 documentary, as the viewer was treated to an image of Cohn-Bendit at the head of a mass of students on the streets of Paris.[150] Another image, also advanced by Frossard was that of the Tower of Babel, also fitting for Cohn-Bendit, with his unrefined ideological stance that seemed to rest on chaos and defiance of authority.[151] For those more sympathetic to Cohn-Bendit's cause, his anarchism was interpreted as a symbiosis of various left-wing forces that came together under the banner of May.[152] He was the symbol of "uninstitutionalized revolutionaries".[153] This, of course, was the interpretation that Cohn-Bendit himself supported: "To say that May was a *gauchiste* movement is wrong. To say that it wasn't is also wrong."[154] Finally, as the memory of May faded and the details of the events became more and more unclear, Cohn-Bendit offered exactly the sort of balance Pierre Nora talks about in his *Lieux de Mémoire* – distinct enough to make a lasting impression, but vague

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[150] André Frossard in *Histoire de Mai, pt 1,* May 7, 1978, France-3
[151] *La Crise de 68: Revolte ou Revolution,* May 4, 1978, TF1
[152] Edgar Morin, "Mai mais. Mais mai. I" in *Le Monde,* May 4, 1978
[153] *Un Sur Cinq – Spécial sur Mai 68*, Antenne 2, May 14, 1978
[154] Daniel Cohn-Bendit in *Deshabillons-les: Mai 68, 40 ans de souvenirs,* March 28, 2008, TF1

enough to leave room for creative interpretation.[155] Once the memory of May, at least for a large part of the post-1968 generations, had boiled down to "It was vague, but it was good",[156] Daniel Cohn-Bendit became an excellent vehicle for this memory; his role in the events, after all, could be summed up in these exact same words.

It was, however, his ethnicity that cemented him as a centerpiece in the May events. Cohn-Bendit was a German Jew, born in France during World War II as his parents had fled Germany in 1933. Officially without citizenship, Cohn-Bendit chose German citizenship at the of 14, yet after going to high school in Frankfurt, returned to France for university studies. His Jewish identity has been an inextricable part of his persona ever since he propelled himself to fame by comparing the French minister of sports and youth affairs to a Nazi. In fact, almost every memorable aspect of his actions during May can be related to his Jewish origins.

This turned Cohn-Bendit into a confluence of many important strands of French collective memory. The question of French anti-semitism, which the question of Daniel Cohn-Bendit inevitably symbolized, has ties to a number of historical events and trends. We will consider two that have concretely been invoked in Cohn-Bendit's case: the Dreyfus affair and the Vichy regime. But first, we have to situate these events in the context of French xenophobia and anti-semitism.

Pierre Birnbaum traces the roots of French anti-semitism to the overwhelmingly Catholic composition of the country, which had prevented Jews from establishing a firm identity capable of disspelling prevalent stereotypes of Jewishness. "Jewish memory is

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[155] Nora, Pierre, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire"* in *Representations*, 26, 23-24

[156] *Deshabillons-les: Mai 68, 40 ans de souvenirs...*

inscribed into the profoundly catholique French landscape filled with chruches and abbeys only as an exception."[157] In the political mythology, rich capitalist Jews and revolutionary Jews are both unfavorable to frugal and conservative Catholic dogma.[158] Though French Jews have been able – often through a rejection of their Jewish identity and outright assimilation – to strive in the elites of French society with increasing success, the underlying sense of precariousness is everpresent, symbolized in French memory by none other than the Dreyfus Affair.[159]

The Dreyfus Affair established many of the tropes that continue to resonate in French discourse of anti-semitism. In 1894 Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French army, was wrongly accused of delivering state secrets to Germany. However, instead of exonerating the Captain from blame once the evidence proving his innocence came to light, the French government attempted to blame him of even further treason, based on new, equally fabricated evidence. This culminated with a powerful public campaign lead by writer Emile Zola finally forcing the French government to give in and reinstate Dreyfus to the military.

The very crude parallel with Daniel Cohn-Bendit is easy to see: the opposition between the French state and an individual with relatively little power is an almost grotesquely exaggerated version of the David and Goliath myth. In Dreyfus' case, the charges were made-up, in Cohn-Bendit's case, they were disproportionate. However, the relationship between Dreyfus and Cohn-Bendit is more complicated than that. For some on the right, the student protests led at Sorbonne by Cohn-Bendit were a perversion of

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[157] Birnbaum, Pierre, "Grégoire, Dreyfus, Drancy et Copernic," in *Lieux de Mémoire 3(1),* ed. Pierre Nora, Paris: Gallimard, 1992, 561-562
[158] ibid., 566
[159] ibid., 590

similar demonstrations undertaken by student Dreyfusards. "[The Dreyfusard student protests] had a clearly defined goal: Defending the sense of justice that had been offended. [---] Furthermore, some of the students were not led, like today, by a German kid, but a Frenchman from Val de Loire."[160] Others saw this, rightly, as yet another expression of French anti-semitism. As Laurent Greilsamer wrote in 2008: "Would he still dare, saint Mauriac? Would he still dare to make this opposition between the Eternal France and the Foreign agent, thrown out like that?"[161] It seems that drawing that parallel was already an incindary activity, but also a provocative and compelling one, given how firmly the Dreyfus affair had been entrenched in French memory.

Be that as it may, the Dreyfus affair does not come close to the level of provocation, incitement and explosiveness of the Vichy analogy. In the years following the Dreyfus affair, the tension between liberal intellectuals and ardent anti-semites only grew. Tensions between supporters of the *ancien régime* and increasingly well-off Jews heightened during the 1930s to an extent historians have called 'endemic'.[162] These tensions came to a head during the four-year rule of Marshal Pétain. This period, now known as the time of the Vichy regime, has a special place in French collective memory. It is at the same time a symbol of an attempt to recover (or redefine) "Frenchness", "French national character" and the French state, but also a reminder of the perversion of

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[160] Francois Mauriac, quoted in "Un Garcon venu d'Allemagne," L. Greilsamer, in *Le Monde,* May 13, 2008.
[161] Laurent Greilsamer, ibid.
[162] Vicky Caron, "The Anti-Semitic Revival in France during the 1930s: The Socioeconomic Dimension Reconsidered" in *The Journal of Modern History,* 70(1), 1998, 28

that idea, a veil behind which lay concentration camps, repression and a police state.[163] Vichy was also the moment of reversal for the Jewish community, the end of progressive liberalization of the Third Republic and the end of a France that could function as a safe haven for German Jews fleeing from the Nazis, the expression of anti-semitic trends that had been boiling underneath a calm surface for decades.[164] The memory of Vichy was both a relieving and a cautious one: It provided both an example that the following regimes could decidedly break with, but also a stark reminder that even the darkest road to hell is paved with good intentions.

The Vichy connection was partially of Cohn-Bendit's own creation. The sentence that propelled him to fame – "Now there's an answer worthy of Hitler's youth minister"[165] – colored his entire career as a leader of the student revolt May. By far the most famous image of Cohn-Bendit from '68 depicts him laughing in the face of an oncoming police officer, which, juxtaposed with another famous May slogan, "CRS=SS"[166], leaves little to the imagination. Not only was Cohn-Bendit rejected by the state, but he was also abandoned by his left-wing comrades, falling under strong criticism by the French Communist Party and their courier *L'Humanité.* His ten-year forced exile was the last straw. In '68 it birthed the popular chant "We are all German Jews". During

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[163] For a discussion of the role of the Vichy regime in French memory, see Philippe Burrin, "Vichy" in *Lieux de Mémoire, 3(1),* P. Nora, ed, Paris: Gallimard, 1992, 321-345
[164] Pierre Birnbaum, "Grégoire, Dreyfus, Drancy et Copernic" in in *Lieux de Mémoire 3(1),* ed. Pierre Nora, Paris: Gallimard, 1992, 594
[165] *Minute,* April 4-10, 1968
[166] CRS are the French Riot Police, formed in 1944 after the liberation. Their biggest crime, according to the leftists students was entering the grounds of the Sorbonne, which was historically a police-free zone. Though generally thought of a brutal, repressive arm of the state by the students, scholars have almost uniformly acknowledged that thanks to the foresight of the Prefect of Paris, the CRS were in fact instrumental in keeping the May revolt relatively non-violent.

the ten-year commemorations, the episode is almost always associated with Vichy, to the point of utter banality: "The deportation of Cohn-Bendit by a small part of the French police reminds one of the anti-semitism of the French police in 1942,"[167] or "The CRS were seen as the Nazis of our time."[168]

The question of anti-semitism and xenophobia, of course, has stayed salient in the four decades following '68, helping to keep the myth of Cohn-Bendit alive in the process. Until '78 the very mention of Cohn-Bendit always brought to mind his continuing exile, and consequentely the continuing authoritarianism of the state. No wonder then that at least two television debates got effectively derailed by this subject. [169] But even after '78, with the rise of Jean Marie Le Pen's extreme-right, anti-immigrant *Front Nationale,* Cohn-Bendit remained the symbol of a revolutionary, but persecuted foreigner.[170] The growing gap between official French policy, which refuses to recognize race as a factor in policymaking, social life or any other field of importance, and the reality of discrimination and racially divided class structure has become increasingly evident and kept alive calls for increased tolerance but also cries to return "France to the French".[171] Cohn-Bendit has become a symbol for both.

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[167] André Glucksmann in *La Crise de 68: Revolte ou Revolution,* TF1; see also Edgar Morin, "Mai mais. Mais mai. I," in *Le Monde*; Ēdouard Waintroup, "L'air du temps. Cinéma. Le Rapace Sur Les Temps," in *Libération,* May 30, 1998 for examples.
[168] *Droit de l'Inventaire*, France-3
[169] See: *La Crise de 68: Revolte ou Revolution,* 05/04/78, Antenne 2 and *Aujourd'hui Madame: L'heritage de Mai 68*, Antenne 2, May 9, 1978
[170] Jim Wolfreys, "Neither Right nor Left? Towards an Integrated Analysis of the *Front National",* in *The Right in France: 1789-1997,* N. Atkin & F. Tallett, eds, London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1998, 261-275 gives an overview of the development and political positions of the *Front Nationale*
[171] Gérard Noiriel, "Francais et Ētrangers," in *Lieux de Mémoire, 3(1),* P. Nora, ed, Paris: Gallimard, 1992, 275-320 examines the mythology of Frenchness, French xenophobia and integration of minorities in more detail.

We should not forget, however, that Cohn-Bendit himself has done a lot to keep his mythology alive. His actions both during and after '68 have shaped him into a Trickster character, forever subverting expectations, independent and strong-headed even after becoming an official representative of the State as a Member of the European Parliament.

This idea, I believe, needs some explanation. Trickster stories are a cross-culture feature of human mythology, leading some to believe that they might be innate constructs that assist in crafting the "learning process into a *communal,* joyful, active process". [172] In any case, trickster myths are ubiquitous and provide a vehicle for memory. William Hynes and Jeanne Campbell Reesman have identified a number of traits identifying a Trickster archetype. Tricksters are "fundamentally ambigous and anomalous", often through comic characterization or ambiguous and overstated sexuality. They are deceivers and trick-players. They are shape-shifters and situation-inverters. They are "imitators of the gods" and "bricoleurs" – lewd improvisers, who utilize a given situation to their advantage.[173] These characteristics turn the Trickster into a creative force, one who breaks boundaries and disrupts hierarchies in order to reify the old order, or lay the groundwork for a new one.[174]

It is not difficult to see how Daniel Cohn-Bendit fits into this pattern. He is most definitely an ambiguous character: both comic and revolutionary at the same time. He

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[172] Kimberley Blaser, "Trickster: A Compendium" in *Buried Roots and Indestructible Seeds: The Survival of American Indian Life in Story, History and Spirit,* M.A. Lindquist and M. Zanger, eds, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994, 56
[173] William Hynes and Jeanette Campbell Reesman, *Mythical Trickster Figures,* Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999, 34-42
[174] Nathaniel Deutsch, *Guardians of the gate: angelic vice regency in late antiquity,* Boston: Brill, 1999, 19

was seen as someone who could grab the people and change their mood at will, but also someone whose actual beliefs and ideas were difficult to grasp.[175] Commemorative articles describe him as "jovial" and "playful", his *jouissant* anarchism is contrasted with the rigid communism of Georges Seguy.[176] His character has obvious links to sexuality – he was propelled to fame on a comment regarding the rights of male students to visit female dorms, and continued as a spokesman for what is seen as one of the greatest sexual revolutions of all time. This trend continued even after 1968, although in a very different context. In a 1975 book *Le Grand Bazar* Cohn-Bendit wrote a fictionalized account of his work as a child counselor in a Frankfurt kindergarten, which included descriptions of paedophilia. The issue came up repeatedly during his bids for the European Parliament, and he repeatedly denied any real life connections to the event, calling it a "verbal provocation".[177]

The image of Cohn-Bendit as the "situation-inverter", the rebel against the established order is one with much appeal to both the *soixantehuitards* and the gaullists. In the archetypal Trickster story, the Trickster's "mocking of established rules actually reaffirms them".[178] Cohn-Bendit too, lost his initial struggle – May failed politically, he himself was exiled for a decade and though he himself was popular with the people, his Movement of March 22nd never established itself as the ideological leader of the student

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[175] "C'etait votre mai 68", *La Marche dé Siecle,* France-3, April 15, 1998

[176] Gerard Lefort, , "Regarder Voir, Bel de Mai," in *Libération*, May 10, 2008; Alain Touraine in "D'un Volcan, il y a toujours de la lave qui sort", *L'Humanité,* May 7, 1998, *Droit de l'Inventaire*, France-3; *jouissance* is here left intentionally untranslated, as it has a specific meaning in French, which combines sexuality and a joy of life, the closest English translation would perhaps be "ecstasy".

[177] Daniel Cohn-Bendit, quoted in "Sixties hero revealed as kindergarten sex author", K. Connolly, *The Observer,* January 28, 2001.

[178] Fiona Darroch, *Memory and Myth: Postcolonial Religion in Contemporary Guyanese Fiction and Poetry,* London: Rodopi, 2009, 104

revolt. For the left, it sowed the seeds of a story of martyrdom, where Cohn-Bendit could return to fight another day (yet another feature of the Trickster mythology). This is invoked in both describing the Cohn-Bendit of '68 as well as the Cohn-Bendit of the present (whichever decade it then might), a rebel against dogma, whether left-wing or right-wing, always out of place, always one step from the edge of the cliff.[179]

The image fits equally when it comes to "shape-shifting" and "trick-playing". On the one hand, Cohn-Bendit has been able to appropriate a variety of roles, ultimately becoming ironically a part of the establishment he originally wanted to overthrow. From a student rebel to a controversial kindergarten instructor, to deputy mayor of Frankfurt to a leader of the Green Party, Cohn-Bendit has surprised the audience with every new move, remaining, as most commentators attest, "forever a militant rebel".[180] He has modified his own personal philosophy several times, shedding the skin of a militant anarcho-syndicalist for that of a moderate reformer trying to implement the ideals of '68 through the established order of European intergration. The intensely political Cohn-Bendit of '68 would never have uttered words of Cohn-Bendit circa 2008: "Socially and culturally we won, politically, thank god, we lost".[181] The trick-playing, which can also be interpreted as additional examples of him as a "situation-inverter", involves his tendency to undermine conventional social norms, to act and behave in ways completely opposite to those expected of someone with his stature. From his comments to Minister Missoffe to his interactions with presidential candidate Sarkozy (suggesting that the UMP

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[179] See "Cohn-Bendit a Nanterres" in *Actualités a 13 Heures*, Antenne 2, March 22, 1988 for an example of the former and Gérard Dupuy, "REBONDS - Livre. Une série d'entretiens politiques avec l'ancien leader de Mai 68," in *Libération,* 05/12/98 for an example of the latter.
[180] Dupuy, ibid.
[181] Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Droit de l'Inventaire,* France-3

candidate must have been smoking pot when he came up with his anti-'68 campaign slogan), to his frequent self-contradictions in discussions about '68. A typical conversation with Cohn-Bendit usually involved him stating that '68 was over, done, not worth talking about any more and then proceeding to talk about the influence of '68 on contemporary life at some length.[182]

We shoud note that Cohn-Bendit's own interpretation of the mythology of May '68 is remarkably consistent with his Trickster role. In reading Margaret Atwood's description of the trickster's role in mythology, one cannot but be reminded of Cohn-Bendit and his version of '68, present already in *Nous l'avons tant aimée, la révolution.* "The trickster [is] responsible for the changes – the mistakes, if you will – that have brought about the deplorable muddle and the sometimes joyful muddle of the world as it is. [...] He lives by his wits, yet he falls into traps. [...] He's a god, but a god of dirt and mixture and of shameless, unsanctioned sex."[183] Cohn-Bendit consistently characterized May as both a success and a failure. Politically, he claimed, the *soixantehuitards* lacked *sagesse*, could not recognize the power of democracy and ultimately failed because of that.[184] Socially it changed France forever, everyone, even the right-wing president of France owes their values, morality and lifestyle to May.[185] He has openly acknowledged May's excesses, including some that he was directly involved in: "CRS=SS was one of

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[182] *Mai 68 un monde en revolte*, France-3, March 22, 2008 or *Les mots de minuit*, France-2 , April 17, 2008 are both examples of this dynamic.
[183] Margaret Atwood, , "Review: *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief Myth and Art* and *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* by Lewis Hyde," in *Writing With Intent,* New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2006, 178-179
[184] Daniel Cohn-Bendit in *La Bouillon de Culture – (Politique et Philosophie),* France-2, April 17, 1998; and *Droit de l'inventaire,* 01/23/08, France-3
[185] Daniel Cohn-Bendit in *Mai 68 un monde en revolte*, France-3

the most idiotic things to come out of '68."[186] Finally, Cohn-Bendit has continued to stand behind the image of May as a sexual revolution, an expression of *jouissance* in French society, with himself as the centerpiece of the mythology.[187]

Daniel Cohn-Bendit's emergence as the central figure of May's mythology is the result of a delicate combination of events and interpretations from the very first days of '68 to the conscious shaping of May's mythology in the following decades. His Jewish ancestry combined with a continously antagonistic relationship with authority enabled him to tap into some of the central tenets of French collective memory: the persistent problem of anti-semitism that shrouds French social discourse is also a constant undertone in the Cohn-Bendit mythology. His character and personality have enabled his elevation into a mythical trickster figure, a transformation that he himself has actively contributed to, with his idiosyncratic interpretation of May that was born out of his 1986 meditation on May, *Nous l'avons tant aimée, la revolution.* Finally, he has persisted in staying on the front stage of French public discourse for decades, reconstructing a career in the European Parliament and the Green Party out of the remains of his revolutionary past, providing additional motivation to keep his myth alive. If one is to look at the events of May itself, then Cohn-Bendit's role is well overshadowed by his comrades in the UNEF and SNESup, Jacques Sauvageot and Alain Geismar. Yet though they may have been the political driving force of the student revolt, Sauvageot and Geismar could never build the sort of versatile, adaptive mythology around their personalities, nor could they advance an portrayal of May that would compellingly account for their central role in it. Daniel Cohn-Bendit's success lay in putting mythology before Marx and in the effective

[186] Daniel Cohn-Bendit in *Droit de l'inventaire*, France-3
[187] Daniel Cohn-Bendit in *Les Mots de Minuit,* France-2

transformation of symbolic capital into political and social capital. In his own words: "It's not easy being the symbol of a revolution."[188]

[188] ibid.

CHAPTER 3:
MAY '68, FORBIDDEN FOR WOMEN? – THE FEMINIST MYTH

Mere utterance of the phrase "Representations of May in feminist discourse" contains so many problems, raises so many questions, and creates avenues for so many contradictions that without a more detailed explanation, we may have well obscured the subject of our analysis, instead of clarifying it. What is meant by "feminist discourse"? Is it the anglo-american conception of "French feminism", centered around the Women's Studies trinity of Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray? Is it feminist theory of the more militant sort, the sort found in the writings of Christine Delphy, Francoise Picq and on the pages of popular radical-left publications, from *Libération* to *Les Temps Modernes?* Or should we be concerned with feminist activism, in the form of the *Mouvement de la Libération des Femmes (MLF)*? Should we be looking at the radical, countercultural feminisms that formed on the margins of French society and slowly made their way to the mainstream, or should we be concerned with the mainstream itself, discourse that made its way into common parlance, the kitchen table, to use a tired, yet apt metaphor? Finally, is it even possible to describe representations of May in feminist discourse in a coherent, totalizing way, without doing an huge disservice to the numerous forms of feminism that have existed in French society in the past four decades?

The answer to the last question can, of course, only be affirmative otherwise this chapter would come to an end very quickly. As before, concentrating on the anniversaries of May and on popular media, allows us to restrict our analysis to the 'mainstream', as close as possible to the *zeitgeist*, the viewpoint of common people, those without a direct personal interest in feminism as a movement. Second, though specific assertions about

’68 in the feminist context can differ greatly based on writer, movement and publication, we can outline a set of general assumptions that are rarely questioned or even stated. These presuppositions outline the space of discussion, the framework on which different writers with different viewpoints interact with eachother, the set of shared ideas that allows them to disagree on other ideas. In other words, we will look at the discussion of women’s liberation, feminism and their use of May ’68 as a discursive field.[189]

More interesting than simply defining the changes in this discursive field from 1978 to 2008, is understanding the conditions that made these changes possible. In foucauldian terms, this would mean looking at changes in the social fabric and the relations of power in order to see how the space for specific discourses was created.[190] May ’68 has always been seen as a time of immense social change, it has been credited with introducing contraceptives to French women, with breaking down authoritarian family relations and breaking the image of the “man as something that is superior to a woman”.[191] However, it was not until the 1980s that these developments became associated with women’s liberation, second wave feminism and specific organizations, such as the MLF. This is quite surprising, given that these movemnents had existed since the early 1970s. Until the 1980s, however, the social changes that May 1968 directly or indirectly brough about were seen as a part of a broader revolutionary trend, as a part of

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[189] Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* New York: Pantheon, 1971, 26-29, for a theoretical overview of this concept.

[190] In other words, we are assuming that changing discourse – in this case that of May 68 and feminist thought in the public media – is conditioned by changing attitudes in society and in societal elites (the media, the government and so on). The exact nature of this development is explored further on in this essay, but it is modeled, in part, on the discussion of changing attitudes towards sexuality in Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume I,* New York: Vintage, 1990, 136-147

[191] *Procès de Mai 1968,* TF1, May 22, 1988, INA

an extragender sexual revolution or as a disturbing trend towards increasing moral laxation, but never as changes related specifically to issues of gender or female emancipation. As the reforms of the Giscard administration became entrenched in society and the decisively equality-oriented politicies of the Mitterrand government further cemented progressive gender roles in public consciousness, feminist thought became the subject of acceptable discourse. May 1968 became known as the breaking point of the old authoritarian society, the genesis of feminist movements in both theory and action. Yet this interpretation was not permanent. The nineties brought about a resurgence of feminist activism, '68 was left further and further into the past and gender relations became increasingly more liberal. In this changed atmosphere, May was no longer conceived of as the epitome of liberation and radicalism. Instead 1968 became an object of criticism for its chauvinism, phallocentrism and lack of real respect towards female equality. This trend has carried over to the new millennium, only exarcebated by the phasing out of radical Marxist feminism in favor of centrist equality movements and "litcrit" feminism. It is therefore important to consider not only the changing role of gender norms in French society, but also the changing nature of feminist theory and the fading authority of left-wing radicals complemented by the failure of the Mitterand administration to enact real socialist reforms and the fall of Communism in 1989 and 1991.

The rupture in sexual and gender norms in France goes back far beyond the revolutionary spring of 1968. Protests against dormitory rights and sexual repression on university campuses, which are often used as metonyms for May, were taking place

several years before the student riots.[192] Two revolutionary reforms, allowing women to work without their husband's permission and legalizing contraceptives were passed in 1965 and 1967, respectively.[193] *The Second Sex,* Simone de Beauvoir's classic work of contemporary feminism predated those developments by more than 20 years. Though the goal of this chapter is not 'set the record straight', to compare fictitious origins of emancipation struggles against real ones, it should still be noted that placing the origin of the Women's Movement in 1968 is very much an arbitrary decision, a question of motive and of memory, rather than of historical fact.

'68 itself, in fact, achieved little in terms of sexual or gender liberation. Its effects on French mentalities are debatable, some have called its influence profound and far-reaching, others "mostly mythical", more symbol than substance.[194] In real terms, May won the workers an increase in the SMIC (Minimum wage for industrial workers), a reorganization of the university system, but no direct and immediate legal reforms in the fields of gender equality and sexual liberalization.

Canonically, the second wave of French Feminism is tied to the formation of the MLF, an association of feminist organizations, named by the pejoratively-minded press. The first mention of the MLF is found in reports of a demonstration at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier on August 28, 1970. A group of loosely affiliated radical feminist organizations, some indeed with roots in '68, symbolically protested in front of the

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[192] Michael Seidman, "Pre-68 Sexual Revolution" in *Contemporary French Civilization* 25(1), 2001, 20-21

[193] Abigail Gregory & Ursula Tidd, eds, *Women in Contemporary France,* New York: Berg, 2000, 1-2

[194] Cf. Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968,* Cambridge: South End Press, 1971 and Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968,* New York: Berghahn Books, 2004, 12

Unknown Soldier in order to "draw attention to someone even more unknown than the Soldier – his wife".[195] Other demonstrations soon followed and though participating organizations varied from occasion to occasion, the press conveniently labeled all of them under the heading 'MLF'.[196] In 1974, Hélene Cixous founded the first Women's Studies Department at the University of Paris VII. Her seminal works on "feminine writing" soon followed.[197] As feminist activism proliferated both in literary magazines as well as on the streets, the Giscard administration followed suit with a number of reforms, starting with creation of a State Secretary for the Condition of Women, to mixed criticism. Many saw the Secretary as simply a ceremonial position, created for appeasing the unexpectedly vocal feminist militants. But real reforms soon followed: the Giscard administration decriminalized adultery, legalized divorce based on mutual consent and ultimately gave women abortion rights in 1974.[198] Gender equality slowly became a topic of mainstream discussion. The victory of the PS in 1981 and the creation of a Ministry of Women's Rights along with the dissolution of the MLF (partially due to a *coup d'état* by a Lacanian post-structuralist feminist movement called *Psych et Po*) reinforced the feeling that the radical roots of feminism had been dissolved and gender equality had become a government policy like any other.[199]

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[195] Anne Tristan & Annie de Pisan, *Histoires de M.L.F.,* Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1977, 54-55
[196] Jean Rabaut, *Histoire des Feminismes Francaises,* Paris: Stock, 1978, 333-338
[197] "Guardian of Language: An Interview with Hélène Cixous" in *Women's education des femmes,* 12(4), 1996, 6-10
[198] Jane Jenson & Mariette Sineau, *Mitterand et Les Francaises: Un rendez-vous manqué,* Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1995, 100-102
[199] On the MLF/*Psych et Po* divide see Bronwyn Winter, "(Mis)representations: What French Feminism *isn't*" in *Women's Studies International Forum* 20(2), 1997, 222; on the victory of the PS and the creation of the ministry, see Jenson & Sineau, 184-202; on the dimishing radicality of feminist discourse see Gill Allwood & Khursheed Wadia,

The 1980s saw both the proliferation of feminism as well as a wave of reactionary movements, not limited simply to Le Pen's *Front National*. At the same time, record numbers of French (well over 70% according to some polls) supported feminist causes.[200] Yet having become a topic of legitimate political debate, issues like contraceptives and abortion resurfaced, this time carried by political parties instead of activist groups and supported or opposed by feminists of different sorts on both ends of the political divide. Sexual harassment and sexism in general became topics of public interest, with the PS aggressively, yet unsuccessfully trying to hold high the liberal banner – ultimately the Mitterrand administration passed few real reforms in those areas.[201] Though the 1980s saw terms like 'gender equality', 'sexism' and 'female emancipation' enter the mainstream vocabulary, it also caused a growing rift between different movements, some of which saw the Socialist government as a profound disappointment instead of the radical change they had hoped for.

This disillusionment, along with the return of the Right in 1993, contributed to the resurgence of militant feminism in the 1990s. The enactment of a new labor law that facilitated layoffs and the creation of part-time and short-term positions was vehemently opposed by female labor unions, who organized walk-outs and strikes in 1993 and 1994.[202] Electoral victories of the *Front Nationale* contributed to a resurgence of radical

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"French Feminism: National and International Perspectives" in *Modern and Contemporary France,* 10(2), 2002, 215-216

[200] Alwood & Wadia, 216 and Claire Goldberg-Moses, "Made in America: "French Feminism" in Academia" in *Feminist Studies* 24(2), 250-251

[201] Jenson & Sineau, 272-279, 289-294

[202] Alwood and Wadia, 216.

feminism, this time supported by the mainstream media[203]. Groups like CADAC and MFPF, though founded in the late 80s, gained tremendous popularity.[204] Probably the most influential group, the Parity Movement called for a constitutional amendment requiring women to be represented in legislative assemblies on a parity with men. The idea gained immense traction in just a few years, and the socialist government of Lionel Jospin, with the approval of conservative president Jacques Chirac, enacted the proposal into law in 2000. According to the law, political parties had endorse an equal number of male and female candidates in all elections.[205]

Many of the trends characterizing the 1990s carried over to the next millennium. The discussion over equal rights became literally quotidian in French mainstream press, and the legislative apparatus turned towards issues like civil union (enacted in 2000) and other gay rights, as well as equal status in the workplace and family policy.[206] The question of the islamic head-scarf, the so-called *affaire des foulards*, which had been brewing since the late 1980s was among the foremost issues of the 2000s.[207] With the

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[203] Maggie Allison, "Women and the Media" in *Women in Contemporary France,* A. Gregory & U. Tidd, eds, New York: Berg, 2000, 79-82

[204] *Coordination des Associations pour le Droit á l'Avortement et la Contraception* (Coordination of Associations for the Right to Abortion and Contraception) and *Mouvement Francais pour le Planning Familial* (French Movement for Family Planning), Alwood and Wadia, 217

[205] On the development of the parity law see Danielle Haase-Dubosc, "Sexual difference and Politics in France Today" in *Feminist Studies* 25(1), 1999, 183-210 on the parity law in practice see Caroline Lambert, "French Women in Politics: The Long Road to Parity," in *Brookings.edu,* May 1, 2001, http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2001/05france_lambert.aspx

[206] Béatrice Mousli, "France in 2009: A Glimpse into Womens Lives", in *Women, Feminism and Femininity in the 21st Century: American and French Perspectives,* B. Mousli & E-A. Roustang-Stoller, New York: Palgrave-McMillan, 2009, 18-25

[207] Jane Freedman, "Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Women," in *Women in Contemporary France,* A. Gregory & U. Tidd, eds., 163-167

importance of gender equality firmly fixed in the public consciousness, debate shifted over to specific aspects of equality associated with particular marginalized groups.

In some respects, the link between the May riots and various feminist movements is not at all surprising. Serious material and intellectual connections existed between the two movements. Some feminist organizations, such as *Féminin. Masculin. Avenir* were indeed born in May 1968 and became eventually consolidated under the umbrella of the MLF.[208] Theoretically too, early second wave Feminism was influenced directly by the new radical forms of Marxism and critical theory that shaped the course of May '68. New feminist thought, similarly to the ideas driving the May revolts, was oriented both against the conservative Gaullists, but also against traditional left-wing Marxists. In addition, both intellectual currents were strongly influenced by situationist radicals, anti-stalinist trotskyists and anarchists.[209] However, far from being the only influence on the MLF philosophy, the *jouissance* of '68 was complemented by the existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir, the social activism of American feminism, to name just a few examples.[210]

While these influences were recognized and affirmed by feminist writers working in the confines of their specific organizations and journals ten years after the May revolts, the attitudes conveyed in major newspapers and television broadcasts were profoundly different. Out of four major French newspapers, only Le Monde published an article on the relationship of May and Feminism, entitled tellingly "Soft Feminism". The article related the '68 critique of the consumer society to the struggle for gender equality, and emphasized the role of cooperation, rather than conflict in resolving the power struggle

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[208] Tristan & Pisan, 37-38
[209] Cohen, 243-244
[210] ibid.

between sexes. "The woman should cling to the earth and bring Man back to it. Not by taking the power from him, but by a mutual agreeement, a pact."[211] Significantly, this article focuses on deradicalizing the social critique of '68, leaving aside many tropes that would later become central to feminist interpretations of May: the changing of social norms, sexual liberation, and the association with the MLF. If we are to assume that the foundations of the discourse of May as the birthplace of second-wave feminism were present already in 1978, then this article certainly failed to reflect that.

Yet the social changes that were later cited as the lasting effects of May in feminist narratives of 1968 were well known to commentators in 1978. A "balance sheet" of May summed up the social effects of May as follows:

> There are no more marginals ... if one was to make a list of everyone who "spoke" in the last ten years ... the list of broken taboos would never end ...: sexuality, abortion, homosexuality, rape, madness, prostitution, divorce, drugs, long hair, communities, birth, death..[212]

This article alone listed most of the key issues that only ten years later would become associated with feminism. Other similar balance sheets mentioned abortion rights and sexual liberation alongside "battles for ecologie, *autogestion*, Océania, against nuclear power and ten or twelve other passionate and diffuse causes."[213] TV broadcasts on the government-affiliated *Antenne 2* put a conservative spin on the same issue, with guests lamenting the newfound "decadence", an excess of "permissivness", most frequently in sexual affairs and the lack of respect towards the older generation.[214] Some saw the social effects of '68 as incomplete, an attempt at reform that had lamentably

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[211] Laurence Bardin, "Le Féminisme Doux," in *Le Monde,* May 12, 1978
[212] "Il n'y a plus de marginaux", in *Le Monde,* May 3, 1978
[213] "Deux tentatives de bilan," in *Le Monde,* May 5, 1978
[214] "L'heritage de Mai 68,"*Aujourd'hui Madame,* Antenne 2, May 9, 1978

stopped and called president Giscard d'Estaing "as authoritarian, though more intelligent than Monsieur Chirac".[215]

Evidently social liberalization was perceived as an important legacy of May, however neither the mainstream media nor the few feminists participating in mainstream discourse never associated these 'elements of social liberalization' specifically with women, nor were they identified clearly as pertaining to gender equality. The word "feminism" never came up. Rather, post-1968 social changes were identified as issues of broad public concern, categorized as "progressivism" or "decadence" depending on the viewer's political orientation, and seen generally as issues affecting the society as a whole, not as key concerns of specific interest groups, such as the feminists.

This is not to suggest that feminists were not concerned with the social implications of May. Issues like abortion rights, contraceptives and divorce are topics that affect women first and foremost. The MLF had championed these issues since their first demonstration by the Unknown Soldier in 1970, and their centrality in feminist literature goes back even further. It is not that feminist movements were not interested in the social aspects of May, *Les Histoires de MLF* and *Histoire Des Feminismes Francais,* both published in 1978, show the opposite. However, in 1978, feminism was still a marginalized movement. It was symbolically marginal, in the sense that French elites and to some extent, the public, saw it as having little broad significance, as a secondary issue, subordinate to more pressing political and social concerns. It was also factually marginal, in the sense that it was a movement still vying for political power, pressuring the legislators and public opinion from the outside, with few advocates amongst the

[215] *Un Sur Cinq – Spécial sur Mai 68*, Antenne 2, May 14, 1978

established French elites. No wonder, given that those elites, in both media and government, were predominantly old, male and if not Gaullist, then at least moderate or conservative.[216] This male-dominated hierarchy was further compounded by the belief in French Universalism, the idea that all people are created equal and thus no attention should be payed to class, race, gender or other distinguishing characteristics in any sort of public discourse.[217] Though purely in terms of political reform, the feminist movement had achieved a lot, the perception of May as a example of *universal* social liberation, rather than specifically *feminist* in certain aspects, showed that the conditions for a broad discussion of feminism as an integral part of French society were not yet ripe.

Yet by 1988, feminism and May had become inseparable. Bruno Frappat called feminism "the incontestable progeny of May".[218] In another article, feminism was cited as one of the indicators showing that "although May is far, its shadow is still with us".[219] Even in political articles, focusing exclusively on the workers, the PCF and the PS, feminism was brought up as one of "specific aspirations converging on a communal perspective" that ultimately allowed for the emergence of the general strike.[220] Finally, the connection with the MLF was often invoked: "The encounter of trotskyist students and maoistes in Mantes [...] paved the way for the demonstrations of the MLF, most notably for abortion rights and contraceptives."[221] Not only had a completely new mode of evaluating May penetrated the public media in the ten years between 1978 and 1988, it

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[216] Mairé Fedelma Cross, "Women in Politics" in *Women in Contemporary France,* A. Gregory & U. Tidd, eds, New York: Berg, 2000, 89-90
[217] ibid., 95-98
[218] Bruno Frappat, "Traces de Mai" in *Le Monde,* May 12, 1988
[219] Jean-Claude Gillebaud, "Les émois de mai," in *Le Monde,* May 24, 1988
[220] Henri Fiszbin, "Comptes de Mai, 1968-1988", in *Le Monde,* May 26, 1988
[221] Guy Herzlich, "De la nostalgie á l'épreuve des faits," in *Le Monde,* May 26, 1988

had become so entrenched in public discourse that no-one felt the need to *actually explain* why the relationship between May and feminism was so strong, it was literally considered 'incontestable'.

Though May was now seen in terms of feminism, in addition to politics and general social change, the issues that became associated with gender equality were neither new nor surprising. Stéphane Paoli listed the following key issues in the feminist interpretation of May: abortion, birth control, patriarchy in marriage and divorce.[222] Alain Krivine, a member of the LCF, put the feminist movement in the same category with the workers' *autogestion* movement and the immigrant rights movement as battles that were started in 1968.[223] Perhaps the most comprehensive account of the feminist interpretation of May was given in the program *Procés de Mai*. An ten-minute introductory clip acquainted the viewer to the situation of women's rights in the 1960s, a time when women could not get a job without their husbands' permission, contraception was illegal, abortion equally so, schoolgirls had to wear uniforms and the definition of man was "someone who is superior to a woman".[224] Though only 20 years had passed since the students' and workers' riots, 1968 was painted as the breaking point between an almost prehistoric time and the modern world. Documentary footage from 1968 was interspersed with contemporary commentary by activists, health care professionals, policymakers and other, who almost universally described their astonishment with the backward gender policies of pre-1968 times. 1968 did not mark a milestone for feminism simply because of this perception of a milestone transition, but because it was described literally as the

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[222] *Le Procès de Mai 1968,* TF1, May 22, 1988, INA
[223] "Mai après," *Génération, vol 11,* TF1, June 27, 1988, INA
[224] *Le Procés de Mai 1968*

birthplace of feminism, or in other words, the MLF. The 1970 Unknown Soldier demonstration was never mentioned, and the jump from May demonstrations to footage of the MLF was presented in such quick succession that a less perceptive viewer could have conflated the two events. The debate following the film provided a conservative and a progressive reading of the feminist interpretation of May. Annette Levy-Willard considered the MLF amongst the excesses of May, another example of May going too far, causing as much social disorder as caused social change. "Some of [the militant feminists] are now divorced, some are living in communities of women. This simply not true, women cannot exist without men".[225] In response, a member of the "jury", a university student from 1988 noted that while the MLF was successful in certain regards, "a lot still remains to be done; we continue living in a man's world".[226] Though the evaluations of the feminist May differed, both parties operated at the assumption that gender equality and women's rights constituted in some ways the essence of '68 and that the MLF, gender reforms in universities, abortion rights, divorce rights and other giscardian reforms could be traced back to May.

What had changed between 1978 and 88 that brought May and feminism together and placed them on the center stage of public discourse? How did this connection, which in 1978 was anything but "incontestable" and "obvious" suddenly become ingrained and propagated so thoroughly that it featured prominently in almost every major discussion of '68 two decades later? The impulse to conflate the birth of the MLF and the May riots is understandable, as the May riots provide an adequate context for an event of such groundbreaking magnitude. If we look at the creation of the MLF as an archetypal event,

[225] ibid.
[226] ibid.

a "creation myth", then it needs a context more powerful than a diffuse set of demonstrations in the 1970 or the continuous build-up of social conflict during the 1960s. Since 1970 and 1968 are in close proximity – looking back from 1988, anyway – the conflation becomes even easier. The link with May also helped to add legitimacy to the women's movement, by way of association with other causes that May had become to symbolize. In some ways, the case of a Feminist May is an inversion of the Daniel Cohn-Bendit myth: the association stuck, because it could easily be associated with May 1968, an event that by 1988 had become an important part of French collective memory. Finally, if certain concerns, such as contraception and abortion rights were considered inherently "feminist" topics in 1988, it was intuitive to ascribe intentionality to students fighting for similar causes in 1968 as well, without regard to whether they actually had such intentions or not. This process parallels a similar situation analyzed in Alessandro Portelli's seminal work on oral history, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli.* Portelli describes how the death of a young steel worker in the hands of the police in 1949 was ingrained in popular memory as having happened in 1953, a time mass strikes and high unemployment. In these conditions the tragic death seemed more meaningful than in an accidental and inconsequential police riot. In our case, the association with May 1968, an event with larger social impact and great mythological status, made the birth of the MLF more meaningful in a similar way.[227]

The forces that kept the feminist May out of the public eye in 1978 and allowed it to emerge by 1988 have less to do with the public's perception of May, and more with their perception of feminism. The feminism of 1978 was a strongly partisan topic,

[227] Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History,* New York: SUNY Press, 1991, 13-14.

advanced by activist organizations and a small number of theorists. Though public demonstrations and protests combined with general social liberalization finally pressured the Giscard administration to push through reforms benefiting the feminist cause, women's rights and gender equality were not mainstream media issues or governmental policy agendas. This changed with the election of Mitterand in 1981, who won widely thanks to the support of women voters, and started his term by appointing a Minister of Women's Rights.[228] While the role of official state institutions in bringing social issues to the public's light should not be overestimated, it is also clear that it is in the nature of mass media to be concerned first and foremost with government policy. Thus, simply by having an item added to the government's agenda can be sufficient to propel it to the center of public attention through media coverage. Social liberalization, combined with the explicilty pro-feminist attitude of the Mitterand administration was enough to start a debate over the merits and dangers of feminism that was not simply limited to demonstrations and articles in specialized journals and publications, but could take place in the mass media, under the watchful eye of journalists and editors, who were, of course, predominanty male. The 1980s also brought about a deradicalization of feminism, with the dissolution of the MLF, allowing more conservative commentators to participate in the conversation. The quickly waning activism of the Mitterrand administration brought about two different interpretations of feminism, one claiming that feminism had gone too far, that its "legitimate" goals had already been achieved and that all new claims for equality and liberalization were excesses; the other lamenting the deradicalization of the

[228] Ursula Tidd, "Visible Subjects: Lesbians in Contemporary France" in *Women in Contemporary France,* A. Gregory & U. Tidd, eds., 180

movement and calling out for a feminist revival.[229] These two interpretations aligned well with the major political interpretations of May that we discussed in the first chapter – conservatives who thought that any further feminist claims would be excesses also considered May an excess, and progressives who lamented the deradicalization of feminism under the Mitterand administration also thought the socialists had betrayed the ideals of May. Uniting these two strands under the same umbrella was a powerful tool for gaining support for both die-hard *soixante-huitards,* progressive feminists and the conservative opposition.

Ten years later, the feminist May was as alive as it had been during the twentieth anniversary of the riots. TV news reports looking back at the events of May usually dedicated one clip to the Grenelle Accords and the general strikes, one to the student revolts and one to the feminist May.[230] The arch-myth of the feminist May was effectively the same as it was in 1988 – May was the breaking point, after which the authoritarian, parternalistic society of Gaullist France started giving way to a more liberal, equal society, giving birth to the MLF in the process. But as always, where there is continuity, there is also change. While the 1988 version of feminist May focused primarily on the social aspects of May as representing the concerns of women, the story was now expanded to cover the entire political sphere. In the words of Genevieve Fraisse, in a discussion over the legacy of '68 in feminism: "The women's movement was not born simply to promote sexual liberation. It is a political movement. Most notably, we

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[229] Gil Alwood, *French Feminisms: Gender and Violence in Contemporary Theory,* London: Taylor and Francis, 1998, 18

[230] "Moeurs et mai 68" in *Midi,* on France 2, May 2, 1998, INA & "Chronique année 1968" in *20 heures,* TF1, May 10th, 1998, INA

critique voting rights, we critique the institutions."[231] With this assertion, the connection between May and feminism had become even stronger, since the link no longer involved simply the shared social agendas of the *soixantehuitards* and the feminists, but the interests of the Left and the feminists in general. Of course, this too was nothing new, and had been articulated by French feminist theorists, particularly Christine Delphy for decades. However, it was not until the the 1990s that this connection became an issue of importance in the eyes of the wide reading public, thanks to the proliferation of the parity movement, demanding equal representation of women in French legislative bodies. The movement was brought to the public attention both by grass-roots movements who bought page-long ads in *Le Monde* and vocalized themselves through mass demonstrations and protests, the intellectual elite, represented by the likes of Christine Delphy and Héléne Cixous who had by 1998 established themselves as public intellectuals *par excellence* and political parties, the socialists and communists who have traditionally had large constituencies and their main competitor, the UDF, which had to attract new voters in order maintain (and later restore) their dominance in the legislative assemblies. In fact, during the 1995 presidential elections, all political parties except Jean-Marie Le Pen's *Front Nationale* named parity an important goal to be achieved with either legislation or other, non-coercive measures.[232] This tangible, practical change in social practices helped to bring what had thus far been mostly a theoretical concern into the public light.

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[231] *Débat mai 68 / d'une génération a l'autre,* France 2, April 26, 1998, INA
[232] Danielle Haase-Dubosc, "Sexual Difference and Politics in France Today" in *Feminist Studies,* 25(1), 1999, 185-189

Another change that helped broaden the focus of the feminist narrative of May was the increase of women writers, women journalists, women sociologists and intellectuals and women politicians in the public sphere. Though still vastly outnumbered by their male colleagues, the presence of women in mass media had increased significantly by 1998. In 1997, 38 percent of accredited journalists in France were women, more than twice the number in 1979.[233] Furthermore, the attitude of the media as a whole had changed from the early 1980s attitude of "*Sois belle, et tais toi!"* (Be pretty and be quiet) to one that highlighted women in both the profession itself as well as in its coverage of women celebrities.[234] The percentages are much lower in the political sphere, for instance only 10 percent of legislators in the *Assemblée Nationale* and the Senate were female in 1997, yet even number had seen a more than a 50% increase after the 1995 elections.[235]

The representation of May reflects this trend. On the one hand, there is a far larger presence of female commentators, but also the major newspapers in 1998 focused on recreating the experience of May through oral histories, rather than commenting on its legacy. *Le Monde* republished a series of articles originally written during the days of the riots, *La Libération* offered a more traditional retrospective and *L'Humanité,* ironically along with the conservative *Le Figaro* were the two newspapers to offer more traditional perspective, though both incorporated extensive interviews with former *soixante-huitards* who offered their reflections from the distance of thirty years. The emergence of female

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[233] Maggie Allison, "Women and the Media" in *Women in Contemporary France,* A. Gregory & U. Tidd, 79
[234] ibid., 80
[235] Mairé Fedelma Cross, "Women and Politics" in *Women in Contemporary France,* A. Gregory & U. Tidd, 90-91

voices and an emphasis on unmediated impressions from 1968 allowed for a more nuanced picture to emerge, one that preserved the core of the feminist May, but complicated some of the assertions that had been ingrained in the French collective memory since the eighties. Anne Wiazemsky, the lead actress in Jean-Luc Godard's *Chinoise,* which has often been seen as the fictional precursor of '68 recalled in an interview for *L'Humanité* how the social upheaval that had become the symbol of May spanned more than three years in her life. "In 1967, 1968 and 1969 there was not a single moment in which I was bored."[236] A companion article in the same issue highlighted some of the issues involved in descriptions of May as some sort of feminist watershed. While Annie Manrique noted that doctors were uncomfortable prescribing contraceptives as late as 1970 and Emmannuelle Prost noted that the proliferation of contraceptives was soon complicated by the AIDS epidemic, all three interviewed women remained true to the narrative of May '68 as a breaking point.[237] In contrast, a memoir in *La Libération* questions the feminist nature of May's sexual liberties in a way that would not have been possible only ten years ago: "A guy, one of the future leaders of '68 asks me one day: 'Are you for sexual liberation?' – I say that I am. – 'All right, we'll sleep together then.' The guys used this sexual liberation to pressure women into sleeping with them."[238]

The female perspective also helps to cement the feminist cause as an enduring legacy of May, in contrast to other legacies, which have in time come to be seen as utopia. This theme was central to two retrospectives of May, *Autocritique 68/98* and *Mai*

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[236] Anne Wiazemsky quoted in Dominique Wiedemann, "La Longue Marche de celle qui ne s'est jamais prise pour ce qu'elle n'est pas" in *L'Humanité,* Mai 7, 1998
[237] "Les Galeries Lafayette, trois femmes et la pilule," in *L'Humanité,* May 7th, 1998
[238] "Le Témoin de jour. Christine Delphi, 26 ans, assistant de recherche en sociologie a Paris," in *Libération,* May 22, 1998

68 a 30 ans. Et Alors? Both programmes asserted that while the legacy of May had died out or outright failed in certain aspects (neoliberalism had triumphed, the education system was in a worse shape than ever before), the '68 for feminism never ended. "The complete liberation of women, which the MLF continued after '68 remains in this sense topical."[239] Though the focus on '68 itself, rather than a contemporary commentary helped to strike the first cracks in the feminist May narrative, the myth was in fact stronger than ever. The failure of the Left in France and the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union had discredited many traditional interpretations of May, leaving feminism as its one enduring legacy, the one battle with tangible, radical results and topical, well-defined goals.

The new century brought about the next great shift in the narrative. It is hard to imagine a discussion of May titled "May '68 – Forbidden for Women?" ten or twenty years earlier, yet such titles were commonplace in the TV and news media of 2008. A two-hour retrospective on May criticized the '68 movement for being chauvinist and leaving the women of '68 in the role of the French Marianne – a flagcarrier, but no more than that. "The role of women in '68 is that of the middle-ages" said one commentator.[240] "Only in the smallest of groups were women equal to men, the true leaders of '68, however, were all men", said another.[241] The criticism of '68 as a period of sexual liberation continued with various articles pointing out that the fight against misogyny and chauvinism was as difficult and painful for both the militants and their families after '68 as it had been before it. "[The MLF] years were the worst years of her childhood. Even if

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[239] *Autocritique 68/98,* on France 2, May 10, 1998, *Mai 68 a 30 ans. Et Alors?,* on France 3, April 7, 1998
[240] *Droit d'Inventaire*, TF1
[241] ibid.

she can appreciate it with validity today, the feminist universe of her mother scared her."[242] Various articles noted how '68 was only a stand-in for a far longer period of social liberalization that could be dated as far back as the 50s and carried on to the late 70s. The rupture was wider and deeper than anyone had imagined.[243] If this was mythbusting, then it was not very successful, since the myth remained alive, although in a more contested form. In a 2007 poll, gender equality was by far the first advancement the French associated with May 1968, followed by 'social protection' and 'workers' rights'.[244]

By 2008, May '68 had grown old and feminism had moved on, the marriage was no longer as vibrant as it used to be, but it persisted, mostly out of habit. Memories once formed are hard to break, and the feminist interpretation of May had been around for several decades. May, on the other hand had become history, even though it had been revived by the Sarkozy campaign, it no longer had the same mythical proportions that it had when the *soixante-huitards* were still in the most active part of French society. The generation had changed and the memories of May were no longer as immediate. But feminism too had moved on. By 2008, parity laws had been passed, contraceptives, abortion and divorce were quotidian and the feminist struggle carried on in the new margins: the *burqa* laws, immigrant rights, gay and lesbian rights etc. The fight for equality was no longer simply a topic of popular debate, it was a *widely supported*

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[242] "Portrait: Virginie Linhart. Il est intérdit d'hériter," in *Libération,* May 28, 2008
[243] Examples can be found in *Droit d'Inventaire,* or *Mai 68: 40 ans de souvenirs,* France 2, March 28, 2008 and in various print media, for example "Analyse: 1968 ou la tyrannie de millesimes" in *Le Monde,* May 30, 2008
[244] "Les Francais plébiscitent Mai 1968 comme une "période de progrés social"" in *Le Monde,* May 14, 2008

popular debate that makes headlines on a daily basis.[245] This is not to suggest that by 2008, equality had been achieved on some mythical "general" level, but that the *status quo* of French everyday life was radically different even from the liberal days of May. In short, the standards against which '68 was being judged had become far more stringent. From a 2008 perspective, the attitudes of the students and workers of 1968 could appear conservative indeed.

The development of the feminist narrative of May demonstrates the plethora of factors that shape public memory. We can look for sources of power, elites who shape the information that gets presented to the public and creates the basis of popular discourse and popular memory. These sources of power are not simply limited to the government and the media elites, but on a nation-wide level, the memory of the 'imagined community' has to be at some point be mediated by journalism. But in a democratic society, grass-roots interest groups and social bodies too can exert power. In the case of the feminist interpretation of May it took a combination of elite recognition and popular support for the riots to become associated with feminism. Once the groundwork was set though, the feminist narrative became such a powerful myth that it shaped the discourse around May for decades, reaching only in 2008 the point, where it became possible to unpack the myth again, to reintroduce nuance into a powerful origin story that has been cemented by decades of repetition. The feminist narrative of May lucidly demonstrates how memory is always seen through a contemporary perspective, how events of the past are interpreted in light of concerns of the present.

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[245] Béatrice Mousli, "France in 2009: A Glimpse into Womens Lives", in *Women, feminism and Feminity in the 21st century: American and French Perspectives,* 19-20

The feminist narrative of May also shows how the idiosyncratic nature of memory draws on analogy and metonymy, in other words the creativity of the human mind, in order to construct a narrative with staying power. Alessandro Portelli has observed that memory often manipulates history for symbolic, psychological and formal reasons.[246] Symbolically, the MLF represented a radical force of social change, a militant progressive movement that would have felt at home in the midst of the May riots. Memory thus relocated the birth of the movement to its appropriate context, even if historically speaking, the origin is firmly fixed in 1970. Psychologically, the successes of feminism imposed over May provided a method of healing. In the first decades, the link with May was a means of associating with something bigger, an event that had resonance in the French society as a whole; in the later decades feminism became the one success that the memory of May could hold on to – when everything else was being dismissed as utopia, the women's movement could show unqualified successes and realistically achievable goals for the future. Formally, May was a rupture point, a break with time, the moment that divide time into a before and an after, so any social change that originated near 1968 would become conflated with it.

[246] Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories,* 26

CHAPTER 4:
GENERATION '68 – MAY BETWEEN HISTORY AND MEMORY

"The Crisis of '68 – Revolt or Revolution?", "A bit of joyous revolution, a bit of revolutionary joy", "May '68 or a Civilized Revolution", "The gains and limits of a verbal 'revolution'", "The popular fight continues", "We knew how to kick Marx into the long grass", "['68 contained] the roots of terrorism" – from editorial pages of the ultra-left *L'Humanité* to the conservative newsrooms and studios of *Le Figaro* and *TF1,* ten years down the line, 'revolution' was the operative word in discussions of May 1968.[247] A decade later, the word was nowhere to be found. Instead, televised debates talked about the excesses of May, and newspaper editorials mentioned the word 'illusion.[248] By the fortieth anniversary those emotions too had died down to vague notions of utopia, and a sentiment among the young French that May "was vague, but it was good".[249] From an acute sense of urgency, commemorations of May had turned into what Jean-Pierre Rioux called a routine reenactment of established narratives, "still not

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[247] "La Crise de 68 – Revolte ou Revolution", *Dossiers de l'Écran,* on TF1, May 2, 1978, INA; "Un fete un peu révolution, une révolution un peu fete," in *Le Monde,* May 5, 1978; "Mai 68 ou la révolution civilisée?" in *Le Monde,* May 6, 1978; Annie Kriegel, "Acquis et Limites d'une 'revolution'verbale" in *Le Figaro,* May 8, 1978; Patrice de Plunkett, "'Nous avons su jeter Marx aux orties" in *Le Figaro,* May 14, 1978; René Rémond, "Difficile Reconstruction de l'Université" in *Le Figaro,* May 10, 1978; Guy Hermier, "Nous continuons le combat populaire de Mai 68" in *L'Humanité,* May 22, 1978

[248] *Le Procés de Mai* on TF1, May 22, 1988, INA and Bruno Frappat, "Traces de mai" in *Le Monde,* May 12, 1988

[249] *Deshabillons-les: Mai 68, quarante ans des souvenirs* on TF1, March 22, 2008, INA

really aware of what it is we're celebrating."[250] A similar narrative was advanced by Kristin Ross, who suggested that the second decennial of May brought with it a "false consensus", reducing May to a harmless youth revolt and a precursor to the market democracy and forceful individualism of 1980s neoliberalism.[251]

One should be careful with assigning totalizing narratives on complex processes of memorialization. As we have seen in previous chapters, discourse around May has always been multivocal and in constant flux. In the political sphere the revolutionary aspects of May retained their prominence even in the decades following the first decennial. The feminist narrative of May, entirely political in nature, did not emerge until 1988, the supposed date of "revolutionary quietism". To see the decline of the 'revolutionary narrative' of '68 as a sign of the imposition of an "official history" is perhaps a step too far. Nevertheless, the is an audible change in tone in May's narratives the further one gets from 1968. This aim of this chapter is to trace that change in tone and relate it to a generational change, the gradual exit of revolutionary activists and genuine *soixante-huitards*, and the emergence of dispassionate scholars and a new generation of students and workers with a less immediate connection to May 1968.[252] From an intense personal memory that permeated the minds of the French public in 1978, to a gradual neutralization of its impact and the emergence of scholarly counter-narratives amidst an explosion of commemorations, this chapter tells the story of May reaching the precarious

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[250] Jean-Pierre Rioux, "L'Événement-mémoire: Quarante ans de commémorations" in *Le Débat,* 149(2008), 15

[251] Kristin Ross, "Establishing Consensus: May '68 as Seen in France from the 1980s" in *Critical Inquiry,* 28/3 (2002), 652

[252] The question of the "1968 generation" is treated at length in Pierre Nora, "Génération" in *Les Lieux de Mémoire, III, 1. Conflits et partages,* Paris: Gallimard, 1984, 932-971

space between history and memory which Pierre Nora has famously called a *lieux de mémoire*..

Instead of focusing on a specific connection or narrative of May, this chapter will look at instances where 1968 has been described as "revolutionary", or the opposite, "illusionary" or "utopian". In what contexts are these assertions made? What does that tell us about the concerns and motives of the people making those claims? What are the social and political processes that frame these assertions? Since we have already examined the mythologization of May in the political sphere, this chapter will focus largely on the social aspects of May narratives and make reference to contemporary political discussions only on occasion.

By 1978 the shock of the May revolts was still rippling through society. When May was called 'revolutionary', it was done most often in two related contexts: As a reference to the sudden rupture in the fabric of normality that May appeared to be; and as a signifier of a broad transformation of French society originating in May. The rupture could mean both a positive break with the opressive reality of the day (from a *soixante-huitard'*s perspective), or an unwelcome interruption of the *status quo* (from a conservative perspective). In both cases, the irrefutable break with the normal state of affairs was recognized as a "revolutionary" element of May. This dynamic was vividly represented in a 1978 televised debate, titled "The Crisis of '68 – Revolt or Revolution?"[253] Of course, the title itself already revealed a certain consensus, whichever side one took: both terms presuppose a legitimately violent affair, an sudden upset of the normal order of things, far from the "vague but good" utopia of a joyous student uprising

[253] "La Crise de 68 – Revolte ou Révolution?" on TF1, May 2, 1978, INA

that came to dominate much of later discourse on May. Indeed, so such claims were made in the actual debate. Michel Droit, arguing that May was ultimately a revolt, not a revolution, still pointed out the "incredible violence" of student leaders like Daniel Cohn-Bendit or Alain Krivine, while André Glucksmann, rejecting the proposition, still maintained that "just because there was no military, no violence, does not mean there was no revolution. Instead this may have been the turning point."[254] Whether the term used was "revolt"or "revolution", the consensus was, in the words of the host, that "[May was] a crisis no-one has forgotten."[255]

The same debate could also be seen as an example of our second case: 'revolution' as a signifier of broad social change. The opening narration noted that "[May] changed the society in which we live", though interestingly enough refused to elaborate on what exactly that social change meant. A similarly vague notion of "something changing" could be gleamed from brief news reports on TF1, which described 1968 as having become "a synonym for uprising, revolt or even revolution".[256] Similarly, the report did not mention specific changes in French society, aside from two tropes that were already present in the "Revolt or Revolution" debate: No-one saw it coming, and "people started to speak".[257]

The latter idea is elaborated at length in two articles in commemorative editions of *L'Humanité* and *Le Figaro*. In the first case, communist activist Guy Hernier described May as a "revelation", the point after which discussions about global capital, contradictions of the capitalist system and anti-capitalism became commonplace and

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[254] ibid.
[255] ibid.
[256] *Actualité a 20 heures* on *TF1*, May 14, 1978, INA
[257] ibid.

widespread.[258] Even if the *gauchistes* of '68 failed in their direct revolutionary goals – after all, the capitalist system remained as strong as ever – they managed to bring the latent contradictions of the system into public light. A more centrist perspective was articulated by Annie Kriegel on the pages of *Le Figaro*: "Winners or losers, the important thing was for [the *soixante-huitards*] to discover in themselves the capacity to talk, not in their name, but from a collective experience".[259] The revolutionary impact of May was primarily seen in it capacity to incite discourse, an idea echoed much later in many scholarly treatments of '68, including Michael Seidman's *The Imaginary Revolution.*

It also helped that the *soixante-huitards* were not shy about using direct allusions to their revolutionary background, including references to French and Russian Revolutions, both during May itself and in later discussions. Student activists appearing in media preferred to talk about the development of their *gauchiste* views than the free-play and *jouissance* that supposedly accompanied the month-long occupation of the Sorbonne.[260] Meanwhile, commentators could not overlook the '68 barricades and cobblestone fights – direct references to the French Revolution of 1789.[261]

Though most commentators participated in reproducing the May-as-revolution narrative, a few opted for a more pessimistic view. Two authors proposed a view of May-as-illusion, a trope that came into full bloom a decade later. Jean-Edern Hallier, a former *soixante-huitard*, denounced May completely: "May '68, that means nothing. No death,

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[258] Guy Hernier, "Nous continuons le combat populaire de Mai '68" in *L'Humanité,* May 22nd, 1978

[259] Annie Kriegel, "Acquis et Limites d'une 'Révolution' verbale" in *Le Figaro,* May 8th,1978

[260] Numerous examples can be found in "Mai 68 – La symphonie inachevée" in *L'Humanité,* May 19, 1978

[261] Examples can be found in Kriegel, "Acquis et Limites d'une 'Révolution' verbale" and in *Histoire de Mai, pt 1* on Antenne 2, May 7, 1978, INA among others

or almost none. No imagination in power. Only the lingering smell of surrealism. [---] It had nothing to do with neither 1848 or the Commune. No intellectual thrill."[262] Signs of this sentiment were present even outside the confines of the conservative *Le Figaro*, a commentator in *Le Monde* called May a "tragical comedy", a revolution in which "no-one was prepared to die for", a "small party in the style of Roger Vailland"[263] lacking "the raw energy capable of dreaming whatever."[264]

The main difference between the commentators who rejected the revolutionary interpretation of May and those who embraced it lay in the emphasis placed in the real, material outcomes of May. Those who portrayed 1968 as a revolution or at least a rupture, emphasized the sudden break with the normal day-to-day existence of French society, or the ripple effect produced by the sudden liberation of discourse. Those who rejected May-as-revolution provided comparisons with a revolutionary ideal-type. In their view, revolutions involved deaths, a substantial change in the political system, or at least a prolonged period of political upheaval towards a specific end. In their view, May had none of the elements.

Nevertheless, the revolutionary aspect of 1968 dominated May's first decennial, possibly owing to the strong presence of the "1968 generation" in the public sphere. Pierre Nora has suggested that historical generations – demographic cohorts defined by a single historical rupture – are formed because historical events provide a common point of orientation that can ground individuals in "world of incessant change". A shared experience, defined against the increasingly faster pace of history provides "the most

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[262] Jean-Edern Hallier quoted in "Nous avons su jeter Marx aux orties" in *Le Figaro*, May 13, 1978

[263] A hedonistic, libertarian socialist writer

[264] "Mai 68 ou la révolution civilisée" in *Le Monde*, May 6th, 1978

instinctive of ways to transform one's memory into history".[265] As a result, individuals belonging to that generation need to constantly reproduce the memory of the event that shaped them, lest it be washed away by the passage of history and new generation-defining events. By 1978, the '68 generation was still the dominant voice in French society, everyone with a voice in public discourse had lived through the students' and workers' riots. It makes sense that a decade later, the '68 generation would need to remind the world the significance of their "generation-shaping" event.

In the same vein, Michael Seidman argues that May's impact lay particularly in the way it altered personal destinies, rather than social and political practices as a whole.[266] In the 1978 assessments of May, 'revolutionary' was most often used in the context of personal ruptures – it provided the opportunity to speak for those who did not previously speak, it changed the daily activities of Parisians and it aroused political activism in previously apolitical individuals. Conversely, those who saw May as an attempt at provoking large-scale political change, usually rejected the term 'revolution', in favor of 'illusion' or 'utopia'.

'Generation' was the defining term of the 1988 commemoration, thanks to the mammoth effort of Hérvé Hamon and Patrick Rothman. The duo published a multi-volume work on the '68 generation in 1987, followed by a 15-part documentary broadcast during the anniversary in 1988. "Generation" followed the life-paths of a number of student revolutionaries, from their formative years in Parisian universities during the 1960s to their post-68 careers as policymakers, die-hard revolutionaries or

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[265] Nora, "La Géneration", 961
[266] Seidman, 281-282

converts to the cause of liberal democracy.[267] As Kristin Ross perceptively notes, May became seen not as a moment of social transformation, or even a permanent individual transformation, but rather an "generational process", a byproduct of maturation, a symptom of raging adolescence that the youth of 1968 had outgrown by the time the documanteary aired, two decades later.[268] The key message of "Generation", as Hérvé Hamon himself noted in a televised interview, was that "revolutions do not change society, and the *soixante-huitards* realized over the course of the 1970s that there are other ways of doing that."[269]

The word 'revolution' had acquired a different meaning by the late 1980s. It no longer stood for the rupture in French society that May symbolized. Instead, it was most often used in conjunction with the adjective "failed". In an episode of "Generation", symptomatically titled "The Lost Revolution", Henri Weber explained the failure of 1968 by the lack of a revolutionary party.[270] In the same episode Alain Krivine rejected the revolutionary narrative of May, saying that "the communist party does not confound revolution with revolt."[271]

Yet since we have explored the political interpretations of May at length earlier in this thesis, let us leave aside the two left-wing radicals, and concentrate on the interpretations dealing directly with May itself. An editorial in *Libération*, presented the new understanding of May's revolutionary potential, a significant shift in representations

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[267] Hérvé Hamon & Patrick Rothman, "Génération" on *FR1* from June 15th to July 1st, 1988, INA
[268] Ross, "Establishing Consensus," 671-672
[269] Hérvé Hamon, quoted in "Journal Télévisée a 13 Heures" on *TF1*, January 8, 1988, INA
[270] Henri Weber quoted in "Génération 10 – La Révolution introuvable" on *TF1*, June 23rd, 1988, INA
[271] Alain Krivine quoted in ibid.

of May: "the revolutionary symbolics that the [*soixante-huitards*] grafted onto their movement, expressed it badly".[272] In the final episode of "Generation", a sociology student circa 1988 expressed similar views: "'68 had nothing to do with revolutions. It was nothing like Che Guevara or Vietnam".[273] These statements echo the pessimist views put forth a decade ago in their comparisons of May with other transformative events of the 1960s, suggesting that perhaps some of the impact of May had waned. It is perhaps not all that surprising that these comments came, on many occasions, from 1988-era students, who, even if they were born before '68, were too young to have intimate personal connection with the event.

Of course, this lack of personal memory could just as easily lead to a valorization of May, giving birth to the idea of May-as-utopia. In both the final episodes of "Génération" and the two-hour televised "Trial of May", students often lamented the lack of idealism in the present, contrasting it with the lofty "utopian ideals" of 1968.[274] "Even if the radical ambitions of May did not come to pass, many things did remain and we do not notice them well enough", commented one student.[275] "The strikes of '86 were too pragmatist, but then again '68 was too utopian," suggested another student.[276] Once again, the utopian dimension of May was constructed in relation to another milestone event, the 1986 university strikes.

Kristin Ross saw the depolitization of May in the 1980s as a deliberate attempt at 'neutering' the lofty ideals of the *soixante-huitards*, by reducing it to an "expression of

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[272] Jean-Michel Helvig, "Le roman du gauchisme" in *Libération,* January 9th, 1988.
[273] "Vingt Ans Aprés", *Génération vol 15,* on TF1, July 1, 1988, INA
[274] "Vingt Ans Aprés", *Génération vol 15* and *Le Procés de Mai 68* on TF1, May 22, 1988, INA
[275] "Vingt Ans Aprés", *Geneŕation vol 15*
[276] "Le Procés de Mai 68"

sociohormonal frustration".[277] The tendency towards depolitization was indeed apparent, fueled partially by the disillusionment of the revoutionary left (which we discussed in Chapter 1), but also a widening generational gap, illustrated vividly by the passing of many influential radical public intellectuals: Jean-Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes died and Louis Althusser was institutionalized in a psychiatric hospital in 1980, Jacques Lacan died in 1981, Michel Foucault passed away in 1984.[278] Many of the living *soixante-huitards,* exemplified by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, changed their views and denounced May themselves. Meanwhile, a increasingly large cohort of French youth was growing up, completely untouched by the "revolutionary flower" of May, exposed only to vague notions of May as "a liberation of speech and mores".[279]

Still, one should assume that this view was consensual, or even ubiquitous. Images of violence and destruction were still a part of May's commemorations, footage of burnt cars and police violence was broadcast both in news retrospectives as well as longer documentaries.[280] Several French news programs dedicated reports to the workers' strikes and the Grenelle Accords.[281] Finally, just because Cohn-Bendit and other prominent revolutionaries rejected the ambitions of the *soixante-huitards* did not mean the everyone else did too. "Remember," said a 1988 student at Nanterre in a sudden fit of

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[277] Ross, "Establishing Consensus," 674
[278] For a discussion of the "silence of the intellectuals", the gap left by the death of prominent thinkers and the disillusionment of others after the socialist victory 1981, see David Drake, *Intellectuals and Politics in Post-War France,* Chippenham: Palgrave, 2002, particularly 167-176
[279] *Le procés de Mai 68*
[280] Examples can be found in "La Commune Étudiante", *Génération vol 8,* on TF1, June 22, 1988, INA and *Journal Télévisée a 13 Heures* on TF1, January 8, 1988, INA
[281] Examples are, among others, *Journal Télévisée a 20 Heures* on TF1, May 27, 1988, INA and *Actualités a 20 Heures* on Antenne 2, May 15, 1988, INA

radical idealism, "He's him, and we're us."[282] Another Nanterre student noted that the aura of '68 had not yet left the university, even twenty years later: "People do not come here for just a diploma, they come for a discussion."[283] Certainly, the social and political conditions had changed remarkably in Mitterand-era France, paving the way for a "depoliticized" interpretation of May. However, one should not discount the profound effects of an emerging generational divide, nor the heterogeneity of possible readings of May.

The powerful role played by the simple passage of time becomes particularly evident in light of the 1998 celebrations of May. On the one hand there was a larger emphasis on 'pure', unmediated retrospectives, many newspapers reprinted articles and editorials that originally appeared in 1968. Meanwhile, a shift in emphasis occured in the selection of commentators: while the previous two anniversaries focused on the *soixante-huitards*, left-wing activists and contemporary students, 1998 incorporated more historians, sociologists and academics than any previous decennial. Jean-Pierre Rioux notes that the decade between 1988 and 1998 saw a resurgence of interest in historical and sociological studies of May, as the tensions and conflicts surrounding the revolutionary spring became less and less acute. At an anniversary conference in 1998, "historiographical concerns were, for the first time, not neglected, the questions of archives and oral sources were posed".[284] The publication of Jean-Pierre Le Goff's major historico-sociological study, "Mai 68 – The Impossible Heritage" turned the unassuming bald sociologist into a media star, who appeared in prime-time television debates and

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[282] *Le procés de Mai 68*
[283] *Actualités a 13 Heures* on Antenne *2,* March 22, 1988, INA
[284] Jean-Pierre Rioux, "L'événement-mémoire", 12-13

interviews in major French daily newspapers.[285] Finally, several broadcasts focused on the present-day lives of the remaining *soixante-huitards,* most of whom had stayed involved in counter-cultural affairs, injecting a sense of scepticism towards the 1998 *status quo* into the debate.

This slightly schizophrenic mixture of approaches created a picture of May that retained the utopian flavor of 1968 that had dominated the second decennial, but allowed for a more nuanced and more critical perspective to shine through in the form of scholarly commentaries. More often than ever before, the utopian idealism of May underscored the failings of the French social and political system. *L'Humanité* ran an extended special on the heritage of May, where it asked prominent scholars and *soixante-huitards* from around the world "What essential truth did May 68 bring to light that our society is most lacking now?" Often the answer referred to the idealism of May, the unseizable "spirit of May" that had for a month engulfed the country and was never heard from again. "Dialogue of a critical spirit", "The desire for liberty", "imagining the unimaginable", "Hope for a 'Big One'", "the power to say: No".[286] A documentary film about the contemporary activities of former *soixante-huitards* was equally critical of the 1998 establishment. The university system was worse than before, the working class was being replaced by robots – former revolutionaries saw little to praise about 1998, noting

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[285] Examples are *La marche de siécle – c'était votre Mai 68* on France-3, April 15, 1998, INA and "Qu'est-ce que Mai 68 a apporté d'essentiel don't notre époque a encore besoin?" in *L'Humanité,* May 7th, 1998

[286] "Qu'est-ce que Mai 68 a apporté d'essentiel don't notre époque a encore besoin?" in *L'Humanité,* May 7, 1998

time and again how the idealism of 1968 was the one thing sorely needed in contemporary France.[287]

The 1998 commemorations of May are harder to boil down to a single theme than those of 1988 or 1978, but perhaps this lack of unity is itself a sign of a historical development. When 1978 concentrated around reliving the rupture of 1968, emphasizing its break with reality, the radical shock it produced in the French social fabric; and 1988 was a period of depolitization and disillusionment, a distancing from May, then 1998 seems like a series of attempts to make May relevant again. More than ever, the third ten-year anniversary of May was concerned with the present, not with the past, in fact 1968 was an event that had to *recalled*, before it could be *remembered* – hence the extraordinary efforts in *Le Monde* and *Libération* to simply recount the events of May, without commentary, without judgement, simply through reproducing articles originally written three decades ago. Commentators on the other hand, were more concerned with relating the ideals of May to current affairs, than assessing or evaluating the chronology of May itself. Ironically, the 'idealism' of May was as vaguely defined as it had been for decades, rather than meaning a revolution in the traditional, Marxist sense, it meant anything from a "critical dialogue" to a "desire for liberty". In this mix of interpretations, the spirit of May had indeed become incomprehensible, as many commentators had predicted.

The diffuse spirit of May had become even more diffuse by the fortieth anniversary of 1968. Often the clearest answer one could give to the question 'What was

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[287] *Mai 68 – Trente ans et alors?* on France 3, April 7th, 1998, INA

May 1968 about?' was "It's vague, but it's good".[288] The increasing historication of May had opened the door for revisions and reevaluations that had previously avoided the front pages of French dailies and prime-time slots of network television. The words 'revolution' and 'rupture' re-entered the vocabulary of newspaper headlines, appearing next to articles celebrating the 'social utopia' of 1968 . "The explosion of May '68 – A revolution without a tomorrow" one day, "The perverse effects of May's joyous utopia" the other.[289] Sociologists and historians, who now dominated the commemorative discourse, emphasized the "forgotten" aspects of May – the workers strikes,[290] the revolutionary aspirations of *gauchiste* cliques,[291] and the chauvinism of May's leaders.[292] Next to the critical reappraisals, the old tropes of a utopian, idealist May survived equally well – From depoliticized utopian representations to feminist interpretations, the "imaginary May" lived on.[293] Finally, president Sarkozy's promise to "liquidate the heritage of 1968" had added a new layer of ideology to the commemorations, an aspect that colored almost every longer discussion of May at some point.

If the voices of *soixante-huitards* dominated the discussion of 1968 ten years after the revolts, forty years later those voices had almost died out, literally. Most student activists of '68 were now in their sixties and most governmental officials and union

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[288] *Deshabillons-lez: Mai 68, quarante ans des souvenirs*, on TF1, March 28, 2008, INA
[289] "L'explosion de May 68, une revolution sans lendemain" in *Le Monde,* May 11, 2008 and "Les effets pervers de la joyeuse utopie de 68" in *L'Echo*, May 27, 2008
[290] For instance in "Les effets pervers de la joyeuse utopie de 68"; "Deshabillons-les"; and "Droit d'inventaire" on *France 3,* January 3, 2008, INA
[291] Examples are, among others, "Droit d'inventaire"; "Actualités a 1920 heures" on *France 3,* April 30, 2008, INA; and "L'Héritage insaissable de Mai 68" in *Le Figaro,* May 17, 2008
[292] "Droit d'inventaire"; "Actualités a 12 heures" on *France 3,* May 2, 2008, INA
[293] "Actualités a 12 heures" on *France 3,* May 2, 2008, INA; and "C'est au programme" on *France 2,* May 19, 2008, INA

leaders had passed away, or were too old to perform an active and visible role in society. Daniel Cohn-Bendit was a notable exception, yet even he had to face the fading legacy of May in a *France 3* special report which paired him up with Maurice Grimaud, the prefect of Paris in 1968, the institutional symbol of the CRS, the symbolic arch-enemy of the 'German Jew'. The meeting was ripe with nostalgia, as the two former adversaries (Grimaud was then over 90 years old) shared their memories of '68 and agreed with each-other more often than not. "Maurice Grimaud and the prefect of Paris are not the same thing," Cohn-Bendit noted, in response to Grimaud's explanation for the use of violence in containing the student riots. "There is a heritage to May 1968," the special report concluded, but one is tempted to add that a heritage which can join the two biggest adversaries of the Parisian revolts in a nostalgic, friendly recollection of the past, has to be one that is in well on its way from being memory to becoming history.

A 2008 poll showed that a majority of French youth believed May 1968 to have been a "generally positive" "students' revolt and workers' strike" for the cause of "social progress" and advancement for "gender equality", "social protection" and "union rights".[294] By contrast, class struggle and workers' rights were mentioned by a minority of French youth when a similar poll was conducted in 2001.[295] The slow, yet persistent historization of May allowed counter-narratives of May to emerge in the popular media and an increasingly dispassionate relationship with May made it easier for those narratives to take hold. The narratives of May in 2008 were no longer written by Henri

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[294] "Sondage: Les francais plebiscitent Mai 68 comme 'un période de progres social'" in *Le Monde*, May 14, 2008
[295] *L'Express*, April 16, 2001

Weber, Alain Krivine or Jacques Chirac, they were written by sociologists like Jacques Le Goff, or historians like Max Gallo.[296]

Four decades of May commemorations have shown the passage of a mythical event from memory to history. To an extent, this process has coincided with the passage of the '68 generation, from actuality to history. By the first decennial of 1968, the French public had not yet recovered from the shellshock of a massive social rupture, inciting discussions about the "revolutionary", "unforgettable" nature of May. Yet May turned out to be more forgettable than its participants believed – by 1988, the revolutionary narrative of May had been replaced by a plurality of interpretations, most involving a shift away from the political and into the realm of the social. The following two decades saw the responsibility of commemoration shift from the shoulders of the *soixante-huitards* to sociologists, and then finally to the historians. Michelle Zancarini-Fournel notes that the first major historical works about 1968 started appearing in the early 1990s and proliferated in the early 2000s.[297] It is no coincidence that the number of historical treatments of 1968 increased during the same period when the role of *soixante-huitards* in commemorating May decreased – the emergence of new social concerns and the aging of the 1968 generation relieved May of passion and created the opening that revisionist accounts of May could fill.

Yet we should not assume that forty years has been enough, that the '68 seen from 2008 was a completely historical May. The explosion of publications, broadcasts and scholarly literature, the re-ideologization of May by Nicolas Sarkozy and the fact that the

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[296] Most notably, the only *soixante-huitard* in the two-hour analysis of May's legacy, "Droit d'inventaire" was Daniel Cohn-Bendit, all other analysts were scholars.
[297] For a longer discussion of French historiography of 1968, see Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, *Le Moment 68: Une histoire contestée,* Paris: Seuil, 2008

French public still considers May to be the single most important event of the 20th century after World War II shows that May 1968 is still in the realm of memory, though openings for historical inquiry have emerged. Jean-Pierre Leroux calls May "a history still in shadow, a memory that has lost its shine"[298], but perhaps a more appropriate, and indeed, more optimistic definition comes from Pierre Nora's concept of a *lieux de mémoire:* "moments of history, torn away from history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded".[299] Though this was not the case in 1984, when Nora started his landmark work in historical memory, May 1968 by 2008 had become a *lieux de mémoire par excellence*, a historical event forced into collective memory by commemorations, retrospectives and re-evaluations.

[298] Jean-Pierre Leroux, "L'événement-mémoire", 14
[299] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire,"* in *Representations,* 26 (1989), 12

CONCLUSIONS:

Commemorations of May 1968 did not produce a cohesive, unified narrative of the students' and workers' revolts, nor were they constant, discreetly delineable exercises in memorialization, appropriation or subversion. This is perhaps the greatest problem with descriptions of collective memory: the term itself suggests the sort of unity and structure that reality can never provide. Anniversaries of May 1968 produced a number of persuasive, often contradictory narratives that evolved and changed over time, in response to the evolving structures of public discourse, changing social and political interests and various personal concerns of individuals with enough cultural capital to shape the course of May's commemorations. In addition to the macrocosm of social structures, the microcosm of memory structures also influenced May's mythology. Stories of concentrated individual heroism triumphed over narratives of diffuse social upheaval, later attempts at affecting social change got incorporated into the May mythology and May itself became a metaphor for a variety of social, political and cultural trends, from narratives of increasing moral relativism to deep feelings of progressive disillusionment. Sometimes narratives of '68 stood and fell by their capacity to tap into national archetypes, as evidenced by the success of Daniel Cohn-Bendit's career as an unpredictable trickster facing an opposition of institutionalized anti-semitism. Though broad frameworks of consensus and disagreement can be identified in some aspects of commemoration, it is through focusing on the evolution of specific narratives that we can better gauge the immense interpretive potential of the May revolts. The Political May, Daniel Cohn-Bendit's May, the Feminist May and the Revolutionary-Utopian May are just a few examples of the plurality of narratives that have defined the mythology of '68.

40 years after the revolutionary spring, debates have become less passionate and more scholarly, and the mythology of May has become more varied and more egalitarian. A new generation has emerged who know May only through its commemorations, not through the event itself. In some ways, May 1968 has become history. Yet much of the mythology still persists, and new narratives are still being created. 2008 was by far the most prolific anniversary of May, and the 'most important event of the 20th century after World War II' is still far from being relegated solely to the domain of historians. Quite the contrary, if May 1968 has become a *lieux de mémoire,* if it has become an "exclusively self-referential sign", a myth so laden with different meanings and interpretations that it is as grounded in its commemorations as it is in the historical reality of 1968, then it may, in fact, survive many more decennials before finally becoming history.

APPENDIX:

MAY '68 ON FRENCH TELEVISION

Date de diff.	Heure	Durée	Titre propre	Titre collection	Titre vidéogramme
13.10.1978			Guy Béart	A bout portant	
20.12.1978	200600	00:01:08	Cohn Bendit	JA2 20H	
02.05.1978	203000	01:46:00	La crise de 68 : révolte ou révolution	Les dossiers de l'écran	
02.05.1978	204000	01:13:05	1968 dans le monde	Les dossiers de l'écran	
21.07.1978	213400	01:16:00	Les années de vos vingt ans	Apostrophes ; 155	
22.05.1978		02:03:00	Mai 68	Aujourd'hui madame	
09.05.1978	140700	01:00:00	L'héritage de mai 68	Aujourd'hui madame	
11.01.1978	223145	00:25:44	Hollywood USA : Jane Fonda	Ciné regards : Hollywood USA	
14.05.1978	213500	01:00:00	Histoire de mai : émission du 14 mai 1978	HISTOIRE DE MAI ; 2	
07.05.1978		01:05:00	Histoire de mai : émission du 07 mai 1978	HISTOIRE DE MAI ; 1	
30.04.1978	213630	00:21:00 environ	Alfred Sauvy	L'homme en question	
21.05.1978	213650	01:12:18	Histoire de mai : émission du 21 mai 1978	HISTOIRE DE MAI ; 3	
13.05.1978	123006	00:01:30	Joseph Delteil	SAMEDI ET DEMI	
14.05.1978		00:05:30	Mai 68	IT1 20H	
08.05.1978	215905	01:00:00	Que reste-t-il de mai 68 ?	Questionnaire	
24.06.1978	231700	00:03:30	Livre : mai 68-PPDA	IT1 NUIT	
24.05.1978		01:00:00	Alain PEYREFITTE	LA PART DE VERITE	
17.05.1978		01:58:00	Spécial mai 68	Un sur cinq	
17.05.1978		00:14:46	L'avant mai 68	Un sur cinq	
17.05.1978		00:03:07	Reportage : qui était Cohn Bendit ?	Un sur cinq	
01.05.1978		01:02:00 environ	Grands soirs et petits matins		
13.05.1978	123011		Extrait film "Grands soirs et petits matins"	SAMEDI ET DEMI	

Heure	Durée	Titre propre	Titre collection	Titre vidéogramme
130900	00:02:31	Plateau René Rémond	MIDI 2	
213125	01:19:17	Apostrophes internationales	Apostrophes ; 627	
215858	00:57:32	L'histoire n'est pas finie		
131800	00:01:25	Les années 68	IT1 13H	
131600	00:06:44	Plateau Hervé HAMON et Patrick ROTMAN	IT1 13H	
200017	00:00:57	Vente affiches 1968	IT1 20H	
130006		Présentation émission "procès de mai"	IT1 13H	
200008	00:02:00	20 ans grenelle	IT1 20H	
223620	01:26:19	Le procès de mai 1968		
231139	00:15:19	Daniel Rondeau	'Strophes	
232020	00:59:30	Ahrweiler Hélène	FIGURES	
120059	00:57:23	Que sont nos vingt ans devenus ? : 1968-1988		
000920	00:28:50	Mai après	Génération ; 11	
003640	00:30:22	La révolution introuvable	Génération ; 10	
235015	00:31:25	Vingt ans après	Génération ; 15	
223855	00:54:42	Roland Barthes 1915-1980 : 2ème partie	Archives du XXème siècle	
200016	00:01:38	Images vidéothèque 68	IT1 20H	
130600	00:01:38	Cohn Bendit à Nanterre	MIDI 2	
130700	00:01:39	Nanterre 22 mars 1988	MIDI 2	
074700	00:05:36	Les 4 vérités : Daniel Cohn Bendit, leader gauchiste	TELE MATIN	
132505	00:01:21	Exposition mai 68	MIDI 2	
193825	00:01:39	Affiches mai 68	JA2 20H	
202100	00:02:01	Mai 68	JA2 20H	
223900	01:04:37	Le souverain de la république	DE GAULLE OU L'ETERNEL DEFI	
222844	00:54:40	Henri Lefebvre ou le fils du siècle		

Date de diff	Heure	Durée	Titre propre	Titre collection	Titre vidéogramr
15.04.1998	205439	01:49:01	C'était votre mai 68	La marche du siècle	
06.08.1998	234714	00:50:53	Génération contestation	LE SIECLE DES HOMMES	
26.04.1998	120032	00:32:30	Débat mai 68/d'une génération à l'autre	Polémiques	
26.04.1998	120002	00:01:37	La Sorbonne	Polémiques	
01.05.1998	200019	00:02:02	1ER MAI/MANIF CGT/CFDT	JA2 20H	
06.05.1998	201847	00:00:51	Cohn Bendit entarté Nanterre	JA2 20H	
09.05.1998	202339	00:03:47	Mai 68 et l'éducation	JA2 20H	
13.05.1998	132800	00:00:00	Plateau Daniel Bensaid et Paul Marie de La Gorce	MIDI 2	
14.05.1998	202437	00:03:59	LA TELE ET MAI 68	JA2 20H	
22.06.1998	202052	00:04:00	Off carte Larzac/Les post soixantehuitards	JA2 20H	
26.04.1998	231400	00:33:00	ENTRETIEN AVEC PIERRE MOSCOVICI	Dimanche soir	
10.05.1998	223700	00:36:00	ENTRETIEN AVEC CLAUDE ALLEGRE	Dimanche soir	
04.06.1998	110900	00:04:46	Roland Garros mai 68	LES ALLEES DE ROLAND GARROS	
17.04.1998	225250	01:10:41	(Politique et philosophie)	Bouillon de culture	
23.05.1998	205635	01:35:56	QUAND UN ANGE PASSE		
30.09.1998	234451	00:57:00	MAURICE BLANCHOT	Un siècle d'écrivains	
01.01.1998		01:30:00 environ	Le fond de l'air est rouge : 2ème partie : Les mains coupées (version 1998)		
19.05.1998		00:10:24	Interview Richard Dembo : Cannes et politique		
07.04.1998	232738	00:17:40	L'école à l'épreuve	La preuve par trois	
07.04.1998	232737	00:10:09	Actions à la chaîne	La preuve par trois	
07.04.1998	232739	00:15:26	Le combat continue	La preuve par trois	
11.05.1998	202800	00:02:43	[Témoignages mai 68]	TF1 20 heures	
28.03.1998	203315	00:01:51	[Exposition sur mai 68]	TF1 20 heures	
28.04.1998	203607	00:04:09	[Mai 68]	TF1 20 heures	
06.05.1998	203814	00:00:41	[Plateau brève : Daniel Cohn Bendit entarté]	TF1 20 heures	
06.05.1998	203855	00:02:27	[Chansons 1968]	TF1 20 heures	
10.05.1998	201851	00:02:50	[Chronique année 1968]	TF1 20 heures	
13.05.1998	195841	00:04:38	[Plateau extérieur invitée : Sophie Marceau]	TF1 20 heures	
15.05.1998	132523	00:03:26	Retrospective mai 68	TF1 13 heures	
10.05.1998	230425	01:23:54	Autocritique 68-98		
29.05.1998	234745	00:53:21	MEMOIRE GAY		
24.04.1998	235538	00:55:26	La danse du pouvoir 24 mai 30 juin 1968	Les brûlures de l'histoire	Mai 1968 : dix sema France : 2
22.03.1998	204510	00:02:36	Mouvement 22 mars	JA2 20H	

Date de diff	Heure	Durée	Titre propre	Titre collection	Titre vidéogramme
15.04.1998	205439	01:49:01	C'était votre mai 68	La marche du siècle	
06.08.1998	234714	00:50:53	Génération contestation	LE SIECLE DES HOMMES	
26.04.1998	120032	00:32:30	Débat mai 68/d'une génération à l'autre	Polémiques	
26.04.1998	120002	00:01:37	La Sorbonne	Polémiques	
01.05.1998	200019	00:02:02	1ER MAI/MANIF CGT/CFDT	JA2 20H	
06.05.1998	201847	00:00:51	Cohn Bendit entarté Nanterre	JA2 20H	
09.05.1998	202339	00:03:47	Mai 68 et l'éducation	JA2 20H	
13.05.1998	132800	00:00:00	Plateau Daniel Bensaid et Paul Marie de La Gorce	MIDI 2	
14.05.1998	202437	00:03:59	LA TELE ET MAI 68	JA2 20H	
22.06.1998	202052	00:04:00	Off carte Larzac/Les post soixantehuitards	JA2 20H	
26.04.1998	231400	00:33:00	ENTRETIEN AVEC PIERRE MOSCOVICI	Dimanche soir	
10.05.1998	223700	00:36:00	ENTRETIEN AVEC CLAUDE ALLEGRE	Dimanche soir	
04.06.1998	110900	00:04:46	Roland Garros mai 68	LES ALLEES DE ROLAND GARROS	
17.04.1998	225250	01:10:41	(Politique et philosophie)	Bouillon de culture	
23.05.1998	205635	01:35:56	QUAND UN ANGE PASSE		
30.09.1998	234451	00:57:00	MAURICE BLANCHOT	Un siècle d'écrivains	
01.01.1998		01:30:00 environ	Le fond de l'air est rouge : 2ème partie : Les mains coupées (version 1998)		
19.05.1998		00:10:24	Interview Richard Dembo : Cannes et politique		
07.04.1998	232738	00:17:40	L'école à l'épreuve	La preuve par trois	
07.04.1998	232737	00:10:09	Actions à la chaîne	La preuve par trois	
07.04.1998	232739	00:15:26	Le combat continue	La preuve par trois	
11.05.1998	202800	00:02:43	[Témoignages mai 68]	TF1 20 heures	
28.03.1998	203315	00:01:51	[Exposition sur mai 68]	TF1 20 heures	
28.04.1998	203607	00:04:09	[Mai 68]	TF1 20 heures	
06.05.1998	203814	00:00:41	[Plateau brève : Daniel Cohn Bendit entarté]	TF1 20 heures	
06.05.1998	203855	00:02:27	[Chansons 1968]	TF1 20 heures	
10.05.1998	201851	00:02:50	[Chronique année 1968]	TF1 20 heures	
13.05.1998	195841	00:04:38	[Plateau extérieur invitée : Sophie Marceau]	TF1 20 heures	
15.05.1998	132523	00:03:26	Retrospective mai 68	TF1 13 heures	
10.05.1998	230425	01:23:54	Autocritique 68-98		
29.05.1998	234745	00:53:21	MEMOIRE GAY		
24.04.1998	235538	00:55:26	La danse du pouvoir 24 mai 30 juin 1968	Les brûlures de l'histoire	Mai 1968 : dix semaines qui ébranlère France : 2
22.03.1998	204510	00:02:36	Mouvement 22 mars	JA2 20H	

Heure	Durée	Titre propre	Titre collection	Titre vidéogramme
130006	00:41:50	<DANIEL COHN BENDIT>	LIGNES DE MIRE	
100849	00:26:52	VINGT SIX MINUTES D'ARRET : EMISSION DU 9 MAI 1998	VINGT SIX MINUTES D'ARRET	
203401	00:02:38	PORTRAIT MOCKY	JA2 20H	
	01:30:00 environ	Le fond de l'air est rouge : 1ère partie : Les mains fragiles (version 1998)		
131447	00:03:15	Historique mai 68	MIDI 2	

Date de diff	Heure	Durée	Titre propre	Titre collection	Titre vidéogramme
17.01.2008	223944	00:21:16	Ce soir (ou jamais !) 1ère partie : [émission du 17 janvier 2008]	Ce soir (ou jamais !) 1ère partie	
23.01.2008	205253	01:52:51	Droit d'inventaire : Mai 68	Droit d'inventaire	
08.04.2008	205356	01:35:02	68		
20.03.2008		00:26:03	Soirée Mai 68		
23.03.2008	065957	00:58:53	André Brahic		
23.01.2008	220418	00:16:41	Le jour où le pouvoir était à prendre	Droit d'inventaire	
11.02.2008	225202	00:07:48	Ce soir (ou jamais !) 1ère partie : [émission du 11 février 2008]	Ce soir (ou jamais !) 1ère partie	
14.02.2008	222904	00:32:17	Ce soir (ou jamais !) 1ère partie : [émission du 14 février 2008]	Ce soir (ou jamais !) 1ère partie	
01.03.2008	231332	03:24:21	On n'est pas couché : [émission du 1 Mars 2008]	On n'est pas couché	
23.01.2008	205702	00:12:20	Etudiants, ouvriers: Le rendez-vous raté	Droit d'inventaire	
23.01.2008	211616	00:17:04	CRS, stars de 68	Droit d'inventaire	
23.01.2008	214248	00:14:33	La guerre des ondes	Droit d'inventaire	
23.01.2008	223011	00:10:58	Mai 68, interdit aux femmes	Droit d'inventaire	
22.02.2008	223527	02:00:17	Esprits libres : [émission du 22 Février 2008]	Esprits libres	
15.03.2008	234039	03:19:18	On n'est pas couché : [émission du 15 mars 2008]	On n'est pas couché	
20.03.2008	202453	00:04:23	[Quarante ans de mai 68 : sur les événements du 22 mars]	20 heures	
22.03.2008	123359	00:02:45	D Tabah à la Cité Universitaire de Nanterre, point de départ de mai 68	12 13. Edition nationale	
22.03.2008	123709	00:03:00	INVITE Patrick Rotman, historien et réalisateur, sur Mai 68.	12 13. Edition nationale	
22.03.2008	202808	00:01:53	[Le site internet de l'INA sur mai 68]	20 heures	
20.03.2008	231534	00:02:59	Mai 68 est issu du mouvement du 22 mars 68 à nanterre	Soir 3 journal	
20.03.2008	231840	00:03:30	SANS DETOUR : ALAIN GEISMAR	Soir 3 journal	
20.03.2008	232200	00:00:20	Lu Vu Entendu : " mai 68 l'affiche en heritage"	Soir 3 journal	
22.02.2008	225428	00:02:22	J'irai cracher sur	Esprits libres	
06.04.2008	185106	00:55:34	Les Charlots	Vivement dimanche prochain	
04.04.2008	223333	01:56:14	Esprits libres : [émission du 4 Avril 2008]	Esprits libres	
28.04.2008	195458	00:01:37	Le dossier : [40ème anniversaire de Mai 68 : rencontre avec deux soixante-huitards]	19 20. Edition nationale	
01.05.2008	194937	00:02:40	[Mai 68 et la télévision]	19 20. Edition nationale	

Date de diff	Heure	Durée	Titre propre	Titre collection	Titre vidéogramme
17.01.2008	223944	00:21:16	Ce soir (ou jamais !) 1ère partie : [émission du 17 janvier 2008]	Ce soir (ou jamais !) 1ère partie	
23.01.2008	205253	01:52:51	Droit d'inventaire : Mai 68	Droit d'inventaire	
08.04.2008	205356	01:35:02	68		
20.03.2008		00:26:03	Soirée Mai 68		
23.03.2008	065957	00:58:53	André Brahic		
23.01.2008	220418	00:16:41	Le jour où le pouvoir était à prendre	Droit d'inventaire	
11.02.2008	225202	00:07:48	Ce soir (ou jamais !) 1ère partie : [émission du 11 février 2008]	Ce soir (ou jamais !) 1ère partie	
14.02.2008	222904	00:32:17	Ce soir (ou jamais !) 1ère partie : [émission du 14 février 2008]	Ce soir (ou jamais !) 1ère partie	
01.03.2008	231332	03:24:21	On n'est pas couché : [émission du 1 Mars 2008]	On n'est pas couché	
23.01.2008	205702	00:12:20	Etudiants, ouvriers: Le rendez-vous raté	Droit d'inventaire	
23.01.2008	211616	00:17:04	CRS, stars de 68	Droit d'inventaire	
23.01.2008	214248	00:14:33	La guerre des ondes	Droit d'inventaire	
23.01.2008	223011	00:10:58	Mai 68, interdit aux femmes	Droit d'inventaire	
22.02.2008	223527	02:00:17	Esprits libres : [émission du 22 Février 2008]	Esprits libres	
15.03.2008	234039	03:19:18	On n'est pas couché : [émission du 15 mars 2008]	On n'est pas couché	
20.03.2008	202453	00:04:23	[Quarante ans de mai 68 : sur les événements du 22 mars]	20 heures	
22.03.2008	123359	00:02:45	D Tabah à la Cité Universitaire de Nanterre, point de départ de mai 68	12 13. Edition nationale	
22.03.2008	123709	00:03:00	INVITE Patrick Rotman, historien et réalisateur, sur Mai 68.	12 13. Edition nationale	
22.03.2008	202808	00:01:53	[Le site internet de l'INA sur mai 68]	20 heures	
20.03.2008	231534	00:02:59	Mai 68 est issu du mouvement du 22 mars 68 à nanterre	Soir 3 journal	
20.03.2008	231840	00:03:30	SANS DETOUR : ALAIN GEISMAR	Soir 3 journal	
20.03.2008	232200	00:00:20	Lu Vu Entendu : " mai 68 l'affiche en heritage"	Soir 3 journal	
22.02.2008	225428	00:02:22	J'irai cracher sur	Esprits libres	
06.04.2008	185106	00:55:34	Les Charlots	Vivement dimanche prochain	
04.04.2008	223333	01:56:14	Esprits libres : [émission du 4 Avril 2008]	Esprits libres	
28.04.2008	195458	00:01:37	Le dossier : [40ème anniversaire de Mai 68 : rencontre avec deux soixante-huitards]	19 20. Edition nationale	
01.05.2008	194937	00:02:40	[Mai 68 et la télévision]	19 20. Edition nationale	

Date de diff	Heure	Durée	Titre propre	Titre collection	Titre vidéogramme
27.04.2008	194644	00:03:58	Le dossier : [40ème anniversaire de Mai 68 : historique du mouvement]	19 20. Edition nationale	
12.05.2008	075050	00:08:06	Alain Minc	Les 4 vérités	
13.05.2008	205432	01:31:44	Les vacances de Clémence		
10.05.2008	202552	00:01:56	[Mai 68 au lycée Condorcet]	20 heures	
29.04.2008	195008	00:02:54	Le dossier : [40ème anniversaire de Mai 68 : rencontre avec le préfet Maurice Grimaud]	19 20. Edition nationale	
03.05.2008	194848	00:03:23	[Mai 68 : les salariés de Reanult Cléon]	19 20. Edition nationale	
15.05.2008	094154	00:49:51	C'est au programme : [émission du 15 mai 2008]	C'est au programme	
19.05.2008	094206	00:50:10	C'est au programme : [émission du 19 mai 2008]	C'est au programme	
25.05.2008	103038	00:25:47	Mai 68, une révolution dans l'église ?	JDS question d'actualité	
12.05.2008	195353	00:02:27	[Festival de Cannes 1968]	19 20. Edition nationale	
11.05.2008	202405	00:01:51	[Témoignage d'un CRS de mai 68]	20 heures	
28.03.2008	220000	00:43:50	Mai 68 : 40 ans de souvenirs	Déshabillons-les	
14.05.2008	232159	00:01:10	Lu Vu Entendu : Lilicub "La belle vie"	Soir 3 journal	
30.05.2008	231316	00:01:50	Meeting d' O. Besancenot à la Mutualité : compte-rendu de la soirée	Soir 3 journal	
25.05.2008	202303	00:02:28	[Mai 1968 : témoignage de cheminots]	20 heures	
25.05.2008	231200	01:30:21	L'arbre de mai	Passé sous silence	
18.07.2008	231902	01:28:30	La musique française	La boîte à musique de Jean François Zygel	
30.08.2008	012339	00:52:27	Retour au pays des babas		
22.10.2008	222624	00:16:41	Reportage	Droit d'inventaire	
22.10.2008	205743	00:12:20	Reportage	Droit d'inventaire	
22.10.2008	213126	00:17:04	Reportage	Droit d'inventaire	

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