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“L’héritage” Is In the Streets: The Text, Images and Legacy of May 1968

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The University of Southern Mississippi

“L’heritage” is in the Streets: The text, images and legacy of May 1968

by

Justin Baggett

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The University of Southern Mississippi
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Abstract

The events of May 1968 in France are among the most important and influential events of the Cold War period. The posters and graffiti of the movement contain significant cultural contributions whose content and legacy are still controversial and prominent parts of French culture some 46 years later. This study examines both the visual and textual portions of both the posters and graffiti from the “mai 68” movement in Paris to discuss their relevance and their origins. This study also analyzes the legacy of the slogans from the graffiti as well as that of the visual elements of the posters. The graffiti and posters from the movement were organized and analyzed by their topic and origins. The study concludes that the posters and graffiti were a significant contribution to the French cultural and political milieu, an effect that will not be mitigated in the near future.

Key Terms: “Mai 68,” France, Paris, posters, graffiti

Dedication

To my parents, Greg and Joann Baggett,
Without whose support this thesis would be impossible,
Thank you for everything you do.

Acknowledgements

I would like a moment to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Brian LaPierre, for his consistent efforts to help me with the production of this thesis. His endless patience and guidance during the writing process helped this thesis become the best it could be. Thank you for everything.

I would also like to pay special thanks to the Honors College for providing me with this opportunity. During my time at the University of Southern Mississippi, the Honors College has proved an invaluable resource for me for anything that I might need.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In May 1968, a series of protests and riots rocked Paris and brought the city to a commercial standstill. These protests expanded the political power of university students and workers across France. Much like in the American student movements of the 1960s, the Parisian students at the Sorbonne in 1968 grew to become a power in the body politic. The protests had both political and cultural impacts on French society, and the cultural artifacts of the movement — the signs, slogans and graffiti — are powerful symbols of both revolutionary change and chaotic upheaval.

In France, the spirit of “*mai '68*” continues to be a political and cultural force to this day on both ends of the political spectrum. Countless newspaper articles concerning the “*mariage pour tous*” (same-sex marriage equality) movement in 2013, for example, have compared it to the 1968 protests and cited “*l'esprit de '68*” as a driving force behind both the pro-marriage equality and the traditional marriage demonstrators, and many protestors from both sides appropriated the iconic posters and slogans of the movement to advocate for their views. The protests certainly have their detractors, however; in 2007, then-presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy vowed to “liquidate the legacy of May 68,” a testament to both the power and the controversy of these demonstrations.¹ The 1968 movement is a *tour de force* within French society, the understanding of which is integral to an understanding of the cultural and political climate of France nearly 50 years later.

¹ Pascal Guyot, “Liquidier Mai 68’, une idée aussi vieille que Mai 68,” *La Dépêche.fr*, 21 March 2008, <http://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2008/03/21/444172-liquider-mai-68-une-idee-aussi-vieille-que-mai-68.html>.

The protests in 1968 grew from a general feeling of discontent into an explosive movement that tore Paris to shreds, raised barricades in the streets, and sparked clashes with the police. The movement was caused, many argue, by the intersection of three simultaneous crises in 1968: overcrowded schools, President Charles de Gaulle's domination of the political system, and a society unused to the consumptive habits of advanced capitalism.² Like many of the 1968 movements, the *mai 68* movement had small rumblings and precursors in 1967, including a failed reform effort at Nanterre that created a small cadre that called themselves the *enragés*, an allusion to the eponymous group during the French Revolution.³ In what was called *le Mouvement du 22 mars*, a growing group of students at the Parisian university began disrupting class and lectures in the name of Che Guevara and Mao Zedong culminating in a student occupation of a forbidden faculty lounge.⁴ The movement eventually moved into the Sorbonne itself, the central school in Paris. After that, the movement eventually died as piecemeal reforms sucked the air out of student demands.⁵ Yet, although the movement failed to gain its political aims, the cultural artifacts continue to have resonance throughout French society.

² See Jaques Capdevielle and René Mouriaux, *Mai 68: L'entre-deux de la modernité: Histoire de trente ans*, (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politique, 1988), and Kristen Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

³ Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 46.

⁴ Andrew Feenberg and Jim Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets: The French May Events of 1968* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 6.

⁵ Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World*, (New York: Random House, 2006), 236.

The most enduring symbols of the *mai 68* movement are the posters and graffiti of the protests. Enduring and symbolic antiauthoritarian phrases such as “*Il est interdite d’interdire*” (“It is forbidden to forbid”) and “*La beauté est dans la rue*” (“Beauty is in the street”) have entered the French lexicon as a political force for movements ever since. The efforts that have been made to organize these slogans have yet to place the iconography in a larger French cultural perspective or context. Rather, many historians use the slogans as an interpretive roadmap of the actual events of May 1968 and as a tool for understanding the demands of the students. This is deeply consequential not only to how one understands the movement but also to understanding how it impacted French society. Historical studies have yet to show how the iconography of the movement grew and contributed to a collective understanding of the movement’s goals and motivations.

The reasons that the protests started, the actual events of May and June 1968, and the aftereffects of the protests are of intense interest to historians; however to say that the visual elements of the protests have received no attention would be mistaken. Many historians have taken a sample of the posters and graffiti to express an idea about the movement, and this project will contribute to the historiography of *mai 68* by trying to view the posters and graffiti in terms of both their messaging and visual elements.

Background on the actual events of May 1968 can be found in numerous sources, and an understanding of the motives of the radicals is necessary to an understanding of their message. The original narrative of “the events of May” is the 1988 book by French reporters Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération*.⁶ Though often criticized for

⁶ Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération volume 1: les années de rêve*, (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1987).

omitting the factory workers and the extensive strikes of May 1968, as were many of the early works on the events, this is an early attempt by French academics to understand what had happened some twenty years before. This account follows a few student leaders from 1962 into the early 1970s, and views the events of 1968 from a personal and political level. The two also began drawing early lines from the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) directly to the political radicalism of May 1968, a line that Kirsten Ross would eventually elucidate in her book, to be mentioned below.

Historians Jacques Capdevielle and René Mouriaux situated the movement in a larger historical context in their book, *Mai 68: L'entre-deux de la modernité; Histoire de trente ans*. Capdevielle and Mouriaux determine that the *événements* were an intermediary moment between what French economists call the “*trente glorieuses*,” the roughly 30-year period of economic expansion following the end of World War II, and the economic stagnation of the 1970s. Effectively, Capdevielle and Mouriaux argue that the protests were neither a spontaneous reaction nor a revolutionary overturning of society; they were merely an indicator of slowing growth in the late 1960s.⁷

Michael Seidman examines “the events of May,” as they have been called in the English-speaking world, in his book, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968*. Seidman argues that the movement does not deserve its current classification as a revolution per se. While Seidman concedes that the movement is a particularly powerful symbol, he argues that the products of what he calls the “Imaginary Revolution” were small and short lived. *The Imaginary Revolution* starts by refuting much of the history up to the turn of the 21st century in assent with political scientist

Bernard Lecroix who “accused [scholars Luc Ferry, Alain Renaut and Gilles Lipovetsky] of neglecting political and social history in favor of what intellectuals said about the events.”⁸ Siedman compares the movement in France to that in Italy, where workers began protesting contemporaneously to the French and fought on long after 1968 to eventually meet many of their original goals.⁹ In the early 1970s in France, however, union membership fizzled out, especially the radical *Union nationale des étudiants de France* (UNEF), which would shrivel to almost half its size between 1968 and 1970.¹⁰ Siedman’s analysis falls short, however, by using comparison to belittle a movement that had little to do with Franco-Italian relations, and more to do with the French government itself; by comparison, the French movement may not have been as effective as the Italian one, but that does not mean it was totally ineffective of its own right. Siedman also takes a share of the book to talk about the situation of pre-May France and many of the problems taken up by the protestors, such as the rights of male students to visit female dormitories, had been “fought and often won by 1968.”¹¹ Moreover, Siedman posits that most workers did not want autonomy, citing many workers having “little desire to become ... involved.”¹² One reviewer responded to these particular points by asking, “The real problem with this book, however, is that if French society was changing so fast,

⁸ Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 6.

⁹ *Ibid*, 274.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 275.

¹¹ Siedman, 38.

¹² Siedman, 229.

the universities were so tolerant, the state was so in control, and the workers were so contented, why did May 1968 happen at all?"¹³

Kristen Ross applies the concept of historical memory to “the events of May” in her book, *May 68 and its Afterlives*. Ross argues that the movement was a political rather than cultural movement, and the idea that “nothing happened politically- but the cultural changes were enormous” from May is the most prevalent misconception surrounding this movement, especially in France.¹⁴ Ross makes the claim that politics were involved based on her assertion that the Algerian War was directly tied to the disruption: “[May ’68] was the revolt of an historically situated cross-section of workers and students alike, for some of whom the War in Algeria provided the background noise of their childhood, whose adolescence or adulthood coincided with the massacre of hundreds of Algerian workers at the hands of Papon’s police on October 17, 1961, with Charonne and the near-daily attacks of the OAS.”¹⁵ Ross is particularly poignant in pointing out that the protests would not have succeeded were they a solely student-led and supported movement; the student riots were coupled with a series of general strikes, that brought Paris to a standstill, not allowing anyone in or out or even, in some cases, to sleep.¹⁶ Ross takes Seidman’s pessimism and turns it upside down, by proposing that the world should not focus on the events as a cultural revolution, but rather as an actual revolutionary

¹³ Julian Jackson, “The Mystery of May 1968,” *French Historical Studies* 33, no. 4 (2010): 629.

¹⁴Kristen Ross, *May 68 and its Afterlives*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 21

¹⁵Ross, 26.

¹⁶Ross, 3-4.

movement intent on destroying capitalism rather than what Seidman and others have called a “hiccup” in the development of advanced capitalist society.

Mark Kurlansky’s book, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World*, covers in depth the life of Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a militant and, for many, the face of the *Mai 68* protests and the *Mouvement du 22 mars* protests at the Sorbonne and Université de Nanterre, respectively.¹⁷ Cohn-Bendit was not the sole leader of the movement though; others would include Jacques Sauvageot, the leader of the university’s student union, and Alain Geismar, a student radical.¹⁸ The movement shifted and grew, however, and the demands grew into a general radical movement whose demands ranged from specific student demands to broad anti-imperialist and antiwar sentiment.¹⁹

Contrary to Kurlansky, Charles Kaiser examines the movement from an American perspective in his book *1968 in America: Music, Politics, Chaos, Counterculture and the Shaping of a Generation*.²⁰ In his book, he argues that the 1968 protests in France were an inspiration to the counterculture in the United States. French student protests nearly brought the government to its knees, and American students sought to emulate their protest tactics. Kaiser posits that protestors in the college halls in the fall and later at the Democratic National Convention were using tactics and drawing inspiration from May.

Other movements were born of the *mai 68* uprisings, as well. Many of these are explored in the collection of essays, *May 68: Reconsidering France’s Last Revolution*,

¹⁷Kurlansky, 219-220.

¹⁸ Ibid, 223.

¹⁹ Ibid, 227-229.

²⁰ Charles Kaiser, *1968 in America: Music, Politics, Chaos, Counterculture and the Shaping of a Generation*, (New York : Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988).

edited by Julian Jackson, Anna-Louise Milne, and James S. Williams.²¹ This collection examines other parts of the *mai '68* movements that are overlooked by the dominant narrative, including a chapter by Phillippe Buton on the Maoist press in France; Buton argues that the Maoist press in the late 1960s grew to romanticize the French Resistance and the Vietnam War, and to draw comparisons between the struggles of May 1968 and those conflicts. Michael Sibalís's “‘And what then about ‘our’ problem’ — Gay liberation in the Occupied Sorbonne in May 1968” and Massimo Prearo's “The 1970s Moment in Sexual Politics” also examine the gay movement that was excluded from the original *mai 68* movement, but grew afterwards in the form of the *Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire* (FHAR). In opposition to Michael Siedman, who believes “the concern for Paris and its suburbs needs little justification,”²² Anna-Louise Milne attempts to “decentre” the history of May from Paris in her chapter, “Decentering the Events.”

My study will add to the existing historiography by examining the visual elements of both the posters and the graffiti. Graffiti was ubiquitous, a constant and overwhelming reminder of the protests and the goals and grievances of the protestors. As a political messaging system, graffiti has a few unique advantages that have only recently been explored. Mel Bochner's article, “Why Would Anyone Want to Draw on the Wall?”²³ includes the *mai '68* graffiti as part of a larger framework for explaining an art movement that he argues starts in the late 1950s to remove the objects of art – that is, to make it an immobile part of the landscape.

²¹ Julian Jackson, Anna-Louise Milne, and James S. Williams, *May 68: Reconsidering France's Last Revolution*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

²² Siedman, 10.

²³ Mel Bochner, “Why Would Anyone Want to Draw on the Wall?” *October* 130 (2009).

My study will diverge from both the Ross and the Siedman views of the movement. My evidence will reveal the historical basis for an inclusive revolution, and will complicate Ross's dichotomous view of a cultural versus a political revolution. By making a close examination of the products of the movement, my study will contribute to the historiography by examining individual pieces of revolutionary art to explore the intersection of the political and cultural revolution.

My study will be a discourse analysis of the "mai 68" movement in Paris. In particular, this study will focus on the posters and graffiti of the 1968 movement. I will organize and analyze the various products of the student-worker revolts that began on 2 May 1968. The posters that I will be using will come from Vasco Gasquet's *500 affiches de mai 68*²⁴ along with graffiti from Julien Besançon's *Les murs ont la parole: journal mural, Sorbonne, mai 68*.²⁵

Chapter 1 of this thesis will attempt to analyze the language of the posters and graffiti and to show how the protestors attempted to appeal to both the literate college student and the layman worker. I will particularly focus on the traditional French roots of the phrases that are taken up by the radicals as well as the influence of the translation of *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, more commonly known as *The Little Red Book*, into French in 1966. Maoism was a particularly attractive ideology to the student protestors in 1968, because of its radical ideology and rabid anti-imperialism, though the current of this ideology within the movement was mitigated somewhat by the introduction of the

²⁴ Vasco Gasquet, *500 Affiches de mai 68*, (Brussels: Éditions Aden, 2007).

²⁵ Julien Besançon, *Les murs ont la parole*, (Paris: Tchou, 2007).

workers to the movement later in May.²⁶ Student protests sprung up from Berlin, Germany, to Berkeley, California, in the aftermath of the Têt Offensive in Vietnam, and the anti-imperialist disposition of Maoism appealed to this sentiment.

In Chapter 2, this study will discuss the visual elements of the protest posters and pose an analysis of what each say about the protests. The analysis will discuss the traditional artistic roots from street art to fine art, and finds that the Situationist roots of the movement moved art from the Louvre to the streets of the *Quartier Latin*. Many of the posters used artistic motifs to simply and elegantly define a subject, and especially returned the eminence of the symbol of Marianne, the female embodiment of the French revolutionary spirit who is most famously represented in Eugène Delacroix's "Liberté guidant la peuple" ("Liberty Leading the People").

Chapter 3 will discuss the lingering legacy of both the visual and literary contributions of the posters and graffiti from the protests in May 1968. It will consider the concepts of *détournement* and *récupération*, which are, respectively, the use of commercial advertising to protest and the use of protest slogans and visual elements of popular movements to advertise. Businesses and corporations have both thoroughly sanitized and commercialized the posters and graffiti in France to appeal to the public and either rid the slogans of their anti-corporate messages or created a pro-corporate message to promote each of their businesses.

This thesis takes a serious look at the iconography of the *événements de mai* and will take into consideration both the visual aspects and the textual content of both the

²⁶ David Bell, "The Tracts of May," *French Politics, Culture and Society* 28, no. 1 (2010):

posters and graffiti. My analysis will reveal the nature of the movement as a united front and as a democracy of the *peuple*. Moreover, my thesis will include a grander context and perspective on the iconography that has yet to be studied in the English-speaking world. The events of *mai 68* were revolutionary in their aims, but the students and workers drew on the traditions of French culture as well as the revolutionary spirit of Mao and others.

Chapter Two

Les murs ont la parole: Language, slogans, and the origins of the text

The student/worker protestors in the Parisian riots of 1968 used a variety of slogans from a variety of sources to voice their concerns. The language of these icons of the *mai 68* movement was culled from the traditional French literary canon and vernacular idioms as well as Marxist language from the newly translated *Quotations from Chairman Mao* and the works of Karl Marx. Most famously, the graffiti and posters heavily quoted the thinkers of a relatively new philosophical movement at the time, Situationism. In this chapter, I will interpret the language of the graffiti and the words



that were written on the posters in a larger French cultural and socialist context.

Fig. 1: L'Agence Roger-Viollet, *Sous les pavés, la plage*, 1968, Parisienne de Photographie, <http://www.parisenimages.fr/en/collections-gallery/8870-7-events-may-june-1968-paris-revolutionary-slogan-paves-plage-under-cobbles-beach>

Several of the slogans have taken on a life of their own in the years since May 1968, and this is true of no other slogan than the infamous, “Sous les pavés, la plage.”²⁷ This slogan is singularly interesting, because it was created specifically for the movement and is more associated with “mai 68” than any other slogan. This slogan was invented by Bernard Cousin and his compatriot Bernard Fritsch, an advertiser also known as Killian. According to M. Cousin, the slogan originally read, “Il y a de l’herbe sous les pavés,”²⁸ in reference to hashish. On May 22, 1968, Cousin met again with Killian with the phrase “Sous les pavés, la plage.” Bernard Cousin recounted their reason for coming up with the slogan: “Nous voulions réaliser un graffiti sur lequel nous serions d’accord, lui, le situationniste révolutionnaire et parisien et moi, le bourgeois catho et provincial.”²⁹



Fig. 2: Inventin, *Il est interdit d’interdire!*, 1968, photography, Construction des inventeurs d’incroyances, <http://inventin.lautre.net/graffiti.html>.

²⁷ “Under the paving-stones, the beach.”

²⁸ “There is herb under the paving-stones.”

²⁹ “We wanted to create a graffiti on which we would agree, him, the revolutionary Situationist Parisian, and me, the bourgeois catholic from the provinces [outside Paris].” From Anne Vidalie, “Sous les pavés, les slogans,” *L’Express*, 30 April 2014, http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/sous-les-paves-les-slogans_458376.html.

Another slogan particular to the movement was “Il est interdit d’interdire.” This slogan came from a famous actor’s random outburst on the radio in spring of 1968. Jean Yanne hosted a weekly shows on Sundays in the spring of 1968, and the anti-establishmentarian sentiment of the message appealed to the youths.

Situationism attempted to adapt Marxism to an advanced capitalist society. Marxism was a legitimate ideology to the Situationists, but they proposed that Capitalism had fundamentally changed since the Industrial Revolution. The movement’s name was derived from the Situationist International (SI), an organization established in 1957 to bring ideas together and regulate the production of “situationist” thought.³⁰ SI attempted to merge traditional Marxist philosophy by adapting it with avant-garde art movements such as Dadaism and surrealism.³¹ Central to the beliefs of situationism was the idea of the “spectacle,” which was an extension of Marx’s concept of alienation. The situationists believed that the proletariat was alienated not only from the goods they produced as Marx had argued, but also from their own emotions, desires, and creativity. Therefore, life in modern capitalist society was nothing more than a series of spectacles, a life lived through observation rather than action.³² However, Situationists also saw the desire to assert oneself as an asset to the proletariat in overthrowing the system that continued to oppress them; to that end, Situationism charged revolutionaries with the task of disseminating propaganda urging the everyday person to take control of his or her life —

³⁰ Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Plant, 1.

a charge that protestors in May 1968 widely adopted.³³ Another important concept to Situationism (albeit borrowed from the intellectual movement known as Lettrism) was *détournement*, which was the adoption of capitalist slogans and logos to suit radical Marxist ends.³⁴

Situationism was popular in France due to its magazine, *Internationale Situationniste*.³⁵ The magazine was remarkably elegant and well-organized and it usually centered on a theme; for example, the first issues were aimed at the art world. The issues concerning art proposed that technological advancements had eliminated the need for all traditional forms of labor necessitating the need for humanity to pick up creativity where “art” left off.³⁶ The men of the SI were by and large artists themselves. Guy Debord, one of the founders of the SI, was a cinematographer and author who created the idea of the “spectacle” in his magnum opus, *La société du spectacle*. Raoul Vaneigem was a philosopher and writer who helped Debord push the SI into heavily theoretical and political motifs in the early 1960s.

The graffiti and posters of the *mai 68* protests used Situationist slogans extensively, and the slogans that they used as graffiti or tag lines are the best-remembered slogans both of the events and of the intellectual movement. For example, *La beauté est dans la rue*³⁷ (a slogan from a poster produced by the *Atelier populaire des beaux-arts*) was a Situationist slogan aimed at changing the elitist basis of art, and moving “beauty”

³³ Plant, 2.

³⁴ Douglas B. Holt and Douglas Cameron, *Cultural Strategy: Using Innovative Ideologies to Build Breakthrough Brands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 252.

³⁵ Stewart Home, *What is Situationism?: A Reader* (San Francisco, CA: AK Press, 1996), 3.

³⁶ Home, 4.

³⁷ “Beauty is in the streets”

from the salons and drawing rooms into the streets. This is certainly in reference to urban riots being a “beautiful” symbol of the situationist revolution, but it could also have separate meanings in the French context. Many of the protestors of the 1960s were fascinated by Bohemian lifestyles and street life, as referenced by a graffito: “La comité gavroche — révolutionnaire.”³⁸

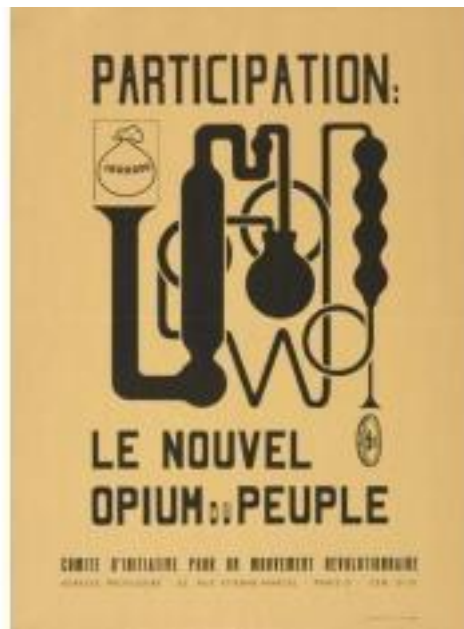


Fig. 3: Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Participation: Le nouvel opium du peuple*, 500 affiches de mai 68, 61.

Due to the Marxist roots of Situationism, traditional Marxist rhetoric was a continuous theme in the graffiti. One poster proposed: “Participation: Le nouvel opium du peuple.”³⁹ This was in reference to a famous quote from Marx’s *A Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* which reads: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart

³⁸ “The street urchin committee — revolutionary.” On *Galerie des Sciences*, Sorbonne. From *Les murs ont la parole*, 90.

³⁹ “Participation [in this case voter participation]: The new opium of the people.” 500 *affiches de mai 68*, 61.

of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”⁴⁰ This dissent against participation is also a part of a large number of posters and graffiti, and speaks to one of the perceptions of the protestors: that participation in the political process as it had been known in France under the gaullist régime was ineffective. Voting was not the solution to the despair of average French citizens, but gave them the illusion of choice, and perpetuated the “spectacle.” Instead, urban revolt and a new French revolution was the only manner in which to truly take control of one’s life and destroy alienation.

The phrase “La vielle taupe de l’histoire semble bel et bien ronger la Sorbonne. Télégramme de Marx, 13 mai 68.” was scrawled on the interior of the Sorbonne.⁴¹ The portion in reference to the “Old Mole” referenced a speech Marx made at the *People’s Paper* in London on April 14, 1856: “In the signs that bewilder the middle class, the aristocracy and the poor prophets of regression, we do recognise [sic] our brave friend, Robin Goodfellow, the old mole that can work in the earth so fast, that worthy pioneer — the Revolution.”⁴² Robin Goodfellow was the name of a main character in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Therefore, to translate this graffito a second (albeit less succinct) way: “The old specter of proletarian revolution is alive and well, and it now has its sights set on the Sorbonne.”

⁴⁰ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 1.

⁴¹ “The old mole of history seems well and gnaws at the Sorbonne. Telegram from Marx, 13 May ’68.” From *Les murs ont la parole*, 88.

⁴² Karl Marx, “Speech at anniversary of the People’s Paper,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, published 1999, accessed 20 September 2014, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1856/04/14.htm#intro>.

In 1967, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* (otherwise known as “the Little Red Book”)⁴³ was translated into multiple languages, including French. The Têt Offensive in 1968 sparked worldwide protest against the American war in Vietnam, and reinforced notions of the war as an unjust one. Maoist thought appealed to young people who saw their government as an oppressor of populations both domestic and foreign.⁴⁴ While in another era, a war fought between two other countries a continent away might be considered their respective problem, Arthur Marwick’s eternal dictum holds true, at least throughout the West: “There can be no study of the sixties without consideration of the complex repercussions of the Vietnam War.”⁴⁵ Outside of the United States, of course, this dictum applies more to France than any of the rest of the developed world; France’s Indochina Wars were a contributing factor to the American war in Vietnam.

Not only did the anti-imperialist stance of Mao’s ideas appeal to young French students; so did the vision of the revolutionary guerrilla. The romanticization of the third world communist guerrilla was an ongoing obsession with dissidents throughout the mid-to-late 1960s, and protestors worldwide idolized the rebels in conflicts from Cuba to Vietnam, and from China to Algeria. The dispossessed youth of the world saw in the insurgents not only a manner of fighting the status quo, but also an alternative to the overly bureaucratic Soviet régime which they saw as having abandoned the core principles of Marxism.

⁴³ *Les Citations du Président Mao Tse-Tuong* and “Le petit livre rouge,” respectively.

⁴⁴ The Maoist involvement in the événements is covered at length in Richard Wolin’s *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s*, though the historiography is lacking in tying Maoism to the movement or discussing the particulars of Maoist intellectuals who were a part of the movement.

⁴⁵ Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States c. 1958-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 24.

The graffiti in particular referenced Mao several times, at least once quoting him directly: “D’où viennent les idées justes? Tombent-elles du ciel? Non. Sont-elles innées? Non. Elles ne peuvent venir que de la pratique sociale : la lutte de classe , la lutte pour la production et l’expérimentation scientifique. Mao Tsé-Toung.”⁴⁶ This particular quote was to be found on the *École nationale des Beaux-Arts*, and was borrowed from *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*. It also represents an interesting re-arrangement of the original quote, of which the last portion was organized “la lutte pour la production, la lutte de classes, et l’expérimentation scientifique.”⁴⁷ While the mistake may be an honest one, the order of these words is important to the overall effect of the expression: in the original version, “the struggle for production” is the first point, which it would be for the leader of a state; in the graffiti, the first stated object is “class struggle.” Though placing the items first may not indicate what the writer thought was important, it reveals what was foremost on his or her mind at the time.

“Mêlez-vous des affaires d’état. Mao Tsé Tuong.”⁴⁸ was written on the *Conservatoire de musique*. These words come from an August 10, 1966 rally of the Red Guard rallies in Tiananmen Square, but the quote was much more succinct than the original quote: “You should pay attention to state affairs and carry the great proletarian cultural revolution through to the end.” As is reiterated throughout the posters and graffiti, the protestors here did not mean becoming involved in voting and politics; the

⁴⁶ “Where do correct ideas come from? Do they drop from the sky? No. Are they innate in the mind? No. They come only from social practice: class struggle, the struggle for production and scientific experimentation. Mao Zedong.” From *Les murs ont la parole*, 147.

⁴⁷ Mao Zedong, *Les Citations du Président Mao Tsé-Toung*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), 37.

⁴⁸ “Get involved in the affairs of state.” From *Les murs ont la parole*, 77.

only true involvement in the body politic for the protestors was urban revolt towards a revolution.



Fig. 4: L' Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *L'etat c'est moi*, Vasco Gasquet 500 *affiches de mai 68*, 89.

Of course, the protestors were no stranger to the revolutionary spirit of France, nor were they strangers to the history of the 1789 revolution. In an anti-gaullist poster, the students called to mind a famous quote by Louis XIV: “L’Etat, c’est moi.”⁴⁹ The students paired the quote with the ubiquitous vision of Charles de Gaulle, which included a comically large nose and the trademark *kepi* of the French military.⁵⁰ The use of this quote was meant to inspire the perception of General de Gaulle as a power-hungry despot intent on returning to monarchical absolutism. In response to De Gaulle’s supposed claim

⁴⁹ “I am the state.”

⁵⁰ *500 Affiches de mai 68*, 89.

to power, the *Atelier* also produced a sign with the words “L’État c’est chacun de nous!”⁵¹



Fig. 5: L’Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *L’Etat c’est chacun de nous*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 17.

In this poster, the protestors intended to not only counter the claims of De Gaulle, but also to reinforce the importance of the individual to the power of the state. For the students, the imagination and power of the individual was the power of the state, and the general will of the population ran counter to that of De Gaulle.



Fig. 6: L’Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *La volonté générale contre la volonté du Général*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 114.

⁵¹ “Each of us is the state!” *500 affiches de mai 68*, 17.

A poster reading, “*La volonté générale contre la volonté du Général,*”⁵² a play on the “general will” versus the will of “the General,” de Gaulle, referenced a revolutionary idea from the French Revolution as well. Jean Jacques Rousseau conceived the idea of the “volonté générale” in his essay, *Du contrat social*, and it impacted the revolutionaries so much that the phrase “volonté générale” was written into the fundamental document of the First Republic, *La déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen*.⁵³ The basis of the poster, therefore, was to acknowledge that the immense power of the Gaullist government was contrary to the foundational beliefs of French republicanism, and that De Gaulle was utterly disconnected from the general will of the populace.

The students returned to French Revolutionary motifs in the graffiti. One in particular simply said, “Vive Babeuf,”⁵⁴ referencing François-Nöel “Gracchus” Babeuf, a leading figure in the “conjuración des égaux” (“Conspiracy of Equals”) from 1796 until his execution in 1797. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels both considered Babeuf’s ideas to be precursors to communism, and even went so far as to call him the “voice of the proletariat” in their collective work, *The Communist Manifesto*.⁵⁵

The protestors also produced a poster that states “L’Élysée est pavé de bonnes intentions,”⁵⁶ in reference to the popular saying, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” Due to the phrasing of the text on the poster, it is worth noting that the French do not use the same phrasing as the Anglophone world; in French, the phrase is

⁵² “The general will versus the will of the General” From *500 affiches de mai 68*, 114.

⁵³ France, L’Assemblée Nationale, *Declaration Des Droits De L’homme Et Du Citoyen*, 1789.

⁵⁴ “Long live Babeuf,” from *Les Murs ont la Parole*, 33.

⁵⁵ Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 73.

⁵⁶ “The Elysée is paved with good intentions.” *500 Affiches*, 94.

“L’enfer est pavé de bonnes intentions.”⁵⁷ While this saying most likely originated with Saint Bernard of Clairveaux,⁵⁸ it was quoted more famously by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital*.⁵⁹ “L’Élysée” in this case is a reference to the “Palais de l’Élysée,” the executive mansion in Paris then occupied by President De Gaulle. Further than the obvious implication of replacing “Hell” with the seat of executive power in the nation (and by extension, implying that de Gaulle is analogous to Satan), the text of this message was tailored in such a way to answer the naysayers of the revolution. The authors of this poster wanted to express that the seeds of the revolution were neither the fault of the populace nor of the nation. The students of the *Atelier populaire des Beaux-Arts* wanted to remind the citizens of the despots of the past to rally the citizenry and their fellow students to fight against this “*enfer*.”

The graffiti were full of direct quotes from French literary figures, the most famous of whom was Romantic novelist and poet Victor Hugo: “Bourgeois, parvenus qui tirent l’échelle après eux et ne veulent pas laisser monter le peuple. Victor Hugo.”⁶⁰ This quote is taken from Hugo’s *Choses vues*, a collection of notes and memoirs that were published posthumously and was most likely written during Hugo’s exile following his

⁵⁷ Literally, “Hell is paved with good intentions.”

⁵⁸ Original quote: “L’enfer est plain des bonnes volontés et desirs.” From Christine Ammer, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms, Second Edition*, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 378.

⁵⁹ Original quote: “Der Weg zur Hölle ist jedoch mit guten Absichten gepflastert er konnte eben so gut der Absicht sein Geld zu machen ohne zu produciren.” From Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen oekonomic, Band 1*, (Hamburg: Verlag von O. Meissner, 1872), 179.

⁶⁰ “The bourgeoisie [are] climbers who pull the ladder up behind them and do not want to let the people rise.” *Les murs ont la parole*, 90.

opposition to the re-establishment of the French Empire of Napoléon III.⁶¹ The quote was written in the Grand Hall of the Grand Amphithéâtre of the Sorbonne. While the quote itself seemingly endorsed a Marxist point of view, it also bears keeping in mind that Hugo was an avowed Republican. For Hugo then, bourgeois does not mean the bourgeois as a Marxist would see it; instead, bourgeois had a more specific connotation, and was associated with a hypocritical moralism associated with the middle class.

Other French authors were quoted as well, including resistance fighter and poet René Char: “Tout bien considéré sous l’angle du guetteur et du tireur, il ne me déplait pas que la merde monte à cheval.”⁶² This quote comes from the poet’s collection, *Le marteau sans maître*. The quote is perhaps in reference to the fact that officers ride horses, and that makes them easy targets for snipers — an antiauthoritarian quote from Président de Gaulle’s compatriot from the Résistance. Moreover the “merde monte à cheval” in this instance would be Charles de Gaulle in the crosshairs of the sniper.⁶³ The protestors used another quote from the poet: “La vie aime la conscience que l’on a d’elle.”⁶⁴ This quote came from *Claire*, a theatrical piece by Char that discusses the tension between art and politics. *Claire* was Char’s adventure into surrealist theater, a fact that particularly appealed to the situationist current within the movement.

The posters did not use direct quotes from French literary figures, but preferred using clever puns on popular French sayings. For example, one wrote “Quand les parents

⁶¹ Victor Hugo, *Choses vues* (Ottawa: Le cercle du Livre de France, 1951). While Hugo had formerly been a royalist, he later became an ardent republican, and spent years in exile from the administration of the second French emperor.

⁶² “All things considered from the angle of the sniper and of the spotter, it does not bother me that shit rides a horse.” *Les murs ont la parole*, 57.

⁶³ Sniper, i.e. the revolution.

⁶⁴ “Life likes the consciousness that we have of it.” *Les murs ont la parole*, 138.

votent, les enfants trinquent,”⁶⁵ in reference to the Biblical saying “Quand les parents boivent, les enfants trinquent.”⁶⁶ Similarly, a poster featuring a fist hitting the caricature of Charles de Gaulle with the tag “Le poing de non retour”⁶⁷ in reference to the saying “le point de non retour.”⁶⁸ The phrase “the point of no return” had not been used in a metaphorical sense in popular culture until after the Second World War, and this poster was taking advantage of the new saying for “crossing the Rubicon.”



Fig. 7: L’Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Quand les parents votent, les enfants trinquent*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 58.

Fig. 8: L’Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Le poing de non retour*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 29.

⁶⁵ “When the parents vote, the children suffer,” from *500 affiches de mai 68*, 58.

⁶⁶ “When the parents drink, the children suffer,” A modern variant of Jeremiah 31:29, “Les pères ont mangé des raisins verts, Et les dents des enfants en ont été agacées.” (“The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge.”)

⁶⁷ “The fist of no return.” From *500 affiches de mai 68*, 29.

⁶⁸ “The point of no return.”



Fig. 9: L'Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Je participe, tu participes, il participe, nous participons, vous participez, ils profitent*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 55.
 Fig. 10: L'Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Je vote, tu votes, il vote, nous votons, vous votez, ils profitent*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 61.

Another pair of posters played on French conjugation rules; one read:

“je participe
 tu participe
 il participe
 vous participez
 nous participons
 ils profitent!”⁶⁹

The other poster ran the same conjugation game, except the verb “*participer*” is replaced by “*voter*”⁷⁰ This play on the verb is meant to express a theme throughout the posters of the *Atelier populaire des beaux-arts*: young people under the age of 21 could not vote;

⁶⁹ “I participate (or vote), you participate, he participates, you [plural or formal] participate, we participate, they profit.” *500 affiches de mai 68*, 55.

⁷⁰ “To vote.” This example is from *500 affiches de mai 68*, 61.

therefore, participation in the democratic system was meaningless, unless that participation was through urban revolt.

The revolution of the 1960s was not only political, but also sexual, and numerous graffiti reflect this fact, although none of the posters produced by the *Atelier* did. For example, a graffiti on the arts building at Censier read “Aimez-vous les uns sur les autres.”⁷¹ On Hall Richelieu, the artists tied their indignation to sex: “Baisez-vous les uns les autres sinon ils vous baiseraient.”⁷² Another graffiti tied Mao to the Sexual Revolution: “SEXE. C’est bien, a dit Mao, mais pas trop souvent.”⁷³ While Mao may have said this — though there is little to no evidence to suggest that he did — it is worth noting that Mao’s voracious sexual appetites were revealed by his doctor, Li Zhisui, who commented on his desires for an endless train of young women in his memoirs, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao’s Personal Physician*; it is therefore worth contemplating what the Chairman may have considered “too often.”⁷⁴

Due to the nature of the demands of the students at the *Université de Nanterre*, the graffiti at the university there was particularly sexual. Nanterre was part of an earlier movement known as the *Mouvement du 22 mars*,⁷⁵ in which the students protested (at least in part) the reform put in place by education minister Christian Fouchet that attempted to deal with an influx of students to the university system in the aftermath of World War II and the Baby Boom. In particular, the students protested a rigid university

⁷¹ “Love on top of one another.” from *Les murs ont la parole*, 72.

⁷² “Fuck one another, or else they will fuck all of you.” from *Les murs ont la parole*, 47.

⁷³ “SEX. It’s good, said Mao, but not too often.” From *Les murs ont la parole*, 73.

⁷⁴ Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao’s Personal Physician*, translated by Anne F. Thurston (New York: Random House, 1994).

⁷⁵ “22 March Movement”

system in which female students were allowed to visit male dormitories under a strict code, and male students were not allowed to visit female dormitories at all.⁷⁶ This was particularly a problem in schools like Nanterre because the students had nowhere else to visit with the opposite sex in the industrial hinterlands of Paris. Much of the graffiti at the university of Nanterre, therefore, referenced sex and sexual liberation. For example, in front of Cafeteria hall C at Nanterre, a graffiti read, “Inventer de nouvelles perversions sexuelles (Je peux plus!)”⁷⁷ The students also directly copied American protests by scribbling “Make Love Not War” on the 3rd floor of Building C, which, surprisingly, is one of the very few examples of American influence on the language of the protests.⁷⁸

By using traditional canon and Marxist rhetoric and inventing new revolutionary phrases, the protestors appealed to the French literary heart. Many of the slogans and captions from the movement would be immortalized in the body politic of the French Republic. The cultural and literary traditions of France gave the protestors ample fodder through which to frame their movement, and they thoroughly explored the vast cultural milieu of the French revolutionary and literary oeuvre.

⁷⁶ Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Random House, 2006), 220.

⁷⁷ “Invent new sexual perversions (I can’t anymore!)” From *Les murs ont la parole*, 37.

⁷⁸ Written in the English, from *Les murs ont la parole*, 33.

Chapter Three

La beauté est dans la rue: the optics of revolutionary iconography in May 1968

While the literary roots of the posters and graffiti reveal aspects of the movement's goals and tactics, the revolution of May 1968 was indubitably a visual one. The artistic tenants of Situationism and the advent of television in the 1950s ensured that any social movement in this time period would not be one of words, but of pictures and art. The visual elements of the posters in particular is an aspect of the legacy of the 1968 movement, and multiple advertisers and protestors would link back to the pictures that the Atelier des Beaux-Arts created in support of a revolution (a fact that I will discuss in the chapter below). In this chapter, my analysis will focus on visual motifs and the cultural basis of the optics of the posters.

In order to simplify the messages and make the images resonate with the citizens of Paris, the Atelier populaire des beaux-arts covered their posters with artistic motifs and caricatures of culturally relevant images. Caricature in particular carries with it heavy cultural associations for France, because of the nature of the caricature. Many associate this art form with street artists (though the protestors wished to bring street art out too — see *Les beaux-arts affichient dans la rue*). Yet it also has links with political cartoonists and their subversive idiom. Honoré Daumier, for example, was famous for creating outrageous caricatures of the leader of France of his time, Louis-Phillippe. In his caricatures, Daumier drew Louis Phillippe's head as a pear; we can see the legacy of these portraits in the portrayals of De Gaulle and Pompidou. This caricaturization of meaningful symbols represents a strong Parisian heritage of street art and speaks to the sentiment expressed in the slogan “La beauté est dans la rue:” street art, with its powerful

political messages in support of the proletarian masses is superior to the genteel art of bourgeois society.

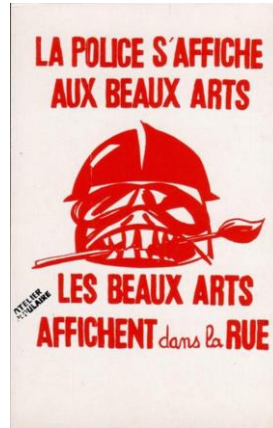


Fig. 11: L'Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *La police s'affiche aux beaux arts, les beaux arts affichent dans la rue*, Vasco Gasquet, 500 affiches de mai 68, 32.



Fig. 12: L'Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Votez toujours, Je ferai le reste*, Vasco Gasquet, 500 affiches de mai 68, 54.

Fig. 13: Honoré Daumier, *M. Jacot-Lefaive*, The Benjamin A. and Julia M. Trustman Collection of Honoré Daumier Lithographs at Brandeis University.

The *Président de la République*, Charles de Gaulle, was often represented by the same caricature: a round head in profile with a comically large nose and donning a *kepi* with stars. At times, the size of De Gaulle's nose was taken to outrageous proportions

(see *Votez toujours, je ferai le reste*⁷⁹), but the image was always intended to immediately identify as well as mock and minimize the power of the president. De Gaulle's nose in *Votez toujours, je ferai la reste* imitates a particular Daumier piece, *M. Jacot-Lefaive*, a fact tying stronger associations between the students and political caricaturists.⁸⁰



Fig. 14: L'Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *De Gaulle Hitler*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 117.

De Gaulle as well as gaullist symbols were used in multiple visual metaphors comparing the régime to the Nazis. For example, one of the more elaborate posters from the movement was a portrait of de Gaulle taking off his face as a mask and revealing Adolf Hitler.⁸¹ De Gaulle was a colonel in the French Army with few accolades when Germany invaded and subdued the nation in the Battle of France, and rose to prominence as the face of the Résistance for the Allied Forces. As a result, in 1968, Charles de Gaulle

⁷⁹ Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68* (Brussels: Éditions Aden, 2007), 54.

⁸⁰ Benjamin Genocchio, "A Masterful Charicaturist and His Lithographs," *The New York Times*, 18 May 2008,

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/18/nyregion/nyregionspecial2/18artsnj.html?_r=0

⁸¹ *500 affiches de mai 68*, 117.

was known for fighting the Nazis more than anything else. Therefore, comparing De Gaulle's policies to that of Adolf Hitler was revealing an utmost hypocrisy within the Gaullist government.

In at least two more instances, De Gaulle was depicted displaying the "Hitlergruß" salute of the Nazis. In one, De Gaulle was standing in a line of clones with the caption "Comité d'action civique."⁸² In another, De Gaulle stood in the Nazi salute position with a question mark over his head.⁸³ In each of these instances, the viewer was asked to question whether the fight against fascism had truly ended with Hitler's death, or whether it evolved into the oppressive gaullist régime.

De Gaulle was also lampooned in a poster mocking a flyer that the French resistance distributed during the Second World War called *À tous les Français*.⁸⁴ The 1968 version was intended to refer to De Gaulle's call to begin the struggle for resistance against the German fascists, and was based off of his speech, commonly known as the *Appel du 18 juin*. The appropriation of a symbol of the "Résistance française" could be interpreted as another indication of the hypocrisy of De Gaulle or to ridicule De Gaulle's reputation as a resistance fighter, but it could conversely be seen as a call to arms in its own right. By recycling the placard of the *Résistance*, the protestors were also appealing to France's rich heritage of revolt and revolution.

The Générale was particularly targeted for a multitude of reasons. De Gaulle was the head of state and the most obvious symbol of the state and "order." However, De Gaulle also symbolized an older world from which the protestors sought to depart. As

⁸² "Civic Action Committee," *500 affiches de mai 68*, 38.

⁸³ *500 affiches de mai 68*, 97.

⁸⁴ *500 affiches de mai 68*, 19.

with the discussion of Hugo’s quote in the above chapter, the bourgeois mindset was associated with archaism and moralism, in which De Gaulle was implicated specifically in one instance. In meeting with his prime minister, Georges Pompidou, he passed along his views on the goals of the protests: “La reforme oui; la chienlit non.”⁸⁵ This pun was a play on the words “chie en lit,” meaning literally “shit in bed” and the word “chienlit,” which is a medieval term for a carnival. This type of scatological humor was very archaic and warranted a (rather graphic) response from the protestors, including a series of posters that read either “La chienlit, c’est lui” or “La chienlit, c’est encore lui” with the illustration of De Gaulle’s caricature with hands raised and, in one instance, dripping with a substance that one can only assume is the “chie” from the “lit.”⁸⁶



Fig. 15: L’Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *La chienlit, c’est lui*, Vasco Gasquet, 500 affiches de mai 68, 90.

Fig. 16: L’Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *La chienlit, c’est encore lui*, Vasco Gasquet, 500 affiches de mai 68, 91.

⁸⁵ Georges Pompidou, “Georges Pompidou ‘La réforme oui, la chienlit non.’” *Institut national de l’audiovisuel*, 19 May 1968, <http://www.ina.fr/video/I09167762>.

⁸⁶ “The ‘chienlit’ (see above) is him” or “The ‘chienlit’ is still him.” From *500 affiches de mai 68*, 90-91.

De Gaulle was not the only person represented as a caricature, however. Georges Pompidou was honored with his own short series of posters featuring his face, also bearing a particularly large proboscis (although his nose was pointed and angled down from his face) and a roughly bristled unibrow. Due to De Gaulle's departure on May 11, Pompidou acted as Président until the General's return on May 30. During that time, Pompidou attempted to open a discourse between the striking workers and their respective corporations; however, many of the signs with Pompidou's face insisted "Pas de dialogue avec l'état policier." For the students, the police state was their main opponent and the single entity which could stop the strikes and protests.

The helmet and goggles of the *Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité* (CRS), the riot police in Paris, were another visual motif. For the protestors, the CRS was the face of the police state and the most visible opponent of the revolution in the streets. The helmet in question was a circular metal helmet with a ridge down the middle and a rim that pointed out and down, and the goggles were thick-framed goggles with one lens across both eyes. Perhaps the most famous uses of these motifs was the silhouetted police officer⁸⁷ and the poster that was tagged "La police s'affiche aux beaux arts, les beaux-arts affichent dans la rue."⁸⁸ The silhouetted police officer had several iterations: in one, the policeman swung a baton behind a shield, whereas the other was the same image with the double lightning bolt symbol of the "Schutstaffel" (SS) of Nazi Germany.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *500 affiches de mai 68*, 46.

⁸⁸ *500 affiches de mai 68*, 32.

⁸⁹ *500 affiches de mai 68*, 46-47.

The SS comparison was a concept that the posters were particularly fond of making, and it reappeared multiple times throughout the source material — in one case, the poster was simply “CRS SS.”



Fig. 17: L’Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Flic et baton*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 46.

Fig. 18: L’Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Flic et baton SS*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 47.

Fig. 19: L’Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *CRS: SS*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 47.

By linking the police with the hated secret police of the Nazis, the protestors created a paradox and perhaps hoped to appeal to the hypocrisy of De Gaulle, who became famous in the Second World War for fighting against the Nazis. In one particular case, the protestors crossed the helmet of the CRS with the caricature of Charles de Gaulle, linking him inextricably with the police state. The posters also linked Georges Pompidou to the police state by tagging a caricature of Pompidou with the words “Pas de dialogue avec l’état policier.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ “No dialogue with the police state.” From *500 affiches de mai 68*, 133.



Fig. 20: L'Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Pas de dialogue avec l'état policier*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 133.

The proliferation of symbols and references from the Second World War and Nazi Germany, aside from De Gaulle's name being so heavily associated with the war, was also a tactical choice of the protestors due to French actions during the war. By referencing the most significant occurrence of their parents' lifetime, the students were both shocking and shaming their parents. Most French citizens in WWII were not resistance fighters, so many were either passively complying with or actively collaborating with Nazi dicta and policies.

The most recognizable character from French art, Marianne, was also referenced a few times in the art of the posters. Marianne represents both the French Republic and its values of "Liberté, Egalité, et Fraternité." In the most blatant of the artistic borrowings, the posters used an exact print of her famous depiction from the painting *Liberté guidant la peuple* by Eugène Delacroix. The poster, however, transforms the weapons of Liberty from the rifle and flag of national unity into a weapon more befitting an insurgent of

1968: a palette and a brush. The text of the poster reads, “Les Beaux-Arts sont fermes [sic] mais la Revolution est ne. [sic]”⁹¹ The poster “La Beauté est dans la rue” revamped *Liberté guidant la peuple* by making Marianne into not an artist, but a street fighter. The poster depicts Marianne, yet she is almost unrecognizable to an outsider — no phrygian cap, and wearing pants instead of her traditional robes. However, her face is unmistakably female, and she is posed in the same stance as the icon. One arm in the air — lobbing a paving-stone — and the other motioning others forward.⁹²



Fig. 21: Eugène Delacroix, *Liberté guidant le peuple*, 1830, Musée du Louvre.

Fig. 22: L'Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *La beauté est dans la rue*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 14.

⁹¹ “The École des Beaux-Arts was closed, but the Revolution was born.”

⁹² *500 affiches de mai 68*, 14.



Fig. 23: L'Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Pas de rectangle blanc pour un peuple adulte: indépendance et autonomie de l'O.R.T.F.*, Vasco Gasquet, 500 affiches de mai 68, 125.

Fig. 24: L'Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *C'est moi l'ange exterminateur*, Vasco Gasquet, 500 affiches de mai 68, 107.

Yet other depictions of Marianne held her in the more traditional role of representing French liberty. In one, “Article 16” imprisons Marianne.⁹³ Article 16 of the *Constitution de la Cinquième République française* stipulates emergency military powers to the “Président de la République.” As of the writing of this thesis, Article 16 has still only ever been used once — following the Generals’ Putsch during the Algerian War for Independence. Because of the language of the Article, however, it seemed that its powers could be used against the riots in Paris. The protestors therefore argued that their liberty as French citizens was limited by the stipulation. Marianne was also depicted as being silenced in a poster advocating for greater media independence from the *Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française* (O.R.T.F.) with the text: “Pas de rectangle blanc

⁹³ 500 affiches de mai 68, 100.

pour une peuple adulte: indépendance et autonomie de l'O.R.T.F.”⁹⁴ In the poster, she appeared on the television with a large white blank space over her mouth, symbolizing the silence of liberty.

Marianne is identifiable in a poster with De Gaulle as well. Under the text, “C’est moi l’ange exterminateur,”⁹⁵ De Gaulle stands with his foot on the body of Marianne, a representation of De Gaulle killing the spirit of France. “L’ange exterminateur” referenced both a 1962 film by Luis Buñuel in which people were psychologically (though not physically) locked in a music room⁹⁶ and a statue by sculptor Josep Llimona in the “Cementerio de Comillas” in Comillas, Spain.⁹⁷



Fig. 25: Josep Llimona, *El àngel de Comillas*, Ayuntamiento Comillas, <http://www.aytocomillas.es/comillas/opencms/contenido/GaleriaDeFotos/ComillasActual.html>

⁹⁴ “No white rectangle for an adult people: Independence and autonomy from the O.R.T.F.” *500 affiches de mai* 68, 125.

⁹⁵ “I am the exterminating angel.” *500 affiches de mai* 68, 107.

⁹⁶ *El ángel exterminador*, directed by Luis Buñuel (1962; New York: The Criterion Collection, 2009), DVD.

⁹⁷ “Heritage in Comillas” *Tourism Comillas*, accessed 11 November 2014, <http://www.turismocomillas.com/heritage.html>.

The art in the poster references the statue — De Gaulle shown with one leg raised and a sword in his right hand in the same style as the statue — but the idea of the words is most likely referenced to the movie; that is, the proletariat is only psychologically trapped in their own poverty, but they physically hold the key to their own liberation.

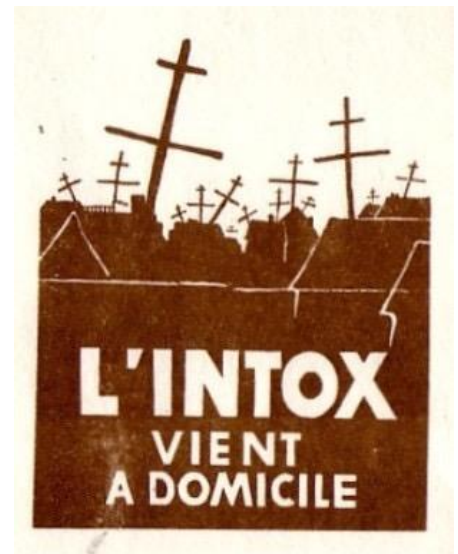
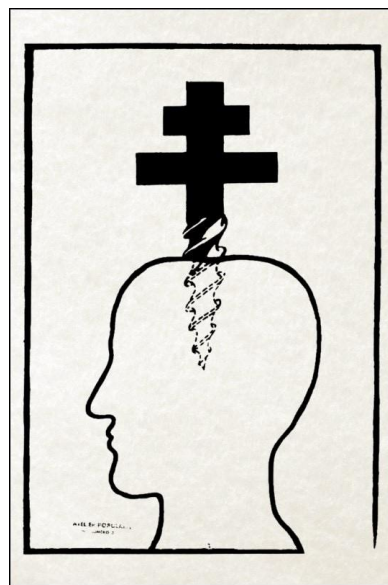


Fig. 26: L'Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Adhérez au parti de la peur*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 58.

Fig. 27: L'Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Propagande gaulliste*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 99.

Fig. 28: L'Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *L'intox vient a domicile*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 118.

The “Atelier populaire des beaux-arts” particularly liked appropriating symbols of De Gaulle’s Fifth Republic as well as the symbols of the companies for whom the striking workers were employed. The symbol of the 5^e République was the familiar “croix de Lorraine” that symbolized the Free French resistance inside of a “V” shape — presumably representing both the roman numeral V and a “v” for “victoire” — which represented the administration and the oppressive gaulliste régime. The V^e République

symbol was used to demonstrate the power of the state and the “parti du peur.”⁹⁸ The “croix de Lorraine” was also used by itself to represent the state, and was more often utilized for its more convenient shape. In many cases, the croix de Lorraine represented the indoctrination of the state; for example, one poster was simply the cross with a screw in literally screwing itself into the silhouette of a human head, while another poster made antennas to resemble croix de Lorraine as a comment on the propaganda of the radio.



Fig. 29: Getty Images, *Tommy Smith and John Carlos Raise Their Fists*, Universal History Archives

Fig. 30: L'Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Poing*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 156.

A favorite allusion of the posters was that of the clenched fist, a symbol of the power of popular revolt that became infamous in the 1960s, and in particular during 1968. The 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City saw the political firestorm that was unleashed following the “Black Power” salute of track runners Tommie Smith and John Carlos. Tommie Smith insisted in his autobiography, however, that the salute was not a “Black Power” salute, but a “human rights” salute — both Smith and Carlos wore the

⁹⁸ “Party of fear.” - Two instances: *500 affiches de mai 68*, 58.

emblems of the Olympic Project for Human Rights.⁹⁹ The symbol eventually became one of the symbols of the Socialist International, stemming from the newly formed *Parti socialiste*, to be discussed below.

The clenched fist can be seen most prominently in the posters with the heading “*JOURNAL MURAL*,” which was a kind of revolutionary newspaper spread across the walls of Paris. The *journals murals* were marked at the top with the familiar “factory” symbol, with the clenched fist rising out of the top of the smokestack.¹⁰⁰ This factory symbol was the symbol of solidarity with striking workers, and the protests used the posters to create a unified front against De Gaulle and the CRS. Another famous instance of this clenched fist symbol occurs in the pair of posters tagged “Le poing de non retour” (see above). In many cases, this was a return to a pre-WWII sentiment; the clenched fist had been a symbol of the Communist party in Germany, in opposition to the “Hitlergruß” salute of the Nazis. The protestors seem to juxtapose themselves against the authorities in 1968 in the same way as the Communists in Germany opposed the National Socialists and Nationalists in the 1930s.

Due to the Situationist concept of *détournement*, or the turning of capitalist slogans and corporate logos for use in radical revolution, the cultural artifacts from 1968 were meant to be as visually and culturally appealing as the advertisements of the era. For example, one poster took the familiar double chevron symbol of auto maker Citroën, flipped it sideways, and made the symbol resemble the “Hitlergruß” salute (under the

⁹⁹ Tommie Smith, *Silent Gesture: The Autobiography of Tommie Smith* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2007), 22.

¹⁰⁰ *500 affiches de mai 68*, 30-31.

tagline “Citroen[:] patronat faciste”).¹⁰¹ Comparing Citroën to Nazis through the manipulation of its iconography is another instance of interesting attribution of Nazi ideology onto an entity that fought to resist the forces of the Third Reich, even instating slow-down and sabotage policies on vehicles produced for the Wehrmacht.¹⁰² Shaming Citroën was not a part of the shaming of the previous generation for collaboration then, but was being shamed for using what the protestors saw as fascist tactics to stop protest.



Fig. 31: L’Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Citroen: patronat fasciste*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 63.

Fig. 32: L’Atelier populaire des beaux-arts, *Renault Flins*, Vasco Gasquet, *500 affiches de mai 68*, 70.

One interesting sign used the helmet and goggles of the CRS and made the face choke on a wrench that read “RENAULT FLINS,” which was an auto factory in a Parisian suburb that was also on strike. By using this imagery, the protestors were implying that the strike at Renault had thrown a wrench into the system that the CRS represented.

¹⁰¹ “Citroën: Facist employer.” From *500 affiches de mai 68*, 63.

¹⁰² John Reynolds, *Citroën 2CV* (Somerset UK: Haynes Publishing, 2005), 27-29.

While the protestors used “détournement” to produce the visual media of mai 68, they also drew on popular images such as Marianne to create the basis for a popular revolt. The protestors also created a new visual medium from which later protestors could draw. The concept of détournement would be used in graffiti later as well— most famously by the enigmatic artist Banksy, who uses corporate emblems such as that of Louis Vuitton, Burger King, McDonald’s, or Disney to express anti-corporate ideas.



Fig. 33: Banksy, *Burger King Graffiti*, Gabe Bergado, “40 Powerful Photos Show Why Banksy Is the Spokesman of Our Generation,” http://mic.com/articles/103360/40-powerful-photos-show-why-banksy-is-the-spokesman-of-our-generation?utm_source=huffingtonpost.com&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=publishexchange_facebook.

Fig. 34: Banksy, Twitter post, 27 April 2014, 2:31 PM, <https://twitter.com/therealbanksy/status/460501387504152576>.

Fig. 35: Banksy, *Mickey and Ronald*, “40 Powerful Photos Show Why Banksy Is the Spokes man of Our Generation.”

While mai 68 was not the beginning of the phenomenon of graffiti, these concepts are still at play today, as are the ideas that the protestors espoused. The iconography of the “French May” is a potent symbol of both rebellion and reform, and the protests created a new cultural icon that is used both politically and commercially 40 years later.

Chapter Four

La lutte continue: The legacy of the slogans, posters, and graffiti of mai 68

The slogans and posters were effective symbols of the revolution in 1968, and their legacy is a strong emblem of traumatic chaos and hopeful agitation for progress. The “h ritage du mai” is subjective, but its influence as a cultural emblem is unmistakable. The revolution’s political goals and accomplishments were equal parts controversial and powerful; the slogans from the posters and signs, however, have been used by movements from both ends of the political spectrum for a myriad of issues since the movement ended in June 1968. While many of the protestors used the concept of “d tournement” during the protests of 1968, many companies sanitized the message of the anti-corporate socialist movement of 1968 into much more commercial legacy. By stealing the power of the words that protestors used themselves, companies have taken much of the power of the protestors.



Fig. 36: Oasis, *Sous les pepins, la plage*, Oasis Fruit, <http://www.oasisbefruit.com>.

Ironically, the slogans of the “ v nements” are most often appropriated for use in advertising campaigns. Many of the slogans and visual components of the riots and of the posters themselves have been appropriated and sanitized in order to sell commercial

items in France. In 2012, Oasis Fruit, a subsidiary of Orangina Schweppes that produces non-carbonated fruit drinks, launched the “Be fruit” campaign (a phrase that is intended to be read in English, but in a French accent would be pronounced like “Be free,” at least in this particular poster a reference to liberation and the creation of freedom). As a part of this campaign, Oasis tagged a poster with the slogan “Sous les pépins, la plage,” in reference to one of the most famous slogans of 1968, “Sous les pavés, la plage.”¹⁰³ The poster had a picture of an anthropomorphized raspberry on a lounge chair on the famed Rue du Bac — a street that the protestors in May 1968 blocked with a barricade.

Similarly, E. Leclerc, a hypermarket, heavily used the posters and graffitied slogans of the *mai 68* movement for a 2005 ad campaign “Defend votre pouvoir d’achat.”¹⁰⁴ The irony of this ad campaign’s slogan alone cannot be overstated: fighting consumer society was the main target of the student protestors in the first place. One ad took the familiar policeman



Fig. 37: E. Leclerc, *La hausse des prix oppresse votre pouvoir d’achat*, *Advertising Times*, <http://www.advertisingtimes.fr/2012/09/leclerc-retour-sur-un-trublion.html>.

¹⁰³ “Under the seeds, the beach.”

¹⁰⁴ “Defend your buying power.”

with a curved baton with the phrase, “La hausse des prix oppresse votre pouvoir d’achat.”¹⁰⁵ Yet another ad from E. Leclerc appropriated the symbol from the poster



Fig. 38: E. Leclerc, *Il est interdit d’interdire de vendre moins cher*, *Advertising Times*, <http://www.advertisingtimes.fr/2012/09/leclerc-retour-sur-un-trublion.html>.
 Fig. 39: E. Leclerc, *La Croissance oui sauf celle des prix*, *Advertising Times*, <http://www.advertisingtimes.fr/2012/09/leclerc-retour-sur-un-trublion.html>.

“Nous sommes les pouvoir”¹⁰⁶ and replaced the slogan with a slogan of their own: “Il est interdit d’interdire de vendre moins cher,” which is also a play on the 1968 slogan, “Il est interdit d’interdire.”¹⁰⁷ A final advertisement for the store took the familiar vision of the factory and added: “La croissance oui sauf celle des prix.”¹⁰⁸ This final poster also used rolls of money with the word “conserve” written across it, implying that the consumer can keep more of his or her money. This is exemplary of a phenomenon known as “récupération,” which is the opposite of “détournement” in that it is the use of revolutionary slogans to advertise. Most often, récupération is done by taking a shocking slogan from years earlier and softens it for mass acceptance.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ “The increase in prices oppresses your buying power.”

¹⁰⁶ See *500 affiches de mai 68*, 143.

¹⁰⁷ “It is forbidden to forbid to sell more cheaply.”

¹⁰⁸ “Yes to growth except that of prices.”

¹⁰⁹ John D. H. Downing, *Radical Media: Rebellious communication and social movements*, (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001), 59.

A group called *Brigade anti-pub* took to the streets to protest E. Leclerc's appropriation, posting similar posters with the tagline "E. Leclerc vous prend vraiment pour des cons."¹¹⁰ These posters were meant to mock the supermarket by taking the slogans and using them to reveal the dystopian extreme that their signs implied. Many of these used the "Nous sommes les pouvoir" poster background, but used more fitting slogans for *l'esprit de '68*: "Consommateurs bluffés, salariés précarisés, producteurs écrasés,"¹¹¹ "Crève la société marchande,"¹¹² and "Contre la vie chère... Pillons les supermarchés Leclerc."¹¹³ One reused the police poster with the slogan "Soumettez votre âme à notre religion."¹¹⁴ In this case, "religion" is the religion of capitalism, to which E.



Fig. 40: Brigade anti-publication, *Consummators bluffés*, Rebellyon.info, <http://rebellyon.info/Ripostons-a-LECLERC.html>.

Fig. 41: Brigade anti-publication, *Crève la société marchande*, Rebellyon.info, <http://rebellyon.info/Ripostons-a-LECLERC.html>.

Fig. 42: Brigade anti-publication, *Contre la vie chère*, Rebellyon.info, <http://rebellyon.info/Ripostons-a-LECLERC.html>.

¹¹⁰ "E Leclerc really takes you for idiots."

¹¹¹ "Deceived consumers, employees without job security, failed producers!"

¹¹² "Kill the society of merchandise."

¹¹³ "Against the cheap life... Let's raid Leclerc supermarkets!"

¹¹⁴ "Submit your soul to our religion."



Fig. 43: Brigade anti-publication, *Soumettez votre âme à notre religion !*, Rebellyon.info, <http://rebellyon.info/Ripostons-a-LECLERC.html>.

Fig. 44: Brigade anti-publication, *Profits*, Rebellyon.info, <http://rebellyon.info/Ripostons-a-LECLERC.html>.

Leclerc (according the protestors) says the consumer should submit his or her soul.

Finally, the protestors created a sign responding to the “conserve” factory posters with the slogan: “Nous conservons nos marges, nous encaissons nos bénéfices, avec des salariés précaires, des producteurs écrasés, et des consommateurs bluffés.”¹¹⁵ The *Brigade anti-pub* effectively attempted to *détourner* E Leclerc’s *récupération*.

The legacy of 1968 in France is not limited to simple rip-offs of the slogans in advertisements, however. According to a 2008 *New York Times* article¹¹⁶, the recuperation of the cultural artifacts of 1968 are also prone to tchotchkes laden with the slogans and images of the posters and graffiti. To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the riots, stores released items by the dozen hoping to profit from the anti-authoritarian movement. In one instance, a Vietnamese-born jeweler named Jean Dinh Van created a silver cobblestone pendant (at a minimum of \$275, no less) to express “his ideal of

¹¹⁵ “We protect our margins, we take (i.e., steal) our profits, with job insecure employees, broken producers, and deceived consumers.”

¹¹⁶ Steven Erlanger, “Barricades of May ’68 Still Divide the French,” *The New York Times*, 30 April 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/30/world/europe/30france.html?pagewanted=all&_r=2&_

freedom and [give] a new interpretation of a strong symbol of 68.”¹¹⁷ In yet another example of the commodification of the movement’s symbols, gourmet food store Fauchon released a line of teas called “le thé de mai 68” that are variously labeled, “Le poésie est dans la rue,” “L’imagination au pouvior,” and “Revolution!”¹¹⁸



Fig. 45: Tous nés d’un homme et d’une femme, *On veut du boulot pas du mariage homo*, L’Humanité, <http://www.humanite.fr/manif-pour-tous-un-grand-fourre-tout-politique>.
 Fig. 46: Tous nés d’un homme et d’une femme, *La priorité c’est Aulnay pas le mariage gay*, L’Humanité, <http://www.humanite.fr/manif-pour-tous-un-grand-fourre-tout-politique>.

In 2013, a referendum that would allow the marriage of same-sex couples swept France, a law that was known across the nation as “la loi Taubira” after its main sponsor, Christiane Taubira. French citizens swept the streets demonstrating both for and against the motion. Both sides used and parodied the slogans, but the organization “Tous nés d’un homme et d’une femme,”¹¹⁹ a traditionalist institution, utilized the slogans and visual elements of the posters liberally and literally. One took the most famous

¹¹⁷ “Le pavé dinh van,” dinh van paris, <http://www.dinhvan.com/en/collections/le-pave-dinh-van/>

¹¹⁸ “Poetry is in the street,” “Imagination to power,” and “Revolution!”

¹¹⁹ “All born from a man and a woman”

incarnation of the *mai 68* symbols — a factory with a jagged roof — and painted in the phrase “On veut du boulot, pas du mariage homo.”¹²⁰ The organization also took a jab at the Parti socialiste’s apparent lack of concern for the workers of France (a strange concern for a party whose basis is in labor), and took advantage of the workers’ fury over a rising unemployment rate: “La priorité c’est Aulnay pas le mariage gay.”¹²¹ This slogan was painted over the head of a worker with a factory in the background, and referenced the shut down of a Peugeot factory in Aulnay-sous-Blais that was expedited due to the economic decline of the time, and was the major source of unemployment in the Parisian suburb.



Fig. 47: Affiches pour tous, *Sous les pavés la creche*, AffichesPourTous.fr.

Fig. 48: *Référendum pour tous!*, Le Manif pour Tous, http://boutique.lamanifpourtous.fr/index.php?id_product=44&controller=product&id_lang=5

¹²⁰ “We want jobs, not homo marriage.”

¹²¹ “Aulnay is the priority, not gay marriage.”

Of course, the left was not totally absent of references to the 1968 movement during the debate over “la loi Taubira.” One poster directly referenced arguably the most famous slogan from 1968: “Sous les pavés la crèche.”¹²² This poster was in reference to the main concern of the French populace during the debate over the bill: adoption. Before the bill passed, gay couples entered a “PACS” (Pacte civile de solidarité), in which they had the same rights as a married couple, with a few exceptions, including adoption and *in vitro* fertilization. While a change to “mariage pour tous” would otherwise mean a nominal change, the fight for adoption rights was one that meant real consequences for France’s LGBT community. More simply, the *droitistes* also appropriated a poster that in 1968 read “Elections: piège a con”¹²³ to read “Référendum pour tous!”¹²⁴ It is worth noting that these two posters reflect almost opposite views. In the 1968 version, the poster is touting the ineffectiveness of voting, whereas the second reflects the importance of equal representation to a functional democracy. This poster may demonstrate a lack of concern for the original content of the poster, but it does reflect a willingness by the protestors to appeal to the Baby Boomers’ revolution.

The younger generation has declined the use of the iconic posters and graffiti of *mai 68*. While the revolutionary spirit of the protests may continue, many younger French groups have protested without use of the iconography. For example, in 2006, French students rose up to protest a new employment law that would establish an employment contract that would be known as the *Contrat première embauche* (CPE). The CPE was meant to ease student unemployment by allowing employers to fire a worker without

¹²² “Under the paving-stones, the crib.”

¹²³ “Elections: Traps for idiots”

¹²⁴ “Referendum for all!”

cause during their first two years of employment granted that the worker was under the age of 26. When the youth demonstrated against this bill, however, they did not use the slogans that the student-worker protestors invented in 1968; instead, they invented new signs, chants, and graffiti. In a moment that was rife with similarities to 1968 (a highly concentrated older generation, a disaffected younger generation, and the abuse of workers), the protestors chose to appeal to their fellow students rather than to hearken to an earlier era and win the support of the Baby Boomers.



Fig. 49: Ni patrie ni frontières, “Nous sommes tous des racailles!” libcom.org, <https://libcom.org/history/paris-riots-information-immigrants-suburbs-2005>.

Fig. 50: This shows the legacy of the CRS poster. Photo: Franck Preuvel, Reuters, http://www.pri.org/sites/default/files/styles/story_main/public/story/images/parisriots.jpg?itok=3h6zhZBw

Fig. 51: “Morts pour Rien: Clichy sous Bois,” Christian Hartmann, Keystone, <http://www.rts.ch/2012/10/31/19/11/4395990.image?w=534&h=301>.

Similarly, in 2005, riots broke out in the suburbs of Paris over the death of two teenagers who evaded arrest by hiding in an electrical substation. The two were part of a North African immigrant population in the city, and triggered protest against the way that youth in project housing were treated by police. However, the immigrants called upon the protests of 1968, with protest signs that read “Morts pour rien”¹²⁵ or “Nous sommes tous les racailles.”¹²⁶ It is interesting to note, therefore, that the native French students were unwilling to produce posters referencing 1968, but the immigrants or second-generation French citizens did this many times over.



Fig. 52: Logo of “Parti socialiste,” Parti socialiste, <http://www.parti-socialiste.fr>.

One of the lasting symbols of 1968 is the symbol of the “Parti socialiste” (PS) known as the “poing et rose” symbol. The PS is the party of François Hollande, the

¹²⁵ “[They] die for nothing.” This and the original poster were meant to play against the ubiquitous First World War monuments in France that often read “Mort pour la France” (“Died for France”). See “Mort pour rien,” *500 affiches de mai 68*, 20.

¹²⁶ “We are all villains.” See “Nous sommes tous indésirables,” *500 affiches de mai 68*, 16.

current president of France, who replaced Nicolas Sarkozy of the *Union pour un mouvement populaire* (UMP), who André Glucksmann called “the first post-68 president.”¹²⁷ The emblem is a clenched fist holding a rose; the rose symbolizes the red of Socialism and the fist symbolizes the power of revolution that brought them into power. Overall, according to the PS website, the symbol is supposed to juxtapose the power of the fist with the “sweetness” or gentleness of the rose.¹²⁸ The symbol of the PS in France has since spread to other socialist parties across the world, and is meant to symbolize a turn away from the outright revolutionary stance of communists, but to emphasize the power of protest.

The legacy of *mai 68* as a movement is a hotly debated topic within France. Journalist Jean-Claude Guillebaud wrote an opinion piece in the *New York Times* for the 40th anniversary in 2008 entitled, “France’s Bright Shining Lie.” In it, he claimed, “The real legacy of May ’68, as we see in France today, is individualism, the rejection of civic sense and ideology, the rehabilitation of the idea that personal and financial success is a worthy pursuit — in short, a revival of capitalism. To borrow an expression of Lenin’s, we were useful idiots. Indeed, the uprising was more a counterrevolution than a revolution.”¹²⁹ Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the erstwhile leader of the 1968 movement, agreed to a certain extent with Guillebaud in that French society should not let the revolution dominate what society became, as he has become a staunch proponent that France should “Forget ’68:” “At first it seems baffling. But, as I made clear at the time in my interview

¹²⁷ “Barricades of May ’68 Still Divide the French.”

¹²⁸ “Le poing et la rose,” *Centenaire du Parti Socialiste*, 2005, http://centenaire.parti-socialiste.fr/article.php3%3Fid_article=298.html.

¹²⁹ Jean-Claude Guillebaud, “France’s Bright Shining Lie,” *The New York Times*, 24 May 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/24/opinion/24guillebaud.html>.

with Jean-Paul Sartre in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, I was only the loudspeaker for a rebellion. Thus, '68 symbolized the end of revolutionary myths – to the benefit of liberation movements extending from the 1970's until now."¹³⁰

Of course, there are other less flattering views of the "héritage de 68," including the most famous instance spoken in 2007 by then-presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy. Sarkozy proposed during a rally: "Dans cette election, il s'agit de savoir si l'héritage de mai 68 doit être perpétué ou s'il doit être liquidé une bonne fois pour toutes."¹³¹ In this speech, M. Sarkozy alludes to eliminating the chaotic and disorderly legacy of 1968, and to return national pride to the French, as opposed to Ségolène Royal, his "Parti Socialiste" opponent, who he called the "héritière de mai 68."¹³² For her part, Mme. Royal wanted a peaceful discourse: "Je propose que la France puisse avancer sans perdre son temps, sans être bloquée, sans dresser les Français les uns contre les autres, en un mot sans violence."¹³³

The legacy of "mai 68" is a controversial, yet indubitably powerful one, and the power of the movement stems not only from the cultural image of the chaotic riots and immortal spirit, but also from the cultural artifacts of the time. The visual as well as

¹³⁰ Daniel Cohn-Bendit, "Forget it: '68 is over," *The Vienna Review*, September 2008, <http://www.viennareview.net/commentary/voices-of-others/forget-it-68-is-over>.

¹³¹ "In this election, we must question whether the legacy of 'mai 68' must be perpetuated or whether it should be liquidated one good time for all of us." From "Nicolas Sarkozy veut 'liquider' l'héritage de mai 68," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 30 April 2007, <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/elections-2007/20070430.OBS4781/nicolas-sarkozy-veut-liquider-l-heritage-de-mai-68.html>.

¹³² "Inheritor of 'mai 68.'" Ibid.

¹³³ "I propose that France could advance without turning back the clock, without being [economically and politically] paralyzed, without pitting Frenchmen against each other, in a word, without violence." From "Ségolène Royal, héritière de Mai 68," *L'Express*, 1 May 2007, http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/politique/segolene-royal-heritiere-de-mai-68_464279.html.

literary contributions of the posters and graffiti of May 1968 fostered a unifying theme across France that not only created an instantly recognizable reference within the culture, but they were also unique to French culture in an era that saw an increasingly Americanized youth. By creating a French cultural icon that largely hearkened to earlier French icons while still remaining contemporary, the student and worker protestors changed the culture to include radical revolution in an increasingly conservative body politic. The New Left made a portion of French culture to resemble a “gauchiste” social democratic undercurrent in the larger gaullist corporate democracy. In effect, the protestors changed politics by changing the culture.

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