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The Death of the Angel:
Guy Hocquenghem and the French Cultural Revolution after May 1968

by

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ABSTRACT

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A leader of the student movements in 1968, a pioneer of homosexual liberation in the 1970s, and a lifelong critic and polemist of French society, Guy Hocquenghem published some twenty books and literally hundreds of articles before his premature death in 1988. This dissertation is a biography of Guy Hocquenghem. However, although it makes ample use of personal interviews and other biographical information, its chief aim is not to psychologize but to contextualize. Its primary orientation is that of the history of ideas, an approach that is more concerned with the relationship between ideas and society than with the logical consistency of the ideas themselves. The present work endeavors, first of all, to explain the evolution of Hocquenghem’s ideas and assess his impact as both a philosopher and a militant on French society after 1968. In addition, because Hocquenghem’s career is, in many respects, emblematic of the journeys of the French ’68ers, it uses his intellectual and political trajectory to describe general patterns that he shared with his generation. More specifically, it relies on Hocquenghem’s career to illuminate a critical but often overlooked and misunderstood dimension of the May ’68 revolt and its legacies: the eruption of “everyday life” into French politics. Finally, this dissertation aims to contribute to the rehabilitation of Hocquenghem’s reputation as key militant, significant philosopher, and consummate polemist of the French ’68 generation. In doing so, it is not Hocquenghem’s ideas themselves that it seeks to redeem so much as his unique utopian perspective.
Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the participation of a handful of people who graciously shared their lives with me during my stay in Paris. Roland, Lionel, Mark Olivier, René, and Hélène, may this work do justice to the time and energy you have spent with me, the confidence you have placed in me, and the memories you have entrusted to me. This work is dedicated to you. I am also especially grateful to Franck Veyron at the B.D.I.C. who guided me through the sources, to Didier Eribon and Françoise Gaspard who allowed me to barge in on their seminar at the E.H.E.S.S., and to Damien Visery and Michael Behrent whose friendship helped sustain me throughout.

Richard Wolin at the C.U.N.Y Graduate Center has been mentoring me for over a decade and served as my main advisor for this project. He has read every word I have ever written, and his input over the years has helped to shape not only my ideas presented here but the very way I think. I would also like to thank Carl Caldwell and James Faubion at Rice University for their valuable time and conscientious advice and Scott Marler for his encouragement and inspiration. Finally, I owe much gratitude to my friends and family for their unconditional love and support. Mom, Dad, and Daniel, I could never hope to repay you for everything you have done for me—though I will continue to try. Ryan and Ginger, thank you for bringing me into your home and embracing the weirdness. Joe, you rock. I assume full responsibility for any factual errors or inaccuracies. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own. May Guy forgive me for exploiting his life for my own bourgeois ends.
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Preface

Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.

-Walter Benjamin\(^1\)

If you don’t admire something, if you don’t love it, you have no reason to write a word about it. Spinoza and Nietzsche are philosophers whose critical and destructive powers are without equal, but this power always springs from affirmation, from joy, from a cult of affirmation and joy, from the exigency of life against those who would mutilate and mortify it. For me, that is philosophy itself.

-Gilles Deleuze\(^2\)

Since the appearance in 1988 of Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman’s monumental two-volume chronicle of the French ’68 Generation, entitled simply Génération, France has been producing a steady stream of biographical, literary, and academic accounts of the seminal events of May ’68 and the years of intense contestation that followed.\(^3\) The French ’68ers, or soixante-huitards, are racing to write their own history. As is always the case when collective memory is codified into history, innumerable episodes, ideas, and people fall by the wayside. Among the ’68 generation’s key personalities, none perhaps is more neglected today than Guy Hocquenghem. A leader of the student

\(^1\) “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 255


movements in 1968, a pioneer of the sexual revolution in the 1970s, and a lifelong critic and polemist of French society, Guy Hocquenghem published some twenty books and hundreds of significant articles in his short lifetime. With the exception of *Homosexual Desire* (1972), an early manifesto of the homosexual liberation movement and founding text of queer theory *avant la lettre*, most of his works are forgotten and out of print, and in the growing mass of literature on the '68 generation, his name surfaces only in a handful of footnotes.¹

This is a biography of Guy Hocquenghem (pronounced “OH-can-gem” with a hard “g”). However, my chief aim is not to psychologize but to contextualize. My primary intellectual orientation is that of the history of ideas. As the intellectual historian Mark Poster characterized this approach, the history of ideas “describes changing intellectual patterns with more concern for the relation of ideas to society than for the logical consistency of the ideas themselves.”² Although it makes ample use of personal interviews and various other biographical sources, this study relies mainly on the historical and historiographical records of postwar France and, above all, on the largely unexplored writings of Hocquenghem themselves.

This study is an intellectual biography, first of all, in that it seeks to explain the evolution of Hocquenghem’s ideas and activism and assess his impact both as an intellectual and a militant on French society. As a whole, Hocquenghem’s intellectual and political itinerary forms a coherent picture, I argue, when we view him as a cultural revolutionary of the '68 generation. This perspective is not intended to detract from his unique importance to the homosexual movements in France and to Queer Theory, the

discipline in which he is best known today, but rather to contextualize these contributions within a broader project that occupied Hocquenghem throughout his lifetime: the cultural revolution spurred by the events of May 1968. Because my interpretation focuses primarily on the late 1960s and early 1970s, the high point of the revolutionary fermentation in France, there are a number of aspects of Hocquenghem’s career to which I cannot do justice. Most notably, I do not treat Hocquenghem’s fiction with the attention it deserves. Hocquenghem began his literary career in the mid 1970s and continued to write fiction until his death. For a more thorough introduction to Hocquenghem’s literary works, I recommend Bill Marshall’s excellent, short monograph *Guy Hocquenghem: Beyond Gay Identity*.  

Second, in addition to considering Hocquenghem’s creative function in history, I also explore his representative function. Because Hocquenghem’s career is, in many respects, emblematic of the journeys of the French ’68ers, I use his intellectual and political trajectory, in other words, to describe general patterns that he shared with his generation. In particular, I argue that Hocquenghem’s itinerary reveals a critical but

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3 Bill Marshall’s monograph also provides an excellent introduction to Hocquenghem’s place in Queer Theory as well as an overview of some of the central philosophical themes in his oeuvre. *Guy Hocquenghem: Beyond Gay Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). On Hocquenghem and Queer Theory, see also the preface to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University, 1995). One notable absence in my bibliography is Frédéric Martel’s *The Pink and the Black: Homosexuals in France since 1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). Martel’s history of homosexuals in France in general, and his portrait of Guy Hocquenghem especially, are wrought with factual errors and distortions. For example, Martel claims that Hocquenghem refused to test himself for AIDS and did not learn of his condition until he was already ill. This is false. Hocquenghem tested positive in March 1985, not long, that is, after the test became available. Martel then goes on to characterize a text by Hocquenghem that appeared in *Gai Pied Hebdo* in September 1985 as the bitter complaint of an HIV patient, whereas, according to his own account, Hocquenghem was ignorant of his condition at the time. For other criticisms of Martel’s book, see, for example, Hélène Hazera, “Petites prouesses avec des mort: ‘Le rose et le noir’,” *Libération* (30 May 1996), 5; La Veuve Cycliste, “Martel en tête, pas en mémoire,” *La Revue h* 1 (summer 1996): 44; and Phillipe Colomb, “Le Rose du destin et le noire de la politique,” *La Revue h* 3 (winter 1996-1997): 40.

4 For a good discussion of “representative” biography, see Jerry Z. Muller’s introduction to *The Other God That Failed: Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatives* (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1987), 2-24.
often overlooked and misunderstood dimension of the May '68 revolt and its legacies: the eruption of everyday life into French politics. Although questions of everyday life appeared suddenly on the political scene in May 1968, they were briefly set aside in the period of revolutionary agitation that immediately followed. When they did finally reappear, they did so within a highly radicalized leftist milieu that played a determinant role in shaping their expression. Central to my interpretation of the legacies of May '68 is the notion of the "French Cultural Revolution," which, briefly put, refers to the widespread effort by the French '68ers to synthesize, both in theory and practice, the traditional Marxist workers' movements with the new cultural demands that burst onto the scene during the events of May 1968. The French Cultural Revolution began in the summer of 1968 during the student occupations in the Latin Quarter and ended in 1974 with the sudden death of President George Pompidou and the beginning of a new era of social and political reform under President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

Finally, I aim to contribute to the rehabilitation of Hocquenghem's reputation as key militant, significant philosopher, and consummate polemist of the French '68 generation. In doing so, it is not Hocquenghem's ideas themselves that I seek to redeem so much as the utopian critical perspective that underlied his thought and militancy, a perspective that is, it seems to me, on the verge of disappearing irretrievably in contemporary society. It is my hope that the present study will lead to new editions and translations of Hocquenghem's works and encourage a wider public to enjoy and engage with his writings.

Because Hocquenghem is largely unfamiliar to the Anglophone world, Chapter 1, "The Death of the Angel," provides a general overview of his life and his writings and
describes the utopian perspective that infused them. My portrait of Hocquenghem in this first chapter is a somewhat impressionistic one. It draws not only from my own observations in the course of researching his life, but also from his surviving traces in collective memory and the recollections of his contemporaries. Chapter 2, “May ’68 and the French Cultural Revolution,” introduces my historical arguments which are detailed in the chapters that follow by situating them within the interpretative history of the events of May ’68 and contemporary debates over May ‘68’s legacies. Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 proceed chronologically according to the framework of the French Cultural Revolution and weave together the history of the ’68 generation with Hocquenghem’s political and intellectual trajectory. Chapter 3, “The Prelude (1944-1968),” considers the origins of the May ’68 student-worker uprising in the period of France’s “Thirty Glorious Years.” Chapter 4, “The Spark (1968),” treats the events of May ’68 themselves, and Chapters 5, 6, and 7 describe three distinct phases of the French Cultural Revolution: “The Crystallization (1968-1971),” “The Dissemination (1971-1974),” and “The Restoration (1974-1988).” In the concluding chapter, “From Gay Liberation to Gay Marriage: The End of Utopia,” I bring the debates introduced in Chapter 2 up to date and briefly explore the possibility for a critical redemption of Hocquenghem’s utopian outlook.

In *Le Pari Biographique* (The Biographical Wager), the French historian François Dosse considers the many perils and pitfalls of biographical writing, particularly when the subject is a critical thinker whose writings, ostensibly, speak for themselves. When Dosse, for example, embarked on his own biography of the philosopher Paul Ricoeur in the 1990s, he immediately confronted the problem that his subject, at the time in his mid-

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80s, was reluctant to share any personal information and, moreover, did not believe that an examination of his personal life would have any bearing on this thought and his legacy. Respecting the venerable philosopher’s wishes, Dosse was forced to write his book without Ricouer’s participation, and even without having met the man.

Among his cautions to the would-be biographer, the experienced Dosse writes, “... no matter how exhaustive his investigations, the biographer should not pretend that he has found the key that will saturate his biographical account with meaning.” In the early 1990s, a small controversy erupted on both sides of the Atlantic when critics accused James Miller of having committed just such an offense in his biography *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. In death as in life, Foucault had proved to be a particularly uncooperative biographical subject. Not only did he rebuff students’ attempts to investigate his life—he encouraged them to pursue their own research projects instead—he also had a strong philosophical position on the question of “authorship.” In “What is an Author?” for example, Foucault famously criticized the familiar notion of an “author” as a solid and fundamental agent of meaning. This idea, Foucault argued, is neither universal nor ahistorical; it emerged at a specific time in the West as a discursive function for establishing relations of authority. As such, the “author-function” was enmeshed in the discourses of power that were the broader subject of Foucault’s investigations. As David Halperin summed up the predicament, “To compose a *biography of Foucault*, then...

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6 Ibid., 414. My emphasis added.
8 See Halperin, 126-85.
work.” Nonetheless, as one of the most important and influential “authors” of the twentieth century, Foucault was bound to attract numerous scholars willing to accept this challenge. Most of the terrain in Miller’s controversial biography, in fact, had already been explored by Didier Eribon in France several years earlier. Miller, however, sought a greater meaning for Foucault and his philosophical project, one that bound more tightly the philosopher’s writings and his practices in everyday life. Despite his evident admiration for his subject, and despite his own disclaimers, Miller, critics charged, believed he had found the key to Foucault’s life in his dangerous addiction to sadomasochistic practices.

Although my interpretation of Hocquenghem’s life and writings is one that aims to bring together the many elements of his variegated career and capture the spirit of his critical approach, I do not pretend to have found the key. I willingly concede that there are other, valuable perspectives for illuminating Hocquenghem’s life. If I seem a little too quick to brush aside the perils of biography—reductionism, stereotyping, and misrepresentation—it is because I believe that Hocquenghem’s biography is long overdue.

As someone who cherished the “mad and inexhaustible charm of the double-life,” who moved in numerous circles, always hiding something from his acquaintences, Hocquenghem would have no doubt agreed with Dosse. “Total self-identification,” he wrote in is unfinished memoir, “. . .doing what one says and saying what one does, is a totalitarian dream.” Hocquenghem did not share Foucault’s

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10 Halperin, 129.
12 Ibid., 66.
philosophical objections to the art of biography—indeed, he even authored a couple of biographies of sorts in his later years. All the same, on aesthetic grounds he would have certainly preferred to be memorialized in some other way, perhaps in an avant-garde film or in a theater production by his close friend, the Argentinian playwright Copi.

On the other hand, as a cultural revolutionary in the 1970s, Hocquenghem sought to politicize the personal as a means of challenging social norms, and, true to his philosophy, he strove to break down the barrier between the public and the private in his own life. In 1972, for example, he “came out” in Le Nouvel Observateur in an article that related his self-realization as a homosexual in frank detail (and “not without a good dose of exhibitionism” he later admitted). Furthermore, throughout his career as a polemist, Hocquenghem denounced the hypocrisy of leftist leaders who proclaimed changer la vie (transform life) on the one hand but kept their own lives secret on the other, and when he could further demonstrate this hypocrisy with choice bits of information, he relished the opportunity to do so.

Hocquenghem not only deserves a biography, he asked for it.
Chapter 1

Guy Hocquenghem: the Death of the Angel

In 1971 he was 25 years old and beautiful as a god. He founded the Revolutionary Homosexual Action Front to get homosexuals out of the ghetto. He never passed up an opportunity to create scandal. Motivated by the spirit of May ’68 he ranted against his repentant generation, and as a writer he explored Gnosis for a “return of spirit.” Guy Hocquenghem died Sunday of AIDS at the age of 42.


If you want to write a book about Guy, the first thing you have to understand is that he was an incredibly beautiful man. This struck me as a strange piece of advice when I first began interviews for this project. It seemed all the more strange because I always explained that I was a historian of ideas writing an intellectual biography, not a personal biography. Yet it came up again and again, in conversations as well as in print—“beautiful as a god,” “cherub-like beauty,” “angelic beauty,” “the beauty of an arch-angel”—almost no one failed to mention it, usually within the first few seconds. Even those who had run-ins with him, been savagely criticized by him, or who were otherwise disinclined to like him seemed nonetheless marked by it. I had only seen a handful of grainy black and white images from newspaper articles and book covers, most of them taken in his last years when he was visibly frail and weak, as though “trembling from a catastrophe that had already taken place” as Roland Barthes once described the
photograph of prisoner taken the day before his scheduled execution. For someone whose beauty was so renowned, there weren’t very many pictures of Guy, especially as a young man. His beauty, however, was not exactly of an iconic nature—like a Jean Seberg or a young Terrence Stamp. It was, instead, a part of his legend and a symbol of the times, more like Che’s Beret, John Lennon’s glasses, or Abbie Hoffman’s middle finger.


According to his obituaries he died at the age of forty-two, but he was actually forty-one (born December 10, 1946), a tragically young age in any case for a writer and philosopher in mid-career.2 His obituary in Libération, the leftist daily where he spent much of his career as a journalist, was headlined “The Death of the Angel.” “Angel” was, first of all, a reference to his physical beauty. Tall and slender, with a mop of brown curls and a boyish face, Hocquenghem continued even in the infirmity of his last years to resemble the same twenty-one year-old firebrand who, as he used to boast, threw the first stone in May 1968 on the rue Guy Lussac.3 Hocquenghem was born into a large family in Boulogne, an upper-middle class suburb just west of Paris. Likewise the products of upper-middle class upbringings, Hocquenghem’s parents instilled in him at an early age a passion for travel and classical learning. Recognizing his exceptional intelligence, his

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1 As cited by Michel Cressole, “Mélancolique et Bûcher” Libération (30 August 1988), 29. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
3 Hocquenghem probably meant this in a figurative rather than a literal sense. Such a claim, in any case, would be impossible to verify.
father, a mathematician, gave him math lessons and tried to steer him to become an engineer like his two older brothers. His mother, a French teacher in a girl’s high school, introduced him to literature, where he felt much more at home. His mother had given birth to ten children in all. Four of them died at very young ages. That left Hocquenghem with his two older brothers, one older sister, and one younger brother and sister each. Even as a middle child in a large bourgeois family, Hocquenghem stood out. He was taller and lankier than his siblings, reaching about six feet by the end of his teenage years, and with his thick ringlets and aquiline features he resembled a Greek statue from the old art books he devoured. Hocquenghem was aware he stood out. As a young boy he amused himself—and irritated his siblings—by stubbornly insisting that he was not related to the rest of his family, but, at best, only a half-sibling, the bastard child of Arab prince, or something equally fanciful.⁴

From the time he was a child, Hocquenghem seemed to have been haunted by a strange feeling of not belonging, not just to his family, but to his country, and even his own epoch. Describing this sentiment from his childhood, he once recalled the following anecdote:

> When I was a kid, I believed that one could declare oneself stateless [apatride]. I imagined I could present myself at the local prefecture and simply return my nationality, just as one returns an article of clothing that’s borrowed or poorly fitting. I was consumed with infantile rage when I was told that it was impossible, impossible for me not to be French. One didn’t get to choose one’s nationality, and there was

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⁴ This anecdote and others from Hocquenghem’s early childhood are recounted by his younger brother Joani Hocquenghem, “Guy, au galop,” L’Observatoire de la Télévision 17 (January 2000): 5-8. Other biographical information in this chapter not otherwise cited comes from, “La Révolution des homosexuels,” Le Nouvel Observateur (10 January 1972), repr. in Hocquenghem, La dérive homosexuelle (Paris: Delarge, 1977), hereafter cited as DH; Hocquenghem, La beauté du métis: réflexions d’un francophobe. (Paris: Ramsay, 1979), hereafter cited as BM; and AM. For the images and descriptions of Hocquenghem in this chapter, I am particularly indebted to Roland Surzur, René Scherer, Lionel Soukaz, Hélène Hazera, Marc (Olivier) Hatzfeld, Jean-Michel Gérassi, Anne Querrien, and Joanni Hocquenghem whom I interviewed over the course of 2003-2005.
absolutely no recourse. It was with tears in my eyes that I learned that there was no superior justice who could rectify this flagrant violation of my freedom.⁵

Among his more vivid memories from childhood were the long family car-trips during which he invariably became sick. In a strange way, he enjoyed the prolonged fits of nausea traveling through the French, Italian, and Spanish landscapes which provided him with a degree of privacy from his family and a window seat in the car. These fits were also among his earliest intimations of his distinctiveness, or his "sensitivity," as his mother referred to it euphemistically. His mother had recognized the same sensitivity in one of Hocquenghem's uncles he never met—one who refused to marry, drank heavily, and died young in an automobile accident. She had also sensed it in one of Hocquenghem's older brothers, Nils, who fell to his death at the age of six playing near an empty elevator shaft.

As an adolescent Hocquenghem began to realize that there was much more to his sensitivity than his disposition for car-sickness. In 1962, at the age fifteen, he left home to attend the prestigious Lycée Henry IV in Paris. That was the year, as he later described it, of his "self-discovery" as a leftist radical on the one hand, and a homosexual on the other. He met his first lover that year, his philosophy professor René Schérer, who, in addition to philosophy, introduced him to the then well-hidden world of Parisian homosexual life. Along with many of his classmates, he also joined the Communist Party's sister student organization, the Jeunesse Communistes, initially more out of a revulsion for Charles de Gaulle and the senseless war in Algeria than out of any deep-rooted political convictions. From that year forward, Hocquenghem led a double-life. At first, it was out of fear and necessity that he kept his two worlds separate. France in the

⁵ BM, 19.
1960s was not a very welcoming place for homosexuals, and the generalized homophobia of the era extended to the leftist circles in which Hocquenghem moved.

But later he would learn to cherish what he referred to in his memoirs as the “mad and inexhaustible charm of the double-life.” Was it his desire for men that had all along been the origin of his childhood sense of not belonging? Hocquenghem often wondered.

“Who knows, perhaps I became a homosexual...as a means of voyaging abroad, that is, as a way of becoming an “Other,” of making otherness my home.” Hocquenghem’s two lives would intersect only briefly in the early 1970s, during the moment of the sexual revolution, but even then Hocquenghem refused to make his home in one world or the other. “Even when I was a homosexual militant, another world, that of erotic frenzy, remained submerged. As well it should’ve been; one must always keep something hidden. Total self-identification (doing what one says and saying what one does) is a totalitarian dream.” And there were other “lives” as well. Few knew, for example, that during the revolutionary fervor of the summer of 1968, Hocquenghem managed to abscond to Greece for three weeks to finish the research for his thesis in Greek philology.

Although most would date Guy Hocquenghem’s entrance into the public sphere to January 1972, when the *Nouvel Observateur* ran his so-called “coming out” piece, “The Revolution of Homosexuals,” his career as a militant began, like many in his generation,
while he was still in his teens. In 1965, with the help of René Schérer, he entered the École Normale Supérieure where generations of France’s best and brightest, from Jean Jaurés to Jean-Paul Sartre, had learned their Marxism. Hocquenghem’s generation was no different. In the 1960s it was primarily the magnetic philosophy professor Louis Althusser who breathed life into old Marxist doctrines at the ENS, imbuing them with an aura of truth both religious and scientific. That same year Hocquenghem left the Communist Party to militate with the gauchistes, the radical Leftists who rejected the ossified doctrines of Soviet communism and its French avatars in search of a more direct approach to revolution. Uncommonly charismatic and articulate, he was a natural born leader in the early gauchiste movements. As his flitted from circle to circle in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he accumulated his own entourage of admirers and friends, the “bande à Guy” as they sometimes referred to themselves, even though he never really intended to be the leader of his own organization—“leaders” were supposed to be a thing of the past for the student movements born of May. To those who fought alongside him for revolutionary change in the 1960s and 1970s, his physical beauty was only the outward manifestation of a kind of inner purity: his uncompromising fidelity to the idealism of May ’68.

10 On the Louis Althusser students at the ENS in the 1960s, see François Dufay and Pierre-Bertrand Dufort, Les Normaliens: De Charles Péguy à Bernard-Henri Lévy un siècle d’histoire (Paris: Jean-Claude Lattès, 1993), 206-239.
11 “Gauchisme” originally referred to everything “left” of Bolshevism, but over the decades it has been employed to refer a range of different Marxist ideologies and organizations. Here and throughout this chapter I use the term in a very general and largely negative sense to refer to the radical Left groups of 1960s and 1970s in France, whether of Leninist, Maoist, Trotskyite, third-world or otherwise Marxist orientation, which coalesced in reaction to the official state communisms of France and the Soviet Union. On the history of gauchisme, see Richard Gombin, The Origins of Modern Leftism, trans. Michael K. Perl (Baltimore, 1975).
But Hocquenghem wasn’t exactly an angel, at least not in the eyes of most of his contemporaries. Or, if he was part curly-haired cherub, he was also part curly-haired imp. Certainly it was the imp who, in 1971, highjacked (figuratively speaking) a Maoist paper in the name of the sexual revolution. The famous issue number twelve of the paper *TOUT* that he organized, which demanded the liberation of women, youth, and all sexual minorities on its front cover, was deemed so obscene by the authorities that it was banned, seized, and pulped. Vendors of the paper were arrested, their stores and homes raided, and Jean-Paul Sartre, the paper’s nominal editor was brought up on charges of “*outrage contre bonnes moeurs*” (outrage against decent values). It was a first in Sartre’s long career of Leftist militancy, but only the very beginning of Hocquenghem’s lifelong battle against “decent values.” Again, it was the imp who, in 1972, published intimate details of his self-discovery as a homosexual—relishing in his own exhibitionism he would later admit—in his “coming-out” essay for the mainstream press *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Later in 1973, when the counter-cultural magazine he wrote for, *Actuel*, began to turn a profit, he “outed” its editors in an exposé as the respectable bourgeois they had become, a dangerous ruse he repeated frequently in his career as a journalist. Although the heyday of “happenings” and political theater ended after the early 1970s, Hocquenghem continued to practice the art of calculated provocation through polemic, following in the footsteps of the great polemists he admired such as Balzac and Proudhon in a tradition as old as the Republic of Letters itself.

To French society after May ’68, Hocquenghem seemed to possess the same destructive charm as the “visitor” in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Theorem*. Pasolini’s 1968 film, based loosely on his novel of the same name, is the fable of a bourgeois industrialist’s
family who is visited by a stranger (played by Terrence Stamp). The handsome and charming young visitor seduces every member of the wealthy Milanese family—the father, mother, son, and daughter, and even the maid—before disappearing just as mysteriously as he arrived, leaving each one of them with existential voids and insatiable new desires. By the end of the film, only the maid displays the will to rebuild her life out of the family wreckage left behind by the visitor. In an interview with the BBC in 1968, Pasolini explained that his visitor character was only partly divine, not extra-terrestrial, but "ultra-terrestrial": "I made Terrence Stamp into a generically ultra-terrestrial and metaphysical apparition: he could be the Devil, or a mixture of God and the Devil. The important thing is that he is something authentic and unstoppable." \(^{12}\)

Guy Hocquenghem epitomized a type of social activist that was characteristic of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and Western Europe: the cultural revolutionary. Cultural revolutionaries were not exactly the leaders of the social and cultural revolutions in the West; these revolutions were much too massive, diffuse, and multi-faceted to have leaders. What separated them from the fray, rather, was a savior-faire for transforming transgression into social and political action combined with a certain recognizable personal and political style. In the 1960s and 1970s no one needed a weatherman to know which way the wind was blowing, but the cultural revolutionaries knew how to make the winds blow just a little bit harder. In the United States, this kind of activist was perhaps best exemplified by someone like Abbie Hoffman. "No one could raise a stink and attract attention to an issue with as few material sources—and with as much creative

flair—as Abbie Hoffman,” his biographer writes. Somewhat more poetically, Jerry Rubin described his famous partner in crime in *Do It* as:

“The Marxist acidhead, the psychedelic Bolshevik. He didn’t feel at home in SDS, and he wasn’t a flower-power hippie or a campus intellectual. A stoned politico. A hybrid mixture of New Left and hippie coming out something different. A street-fighting freak, a dropout, who carries a gun at his hip. So ugly that middle-class society is frightened by how he looks. A longhaired, bearded, hairy, crazy motherfucker whose life is theater, every moment creating the new society as he destroys the old.”

In France in the 1970s, and with a distinctly French flair, Guy Hocquenghem played a similar part, the main difference being that, in the Republic of Letters, a carefully planned literary event such as a manifesto or a well-timed article could often “raise a stink” more effectively than any piece of street theater. Imp or Angel, his beauty was both creative and destructive. As a close friend and former member of the “bande à Guy” once described him: “Guy constantly pushed radicalism further than anyone else. He was like an angel, an exterminating angel (*l’ange exterminateur*). You didn’t want to get too close for fear of burning yourself on his wings.” ‘Exterminating Angel’ is the title of a famous Luis Buñuel film from 1962 in which the guests at an aristocratic dinner party find themselves inexplicably unable to leave their host’s luxurious mansion. For several days they remain there, forced to survive on their own after their servants, cooks, and housemaids have all left. Their bourgeois rituals and pleasantries are soon dispensed with. The mansion becomes a pigsty as the invitees fight like animals over the last scraps of food, drops of water, and a small corner of their own where they might find solace from the company of the others. A herd of sheep wandering through the home—a common trope in Buñuel’s absurdist vocabulary—is slaughtered and sacrificed by the

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14 Jerry Rubin, *Do It* (Ballantine Books, 1970), 82.
guests to some unknown god in the vain hopes of escaping from their hell. Eventually the guests find their way out and head to a church to pray and celebrate, only to find they are once again trapped. In the span of an hour and a half, Buñuel’s film depicts the degeneration and demise of centuries’ worth of bourgeois cultivation. The ‘exterminating angel’ referred to in the title of the film, according to one theory at least, is not a character, but the metteur en scène himself, the diabolical genius who sends bourgeois civilization on a spiraling path towards destruction. If Hocquenghem represented a certain kind of nihilism, then it was the “active nihilism” of the mad Nietzsche; not the nihilism that stands by idly as the gods of old begin to falter, but the nihilism that gives those gods an extra push.15

If he was best known as a messenger of the French Cultural Revolution in the 1970s, today Guy Hocquenghem is better remembered for his pioneering role in the French homosexual liberation movements. His “coming-out” essay in the Nouvel Observateur in 1972, perhaps more than any single event, helped establish the cause of gay liberation firmly in the French public consciousness and propelled Hocquenghem to instant stardom in Parisian intellectual circles. That same year saw the publication of his work, Homosexual Desire, the first philosophical elaboration of the new revolutionary homosexual movement in France and his most well-known work today. Reversing the terms of debate on homosexuality, which up till then was still dominated by psychoanalytic, medical, and religious discourses, Homosexual Desire opens with the

sentence, “The problem is not much homosexual desire but the fear of homosexuality. . .” and is considered to be a founding text of queer theory—the discipline in which he is most widely known in the United States. Guy Hocquenghem’s name in France today is almost synonymous with the early years of gay liberation and, more specifically, with the Revolutionary Homosexual Action Front [*Front homosexuel d’action révolutionnaire* or FHAR], the movement he helped create in the early 1970s. Exaggerating only slightly, one might say that Guy Hocquenghem was to French gay liberation in 1972 what Stonewall was to its American predecessor in 1969. In its early period at least, he was responsible for much of its momentum, its theory, and its character.

In the 1970s Hocquenghem played the role of media figurehead for the countercultural revolution, a part well-suited to a provocateur like himself. Homosexual activist, however, was never a role he assumed with ease. In the early 1970s, homosexual activists in France viewed themselves as part of something larger, the ‘sexual revolution,’ or the ‘cultural revolution.’ Like many of France’s new social movements, the homosexual liberation movement emerged as an outgrowth of the *gauchistes* groups that formed after May ’68 and in its early period at least shared many of the same revolutionary aspirations. It was only later, in the course of the 1970s, that the sexual revolution completely severed its ties to its *gauchiste* origins and embraced the politics of reform that characterizes it today. In Hocquenghem’s harsh estimation, after the break up of the FHAR in 1974, the homosexual liberation movement was recuperated by the society of consumption and by the mainstream Left, and was thereby completely emptied of its subversive potential. As the focus of the movements shifted towards questions of rights and identity and away from the revolution of society, Hocquenghem grew more
distant and critical. "If we called ourselves a 'revolutionary homosexual action front',"
Hocquenghem insisted a decade a half later, "it was because, for us, what was most
essential was not homosexuality but revolutionary action. It was a way of saying not only
that a revolutionary could be homosexual too, but that being homosexual might be the
best way of being revolutionary."

Hocquenghem was known to affirm and deny his homosexuality in the same
breath, something he did in part to frustrate those who would pigeonhole him, but more
importantly because his understanding of homosexuality--'homosexualities' or
'homosexual desire' as he usually preferred--never corresponded to what most people
then and now mean by the term. As a homosexual activist with utopian aspirations
Hocquenghem sought to radically rethink not just homosexuality, but all forms of
sexuality and desire. In the early 1970s, during the years of the FHAR, he examined
homosexuality primarily through the philosophical lenses of Gilles Deleuze and Felix
Guattari, the Marxist discourses of his day, and the utopian philosophy of Charles
Fourier. After this period, he explored the subject more frequently through history,
literature, and film. Regarding homosexuality, what his oeuvre as a whole offers is not,
therefore, a systematic theory, but an eclectic array of perspectives. Although he is
considered today a pioneer of queer theory avant la lettre, a "Hegel of homosexuality"
Hocquenghem was not.

As a gauchiste militant, he was initially attracted to homosexual activism by what
he perceived to be its unique revolutionary potential. After May 1968, the mottos of the
radical left became "vivre autrement" (live alternatively) and "changer la vie" (change
life). A truly revolutionary society, many gauchistes believed, could only be built on top

16 "Les premières lueurs du Fhar" (Interview with Hocquenghem), Gai Pied Hebdo (12 March 1988): 32.
of the rubble of bourgeois institutions, customs, and values, through the complete transformation, in other words, of everyday life. In his writings for the FHAR, Hocquenghem employed the term ‘homosexuality’ to refer not to ‘love between members of the same-sex’—a tautological and impoverished formulation in his opinion—but to the ensemble of affective relations, including but not exclusively sexual relations, that take place outside of the norms of bourgeois capitalist society, and which, therefore, could be mobilized against it. Homosexuals, in the everyday sense of the term, were not in and of themselves revolutionary, but as a marginalized community with its own history of oppression and a vast, almost innate experience in the ways “vivre autrement.” In the first manifesto of the FHAR from 1971, the Rapport contre la normalité (Report against normality), he explained:

I believe that homosexuality lived in conscious way is more than a form of oppressed sexuality, more than a way of imagining affective relationships, and more than an attitude vis-à-vis the family and heterosexuality. We are not revolutionaries specialized in the question of sexuality. I believe that a conscious homosexual possesses a unique outlook on the world, the realm of politics included.\footnote{AM, 160.}

Hocquenghem remained true, in short, to a radical vision of homosexual liberation characteristic of the early years of the FHAR, a vision that gave way to a more moderate reform-minded movement in the 1980s, and of which few traces of which remain today.

When such dreams dissipated along with the general revolutionary enthusiasm of the early 1970s, Hocquenghem had a somewhat difficult time finding his place in the new France. Like many of those drawn into the May events, he had wagered his future on the
promise of revolution in the years that immediately followed, investing himself
completely into militancy rather than continuing his studies and pursuing a career. A
philosopher, polemist, journalist, and a novelist, he weaved back and forth from vocation
to vocation in the second half of the 1970s and 1980s, never making his home in any one
of them. He had an impulsive habit for firing up controversy everywhere he went,
surprising and sometimes angering even those closest to him, often burning his bridges
behind him. Journalism provided the steadiest source of income for much of his life. His
longest tenure as a regular contributor, however, was on the staff *Libération*, the
newspaper founded by his former comrades the Maoists in the early 1970s, and where he
worked from 1978 until 1982—about six years not including several months during
which he was suspended for various “misconducts.” And although Hocquenghem taught
philosophy for many years at the University of Vincennes and the University of Paris St.-
Denis, it was only six months after his death that he was finally awarded an academic
title.

Hocquenghem lived by the philosophy, succinctly expressed by the French
situationist and kindred spirit Raoul Vaneigem, that “There is no such thing as a good
usage or a bad usage of the freedom of speech, only an insufficient usage,” a dangerous
credo for someone who lived by his pen.¹⁸ When he turned his talents increasingly
towards social and political criticism in the late 1970s, he respected nothing and spared
no one. Hocquenghem paid a price for his words. In the obituary for *Libération*, Laurent
Joffrin, his former colleague, relates a particularly vivid memory of one of
Hocquenghem’s television appearances in 1979.¹⁹ Having been invited to defend his

anti-French polemic, *La Beauté du Métis* ("The Beauty of Mixing," subtitled "confessions of a Francophobe") on *Apostrophes*, the prestigious political and cultural debate program hosted by Bernard Pivot and the launching pad for aspiring intellectual celebrities, Hocquenghem took the occasion to flay a panel of some of France’s most influential print editors, the very same men who had the power to decide his career. Anyone who had been following Hocquenghem’s fortunes could only marvel at his astonishing lack of circumspection. Of the many things that interested Hocquenghem throughout his lifetime, a career was never really one of them.

Although he used words recklessly, he was not a rebel without a cause. In the first few years following May 1968, he worked among a milieu of utopian *gauchistes* who demanded everything—*Ce que nous voulons: Tout!* was their slogan (What we want: Everything!). The main conclusion they drew from the failures of the 1968 student-worker uprising was that the revolution of the cultural sphere could not wait until after the workers’ revolution. Taking inspiration from both Mao Tse-Tung’s Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and the counter-cultural movements of the American West Coast, they sought nothing less than “total cultural revolution” for France.

While the utopian esprit that motivated them died within a few years after the May revolt, the theme of utopia continued to permeate everything Hocquenghem wrote. Even when he became ill in the 1980s, withdrew somewhat from the public eye, and began focusing his energies on literary pursuits, the theme of utopia remained omnipresent, whether the setting for his fiction was the early origins of Christianity, the European discovery of the New World, or the teeming homosexual underworlds of Paris, New York, and Rio de Janeiro. As a writer, Hocquenghem sought to recover history’s
"aborted utopias," those lost and forgotten moments of idealism when the course of history might have turned differently.

But the utopian experiment always looming in the background was the one Hocquenghem experienced firsthand: the aborted utopia of May 1968. When the student movements exploded in May '68 in Paris, just weeks after being ignited on the nearby university campus at Nanterre, Hocquenghem raced with many of his classmates to the Sorbonne, the symbolic seat of student power. In the confusing first days of the revolt, Hocquenghem hazarded an early attempt to give meaning and direction to the student movement in the first new publication of the '68 generation, Action. In "Why we struggle" [Pourquoi nous nous battons], the centerpiece of Action's inaugural issue, he described something close to what Herbert Marcuse had referred to a few years earlier in One Dimensional Man as a "great refusal" beginning to emerge. The youth of 1968, Hocquenghem wrote, "refuse the future that the existing society offers them ... And when they revolt with violence, they are conscious that they are rendering this refusal more visible and clear."²⁰ A couple of weeks later, the momentum of the uprising shifted dramatically from the students to the striking workers, and the primary task of the student movements, heavily influenced by the Marxist discourses of the day, became that of unifying their struggle with that of the workers. Hocquenghem, too, was swept up briefly in this populist enthusiasm, and after the uprising crumbled in June and July, with the re-emergence of a victorious Charles de Gaulle and an end to the workers' strikes brokered by Prime Minister Georges Pompidou, he continued to drift through a number of different

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gauchiste circles in search of way to bridge the revolution of the proletariat with the new cultural demands that burst on to the scene in May.

The moment of the revolt that marked him the most, however, was that initial euphoric gesture of refusal. In the first two or three years following the uprising, he continued to believe that this esprit could be re-animated within the gauchiste movements, even as these movements were becoming more and more ideologically and organizationally streamlined, and in some cases, such as the Maoist Proletarian Left for example, increasingly violent in their rhetoric and actions. By 1972, he had completely given up on the gauchistes, although he still identified himself as a radical leftist of sorts, albeit more of a counter-cultural bent—“Marxiste tendance Groucho” (Marxist of the Groucho School), to quote a famous May ’68 graffitti.

When his fellow 68ers converted en masse to the liberal democratic consensus of the 1980s, jumping on the Mitterrand bandwagon, Hocquenghem became a fierce critic of his generation—or “rénégation” in French as he famously dubbed them. His was a generation that, in his own words, “turned 40 years old from 25 with almost no transition,” and he dedicated much of his time as an essayist and journalist to holding his repentant comrades to the revolutionary promises of their youth.21 In the Open Letter to those who Traded Maoism for the Rotary Club (1986), Hocquenghem accused his former comrades of reneging on their revolutionary promises and becoming that which they despised most in their youth: bourgeois conformists, unscrupulous careerists, and petty seekers of power and wealth. Of the revolutionary conflagration Hocquenghem helped them stoke in 1968, only ashes remained in the 1980s, and paradoxically it was they, the ex-Maoists turned courtiers of the “Mitterrand Restoration,” and not the Gaullist

21 From the short story “Faux Printemps,” ON, 103.
reactionaries who had put out the flames. The real danger posed by the "Maoist-turned-Rotarians," Hocquenghem argued, stemmed less from their conversion to the liberal consensus than from the way in which they converted; possessed by the same doctrinaire zeal with which they once preached revolution, they exploited their credentials as 68ers to impose their vision of politics on future generations, silencing their demands and censoring their imaginations. Pointing his finger at his "rénégation," he wrote:

There you sit, guarding the door to the future, and like the dog from the parable, the food you could not eat--utopia, the nourishment of spirit--you prohibit others from consuming. . .Out of your repudiation squared, cubed, you constructed a pyramid which you've pulled your selves up onto reaching for power and money. And there you've remained, occupying all the posts, your networks blocking entry to all newcomers. . .And from the top of your pyramid of arrogance and hypocrisy you coldly declare, holding down those who would take a look for themselves, that there is nothing to see, just a moribund wasteland extending to infinity.22

With these words Hocquenghem said good-bye not just to his former comrades, but to any aspirations he may have still had to influence the French Left. When the Open Letter appeared in 1986, not one of its main targets responded. Instead, on behalf of the numerous affronted parties, Jean-Michel Helvig denounced the pamphlet in a review for Libération as a hateful harangue worthy of the anti-Semitic extreme right critics of the 1930s, effectively pre-empting any further debate.23

But if few paid attention to the Open Letter, still fewer noticed its philosophical companion text, published the same year in collaboration with his former philosophy professor and lifelong friend, René Schérer, entitled L'Âme Atomique.24 In L'Âme Atomique Hocquenghem and Schérer observe that in modern society, "the fear of the end

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24 L'Âme Atomique (Paris: Albin Michel, 1986). "Atomic Soul" is a pun on "atomic weapon," (l'arme atomique), hereafter cited as AA.
of the world prohibits reflection about the ends of this world.”²⁵ Weaving through two millennia of utopian thought in the West, they investigate the possibilities for restoring “soul” to Cold War Europe, a civilization still reeling from the horrors of the twentieth century and paralyzed by the fear of the bomb and ecological disaster. In the mid-1980s, Hocquenghem’s career came full circle in a sense when he once again became Schérer’s student. The second time around, however, he had much more experience to bring to their philosophical relationship which culminated in *L’Âme Atomique* and *Paris sur l’impossible*, also a philosophical investigation of utopia which was published after his death by Schérer.

Hocquenghem’s humorous satire in the *Open Letter* and his philosophical peregrinations in *L’Âme Atomique* are really two aspects of a common critical standpoint he maintained throughout his lifetime. In his writings on aesthetics, Hocquenghem explains, for example, how his humor arises essentially out of a sense of dégoût or “disgust.”²⁶ Far from being a simple case of aversion or nausea, the experience of disgust situates an individual in a state of profound disharmony with his surroundings. It is at the same time “noble, misanthropic, [and] comical . . . in short disgust is never just mournful, it is desperate or humorous.”²⁷ As an example, Hocquenghem relates the story of a friend who lived for several months amidst total misery in the poorest slums of India. Whenever this friend went to use the public outhouse, the story goes, he noticed that he

²⁵ AA, 315.
²⁷ Ibid.
was being followed by a pig. Eventually he realized that whilst he was entering the outhouse from the front door, the pig was sneaking in from the back to feast on his excrement. From that point on the friend manically shooed the pig before using the outhouse, sometimes chasing him far off into the neighboring fields (to the great amusement of the locals). Like "melancholy" in Baudelaire's modernist aesthetics, disgust harbors both creative and destructive potential. Creating humor out of disgust was, for Hocquenghem, a form of the "heroism of modern life," to quote Baudelaire's famous phrase, a means of lifting oneself temporarily out of the muck—quite literally in the case of his friend—of the modern world. But as Hocquenghem observed in 1987, the very capacity to experience disgust had already become a thing of the past. "The man with no disgust, capable of accepting everything...is the new fashion." Disgust today is "nothing more than a problem of stress or a case of the blues."

Humor, however, is only one potentiality of disgust. In its complete repulsion of the world as it is, disgust also creates a space for imagining it anew. It is, in other words, a condition for the possibility of utopian thinking. This connection first revealed itself to Hocquenghem in May 1968, when the Parisian students, united only in their "great refusal," rose up and the occupied Latin Quarter, transforming it into a microcosm of the society they wanted to live in. For Hocquenghem and Schérer in *L'Âme Atomique*, for example, the philosophy of utopia for the modern world passes not through Lenin, Marx, or Mao, but through Lucretius, Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin, and especially Charles Fourier.

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29 "Le dégoût du siècle," ibid.
Fourier’s philosophy had long occupied a central place in Hocquenghem’s thought. As he had argued in vain against the hard-line gauchistes in 1972, “We should not consider Fourier as a “precursor” in the terrain opened up by Marx. It is, rather, the reverse that rings more true. We should view Marx as someone who explored only one aspect, albeit admirably so, of a philosophical terrain inaugurated by Fourier.”30 Marx, in other words, explored almost unilaterally the political dimension of utopia, leaving aside what Hocquenghem and Schéfer, borrowing from Fourier, variously referred to as “domestic utopia,” or the “utopia of everyday life.” In Fourier, the ideal political order is not a model to be constructed or imposed on humans, but the natural outgrowth of humans as they already exist in their everyday lives, their everyday relationships, and their everyday desires—that is, when false constraints imposed on them, such as the nuclear family and monogamy, to cite a couple of Fourier’s bugaboos, are stripped away. Political utopia, for Fourier, thus arose organically out of domestic utopia, and was, therefore, of secondary importance. Similarly, for Hocquenghem and Schéfer, utopia was essentially apolitical and a-teleological, that is, not “the end of history,” or something to work towards, but as they sometimes described it, an “exigence” or an obligation.

Utopia...is an “exigence” not an “end.” The “exigence” is not the absorption of the utopia into the real, but the penetration of the real by utopia. Utopia is not something to be anticipated, a simulation of what is to come. In suggesting or hinting at possibilities outside of the realm of the probable, it reorients the real, deters the real from limiting itself, closing in on itself. But at the same time, it forbids its own realization.31

In the second half of the 1970s, the political mood in France took a 180—degree turn, and with the widespread abandonment of Marxism, “the unsurpassable horizon of

30 AM, 65.
31 [René Schéfer with the collaboration of Guy Hocquenghem], Pari sur l’impossible: études fourieristes (Paris: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 1989), 7, hereafter cited as PI.
our times” as Sartre had famously referred to it a generation earlier, the very idea of utopia too was jettisoned. The new political zeitgeist was perhaps best represented by the arrival of the New Philosophers, a loosely-unified group of thinkers committed to political liberalism, human rights, and, above all, austerity in political thought. Many of the key figures in the New Philosophy movement were converts from post-68 gauchisme and their considerable influence in the second half of the 1970s was due in no small measure to their media savvy and, in particular, their ability to exploit their gauchiste credentials to add moral weight to their political convictions.32 These repentant ‘68ers, Hocquenghem charged in the Open Letter, had not only abrogated on their utopian “exigence,” they were furthermore quelling the utopian energies of the increasingly alienated younger generations. This was the underlying message of both the Open Letter and L’Âme Atomique; when France’s Maoists-turned-Rotarians exhorted humility and austerity in political thought as the best safeguard against catastrophe, Hocquenghem tried to warn against an overdose of their medicine.

This turnabout in the political climate, although informed to be sure by events taking place around the globe, was as much a result of a certain oedipal logic endemic to French intellectual life as anything else.33 Drastic as it was, however, it paled in comparison with the real social transformations taking place during this same period. Though it may have been a failure in the short-term, May ’68 catalyzed a process of significant institutional reforms, beginning with, and perhaps most significantly, France’s outdated educational system. Furthermore, May ’68 and the years of revolutionary

32 On the media savvy of the New Philosophers, see Kristin Ross, May ’68 and its Afterlives (University of Chicago, 2002), especially “Philosophers on Television,” 169-181.
fermentation that followed gave birth to the new styles and forms of protest, as well as the new social movements—such as women’s and homosexual liberation, ecology, and the anti-racism and anti-discrimination movements—that would completely reshape the landscape of French politics within the span of a decade. Though Hocquenghem remained an active participant in some of these movements, albeit somewhat inconsistently and always on his own terms, he was no longer a leader. Occasionally, Hocquenghem’s venomous pen turned against the movements themselves, leading many to wonder whether his sympathies were truly with the Left or whether his political sensibility, which he sometimes described as “neither right, nor left, but extreme,” was merely the cover for a thoroughgoing cynicism.

To many of his peers in the new social movements of the 1970s and 1980s, Hocquenghem seemed to be fighting a battle that had already been won; one could not longer pretend that the institutions of the Fifth Republic were still as solid, self-assured, and inflexible as they had been under Charles de Gaulle before 1968, or that bourgeois culture was still as stuffy and stultifying as had been in the 1950s and 1960s. Much work remained to be done, of course, towards the creation of a freer, more tolerant France, but it was nothing that could not be accomplished through the slow but inevitable progress of reformist social politics. To the repentant comrades he reproached in the *Open Letter*, Hocquenghem had quite simply floated away in the pipe dreams of their youth. It may be true, as Jean-Michel Helvig wrote in his condemnatory review of the *Open Letter*, that “Celebrating a fidelity to one’s ideas is not necessarily an ode to the intelligence of time.”

On the other hand, for the generation that is perhaps better known in France today not for having built the barricades of May, but for having rebuilt their careers in the

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34 Helvig, ibid., 11.
late 1970s and 1980s as "New philosophers," anti-communists, and neo-liberals, self-renunciation is not necessarily a mark of sophistication either. Hocquenghem was an idealist, but he was not so obliviously idealistic that he rejected the enormous achievements of the Left's social and cultural agenda in the late 1970s under Giscard or in the 1980s under Mitterrand. But without that initial experience of dégoût and the utopian esprit that characterized the early student movements, something vital, he believed, had been lost.

Against the boundless optimism of the new social movements, the gloom and doom of the New Philosophers, and the self-righteousness of the repentant "Maoists-turned-Rotarians", Hocquenghem sustained a unique critical voice that drew as much from his own lived experience and his historical sensibility as it did from the West's utopian philosophical traditions. By the end of the 1970s, Hocquenghem was well aware, for example, that he had participated in one of the most extraordinary cultural transformations in the history of Western civilization. Never before in the history of mankind had homosexuals enjoyed as much freedom, security, and acceptance. Homosexual liberation, furthermore, had opened a new space of tolerance in France for numerous other repressed minority groups. As the pre-eminent French sociologist Henri Mendras described the FHAR in a recent work: "[what began as]... a revolt of homosexuals led to a rapid and complete reversal of the majority of French peoples' attitudes towards homosexuality, and, consequently towards the differences of the Other."35 In Hocquenghem's words, the decade of the 1970s was "Ten years worth twenty centuries."36

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35 Henri Mendras, François, comme vous avez change (Tallandier, 2004), 122.
Yet Hocquenghem remained skeptical, first of all because homophobia was still alive and well in France, having only changed its forms. In the early 1980s in particular, it made an ugly re-appearance, first in the form of a crusade to protect children from pedophiles, and later as pretext to save the population from AIDS. Moreover, Hocquenghem continued to view the world through the lens of May ’68. By the 1980s, his adherence to these utopian ideals had marginalized him within the French intellectual circles that had celebrated his “coming out” in 1972. According to his editor at Libération, Serge July, Hocquenghem had trapped himself in “an infernal logic in which he was forced to be a caricature of himself . . . the soixante-huitard waging war against all mandarins, in search of an ontological difference.”37

As Hocquenghem withdrew slowly from the spotlight of public life in his last years, his thoughts turned to the broader question of modernity. His philosophical temperament increasingly emulated the “total historical pessimism” he viewed in Jean Genet: “I see approaching the line of the horizon behind which I will disappear, merging with it, never to return: these lines are the secret of the “Genetienne” attitude.”38 But Hocquenghem’s disgust, that profound sense of disaccord with the world as he described it, was not, however, a total nihilism as his critics often charged. It was more like the kind of “active pessimism” that Walter Benjamin a generation earlier had observed in Nietzsche, Charles Fourier, and Charles Baudelaire. In active forms of pessimism, for Benjamin, there exists a germ of lucidity, an openness to the possibility of utopia that is

inscribed in every generation, at every moment. This pessimism, which Hocquenghem so much admired in Genet, was not an attitude of “detachment,” but “a mixture of despair and jubilation, an aesthetic attitude, but an aestheticism that is never severed from its metaphysical ambitions.” In the 1940s, as Europe in its darkest hours was contemplating a Nazi “reign of one thousand years,” Walter Benjamin set down to paper what was to be his last text, his eighteen theses “On the Concept of History.” Several months later he committed suicide while trying to cross the Spanish border from France in flight from the Nazis. Curiously, instead of taking aim at the fascists in his eighteen theses, he seemed more concerned with criticizing Germany’s reformist Social Democratic party. Blinded by their narrow faith in progress, the Social Democrats, he argued, had lost sight of the genuine “revolutionary experience,” a kind of experience Benjamin could only describe in the encrypted form of his famous final fragments. Much like Benjamin in the 1930s, Hocquenghem in the 1980s was temperamentally averse to the political zeitgeist of the times which preached reformism and gradualism, but his critique of progress was not, therefore, a complete rejection of its achievements, but instead a recognition of incompleteness, its inability, in and of itself, to bring about revolutionary change. According to Benjamin, the key lesson for the workers’ movements of his age was that capitalism will die no natural death. Neither will bourgeois values, Hocquenghem might have added.

Perhaps it was this parallel that turned René Schérer’s thoughts on the occasion of Hocquenghem’s death to Paul Klee’s painting, the Angelus Novus, the angel of history,

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40 “Le captif délivré,” ibid., 55.
41 Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Illuminations.
immortalized in Benjamin’s oracular ninth thesis. “And so I imagine him passing through the gates of death,” Schérer wrote, “an allegorization of Paul Klee’s Angelus novus described by Benjamin: floating on the winds of history, mouth open, his eyes fixed on the catastrophe of the present, his wings spread wide towards the future.”

A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

On the 30th of August 1988 at 2:00 P.M. several hundred people came to pay their respects to Hocquenghem at the Église Notre-Dame-des-Champs on Paris’s Left Bank, not far from the streets where Hocquenghem lived throughout much of the 1970s. Among the crowds of curious on-lookers, there were dozens of friends from his gauchiste days. Some of them had known him since well before May ’68, when he was selling Trotskyist papers, rushing from meeting to meeting, and beginning to gain a reputation for himself as a leftist leader. There were also many ‘Fharistes’ and ‘Fhareuses,’ the old-guard, so to speak, of the homosexual liberation movements, as well as many younger homosexual militants who knew Hocquenghem by reputation only and had come

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42 “À la mémoire de Guy Hocquenghem,” afterword to PI, 213.
43 Benjamin, Thesis #9
to pay homage to one of their maverick forefathers. And then there were old friends, lovers, and admirers, of all ages and all walks of life, who’d grown close to Hocquenghem at one time or another, in one context or another during his lifetime. Everyone there recognized at least a few other faces in the crowd—former comrades, colleagues, and friends from past lives—even if they hadn’t seen or heard from one another in years or decades. There was a lot of nervous chatter. Describing the awkward mood, Hélène Hazera, a close friend from the days of the FHAR wrote: “There were tons of people for Guy. Some people couldn’t keep themselves from smiling before remembering why they were there and resuming a solemn composure.”

After the Catholic ceremony, in which a priest delivered a standard peroration for the dead, the crowds filed to the Cimetière Père La Chaise where Hocquenghem’s body was to be cremated and his ashes buried. The incinerator was unusually slow heating up the day, so that the cremation process took somewhat longer than was planned. The music selection that had been decided upon for the occasion ended before Hocquenghem’s body had been reduced to ashes, leaving his mourners trapped there for a few terrifying moments with nothing but their thoughts and the incinerator’s droning.

It seemed strange to many that Hocquenghem, who had probably never set foot in a church in his adult life, would want a Catholic ceremony, apparently against the wishes of his family. Could this have somehow been another stunt of his? If so, the meaning wasn’t clear. Was he quietly thumbing his nose at the Church, which, to be sure, had never been much of a friend to homosexuals? Was it out of an aesthetic preference for the ancient Catholic rites, a kind of Pasolinian gesture of revolt against the drabness of modern bourgeois society? In his memoirs, Hocquenghem recalls fondly his

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grandmother, who, taking advantage of his parent’s indifference, would steal him off to
mass on Sundays. She was the only person, he remembers, who ever “spoke to me of
religion without a condescending note in her voice.”

Or perhaps it was just a private joke. Hocquenghem was well-known for his dark
sense of humor, even when it came to such serious matters as death. When Pasolini was
murdered by a 17 year-old delinquent under mysterious circumstances in 1975,
Hocquenghem wrote an article for Libération entitled, “We All Can’t Die in Bed”:
“Pasolini’s death seems to me neither abominable, nor even, perhaps regrettable. It’s
somewhat satisfying as far as I’m concerned. So much less stupid than a highway
accident. In a way, I would want it for myself and for all of my friends.” Although he
received a lot of criticism for his irreverent piece, he had meant it as a sincere and
personal tribute to one of the artists he admired the most. At the Church, someone had
placed a wreath at Hocquenghem’s casket that read in large letters “With Tenderness.”
Hocquenghem had once written a treatise against tenderness that had become a source of
endless argument between him and his life-long friend Michel Cressole. Michel had the
last word in the end.

Had Hocquenghem in fact been the metteur en scène of the afternoon’s activities?
Or was it an awkward compromise negotiated among his friends and family? No one
was quite sure what to think. As an invalid who spent a lot of time in hospitals,
Hocquenghem would have had plenty of time to plan for his funeral. Hocquenghem’s
last days in the summer of 1988, spent at the Claude-Bernard Hospital in Paris’s 18th
arrondissement, were the inspiration for a play by the Argentine poet Copi.

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45 AM, 32.
46 “We All Can’t Die in Bed,” repr. in DH, 28.
Hocquenghem and Copi had become close friends in the 1970s at *Libération*, where Copi once enjoyed the privilege (until he over-stepped it one too many times) of doodling his absurdist cartoons on the day’s edition minutes before it went to print. For years, Copi had brought to life on stage the burlesque courtly rituals and bizarre daily rhythms of Hocquenghem and the others members of their extended family in the homosexual community. In “The Inopportune Visitor,” Copi’s last play, the character Cyrille is making arrangements for his own funeral on his hospital deathbed with his assistant and long-time admirer Hubert.

Cyrille—Tell me, do we have house linens yet in the mausoleum?

Hubert—Everything is ready sir.

Cyrille—Let us be off then.

Hubert—We’ll find the cherry orchard still in bloom.

Cyrille—A real cherry orchard?

Hubert—Well, a small one.

Cyrille—This evening we will dine in the moonlight. I will recite verses from Lorca for you. But first you must help me into your carriage,

Hubert.

...  

Cyrille—We must hurry Hubert! Oh no, shit...

...  

Hubert—Cyrille, your heart?

Cyrille—What time is it?

Hubert—*Las cinco en punto de la tarde, señor.*
Cyrille—It's time.

_Cyrille dies_

Hubert—keep your coat on, you’ll be cold tonight.\textsuperscript{47}

Although probably based on Hocquenghem, Cyrille might well have taken inspiration from any number of people in their circle of friends suffering from AIDS, including Copi himself. Ironically, Copi died before "The Inopportune Visitor" made it to the stage. Hocquenghem, however, lived just long enough to see the first reenactment of his final days, after which he declared Copi the "Molière of modern times."\textsuperscript{48}

Though he often made light of death, even while it was at his doorstep, Hocquenghem desperately did not want to die. After he tested positive in 1985, he took every measure to preserve his life and protect the lives of those around him. Up until the time of his death he continued to write at a desperate pace. As soon as he finished one book he began another; he always had more to say. There may have also been a more practical motivation behind his obsessive writing; Hocquenghem literally lived by his pen. He may have had no choice but to continue writing in order to pay his bills and to ensure the care after his death of his companion Roland Surzur, also infected with HIV, like Balzac’s tragic hero of _Lost Illusions_, the poet Lucien de Rubempré, who was compelled to write popular songs at the deathbed of his lover Rosette to pay for her funeral.

It was also possible, of course, that there was nothing at all ironic about Hocquenghem’s apparent decision to have a religious ceremony. In the mid 1980s he

\textsuperscript{47} Copi, _Une visite inopportune_ (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1988), 72-73.
\textsuperscript{48} “Copi soit-il,” repr. in ibid., 81-83.
had returned to some of the philosophical pre-occupations from the time when he was still a promising young Hellenist and Latinist at the ENS. He had always been particularly fascinated by the ancient cults of Gnosis and the origins of early Christianity, and in 1985 he even published a historical biography of the apostle John, the alleged author of the apocalyptic Book of Revelations, entitled *The Wrath of the Lamb*. The novel is actually more about the birth of the modern world out of the rich and variegated cultures of the 1st century A.D. than it is about John. And although Hocquenghem’s account of John’s life is far from doctrinal—Hocquenghem eroticizes, for example, the spiritual relationships between Jesus, John, and their disciples—to many it seemed like a strange choice of subject for the cultural radical of the 1970s. Those unaware of the underlying continuities in Hocquenghem’s thought concluded that he had taken on the project—for which he received an advance from his editor—only for the money, or perhaps in the vain hopes of finally achieving acclaim as a novelist. Hocquenghem describes the apocalyptic John returning to the mysticism of the Greeks on his deathbed, lashing out against a world he rejects in its entirety, and yet mad with hope and love for another world yet to come. One can only wonder what Hocquenghem experienced on his own deathbed.

Hélène Hazera was one of the few in attendance who had known Hocquenghem throughout most of his career. Although they had been crossing paths since 1967, it was the FHAR that brought them together. At the FHAR, Hélène, a transgender, animated a troupe of noisy drag queens known as the “Gazolines” who crashed leftist events and May 1st parades shouting such surrealist slogans as “Long live hysterical materialism!,” “Nationalize the sequin factories!,” and “Workers of the world, fondle one another!”
Hélène’s special talent in those days was singing the communist anthem “lutte finale” in *bel canto*. By 1988 she was already well-accustomed to attending the funerals of her friends killed by AIDS and had started a journal to chronicle the unending hecatomb. There was something different, however, about Hocquenghem’s funeral. “With Guy,” she wrote in her journal, “it was a whole generation we were burying.”

*With Guy, it was a whole generation we were burying.* Few who knew him would have disagreed. But what exactly was it that France buried on August 28th 1988 along with Hocquenghem? That seemed much harder to pin down. The meaning of Hocquenghem’s death, “the death of the angel,” remains in some ways as elusive as the meaning of the events of the May ’68 themselves.

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49 Hazera, ibid.
Chapter 2

The "Interpretation in Search of an Event"

And the French Cultural Revolution

People rarely realize that they are creating new landmarks while in the process. More often than not it is only once their creation has taken on the imaginary solidity of the past that its meaning becomes clear, and, as a result of this mere reality, determinative of the future.

-Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Originality of the May 68 Crisis"

Except perhaps for the revolution of 1789, no other moment in French history has been the subject of so much intense debate, not only among historians and social scientists, but also among politicians and in the larger intellectual and public spheres. As one historian observed, May '68 has become less an event in search of an interpretation over the decades than an "interpretation in search of an event." In chapter 4 I will turn to the events of May '68 themselves. Here I begin with the interpretations, their history, and the predominant role May '68 continues to play in contemporary debates. My aim is not to try to settle these debates, but to outline a historical framework, the "French Cultural Revolution," that will, I believe, help clarify them. Before we can begin to make sense of the events and their legacies, we must first cut through the layers of confusions,

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misconceptions, and manipulations that have been piled on top of them over the last few
decades.

No one could have foreseen what took place in France that summer. Although
there had been occasional eruptions of student discontent in the years leading up to the
events of May '68, there was nothing to suggest that tensions would suddenly come to a
head in such a dramatic way. In the first months of 1968, French commentators were still
patting themselves on the back for having dodged the massive student rebellions that
were already sweeping Germany, Italy, and the United States. At the end of December
1967, Charles de Gaulle proudly declared in a national broadcast that France's days of
civil conflict were over. "I do not see how we could ever again be paralyzed by such
crises as we've experienced in the past." The General wasn't alone in this sentiment.
Writing for l'Esprit in April 1968, journalist George Lavau explained that France's
steady growth and prosperity did not permit it the luxury of serious social and political
unrest. Similarly, l'Observer journalist John Weightman asserted, "The bourgeois spirit
has never been as strong. If there is something that has changed, it is the spirit of the
French, once idealistic and audacious, now plunged into a state of profound lethargy."
And finally, in the famous last words of Le Monde journalist Pierre Viansson-Ponté,

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Castells, 1988), 12.
5 John Weightman, cited in ibid., 12. On the complacency of French journalists on the eve of May '68, see
wrote just a week before the eruption of the student revolt at Nanterre, “What characterizes our public life today is that France is bored.”

Then, beginning in March, a snowballing of relatively minor events changed the whole outlook. On the university campus of Nanterre, a Paris suburb surrounded by immigrant shanty-towns, a group of student activists who dubbed themselves the “Movement of March 22nd” occupied the main university administrative building demanding the release of some of their comrades who had been arrested in connection with a Vietnam War protest. News of their courageous exploits spread over the next few weeks to the Latin Quarter, where, on May 3rd, Parisian students staged their own protest in the courtyard of the Sorbonne, initiating the student phase of the movement. At the peak of the student mobilization, the infamous “night of the barricades” on May 10-11, students managed to occupy most of the Latin Quarter, including the hallowed Sorbonne and a number of symbolically important national monuments such as the Odeon Theatre. In the weeks that followed, the student occupations spread throughout the French countryside. At the same time, the workers too began to strike in solidarity with the students, first in the thousands, then in tens of thousands, and finally in the millions. By the end of May, most of the country was paralyzed. Then, in an equally amazing turn of events, the student and worker movements began to disintegrate. By the end of June the Gaullist government was firmly back in power, the majority of workers had gone back to their jobs under the Grenelle labor agreements brokered by Prime Minister George

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6 Pierre Viansson-Pointé “Quand la France s’ennui” Le Monde (15 March 1968).
Pompidou, and most of the French population was preparing for their summer vacations as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened.\(^7\)

But something extraordinary did happen. In 1967 and 1968 student rebellions swept through the United States, Germany, Poland, Asia, and Latin America, but only in France did these rebellions spread to the high schools, the working classes, and society at large, bringing the entire country to standstill and even creating a brief vacuum of political power. The events of May ’68 erupted, furthermore, at a time of relative political and economic stability. Then, just as abruptly as it all began, the student-worker rebellion was over. As Edgar Morin reminded his readers, writing for *Le Monde* months after the events:

We evoke May ’68 as though its meaning or insignificance were evident. The ideologues, politicians, and sociologists who have been fighting over May ’68’s cadaver since June have forgotten, however, what is essential: its element of surprise, for both its actors and observers, its incongruity with respect to the theories and doctrines with which we understood our society.\(^8\)

May ’68 was a turning point in history that did not turn, a “sphinx-event” in Morin’s oft-quoted formula, both enormous and insignificant.\(^9\) In the short-term, the May events changed relatively little, apart from spurring limited educational and labor reforms. According to the historian Michael Seidman, even in terms of French culture

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\(^8\) Edgar Morin, “Mai-Sphinx,” repr. in *Mai 68 La Brèche suivi de vingt ans après*, 147.

\(^9\) Ibid.
and mores, the May events can be seen in continuity with a process of liberal
transformation that was already well underway by the mid-1960s. Arguing against
those who view May ’68 as a great breach or watershed in the evolution of modern
French society, Seidman concludes: “If the May events were important, it is not because
of what they altered. Instead they are remarkable by virtue of the transformative power
that much of the media, many scholars, and ordinary French people have attributed to
them.” The events continue to fill an important void in French public consciousness,
but for Seidman their prominence in collective memory is undeserved.

It is certainly true that far too much is attributed to the May events, but at the
same time this “transformative power,” a result of the events’ accrued meanings, began
reshaping French society almost immediately, rendering the task of distinguishing it from
a strictly causal history of May’s legacies nearly impossible. May ’68 is the kind of
historical event whose hold over the imagination somehow exceeds rational analysis.
Some of this power, no doubt, stems from the euphoric experience of the events, an
experience the French journalist Jean-Claude aptly described as a “metaphysical-political
electroshock,” and which has been recounted millions of times over in ‘68ers memoirs
and novel. But even for those too young to have experienced the events, the mere
mention of May ’68 evokes mystery and awe. In French collective memory, the events
seem to have a gravitational pull of their own; for the generation of ’68, the generation
that continues to govern and debate French society today, everything seems to have
begun in May ’68.

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11 Ibid., 12.
13 See, for example, Anne Chemin, “L’ENQUÊTE : les militants de l'époque et leurs enfants jugent mai 68
Thus, although May '68 remains an inevitable reference point in contemporary French debates—from long-debated issues over women’s rights to more recent rows over gay marriage and the Islamic headdress—it almost never refers simply to the events of that month themselves. Rather, it usually serves as a catchphrase for a range of social evolutions whose early signs may have been evident before the 1960s, but which were somehow catalyzed or accelerated by the events. In this respect, “May ’68” is the French corollary of the American “60s,” only in a super-condensed form that makes insightful debate about its legacies all the more elusive. It may seem needless to emphasize the point that May ’68 is an overburdened signifier, or to point out that its meaning has been anything but stable over the last few decades. Yet when the meaning, or meanings, of May ’68 are simply taken for granted, the debate rapidly breaks down into well-worn clichés.

Take, for example, a recently published dialogue between two of May ’68’s most notable student leaders, Daniel Cohn-Bendit (now a leader of the European Green Party) and Bernard Kouchner, (founder of Doctors without Borders and former French Minister of Health). Their exchange, entitled “Is May ’68 to Blame?”, illustrates many of key features of the current May ’68 vulgare.

KOUCHNER: May ’68 played a role in the social and cultural evolution but not directly, its influence operated through thousands of detours, passions, and trickles, as is always the case with History. An example? If

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14 The following passages are taken from Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Bernard Kouchner, *Quand to sera president* (Paris: Laffont, 2004), 355-366.
May had not existed, patients would not be able to demand today that their pain be treated. This evolution is certainly an anti-authoritarian one.

But not all of May's legacies are to be lauded. Later in the dialogue, Kouchner weighs in on the problem of the "tournantes." A tournante is a form of ritualized group rape prevalent in some of the lower-income, mostly North African, and mostly Muslim neighborhoods surrounding France's major cities—known as cités, quartiers populaires, or quartiers difficiles. The problem of the tournantes was brought to wider public attention recently through Samira Bellil's highly publicized personal account, Dan l'enfer des tournantes (In the hell of the tournantes), and through the actions the young feminist group Ni putes ni soumises, (Neither Whores nor Submissives) which has made the tribulations of young women of the cités central to their agenda.\(^{15}\)

**KOUCHNER:** We were fighting for sexual liberty, and now we find ourselves with tournantes, a form of sexual oppression in the physical sense; that is to say, to call something by its proper name, collective rape. The evolution of sexual behavior—which you date to May '68—is following a path that is unlikely, frightening, and criminal.

**DANIEL COHN-BENDIT:** First of all, as I already explained, one finds in Islam, or at least in certain of its variants, a notion that helps explain the tournantes: any girl who does not wear the veil is necessarily a whore. But that has nothing to do with May '68...In France we find the influence of Islam to be sure, but also a certain kind of male revenge in reaction to the push of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. It's a serious and troubling phenomenon, this repressive and aggressive form of sexuality. But good God, once again, what does this have to do with May '68? If you want me to admit once and for that May '68 did not save the planet or bring paradise down to earth, I will humbly concede, but to blame the tournantes on the movement for sexual liberty makes about as much sense as holding Bush responsible for Bin Laden.

On the one hand, Cohn-Bendit has good reason to be skeptical of Kouchner's association of the demands for sexual freedom in May 1968 with the problem of the tournantes.

tournantes. First of all, Cohn-Bendit led the protests for sexual freedoms on the campus of Nanterre in March and April of 1968, the events that sparked May '68. Moreover, from the little research that has been done on the tournantes, it seems that this particular form of collective rape is a relatively recent phenomenon, dating back probably to the 1980s or even the 1990s. In any case, the tournantes clearly have much more to do with the cultural evolution of a particular French demographic—urban, mostly North African and mostly Muslim teenage males living in France's cités—than with anything that happened in 1968.16

On the other hand, Cohn-Bendit himself hints at a possible linkage in his rejoinder to Kouchner. Although he dates the "feminist push" rather vaguely to the "1960s and 1970s," there wasn't much of a feminist movement in France before May 1968, or even during the summer of '68 for that matter. By most indicators, French society in the 1960s lagged somewhat behind the United States and some of its European neighbors in terms of women's organization and women's issues. It was only in 1966, for example, that the institution of marriage was amended in France to permit women to work outside of the home without the permission their husbands, and it wasn't until 1967 that forms of contraception widely practiced in the United States and elsewhere in Europe—the birth control pill most significantly—were finally legalized. As for political representation, it wasn't until the 1980s that the percentage of women in the National Assembly climbed

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above six percent—the level it had been in 1946 when French women voted for the first time in a presidential election.\textsuperscript{17}

May '68 did in a sense amount to a great leap forward in terms of the organization of the women's movement and the advancement of a variety of women's issues, from abortion rights and public child-care services to violence against women. Women's liberation is, in fact, one of few legacies of May '68 that most commentators agree on.\textsuperscript{18} So while it makes little sense to blame these acts of sexual aggression primarily on May '68, if we conceive of the tournantes as a reaction to the success of feminism, as Cohn-Bendit suggests, then we do have to bring May '68 back into the explanatory context. It would take a lot more evidence to make Cohn-Bendit's argument convincing—and one could also argue, much more sensibly in my opinion, that the tournantes reflect the limits of the feminist push of the 1970s rather than a reaction to it. My point in reiterating this dialogue, however, is not to settle these questions, but simply to illustrate the main features of the May '68 vulgate, all of which are present in this brief exchange.

According to the current wisdom, May '68 marks a radical and historic prise de parole, or “seizing of the word” in Michel de Certeau’s classic formulation—“In May we seized the word as we had seized the Bastille in 1789.”\textsuperscript{19} Students spoke out against their professors, children against their parents, workers against their bosses. Furthermore,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} For these and other statistics on women in France, see Maryse Jaspard, \textit{La sexualité en France} (Paris: Découverte, 1997).
\item \textsuperscript{18} On the emergence of the \textit{Mouvement de Libération des Femmes} (MLF) out of May '68, see François Picq, \textit{Libérations des Femmes: les années-mouvement} (Paris: Seuil, 1993), which is the most thorough and impartial history of the MLF. The best English-language source on the women's liberation movement in France after May 1968 is Claire Duchen, \textit{Feminism in France: from May '68 to Mitterrand} (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Books, 1986). See also Claire Duchen (ed.) \textit{French Connections: Voices from the Women’s Movement in France} (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987).
\item \textsuperscript{19} Michel de Certeau, “Prendre la parole,” repr. in \textit{La Prise de parole} (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1968), 40. The expression became widespread through de Certeau’s influential chronicling of the events for the journal \textit{Études}. On de Certeau’s public role in May '68, see François Dosse, \textit{Michel de Certeau: Le marcheur blessé} (Paris: La Découverte, 2002), 157-171.
\end{itemize}
within a short interval of the May revolt, women, homosexuals, ethnic and cultural minorities, and other oppressed groups in French society began to speak out as well. Through this prise de parole, May '68 thus brought about a much needed relaxation of outmoded social, cultural, and institutional norms and paved the way for numerous widely accepted social advances, such as abortion rights and the lowering of the age of majority from 21 to 18. May '68 even made possible, it is said, the more recent, and more divisive, social achievements--such as the parity laws (2000) designed to increase the representation of women in government and the “PACS” (pacte civil de solidarité) laws (1999) which grant civil unions to homosexual couples.\textsuperscript{20}

But even for its staunchest defenders, May '68 simply went too far, first of all in its radical questioning of authority and hierarchy, but also in its overestimation of the virtues of individuality and in its attempt to make a complete break with past traditions. The result is that French society continues today to suffer from a corrosive culture of narcissism and hedonism (fueled by modern consumerism), a breakdown in the transmission of its national heritages, and a general crisis of authority in the home and in the schools. Thus, while May '68 made possible, in Kouchner’s estimation, the self-assertion of patients vis-à-vis their doctors, it also paved the way for the rise of sexual delinquency among adolescents in the cités.

At the heart of the May '68 vulgate is the idea that the events gave birth abruptly to a new kind of individualism. Those who remain sympathetic to the events see May '68’s individualism as a largely positive development which broke ground for much needed democratic and liberal reforms in the 1970s and 1980s. For the social thinkers

Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort, and Cornelius Castoriadis, for example, May ‘68’s importance lies less in its immediate results than in the self-confidence and enthusiasm for democratic participation it sparked among French youth.\textsuperscript{21} Similarly, Henri Weber, a former ‘68 leader from the Trotskyite camp (today a Socialist Party deputy), insists on the distinction between the ‘revolutionary’ individualism of May ‘68 and the ‘narcissistic’ individualism of contemporary French society. May ‘68, Weber maintains, was individualistic in the sense that it sought a social order in which “the full flourishing of every individual was the condition for the free development of all.”\textsuperscript{22} The narcissistic individualism of modern France, on the other hand, privileges individuality as an end in itself. The relationship between these two forms individualism for Weber is one of “rupture, not continuity.”\textsuperscript{23}

But the defenders of May ‘68’s legacy of individualism today are far fewer and less vocal in comparison with the critics who hold the May events responsible for virtually all of contemporary French society’s problems. According to \textit{Le Figaro} editorialist Max Clos, for example, the hedonism and moral laxity of the ‘68ers are directly responsible for today’s “insecurity, violence, pedophilia, a paralyzed educational system, unmotivated police force, and lawless neighborhoods.”\textsuperscript{24} And as Jean Sévillia, author of the successful polemic \textit{Le terrorisme intellectuel} (Intellectual Terrorism) recently summed up the hostile opinion:

“It’s forbidden to forbid.” The famous May ‘68 slogan expresses the philosophical essence of May ‘68 thought: radical individualism. All

\textsuperscript{21} Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort, and Cornelius Castoriadis, \textit{Mai ‘68: La brèche: suivi de Vingt ans après.}
\textsuperscript{24} Max Clos, "Le procès de mai 68: Debats et Opinion; Le Bloc Notes de Max Clos" \textit{Le Figaro} (2 March 2001), 15.
authority must be challenged. Every constraint is suspect. Morality, social structures, traditions, and classical culture are all likened to enslavement. All that counts is satisfying one’s own desires. The sole ideal: “realize oneself,” defying all taboos. No more objective norms about right and wrong. Emptied of all content is the notion of “fault.” It’s never the fault of the delinquent; society is always to blame.25

For May’s critics, one of the pop cultural phenomena that has best epitomized May’s legacy of individualism in recent years is the runaway hit talk show C’est mon Choix (It’s my choice). Modeled in format after American talk shows such as Sally Jesse Raphael and Ricky Lake—a format in which invited guests flaunt their lifestyle choices before a rowdy audience—C’est mon Choix, hosted by television personality Evelyne Thomas, began airing its first season on the semi-public France 3 in 1999. The selected themes ranged from the more benign “My pet can do whatever it wants” and “I like to be nude,” to the more controversial “I dress up as a woman” and “I work with my body.” A spearhead of its genre in France, the show quickly climbed to a more than 25 percent market share with over seven million loyal viewers. Encouraged by its success, France 3 decided to move the show to prime-time after the summer break. Officials in the CSA (Conseil supérieur de l’audiovisuel, the committee that oversees the subsidization of federal communications) and a number of French deputies, however, had other plans. In November 2000, when it came time for the National Assembly to debate the public communications budget, C’est mon choix was singled out for attack for its vulgarity, sensationalism, voyeurism, and moral bankruptcy. As a result, the program instantly became the most controversial (and one of the most popular) programs in recent French memory. Although the general attitude toward the program in the National Assembly was one of disdain and disgust, a handful of deputies did come forward to defend it, 25 Jean Sévilla, Le terrorisme intellectuel de 1945 à nos jours (Paris: Perrin, 2000), 89-90.
claiming that it reflected the new realities of French society and taught the values of respect and tolerance. Ségolène Royal for example, the delegate Minister of Family and Childhood, admitted she enjoyed the show and that she even encouraged her children to watch it with her. In the end, C’est mon choix survived the onslaught, only to see its popularity begin to ebb the following year with the invasion of reality television, and in 2004, the Trojan horse of French trash television was finally cancelled.

The parliamentary brouhaha over “C’est mon choix” illustrates what sociologist Phillipe Beneton, co-author of one of the earliest studies of May ’68, characterized recently as the essential “incoherence” of May ’68’s triumphant ideology. On the one hand, individuals are urged to “live freely, avoiding prejudice, according to their own values, thinking for themselves, living out their passions, true to their autonomy.” On the other hand, they are asked to “be democratic, practicing tolerance, respectful of human rights, and wary of racism and sexism.” The resulting ideology is an enchanting mixture of unfettered libertarianism and dogmatic relativism, hip to modern times, but fundamentally self-contradictory. According to Beneton, “If all values are equal, then we have to accept those of the racist and cannibal.” Reductio ad absurdum!


The more conservative elements in French society aside, most even-minded French people continue to view May '68's legacy as a decidedly mixed one. They see the events as an important exercise in anti-authoritarian rebellion that rejuvenated French democracy, but, as with all such rebellions, certain excesses were to be expected. At the same time, more than half of all French people, according to one poll taken in 1988, identified May '68's long-term legacy to be a "retreat into individualism," an individualism that allows a greater flourishing of individual liberties to be sure, but that also brings with it new forms of alienation and host of new social problems.\(^{28}\)

Individualism has not always been regarded as May '68's central legacy. This notion is, rather, a relatively recent one, dating to the 1980s to be more precise. In the summer of 1970, French sociologists Philippe Bénétton and Jean Touchard published what was at the time the most exhaustive study of the variety of interpretations of May 1968. Their study took into account not only the opinions of France's leading intellectuals and politicians but also those of the general populace. According to their research, the vast majority of interpretations fell into one of eight main categories, not one of which privileged individualism.\(^ {29}\)

1. An enterprise of subversion: An interpretation common among the Gaullists who blamed the French Communist Party, Moscow, or even Beijing for inciting the student/worker revolt.

2. A crisis in the university: A theory that underscores the problem of over-population in the already ill-equipped and outdated university system.

3. A rush of blood to the head, a youthful revolt: Interpretations that rely on crowd psychology or psychoanalysis to describe the "vast release"—in

\(^{28}\) According to a poll conducted by the CSA, in "Dossier Mai 68," *La Tribune* (11 May 1998).

Raymond Aron’s words—that erupted out of the boredom and affluence of French society in the 1960s.

4. A spiritual revolt/crisis of civilization: Similar to the above but emphasizing a kind of “spiritual hunger” that rejected the alienation of the modern age.

5. A class conflict/a new kind of social movement: An interpretation first articulated by the prominent sociologist Alain Touraine who argued that the revolt signaled a type of social conflict that fit poorly into the categories of traditional Marxist analysis, a conflict not between the “haves” and the “have nots” but between those with the power to make decisions in the new technocratic society and those without.

6. A social conflict of a traditional kind: A view prominent among communist and trade unionist leaders who characterized May ’68 as an episode, albeit a spectacular one, that was essentially in continuity with the economic strikes of the 1950s and 1960s.

7. A political crisis: Interpretations that attribute the revolt to de Gaulle’s unpopularity, the lack of a viable left-wing alternative, or to the weakness of the intermediary institutions, such as the houses of parliament, in the hierarchy of power prescribed by the constitutions of the Fifth Republic.

8. A chance combination of circumstances: From the occupation of the administrative building at Nanterre, to the police’s mishandling of the protests at the Sorbonne, and even the spontaneous worker’s strikes, some viewed the May events as long series of accidents.

In Bénétton and Touchard’s estimation, each of these explanations—with the exception of one and eight—possessed some truth and merited further investigation. Despite the proliferation of literature on the events in the early 1970s, most of the interpretations continued to fall within one or a combination of the six remaining categories.30

Beginning in the mid to late 1970s, a convergence of events completely transformed the French political mood and, along with it, attitudes towards May ’68. With the revelations of the gulags in the Soviet Union, the killing fields in Cambodia, and the massacres of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, the problem of

30 For an exhaustive history of May ’68 interpretations, see Keith Reader, ibid.
communism's relationship to genocide and totalitarianism became unavoidable. The collective weight of these events, which the historian François Dosse has referred to as the "Gulag Effect," toppled the dominant Marxism of the French Left suddenly like a house of cards. Correspondingly, the power and influence of the French Communist Party too suffered greatly. The decline in prestige of the French Communist Party, particularly among the intellectuals and youth, was already well underway before May '68. The first major blow came in 1956, when it failed to condemn the Soviet invasion of Hungary, demonstrating its blind commitment to toeing the Moscow party line. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, its reputation further suffered when it failed to take a firm stance against the war in Algeria, despite its nominally anti-colonial stance. Still, on the eve of May 1968, the Communist Party and its affiliated trade union, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), remained the "official" party of the left, the bulwark of the workers, and the inheritor of the anti-fascist resistance of World War II. Although it was weakened by scissions in the 1960s, the party's sister student organization, the Union des Étudiants Communistes (UEC), was still the most powerful of the student unions, with a membership of nearly half the student population. Less than a decade later, the PCF found itself playing second fiddle to Mitterrand's reformed Socialist Party, and UEC no longer existed. The era when Sartre could still proclaim that Marxism was the "unsurpassable horizon of our times" had come to an end.

With the zealousness of repented converts, many of the former leaders of May '68 led the new wave of popular sentiment calling for a swift return to the dominant liberal

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democratic values of the West. The years 1975, 1976, and 1977 in particular saw the profusion of not only books and articles, but also television and radio appearances by the thinkers associated with the neo-liberal “New Philosophy.” The meteoric rise and fall of the New Philosophy has sometimes been dismissed as a media coup, or, as one commentator described it, “proof of Andy Warhol’s assertion that a time would come when everybody in the world would be a celebrity for fifteen minutes.”

More polemical than constructive, the new philosophers denounced “totalitarianism” in all its forms, lumping together May 1968 with the Reign of Terror, Nazism, the gulags, and the Khmer Rouge. Although their denunciations lacked sophistication, they did nonetheless succeed in opening up new possibilities for a wearied intellectual Left searching for alternatives to Marxism. As Sunil Khilnani summed up their significance, “The New Philosophers certainly did not bring a liberal voice to French political argument; but their analytical and historical indiscretions did help to create conditions which enabled the revival of liberal political theory in France during the 1980s.”

Prior to the New Philosophers, anyone who criticized the state in the name of liberal democratic values was automatically identified with the Right and thereby marginalized within in the left-dominated sphere of intellectual politics. By the 1980s, however, the combination of a leftist politics and a strong advocacy of human rights and liberal political values began to appear more and more acceptable, if not completely natural.

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33 Of particular importance and influence were André Glucksmann, La Cuisinière et le mangeur d’hommes (Paris: Seuil, 1975) and Bernard-Henri Lévy, La Barbarie à visage humain (Paris: Grasset, 1977).
The New Philosophy thus helped to set the stage for what has been referred to as France’s “liberal renaissance” in the 1980s. During this time, French intellectuals revisited the West’s liberal political heritage since the Enlightenment and began rediscovering, in particular, their own liberal traditions, from Tocqueville to Raymond Aron.\(^\text{36}\) Nothing epitomized this paradigm shift better perhaps than the explosion of interest in the 1980s in Raymond Aron and the proliferation Aronian think-tanks and institutes throughout France. The only intellectual giant to have taken a consistently liberal stand against the ideological temptations of his age, Aron, who died in 1983, lived just long enough to see his star rise. Only a few years before his death, Aron was still being vilified by the Left as a conservative traitor of France’s revolutionary tradition. Tony Judt has characterized the long and diverse career of Aron as a “bet on Reason against History.”\(^\text{37}\) Although Aron argued from the Kantian conviction that man, by virtue of his reason alone, possesses the capability to shape and control his destiny, he remained deeply skeptical of the revolutionary faith in man’s ability to effect swift and radical change. As the history of totalitarianism in the twentieth-century demonstrated, he argued, political programs that claim History to be on their side are far too willing to pick up where History has left off. A realist and a pragmatist, Aron devoted his life to defending the humble virtues of democracy, liberty, and human rights against the intellectuals of the Left who, as he charged, had turned communism and socialism into dangerous secular religions. (Marxism was the “opium of the intellectuals” in his famous

\(^{36}\) For an overview of the liberal renaissance in the 1980s, see Mark Lilla’s introductory essay to New French Thought, ibid.

formulation, also the title of one of his most influential polemics against the left.\textsuperscript{38} By the 1980s, History had clearly proven Aron right as Aronian political liberalism became, as one commentator put it, “the closest thing to a reigning public philosophy in France today.”\textsuperscript{39}

In the 1980s it suddenly became more fashionable to be “right with Aron than wrong with Sartre” as the expression went, but the liberal renaissance ran much deeper than intellectual trends; it gradually transformed the way the French understand their history, their national heritage, and their very identity. Another sure sign that the times were changing was the radical shift in the interpretation of the French Revolution orchestrated by the historian François Furet around the time of bicentennial anniversary. In the years leading up to the time of the bicentennial commemorations, the liberal transformation in French thought was already well underway. The Marxist interpretation of the Revolution, though somewhat bruised by critics over the decades, remained, however, the orthodoxy—{}from the towers of the Sorbonne all the way down to civics courses in French rural lycées and colleges. Through the well-timed publication of three major works on the Revolution in 1988 and 1989, as well as through scores of public lectures, seminars, and media appearances, Furet and his collaborators managed to overturn the Marxist paradigm.\textsuperscript{40} Against the Marxist historians who placed economic factors and class struggle at the center of their historical narratives, Furet et al. insisted on the autonomy and historical efficacy of key political ideas. The Revolution was a

\textsuperscript{38} Raymond Aron, \textit{L'Opium des intellectuels} (Paris: Gallimard, 1968)


monumental event in the history of the West, they argued, not because it replaced one social class with another or initiated a revolutionary process, but because it introduced the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the notion of a sovereign people, the hallmarks of modern democratic society.

The French Revolution also had a "revolutionary" legacy in the Marxist sense, a legacy that would play itself out in violent episodes throughout Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, but this heritage, they argued, ran counter to the liberal democratic principles of modern society. Echoing Tocqueville's analysis of the French Revolution, Furet et al interpreted the "revolutionary" heritage of the Revolution (i.e. totalitarian heritage), as a vestige of Old Regime despotism. The revolutionaries of 1789, they argued, had replaced a sovereign king with the sovereign will of the people, without, however, modifying the Old Regime conception of political power as centralized, limitless, and indivisible. Their failure to conceive of political dissent as anything less than intrigue or treason continued to plague their attempts to construct a stable system of democratic representation for well over a century. It was only through the development of Republican philosophy in the 19th century that the French Revolution's true democratic legacy came to fruition in the form of the Third Republic.\(^4\) In the 1980s the May '68 revolt and the wounds it had inflicted on the body politic were still fresh enough that they didn't need to be mentioned by name. The message of Furet and the new historians was clear enough: May '68 was the last stand of the French revolutionary tradition, and the radical Leftist movements that sprang from the May '68 revolt were merely its dying embers.

New Philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy once described the May movement’s leaders, the intellectuals among them in particular, as bloodthirsty revolutionaries armed with their “bibles of terror” (Mao’s Little Red Book). Such facile denunciations aside, however, the liberal renaissance did not lead to wholesale rejection of May ’68, but rather, as with the Revolution of 1789, a re-interpretation of the events in light of contemporary social and political pre-occupations. By the 1980s, the radical Leftist movements born of 1968 had all but disappeared, and under the leadership of Mitterrand’s reformed Socialist Party, something like a new liberal consensus had begun to settle in. At the same time, however, political passions cooled considerably, giving way to apathy and cynicism, and many critics perceived a corresponding decline in French enthusiasm for public life more generally. As one May critic explained:

In 1993 France remains a favored and well-off country, but with a population that is fragmented, demoralized, and unmotivated, having lost its dignity and its pride. At the same time, the state, overrun by the imposters [of the ’68 movements] has descended into irresponsibility and corruption. At the beginning of 1968 it was “boredom,” at the beginning of 1993 its “malaise.”

Philosophers such as Jean Baudrillard and Jean-François Lyotard declared the birth of the “postmodern” era, characterized by the delegitimation of the “grand narratives” (in Lyotard’s classic definition which had guided human belief and human behavior since time immemorial. Many blamed the new malaise on the arrival of mass consumerism or the Americanization of the French media. Others blamed the moral laxity of the Socialist

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43 François Goetz, Mai 68, Une imposture qui nous a couté cher (Paris: EDITIC., 1993), 2.
government, considered by many to be the “Hegelian realization” of May 1968.45 Most, however, agreed that modern individualism was somehow at the root and that May 1968 had somehow played a key role in its evolution.

Although the revolutionaries of ’68 may have expressed themselves in the Marxist or anarchist lingua franca of the times, most participants and observers at the time realized that May ’68 was more a revolutionary drama than a true revolutionary enterprise. If May ’68 had been a movement to seize power, like those of 1917, 1871, and 1848, the students might have laid siege to de Gaulle’s palace at the Elysée or the National Assembly. Symbolically, they chose instead to occupy the Odeon Theater. There were, to be sure, a few cells of “hardcore” Marxist-Leninist students at the time that craved an immediate seizure of control, but they had relatively little impact on the ideas and direction of the revolt. Many of them in fact looked with disdain on the student movement, which they considered too festive, naïve, and not inclusive enough of the workers to jump-start a true revolutionary process. The famous protégés of Louis Althusser who formed the Maoist Proletarian Left after May ’68, for example, refused to participate in the student phase of the movement and even organized a campaign to dissuade other student protesters from falling into “the trap laid for them by the bourgeoisie.”46 And according to Pierre Goldman, a “hardcore” Marxist-Leninist who had been trained in guerilla warfare in Venezuela:

It seemed to me that the students streamed into the streets and the Sorbonne like a twisted and hysterical torrent. In a playful and masturbatory demeanor they satisfied their desire for history. I was shocked that they always spoke out with such visible jubilance. In place of action they substituted the verb. I was shocked that they called for the

empowerment of imagination. Their seizure of power was only an imaginary one.47

The confrontation between protesters and police was fierce to be sure, but despite the hundreds of injuries and the carnage wreaked upon the Latin Quarter, no one died in May ‘68.48 The vast majority of the protestors and members of the forces of order seemed aware that they were play-acting and proved unwilling to take their violent drama to another level. The barricading of the Latin Quarter during the second week of May was clearly a tribute to the Paris Commune of 1871, but no one seriously believed the barricades would hold out against a possible military invasion, and no one in the government, despite some rumors at the time, seriously considered planning one. Even those observers hostile to the events, like Raymond Aron, recognized that May was mostly theater. According to Aron, “We were all playing roles...beginning with myself...I played the role Tocqueville, which was somewhat silly of course, but others played the role Saint-Juste, Robespierre, or Lenin, which, all things considered, was even more ridiculous.”49

Could it be then that May ’68 was really about this individualism that was at the root of the French “malaise” of the 1980s, and not about revolution at all? The most influential articulation of this thesis came from the postmodern philosopher Gilles

48 According to one tally, there were some 1,800 injuries reported as a direct or indirect result of the protests throughout the country between May 3rd and July 30th. There were four deaths during this same period, all of them apparently unintentional, and none of which occurred in Paris: 17 year-old Gilles Tautin, who drowned while trying to escape a police charge at the Renault-Flins automobile plant on June 10, a policeman was run over by a truck in Lyon on May 24th, and two workers at the Peugeot-Sochaux automobile plant on June 11th. See Isabelle Sommier, La Violence Politique et son Deuil: L’après 68 en France et en Italie (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1998), 91. For a chronicle of the police repression of the radical Left in France from 1968 to 1974, see Maurice Rajsfs, Mai 68: Sous les pavés la repression (Paris: le cherche midi éditeur, 1998).
49 La Révolution Introuvable, 33.
Lipovetsky in 1983 in a short collection of essays entitled on *L'Ére du vide* (The era of emptiness). Although the events were only tangentially related to his philosophical theses, Lipovetsky succeeded in casting them in a new a provocative light: May '68, he hypothesized, signaled the dawning of a new epoch in the history of advanced democratic societies characterized above all by hyper-individualism. Whereas the “individualism” of Enlightenment philosophy, an ideology that helped bring down the Old Regime, viewed the individual as an autonomous being inscribed within a larger social fabric, the new individualism ushered in by May was fundamentally hedonistic and narcissistic and devoid of any coherent vision of society as a whole:

[In May 1968] the bloody revolution was replace by a “fragmented” revolution that was multidimensional. . . [May '68] was a hot transition between an era of social and political revolutions in which the collective was privileged over the particular and the era of narcissism which is apathetic and divested of ideology.  

May '68, according to Lipovetsky’s formula, was a “personalized” revolution, a revolution with no vision and no concrete goals, a revolution, in short, “without a revolution.” May’s “seizing of the word” thus never translated into an effort at “seizing power, identifying traitors, and drawing distinctions between the good and the bad,” because it was all along about the “liberation of pure communication, divested of ideological content.” As one '68 protestor expressed himself on the walls of the Parisian campus at Censier: “I have something to say, but I don’t know what it is.”

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51 Ibid., 312.
52 Ibid., 311.
According to Lipovetsky, May '68 was essentially a belated exercise in the "long-term dynamic of democratic individualism," but unlike those commentators before him who praised this "exercise" for its liberalizing and democratizing effects, Lipovetsky's postmodern interpretation was purportedly value-neutral. The pure communication he viewed as an outcome of the events is not the same kind of communication promulgated by modern democratic theorists such as Jurgen Habermas, but more like the incessant, meaningless chatter in Alexandre Kojève's Hegelian vision of civilization at the end of history. Lipovetsky does not deny that the May movement was also animated by a powerful sense of solidarity—expressed for example in one of May's earliest slogans in support of Dany Cohn-Bendit "We are all German Jews!"—as well as a by a desire for collective action, but as a philosopher of the present age, it was May's underlying logic of individualism that interested him primarily. Searching for the seeds of modernity or postmodernity, interpreters of the May events in the 1980s such as Lipovetsky commonly ignored the expressed aims and ideas of the May revolutionaries themselves.

Lipovetsky was not the first to theorize a breach between the announced aims of the student protestors from the underlying logic of the revolt. Already in 1968, the sociologist Alain Touraine argued that the Marxist discourse of the students was out of step with the reality of their situation. Against the technocratic utopian vision of France's economic and political leaders, which reduced all social problems to matters of modernization, adaptation, and integration, the students in May invented a libertarian

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counter-utopia that Touraine characterized as a “utopian communism.” “The message of the technocrats who controlled society was adapt yourself, to which the May movement countered express yourself.”

For Touraine, despite its Marxist overtones, the May uprising was not a revolt against capitalism, but technocracy, and the stakes were not economic interests, but the power to make decisions. At a time of rapid growth and transition, May ’68, according to Touraine’s hypothesis, exposed the fault lines of a fundamentally new kind of social conflict, whose movements and ideas would take shape in the years to follow. To take another example, from a Marxist perspective Régis Debray described the May movement as a “ruse of history” on its ten year anniversary. May ’68 expressed itself as an anti-capitalist revolt, but it was in fact “the cradle of the new bourgeois society.” Although the students believed they were rebelling against the emerging new society of mass industrialization and mass consumerism, they were in fact forging the new individualist ethos that it lacked in order to take firm root in France. “The revolutionaries of May were precisely those businessmen of genius that the bourgeoisie needed.” But for Lipovetsky, May ’68 signaled neither a new age of social conflict nor a new stage in the evolution of capitalism, but rather the end of conflict itself, the end of ideology, and, in short, the end of the dialectic of history.

Lipovetsky’s rereading of May ’68 had the advantage, however, of arriving at the right time: just after the collective renunciation of the French revolutionary tradition and amidst a widespread cynicism, tinged with anxiety, regarding the future of French

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58 Ibid., 15.
society. Although Lipovetsky intended his individualist reading of May to be purely descriptive, others quickly seized upon it for less impartial ends. Borrowing heavily from his theses, Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut’s essay, *French Philosophy of the 60s*, opened up a new line of attack on the May movements that remains broadly influential today.\(^{59}\)

Ferry and Renaut set out in their polemic to explain what they viewed as the apparent contradiction between the radical individualism of May ’68—epitomized for them by the slogan “It is forbidden to forbid”—and the philosophical “anti-humanism” which they inferred to be the dominant *esprit* of the radical left of the time. In their characterization, French anti-humanist philosophy, represented by such intellectual giants as Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida, is essentially a reworking of the German critique of Enlightenment reason infused with a French linguistic flair.

Against the Enlightenment philosophy of the rational, autonomous individual, the basic building block of all liberal political philosophy, it proposes a pseudo-science of the structures that thoroughly determine human subjectivity—whether economic (Marx reworked by Althusser), socio-cultural (Nietzsche via Foucault), linguistic (Heidegger via Derrida), or psycho-analytic (Freud via Lacan). French anti-humanism, in their reading, is a cynical philosophy that teaches the powerlessness of human agency—summed up aptly by the proclamation the “death of the subject”—and leads inevitably to a dangerous nihilism. How could it be then, they wondered, that this philosophical *ethos* found its highest expression in a spontaneous outburst of radical individualism in May 1968?

According to Ferry and Renaut:

> The critique of truth as Absolute Knowledge, though perfectly legitimate in itself, when not accompanied by a consideration of the regulating value

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that the demands of reason can ideally nevertheless preserve, can be
wonderfully reconciled with the individualist sentimentality that the
formula “To each his own truth” expresses so well.\textsuperscript{60}

In other words, not only was the May ’68 revolt never really about revolution, it wasn’t
exactly about hedonistic individualism either. The libidinal eruption was, rather, the
Nietzschean form taken by the student’s radical rejection of the Enlightenment tradition.

Ferry and Renaut’s anti-may polemic is so confused that it baffles even many of
those who are sympathetic to its authors’ point of view. To begin with, its intellectual
portraits of the eminent French thinkers of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s are extremely
reductive to say the least. Moreover, the constellation of thinkers they identify came to
intellectual prominence, for the most part, in the course of the 1970s, and had virtually no
influence on the students in 1968. In their collaborative works that followed, it became
clearer that their interpretation of May 1968 was only tangential to their larger political
philosophical project: to forge a new philosophy of human rights that is appropriate to the
liberal political ethos of the 1980s and impermeable to Marxist and Heideggerian
criticisms. As key advocates of the French liberal renaissance, the intellectual path they
chart towards a “modern” notion of human rights begins with Kant and Fichte and passes
through a renewal of 19\textsuperscript{th}-century French Republican philosophy.\textsuperscript{61} It was, however,

\textit{French Philosophy of the 60s} that first brought its authors immediate renown and
launched their individual careers—Alain Renaut as a political philosopher and Luc Ferry
as a media intellectual and, most recently, as the “philosopher-minister” of education
under Jacques Chirac. With Ferry and Renaut’s polemic, the casual grousing about the
moral and ethical depravity unleashed upon society by the students took on a new

\textsuperscript{60} Ferry and Renaut, ibid., 228.
\textsuperscript{61} See especially Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, \textit{Political Philosophy 3: From the Rights of Man to the
Republican Idea}.
philosophical dimension in the 1980s, echoed most recently, for example, by Jean-Pierre Le Goff, for whom “the May ’68 youth in revolt sought to settle the score with the humanist culture in which they were largely educated.”  

Was May ’68 a revolt against the liberal humanist tradition? Was it one great Dionysian lovefest? Was it really “forbidden to forbidden” in May ’68? My description of the events in the chapters that follow will challenge these and others myths about May ’68 in addition to the founding myth of the current May ’68 vulgate: the notion that May ’68 gave birth suddenly to radical individualism. Viewed in the larger historical context of postwar France, May ’68 clearly did play some part in the rise of modern individualism, but the path that leads from May ’68 to the individualism of the 1980s was by no means straight or inevitable. As Castoriadis observed, there is at least one major obstacle to placing individualism at the heart of the May ’68 revolt: if one looks at the events themselves—the actors, the movements, and the ideas—individualism is scarcely anywhere to be found. Reappraising the events in 1986, Castoriadis, expressed his bewilderment at the new individualist reading promoted by thinkers such as Lipovetsky and Luc Ferry:

The weeks of fraternization and active solidarity, when you could address anyone on the street without worrying about being seen as a madman, when all drivers would stop to pick up hitchhikers—the truth of all of this was hedonistic egoism? “Talk to your neighbors,” a slogan from May ’68, was in fact an insidious invitation to the modern isolation of individuals within their private spheres? The sit-ins and teach-ins of all varieties, where professors and students; teachers and school children; doctors, nurses, and staff personnel; workers, engineers, foremen, commercial, and

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administrative professionals, spent days and nights discussing their work, their relations, the possibilities for transforming their organizations and their goals, paved the way for viewing the other as a foreign object? When, in the great amphitheatres of the Sorbonne, bursting with people, the delegates representing the most improbable and diverse groups—from retirees to the handicapped—stood up to demand that society finally listen to them, certainly they were unaware of what they were saying and doing.\textsuperscript{63}

Citing graffiti such as “It is forbidden to forbid,” “take your pleasures for reality,” and “I come on the paving stones” \textit{ad infinitum} is hardly a way to deduce the essence of a movement. In May ’68, protestors scrawled slogans like Chinese \textit{daziboa}s throughout the Latin Quarter. Other, less often quoted slogans included “speak to your neighbors,” and “the new society will be founded on the absence of all egoisms.”\textsuperscript{64} And these slogans were sandwiched between thousands of others whose meaning is anyone’s best guess, such as the following citation from Mao Tse Tung’s little red book: “An egg that receives an appropriate amount of heat will transform into a baby chick, but that heat will not transform a rock into a baby chick, because they are different materials”\textsuperscript{65} But if individualism isn’t the key to May ’68, then how should we understand its legacy? How do we get, in other words, from the 1968 to the 1980s?

In a sense, the answer is simple: we have to pass through the 1970s. More specifically, we have to pass through the period of contestation I refer to here and throughout as the “French Cultural Revolution,” which lasted roughly from the summer of 1968 until the mid 1970s. In one sentence, the French Cultural Revolution was the massive effort by the radical left after May ’68 to synthesize, both in terms of theory and practice, the traditional struggle of the workers with the new social and cultural demands.

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Mai 68: La Brèche}, 185-186.
\textsuperscript{64} The latter slogan comes from the Library Hall of the Sorbonne and is cited in \textit{Interdit d’interdire : Le murs de mai 68}.
\textsuperscript{65} Slogans cited in \textit{Le journal insolite de mai}, 73-77.
that burst on to the scene in May 1968. The French Cultural Revolution refers, therefore, to a specific revolutionary moment rather than the more general processes of cultural revolution in the sense of cultural shifts or transformations. However, as I will try to demonstrate, it is impossible to understand the processes of cultural revolution in France after May 1968, however we conceive of them, without relating back to this particular period of revolutionary upheaval.

A professor of sociology at Nanterre in 1968 and a good friend of Dany Cohn-Bendit, Alain Touraine was well-placed to comment on the events as they unfolded. For Touraine, the May revolt had transpired too quickly and amidst too much emotion and confusion to be considered itself a coherent movement. Rather, to quote the May slogan that serves as the title of Touraine’s concluding chapter, “May ’68 was only the beginning.”

For Touraine, the May revolt exposed the fundamental contradictions of postwar French society and hinted at the new forms of social struggle that would emerge in the years to come. Like Touraine, I consider the May revolt less as a coherent movement than as the rendezvous where May’s actors came together and France’s new forms of struggle first began to take shape. May ’68 inaugurated the French Cultural Revolution and provided it with its initial energy and palette of ideas, but if we want to understand May’s legacies we have to turn to the period of revolutionary fermentation that followed. Furthermore, although France in the 1980s turned its back on the romantic idealism of these years, we must take seriously, I argue, both the experience of May’s “metaphysical-political electroshock,” to quote Guillebaud, as well as its utopian esprit.

What began in March as a small student uprising on the outskirts of Paris succeeded in paralyzing the entire country and even creating a brief vacuum of power at the center of

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66 Alain Touraine, “Ce n’est qu’un début,” Le mouvement de mai ou le communisme utopique.
the Fifth Republic. The events of May thus exploded the horizon of what previously seemed possible, and in the years that immediately followed, "demanding the impossible" as one of May's graffiti urged, did not seem so unreasonable.

The May revolt refocused French radicals' attention back on French society itself. In the decades leading up 1968, the Left had gotten used to the idea that truly significant events always took place somewhere else, whether in Eastern Europe, North Africa, Cuba, or Asia. In the global struggle to topple capitalism, imperialism, and oppression everywhere, the French radicals were obliged to play the role of cheerleaders who marched in the streets shouting their support for Guevara, Castro, Arafat, and Ho Chi Minh. A few radicals, such as Régis Debray and Pierre Goldmann most notably, took their commitment a step further by joining their Marxist brethren abroad. Before 1968, however, almost no one would have guessed that revolution was possible in France itself, let alone that France might become a locus for world revolution.

My allusion to the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China is intentional, first of all because many of France's cultural revolutionaries after 1968 took direct inspiration from the events in China, or rather, what they believed was going on in China (not without a dose of willful blindness). Furthermore, even for those radicals like Guy Hocquenghem who distanced themselves from the so-called "hardcore" Maoists of the Proletarian Left, Mao's philosophy seemed to jibe with the lessons they had absorbed from the failures of the May movement. The principle innovation of Mao's philosophy of "cultural" revolution was the notion that the cultural sphere, traditionally considered to be of secondary importance in Marxist philosophy, could become a milieu of revolutionary action. After the reestablishment of law and order by de Gaulle and the
“silent majority” in June and July 1968, radicals became convinced that the revolution in France would not succeed through class struggle alone; bourgeois values and ideology had to be targeted at the same time. “The revolution will be cultural or not at all.”67 They were also persuaded that if you want something done right, you have to do it yourself; May ’68’s revolutionary promise would only be realized through a complete break from the established “adult” Left and through the exploration of the new forms of organization and action that had just begun to emerge. The French Cultural Revolution was, perhaps above all, a generational revolt, and, taking inspiration from the young “Red Guard” of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, young French radicals after May ’68 believed that the task of revolution lay on their shoulders and their shoulders alone.

Mao’s philosophy, however, was by no means the only major intellectual influence on the French Cultural Revolution. In 1969, the French Left also discovered another America, “Woodstock Nation,” the America of Janis Joplin, Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Huey Newton, and Timothy Leary, and for a brief moment America seemed to replace China as the screen onto which radicals projected their revolutionary aspirations. There were also numerous French and European intellectual influences, such as existentialism and situationism, the latter of which erupted in France in 1966 with the infamous pamphlet entitled “On the Poverty of Student Life” and had already contributed to the May uprising much of its characteristic aesthetic.68 Finally, there was also a

panoply of unorthodox and new-Marxist currents, from Trotskyism to the various third-world Marxisms, which had been filtering into the circles of the French Left since the 1950s. This period of leftist agitation was unified less by a shared philosophy or ideology, whether the “philosophy of desire” (Le Goff), “radical democracy” (Morin, Lefort, and Castoriadis), “anti-humanism” (Ferry and Renaut), or guerilla-Marxism (the New philosophers), than by a utopian faith and energy awakened by the events of May 1968.

The French Cultural Revolution, I argue, was a utopian moment that merits to be considered along with those that followed the revolutions of 1789, 1848, and 1871, and like those moments that preceded it, it erupted suddenly and exhausted itself within a few short years. Although the utopian esprit dissipated in some circles earlier than in others, I date its definitive end, somewhat arbitrarily, to 1974. That was the year, first of all, when Valéry Giscard d’Estaing was elected over the Gaullist candidate Pompidou to become president, rousing new hopes for progressive social reform. Giscard’s narrow margin of victory over François Mitterrand furthermore inspired many ’68 radicals to rally around the reformed Socialist Party. 1974 also marked the end of gauchisme in France and witnessed a number of real and symbolic victories for the cultural revolutionaries. The end of the French Cultural Revolution’s demise is thus attributable in part to its successes, in part to the new political zeitgeist of the 1970s, and in part to sheer exhaustion.

This period of contestation was characterized by fluid organization and frenetic activity. Theory and practice changed and evolved rapidly; old ideas were discarded, new ones came and went, sometimes filtering in from abroad, sometimes percolating up
from the past. To understand this period, we should consider it not as a monolithic movement but as milieu of continuous experimentation comprised of numerous competing and inter-mixing currents, a milieu broadly open to outside influences but primarily committed to effecting revolutionary change within France itself. May ‘68’s “seizing of the word,” for example, did not lead immediately to widespread calls for women’s and homosexual liberation—the MLF (mouvement de libération des femmes) was not founded until August 1970, and the FHAR (Front homosexuel d’Action Révolutionnaire) did not appear until early 1971. Only by first appreciating the inner evolutions within this milieu can we understand the emergence of these two movements, their unique character, and their trajectories since the 1970s.

In the chapters that follow, I examine this milieu in terms of its intellectual and social spaces. The intellectual space was structured first of all by a Manichean worldview which pitted “the people” against the forces of bourgeois capitalism and which postulated the essential interconnectedness of the various struggles of “the people,” from the traditional concerns of the working classes to the specific problems of immigrants, women, students, and sexual minorities. The cultural revolutionaries believed that all of the struggles of “the people” had to be fought and won simultaneously, otherwise they would all fail together. The intellectual space was also characterized by a theoretical and methodological pragmatism, exemplified, for example, by what some militants understood by the term la pensée-maotsétung. (Mao Tse-Tung thinking)\(^{69}\) Whereas “Maoism,” “Trotskyism,” “Freudianism” and every other “ism”

\(^{69}\) This term was borrowed from the 9th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1969 where it was coined to replace the term “Maoism” as part of an attempt to put more distance between the Chinese Communist Party’s revolutionary philosophy and the person of Mao Zedong. See Pierre Masset, L’empereur Mao: essai sur le maoisme (Paris: Éditions Lethielleux, 1979), p. 287.
signified mindless obedience to others’ doctrines, "la pensée-maotsétung demands that communists think for themselves, beginning from concrete circumstances."\textsuperscript{70} This did not mean junking all previous revolutionary theories and starting from a clean slate, but rather drawing from past traditions eclectically and adapting them to meet specific situational needs. It also entailed that nothing could be held sacred; everything must be criticized. "Criticize Confucius and Lin Biao," as the Chinese newspapers famously proclaimed, but criticize too Mao, Marx, Sartre, and Freud.\textsuperscript{71}

But of greater importance in my view, the French Cultural Revolution was also comprised of social spaces. A generation is, "perhaps above all," in the words of Pascal Ory, "that place where contemporaries meet each other."\textsuperscript{72} Like the resistance movements of World War II or the trenches of the Great War, May '68 was the historical accident that brought contemporaries from diverse backgrounds together with a common sense of purpose. The French Cultural Revolution was held together, first of all, by its networks of meetings places: the packed cafés and lecture halls of the Latin Quarter; the rural and urban communes, the groupes de bases (grassroots organizations), the "free" universities, and, of course, the streets, liberated by and for the students in May '68.

It was furthermore made up of meeting places where student militants mixed with segments of the population that had never before appeared in the left’s radar. The years following May '68 was the period when theory moved "from the amphitheatres to the factories," to quote the title of Marcix Dressen’s anthropology of the 68ers (\textit{De l'amphi à

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Vive la Révolution}, 1 (November 1969), p. 11.

\textsuperscript{71} Lin Biao was Liu Shaoqi’s successor, the compiler of the Little Red Book, and Mao’s closest aid during the Cultural Revolution until his fall from grace and mysterious disappearance in 1971.

l'étalbi). Or, sticking with the Maoist metaphors, it was a place where militants "got down off of their horses to meet the people," according to Mao's famous exhortation. The établis, the subject of Dressen's study, were the student militants, many but not all of them associated with the Maoist and Trotskyist movements, who abandoned their studies to take up blue-collar work in factories. The Maoists referred to this learning process as the enquête, or investigation, which for them entailed becoming "étalbi" in the factories, the coastal town loading docks, the urban working-class communities, the immigrant shanty towns, and even the farms in the countryside. Not long after May, the spirit of the enquête spread to the prisons, the mental wards, the schools and daycare centers, and even the teeming urban underworlds of prostitution, drugs, and taboo sexual practices. This was the period when, for example, leftist militants first began to take a serious interest in the subcultures of the cités which have been under so much public scrutiny in the last few years.

The militants' many delusions, their naïveté, their revolutionary posturing and radical discourses aside, there occurred during this period, I argue, a genuine encounter between the young French Left and the rest of French society, an encounter that developed into a durable relationship that would continue to inform and transform their politics in the course of the 1970s and 1980s. In other words, while the cultural revolutionaries may have been fairly deceived about everyday life in China and Cuba, they came to understand fairly well what was going on within their own borders. The modern French Left's heightened sensibility to the issues of human rights, civil liberties, racism, and discrimination within their own society, and its tireless activism on behalf of

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these causes is, I believe, one of the most enduring legacies of the French Cultural Revolution.

What the cultural revolutionaries discovered “when they got down off their horses,” was not, however, a unified mass poised for revolution, but a great diversity of ethnic, racial, sexual, and cultural communities, the society that had been evolving under their noses throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a society, in short vastly more rich and complicated than they ever could have imagined. While the utopian vision that synthesized these various struggles faded rapidly after the early 1970s, the militants’ engagements on behalf of these communities persisted, giving rise to the various new social movements that continue to populate the French political landscape. The movements of the French Cultural Revolution, not May ’68 itself, gave rise to the new social movements such as women’s liberation, anti-racism, and ecology, but they were not therefore themselves “new social movements,” at least not as the term is generally employed by sociologists. According to the Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci’s classic formulation, whereas the “old” working-class social movements before the 1960s focused on the “freedom to have,” the “new” social movements of the 1970s and 1980s were concerned with the “freedom to be.”74 For Ronald Inglehart, similarly, the “new” social movements of the 1970s differ from their predecessors in terms of their “post-materialist” values and worldviews.75 With respect to social movements in France in particular, Henri Mendras has distinguished between the “political and syndical” militancy of the

workers' movements and the “moral” militancy born in 1968 (and of which Guy Hocquenghem, for Mendras, is emblematic). The movements born of May ’68 clearly displayed some elements of both “old” and “new” movements, but these disparate elements were unified, moreover, by a common vision and sensibility. By trying to impose a sociological taxonomy, or by focusing only the new social movements that later emerged from this milieu, we not only lose sight of this period’s complexity and uniqueness, we also fail to understand, I argue, its historical significance.

As Alain Touraine observed with the benefit of hindsight in 1995, in the same way that the industrial revolution of the early 19th century marked the entrance of work into the public and political spheres, May ’68 marked the entrance of everyday life. Just as work’s entrance into the public arena was impelled by a utopian imagination, so too, in France, was the entry of everyday life. Insisting on the irreducible utopian character of the May uprising, Touraine described May esprit as a “utopian communism.”

Emphasizing a different aspect of this esprit, I characterize the years immediately following May ’68 as a search for “domestic utopia” in Fourier’s sense of the term, or a “utopia of everyday life.” The militants of the French Cultural Revolution viewed the distinction between “public” and “private” as a bourgeois mechanism of repression, and they sought therefore to “deprivatize” everyday life, first of all as a means of destabilizing the dominant social-political order, but also in order to craft alternative principles for organizing everyday life. In a sense, their utopian vision was grander than any that had ever come before it; by “everyday life” they understood not only “work,” but

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all forms of human interaction, affection, and fellowship. Although the past provided them with some antecedents, these alternative principles, they realized, would have to be forged anew, through their lived experience, and, moreover, through a broadening of their horizons to incorporate the experience of others. To reduce this utopian moment to such modern day achievements as the parity laws and the “PACS” would be akin to reducing the socialist workers’ utopias of the 19th century to the thirty-five hour work and the minimum living wage.

Cornelius Castoriadis was more prophetic than he could have known when he wrote in 1968: “People rarely realize that they are creating new landmarks while in the process. More often than not it is only once their creation has taken on the imaginary solidity of the past that its meaning becomes clear, and, as a result of this mere reality, determinative of the future.” The cultural revolutionaries succeeded in transforming French society, but not necessarily in ways they intended or even could have imagined. Once dispersed throughout France, their creations took on lives entirely of their own. They had no way of knowing or understanding that posterity would one day view them as the pioneers of modern individualism.

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78 Refer to footnote 1.
Chapter Three

The Prelude (1944-1968)

Changes have taken place at such a rapid pace in the past 25 years that adults cannot assimilate them . . . Children are growing up in a world that was unknown to their parents. They are brought up by television. They do not form part of any religious, national or ethical structure that their parents knew. They belong to the whole world.

—Margaret Mead

Jean Fourastié was one of the key architects of France's economic recovery in the years following the Liberation. An enthusiastic advocate of "Americanization," and a missionary of the American-led Marshall Plan to rebuild the French economy, Fourastié dazzled French readers in the 1950s with his bestsellers depicting the new technological France of the future. By the early 1970s, however, after the economic shock of the first oil crisis, Fourastié's enthusiasm had tempered considerably. In 1979, he coined the phrase for which he is most well-known, "the thirty glorious years," to describe the three decades of rapid modernization following the end of the second World War. His study by that title famously opens with descriptions of two French villages, Madère and Cessac. This first is quaint, rural, and secluded; the second is bustling, connected, and teeming

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1 Lecture given in London, 1968.
with new tractors, automobiles, telephones, and televisions. The two snapshots, Fourastié then reveals, are actually of the same village, the first taken in the year in 1946 and the second in 1975.

*The Thirty Glorious Years* remains one of the most comprehensive and influential studies of the evolution of postwar France, but there was something about this period that continued to bother Fourastié in 1979. As he explained in one of the final chapters, entitled “The Gloom”:

The historians who, sooner or later, examine the newspapers of the period between 1946 and 1975 will find few accounts of the ardor of life or the joy of the French people. The great mutations in terms of quality of life and in life more generally are not to be found... Gloom, uncertainty, the recounting of catastrophes, accidents, and troubles dominate by far.\(^4\)

For Fourastié, the “thirty glorious years” was by no means a period of spiritual, cultural, or national renewal. “If I characterize the thirty years separating 1945 and 1975 as “glorious,” he emphasized,

...it is because they were, in my estimation, in terms of the quality of life and the realm of life, but not at all so in terms of philosophical reflection, art, literature, spirituality, demography, vitality, or virtue.... We have not yet reestablished, in comparison with our economic prosperity, the personality of our people and our social unity.\(^5\)

The swift reconstruction of the French economy in the decades following the Liberation was stimulated in large measure by the French peoples’ desire to put their noses to the grindstone and put the troubling events of recent memory behind them as quickly as possible. After France’s ignominious fall in 1940, and the four years of bitter occupation and civil war that followed, most French citizens were ready for some kind of return to normality, even at the heavy price of modernization at breakneck speed. In

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\(^4\) Ibid., 233.
\(^5\) Ibid., 277.
addition to an economic boom, the "thirty glorious years" was fueled by a postwar
demographic explosion, the "baby-boom." The baby-boom after World War II was by no
means unique to France, but it was particularly striking in that country where low-birth
rates and demographic stagnation had, for over a century, been the norm. But if
economic and demographic booms served as a steady motor for modernization during
these decades, the transformation of French politics and institutions progressed at a much
slower pace, and the evolution of French values and mores was still more halting.
Judging by the literary, philosophical, and artistic output of these decades, one might
hastily conclude that France was on the cutting edge of the social and cultural revolutions
of the 1960s. Beyond this small world of elites, however, it was quite another story.
Despite the rapid economic recovery, the steadily improving quality of life, and the
newfound affluence of the 1950s and 60s, the "thirty glorious years" brought with them
an array of new anxieties and uncertainties, many of which the French continue to
struggle with today.

French institutions were indeed evolving in the 1950s and 1960s, but not nearly
quickly enough to keep up with the emerging values of the new generation. On the eve
of May '68, French society still had much catching up to do. In this respect, there is
some truth to Gilles Lipovetsky's assertion that May '68 functioned as a belated exercise
in the "long-term dynamic of democratic individualism." The events of May '68
accelerated the processes of social and cultural transformation that would completely
change the face of French society by the time of François Mitterrand's rise to the
presidency in 1981. The path that lead from 1968 to 1981, however, was by no means

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clear cut. In the late 1960s, France seemed to be on the path towards a “gentle”
revolution, much like those that swept through the United States, Western Europe, and
Japan. May ’68, however, altered the trajectory of the student and youth movements by
reshuffling their priorities, re-channeling their energies, and, perhaps most importantly,
exploding their sense of possibility. In a sense, then, May ’68 derailed the evolution of
postwar France as much as it accelerated it.

Guy Hocquenghem was a exemplary baby-boomer, born at the peak of the
demographic boom. Between the years 1946 and 1975, the French population increased
dramatically from about 40.5 to 52.6 million. Part of the increase can be explained by
new waves of immigration in the postwar years, consisting of both French citizens
leaving the colonies, particularly in North Africa, as well as of native Europeans and
North Africans. The number of foreigners increased from about 1.7 million in 1946 to
about 3.4 million in 1975, with a marked jump in immigrants from North Africa. Part of
this increase was also due no doubt to a decline in mortality rates and an increase in life
expectancy. But more significantly, birthrates rose dramatically after the liberation –
from about 14.6 per 1,000 in 1938 to around 20 per 1,000 in the 1940s.7 Hocquenghem
was born in 1946, the year that saw the highest peak in birthrate, at about 21.4 per 1,000.
Whereas French families had only two children on average in 1935, between 1942 and
1964 they had three. Thus, while Hocquenghem’s household of six children may have
been unusually large, it was not completely out of the ordinary.

7 These statistics are from Robert Gildea, *France Since 1945* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 93-95.
Hocquenghem's hometown of Boulogne is a small town in the western suburbs of Paris, about five miles from the city center and separated from central Paris by the Bois de Boulogne. Although Boulogne had been more or less integrated into Paris proper since the early decades of twentieth-century, thanks largely to the town's most famous entrepreneur, Louis Renault, and his rapidly expanding automobile plants, Boulogne experienced many of the same transformations as the rest of France's rural and suburban communes. The Renault company itself was emblematic in many ways of the renewal of postwar France. An admirer of Hitler and Mussolini, Louis Renault was in no rush to convert his plants for military production when the Ministry of Armaments pleaded with him to do so. Instead of contributing to the efforts of the allies, Renault's plants were used to repair French tanks for use by the Germans during the Occupation. In 1942, British Air Force raids completely destroyed most of 's operation. After the Liberation, the Renault company was nationalized as punishment for "trading with the enemy," but also as a part of concerted effort to put the French economy back on firm footing. The same year that Hocquenghem was born, Renault produced its first small, affordable automobile out of its newly rebuilt plants in Boulogne, the 4CV - affectionately known as the "four horse" - France's answer to the Volkswagen and still Renault's most successful product to date. Like many bourgeois families in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Hocquenghem family owned one, and Guy spent much of his family vacations nauseous in its backseat.

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In the late 1940s and 1950s, the 4CV became an icon of economic modernization. By 1947, the year the "four horse" went into mass production, France's levels of production had already matched those of 1938. The economy was stimulated in large part by American national and private investment under the Marshall Plan, but also by the opening up of French trade to markets outside of its former empire. This combination of high investment and expanding trade helped the French economy grow at an average rate of 4.5 per cent per annum over the period from 1949 to 1959, faster than its American or British counterparts in other words, and second only to West Germany.\textsuperscript{10} The economy also gradually made the transition during this decade from one driven by production to one driven by consumption. Between 1951 and 1958, the number of privately-owned automobiles doubled, and half of these cars were new. Similarly, at the beginning of the 1950s, there were only about 24,000 televisions in France, but in 1958, there were nearly a million. Between 1950 and 1957, total household consumption grew by 400 percent, and new appliances such as vacuums and refrigerators accounted for a substantial portion of this growth.\textsuperscript{11}

Not everyone was as enthusiastic as Jean Fourastié about the arrival of American-style consumerism. The intellectuals and the cultural elite voiced concerns and sometimes actively resisted these developments. Overall, however, in the 1950s, there at least seemed to be a general consensus that rebuilding France entailed becoming more American. Coca-cola, Hollywood movies, and, moreover, American habits of consumption might be evils, but they were necessary ones if France was to restore its economic might and its role as a world leader. As the historian Richard Kuisel has

\textsuperscript{10} Statistics are from Gildea 99-101
\textsuperscript{11} Richard Kuisel, 105.
demonstrated, the American model in the postwar years took on a whole new significance; whether one perceived it as a menace or an ideal, it was impossible to ignore.\textsuperscript{12} In the 1960s, as the United States became increasingly involved in global political conflict – particularly in South East Asia – the rejection of American capitalism at home and American imperialism abroad would help fuel the student movements of May 1968. In the 1950s, however, popular opinion remained mixed, and, despite occasional eruptions of anti-Americanism from the populace, resistance was restrained. Intellectuals bemoaned the importation of American mass culture and consumerism. The communist left predictably denounced any American influence, and nationalists warned against the growing influence of America in European politics, but most French people were prepared to tolerate Americanization for the sake of rapid recovery and reconciliation.\textsuperscript{13}

For the young baby-boomers, the arrival of American culture was most welcome in the early postwar years. American “youth culture” in the 1950s took only a few years to reach France, and as in the United States, it was less warmly greeted by the older generations. Just two years after the Ed Sullivan Show famously censored Elvis’s gyrating hips in 1957, the French commercial radio station Europe No. 1 began airing France’s first Rock and Roll program, accompanied by a magazine based on the radio show. The program’s slangy title, “\textit{Salut les Copains}” (Hey There, Buddies), was sufficient enough to raise eyebrows in 1959. Although it seems rather innocuous compared to expressions of youth culture that would follow only years later, in a society

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.

where, as Hocquenghem recalls, his father continued to address his mother in the formal
"vous," the use of street talk came as a revelation. Also that same year, France
produced its first Rock icon, "the French Elvis," Johnny Hallyday, who helped expose
rock and roll to French audiences by adapting classic French *chansons* to its upbeat
rhythms. In 1963, Hallyday (born Jean-Phillipe Smet) headlined France's first major pop
music concert at the stadium at La Nation. The event attracted well over one hundred
thousand people, most of them under the age of twenty. It also attracted the ire of the
conservative French presses. According to one journalist at *Le Figaro*, for example,
"What difference is there between the twist...and Hitler's speeches at the Reichstag,
apart from the leaning towards music?"  

As in the United States and elsewhere in Western Europe, pop music (known as
"yü-yü" music in France) and pop culture more generally helped form the baby-boomers' 
early sense of generational identity. Borrowing heavily from the fashions and the music 
of the U.K. and the United States, the French would-be '68ers managed to develop a 
distinct cultural identity by the end of the 1950s. They had not yet, however, formed a 
distinct political identity. This is not to say that they were not yet politicized – French 
youth in the 1950s were probably more actively involved politically than any of their 
American or European counterparts. Their political energies, however, were still being 
channeled by the political institutions of their parents. Youth of leftist backgrounds in 
the 1950s, and especially those whose parents had participated in the Resistance, 
continued to attend communist youth meetings, read communist youth magazines, and 
attend communist youth camps in the summer. Youth from more conservative

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14 DH, 27.
15 Quoted in Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 105. For more on *Salut les Copains* and the arrival of rock and roll in France, see Marwick, 95-111.
backgrounds tended to join the youth groups of the Catholic Church, or even those of France's many nationalist or right-wing groups. Both the communists and the Catholic Church, the two largest political influences on French youth, were quick to realize the importance of the emerging youth culture in the 1950s. Unwilling to be outdone by "Salut les Copains," for example, the Communist Party launched its own version of a youth magazine in 1963 entitled "Nous Les Garçons et les Filles" ("Us Boys and Girls"), and the Catholic Church updated its youth-oriented magazines (which seemed rather shoddy in comparison with the flashy "Salut les Copains") to incorporate popular music, film, and fashion trends.¹⁶

It wasn't until the escalation of the colonial war in Algeria which led to the end of Fourth Republic that the French '68ers began to fashion a unique political identity to match their cultural one. In collective memory, as well as in the history books, the Fourth Republic has never been highly regarded.¹⁷ Forged hastily at the end of 1944, and approved by a popular referendum in the fall of 1946, it had the misfortune of having to face not only the task of postwar reconstruction, but also the challenges of the Cold War and decolonization. Modeled after the Third Republic, which collapsed ignominiously in 1940, the Fourth Republic was parliamentary, not presidential, and its parliament was controlled by shifting coalitions of political parties—some of which, like the Communist and Radical Parties, were resurrected from the Third Republic, and some of which emerged after the Liberation, such as the Catholic-influenced MRP and the Gaullist RPF.

¹⁶ Ibid., 104-8.
¹⁷ Still considered by many to be the standard history of the Fourth Republic is Jean-Pierre Rioux's two volume La France de la Quatrième République (Paris: Seuil, 1983). For a more recent, a more sympathetic, re-assessment of the Fourth Republic, see Pascale Goetschel and Bénédicte Toucheboef, La IVème République: La France de la Libération à 1958 (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2004).
parties. (Mouvement Républicain Populaire and Rassemblement pour la France). With twenty-one different governments over a period of fourteen years, not including the provisional governments before 1947, its record of stability was even worse than that of the Third Republic. As Charles de Gaulle had predicted, the parliamentary constitution of the Fourth Republic—which he had strenuously tried to block—put political power back in the hands of the party bosses, exactly where it had been in the Third Republic. Unwilling to play a mitigated role in this system, the General exiled himself from the new government, but not from politics altogether.

Beneath its chaotic veneer, however, the institutions of the Fourth Republic did at least provide France with enough continuity in terms of economic policy to rebuild within a very short period of time. And, surprisingly enough, it provided the country with enough political stability to avoid a communist revolution from the Left or a dictatorial coup from the Right. Even the gradual dissolution of the French Empire did not seem to pose a major political threat to the Fourth Republic—until that is, Algeria.

From the time of the French Revolution, France’s imperial ambitions had been plagued by a contraction: as an article of the Fourth Republic’s constitution (taken directly from the constitution of 1791) clearly stated, France would never undertake a war of conquest against the liberty of any people. To justify its imperial conquests, the French thus developed a firm ideological belief in their “civilizing mission” to bring enlightenment values and technical progress to the third-world. After the Liberation, France was forced to confront the reality that it no longer possessed the might, or perhaps even the will, to back up its civilizing ambitions. After the military defeat at Dien Bien

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18 See Ibid., 173-229, for a complete description of the new political spectrum of the Fourth Republic.
Phu in 1954, which forced the French to reconsider their goals for Indo-China, a new government was formed by Pierre Mendès France of the center-left Radical Party. Mendès France was a pragmatist who understood that further colonial wars would impede France’s economic growth and hamper its competitiveness in world markets. Under his leadership, French troops pulled out of Vietnam and negotiations were begun to promptly return sovereignty to Tunisia and Morocco where indigenous nationalist movements were quickly gaining momentum. But even the pragmatic Mendès France was unwilling to concede Algeria, which had been a colony of France since 1830 and was widely regarded as an extension of metropolitan France. The problem was compounded by the fact there were nearly a million French settlers (referred to as pieds-noirs) living in Algeria. In 1954, Algerian nationalists formed the National Liberation Front, or FLN (Front de Libération National) and inaugurated a paramilitary campaign in the southern mountainous region to create a sovereign Algerian state. Although France never officially admitted it was at war and strictly controlled news coverage of the conflict on the state-run media, the bloody fighting continued for eight more years, eventually reaching the mainland.  

When Albert Camus, himself a pied-noir, accepted his Nobel Prize for literature in 1957, he famously told students, “I believe in justice, but I would defend my mother before justice.” Camus aside, the left-leaning intellectuals, led by Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as some voices on the Catholic Right, began speaking out against the France’s brutal

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21 [quoted where?] On the intellectuals’ responses to the war in Algeria, see James D. Le Sueur, Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria (University of Nebraska Press, 2005). On Camus’s response in particular, refer to pages 98-146.
military tactics in Algeria as early as 1955. Public outcry against the war also began to
grow. In 1956, scattered protests erupted at railway stations across France as 70,000
young men who had already completed their military service in were recalled to Algeria.

It wasn’t until 1957, however, that the will of the politicians began to fail and the
tide of public opinion turned against the “war without a name.” After a wave of FLN
bombings in Algiers that year, special powers were handed to General Massu,
commander of the 10th Paratroop Division, to root out FLN supporters and restore order.
Massu then took license to begin a massive and brutal campaign of torture, assassination
and imprisonment. Soon enough, suspected French FLN sympathizers on the mainland
too were being arrested and tortured, such as the communist editor of _Alger républicain_,
Henri Alleg. In 1958, Alleg published a gruesome account of his experiences, entitled _La
Question_, which included a preface by Jean-Paul Sartre. Such accounts of the
paratroopers’ deadly tactics helped spread anti-war sentiment well beyond the realm of
the left-wing intellectuals.\(^{22}\)

Sensing perhaps that popular opinion was turning against them, a number of
militant *pieds-noirs* enlisted the help of right-wing groups and disgruntled military
leaders to stage a coup in Algiers on May 13, 1958, which succeeded in overtaking the
governor-general’s office.\(^{23}\) This act of civil war necessitated decisive action from the
politicians in Paris, but by this time, the Fourth Republic had become virtually
ungovernable.\(^{24}\) The problems in Algeria and a shifting of party alliances had forced
Mendès-France to resign in May 1956. Mendès France was succeeded by the Socialist


\(^{23}\) These events are recounted in Gilea, 6-34.

\(^{24}\) On the final months of the Fourth Republic and De Gaulle’s return to power, see _La IVème République_,
489-505.
Guy Mollet who himself was forced from power a year later by a strange alliance between the Communists and the Right. In October and November of that same year, five successive prime ministers were rejected for investiture by parliament. Then, coming full circle, another member of the Radical Party, the young and inexperienced Felix Gaillard, a rival of Mendès France, was finally instated. On the day when the military officers and right-wing extremists seized the governor’s office in Algiers, a new minister, the center-right Alsatian Pierre Pflimlin, was about to be sworn into power. The perception that Pflimlin was open to negotiating with Algerian nationalists mostly likely spurred the coup’s leaders to take decisive action that day. Believing de Gaulle to be on their side, the leader of the coup called for him to return to form a new government of public safety in Algiers.\(^{25}\)

Thus the stage was set for de Gaulle’s return to power. After letting the crisis spin out of control, he donned once again the role as France’s savior, issuing a communiqué stating he was ready to “assume the powers of the Republic.” Then, using a clever double game, he managed to win over the Algerian nationalists while at the same time convincing the politicians in Paris that he was their best safe-guard against political chaos, or worse still, a communist revolution. Under pressure from both the right and the left, Pflimlin resigned and the president of the Republic, René Coty, invited De Gaulle to form a new government. Sensing he had the upper-hand, de Gaulle asked the assembly not only for the full powers to form a new government, but also the authority to draft a new constitution. The politicians, mired in their own internal disputes and desperate, instated him by a vote of 329 to 224. Then, after a three-month long, carefully orchestrated media campaign, de Gaulle’s constitution was overwhelmingly approved by

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\(^{25}\) Ibid.
a referendum. The new constitution shifted power away from the parliament to the executive branch, placing the power to choose ministers, hold referenda, dissolve the assembly, and exert special powers in times of crisis in the hands of the president. The president, under the new constitution, was to be elected not by popular vote, but by an electoral college of approximately 80,000 representatives. With the political parties deeply divided, and for the lack of any other viable candidates, de Gaulle himself was easily elected the Fifth Republic’s first president.²⁶

Under these inauspicious circumstances, the Fifth Republic was born. At first, De Gaulle tried to play down the association between himself and the new regime. "Do people believe that at the age of 67 I am going to begin a career as a dictator?"²⁷ Many French men and women did in fact. After all, Marshal Pétain, began his career as dictator of the hated Vichy regime at the age of 84. Once safely in power, De Gaulle revealed his ambitions of creating a highly personal, presidential regime through his own brash statements, referring to himself not as an elected president, but as a "national arbiter," standing above the political parties. Sometimes he referred to himself in more mystical terms as the "embodiment" of France itself. Thus, while de Gaulle’s coup may have resolved a political crisis in the short-run, in the end it did little to inspire confidence in the new Republic and fueled new fears that France had fallen to another Napoleon III.

Nor did the coup immediately resolve the colonial crisis in Algeria. In late 1959, De Gaulle proposed to offer the Algerian people the choice between independence, integration with France, or something in between, but only after a four-year ceasefire. The violence, however, continued. This time, the struggle for a French Algeria was being

²⁶ Ibid.
²⁷ Cited in Gildea, 51.
led by a terrorist group made up of dissident soldiers and right-wing extremists that called itself the Secret Army Organization (*Organisation de l'Armée Secrète* or OAS), and their violent activities — which included an assassination attempt on de Gaulle — were being waged on the French mainland as well. At the same time, the French military's repressive campaign against the FLN also escalated. On October 17th, tens of thousands of Algerians — men, women, and children — organized a demonstration in Paris in favor of peace. The prefect of police, Maurice Papon, a former Vichy officer responsible for deporting Jews during the Occupation, responded with deadly force. At least seventy-five protestors were either beaten or shot to death, their bodies tossed into the Seine, and at least as many simply disappeared. Although an almost total news blackout by the state-run media makes exact figures difficult to estimate, some two hundred people probably died as a result of the attack. 28 On February 8, 1962, the trade unions and parties of the Left organized another anti-war protest. When the procession reached the Charonne metro station, police charged, killing eight and injuring hundreds. The following week, on the day of a mass funeral for Charonne's victims attended by half a million people, the unions called a general strike. In the spring of 1962, a ceasefire with the OAS was finally signed, and referenda on Algerian independence were overwhelmingly approved by both the French and the Algerians. The violence, however, did not finally abate until the following year. 29

The colonial crisis in Algeria and de Gaulle's dubious return to power helped politicize and radicalize the 68ers — most of them in their teens at the time — within a very short period of time. First of all, the crisis in Algeria badly damaged the credibility of

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29 See Gildea, 24-33.
the official Left, especially the Communist Party (the PCF) which, in the 1940s and 50s, had exerted a great deal of influence on French youth through its sister student organization, the UEC (Union des Étudiants Communistes) as well as through its various other youth camps and programs. The prestige of the PCF had been on a slow decline among the intellectuals at least since the late 1940s due to its strict ideological adherence to the Soviet Union. Many left-wing intellectuals abandoned PCF for the Trotskyism of the Fourth International, which was founded in Paris in September 1938. Others distanced themselves still further from organized communism. Since the late 1940s, there had been a number of dissident communist groups with no strict affiliations, whether to Lenin, Trotsky, or Mao. Socialism or Barbarism (Socialisme ou Barbarie), founded in 1949 by ex-Trotskyites Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort, was probably the most well-known and influential of these intellectual circles. Their journal by the same title was initially marginalized, if not completely ignored by the French Left. But as events in the east continued to validate their criticisms of Soviet communism in the course of the 1950s, the French began paying more attention.

In 1956, the PCF staunchly defended the Soviet invasion of Hungary, proving its unwillingness to stray from the Moscow party line. This proved too much even for Jean-Paul Sartre, the uncontested leader of the intellectual Left and a long time fellow traveler, who finally broke from the party that year. Furthermore, despite its nominally anti-colonialist stance, the PCF refused to take any kind of position either against the use of

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30 On the history of Trotskyism in France, see Christopher Nick, Les Trotskyistes (Paris: Fayard, 2002).
brutal force in Algeria or for Algerian independence. Also in 1956, the communist block
in the National Assembly voted for a special-powers law that gave free rein to the
hardliner minister-resident of Algiers to "pacify" the FLN and its supporters. As Jean-
Paul Sartre summed up the state of the PCF in a biting critique from 1956:

Consider this monstrous Party which blocks and freezes five million
voices, demobilizes the working class, abandons the interests of the
masses for parliamentary maneuvers, lightly denounces Algeria in order to
threaten the socialists, quite in vain, but at the same time does not hesitate
to rationalize its contempt with stupid declarations about the situation in
Hungary...Alliance with the Communist Party as it is and intends to
remain can have no other effect than compromising our last chances for a
common front.\(^{33}\)

In the early 1960s, official communism continued to play an important developmental
role in lives of French youth, largely because of its continued association with the heroic
Resistance of World War II and its deep institutional roots in French society. But it
would soon become clear to Hocquenghem and his radical leftist peers that if they wanted
to be a part of the avant-garde, they would have to begin looking elsewhere.

Many of the young 68ers were inspired by the example of the FLN to embrace the
causes of anti-colonization and began looking to the third world for newer, more vibrant
forms of Marxism. Once again, it was Sartre who showed the way, first by heading a
controversial manifesto in 1961 in support of a French FLN supporter on trial and on
behalf of the Algerian people, and then by writing the preface to Frantz Fanon's famous
psychopathology of the colonized mind, *The Wretched of the Earth*.\(^{34}\) Sartre's preface
went a step beyond criticizing the French colonial system in Algeria; it defended the use
of violence on the part of those struggling to free themselves from colonial rule. Anti-
colonialist activists like Fanon helped sensitive French youth not only to plight of those

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\(^{34}\) Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).
living in their colonies, but to daily racism and discrimination that immigrants faced on
the mainland, particularly those from North and West Africa. Soon enough, France’s
68ers also began looking beyond Algeria and France’s former colonies to Cuba, South
East Asia, the Middle East Latin America, and Africa for new sources of revolutionary
inspiration.

Finally, the circumstances surrounding de Gaulle’s return to power convinced
many young ‘68ers that their own society was still under the menace of totalitarianism as
it had been in the 1930s and 1940s. Already in 1958, as de Gaulle was still orchestrating
his return, many were crying fascism. On the 4th of September, when the General
organized an elaborate public ceremony to present his new constitution at the symbolic
Place de la République in Paris, he was greeted by some with chants of “No to the
dictatorship!” and “Fascism will not prevail!”35 And it was no accident, for example, that
one of the first youth-led anti-war movements called itself the Jeune Résistance, an
allusion to the Resistance movements of their parent’s generation. Founded in 1959, and
made up of primarily of draft-dodgers and deserters, Jeune Résistance denounced not
only the brutality of French forces in Algeria, but also what they perceived as the
resurgent militarism and fascism in de Gaulle’s new Republic.36 The fact that the violent
attacks on Paris protestors in 1961 and 1962 were led by former Vichy official Papon did
not help the General’s image either. Even for those unwilling to cry fascism, de Gaulle’s
control over the state-run media, his cult of personality, his abuse of presidential powers,
and his willingness to use force when censorship failed made it clear to many that France

35 Hamon and Rotman, 43-44.
36 See Gildea, 30-31.
had become, if not a dictatorship, then at least much more authoritarian than it had been before World War II.

According to Hocquenghem, May 13, 1958, the date of the nationalist coup in Algiers, was the first day he read the newspaper.\textsuperscript{37} When he arrived in Paris in 1962, two months before his sixteenth birthday, to attend the prestigious \textit{Lycée Henri IV}, one of the first things that struck him were the images of Algerians being tortured that had been pinned up on trees around the city with the caption: "They Are Torturing in Algeria!"\textsuperscript{38} Before arriving in Paris, it seems, Hocquenghem had considered himself a Gaullist, though probably more to irk his liberal left-leaning family than out of an admiration for the General.\textsuperscript{39} For one of his first school reports later that year he used Sartre's \textit{The Jewish Question} to analyze the problem of anti-Arab racism in France. That same year, he joined the PCF-affiliated youth group \textit{Jeunesse communistes}, which was, at the time, the largest and most influential of the Leftist organizations for students his age. After the police attack at the Charonne Metro stop, Hocquenghem also joined the throngs of students and workers who protested for days.\textsuperscript{40} And when Jean Genet’s controversial play about the war in Algeria, \textit{Les paravents} (The Screens) risked being pulled from the Odeon Theater after extreme-right militants stormed one of its performances, Hocquenghem was once again there with his fist in the air.\textsuperscript{41} From that year forward, Hocquenghem remained a stalwart political leftist. As he put it, in 1962, "I entered into politics, and I never came out."\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{37} AM, 57.
\textsuperscript{38} DH, 29.
\textsuperscript{39} AM, 58.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 59.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 29.
But there was much more than just politics that was driving a wedge between the 68ers and their parents in the early 1960s. Like their cohorts throughout the world, they sought new freedoms: freedom from the strictures of family and religious life, freedom from the constraints of the educational institutions, freedom of expression, and, of course, sexual freedoms. While all the Western democracies were struggling to adapt to these demands in the 1960s, there is much evidence to suggest that France was dragging its feet, at least in comparison the United States, England, Germany, and some of its other European neighbors. First of all, judging by the relative dearth of sociological literature and public commentary relating to French youth, authorities appear to have been slow to recognize the emerging youth subculture or even to identify, for example, the existence of a special demographic known as “teenagers.”\(^{43}\) There were also a number of factors specific to the French context that seem to have made the generational clash in the 1960s all the more acute: the presence of a highly-structured and centralized national education system, the strong influence of Catholic institutions, the solidity of the bourgeois family structure, and a long-standing national obsession with France’s low-birth rate and stagnating population.\(^{44}\) France under de Gaulle in the 1960s continued to resemble in many respects the France of Marshal Pétain in the 1940s, the France, in other words, of _Travail, Famille, Patrie!_ (Family, Work, Fatherland).

The state of women’s rights in France in the 1950s and 1960s clearly demonstrates the intransigence of the Fifth Republic to changing attitudes and the growing divide between the world of the intellectual and cultural elites and the rest of

\(^{43}\) Marwick, 95.

\(^{44}\) For a richer comparison between France, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Italy, see Ibid., 95-111. On the national obsession with France’s “birth dearth” since 1800, see Robert Nye, “Sex and Sexuality in France since 1800,” in _Sexual Cultures in Europe: National Histories_, Franz X. Eder, Lesley A. Hall, and Gert Hekma eds. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 91-113.
French society. On the one hand, France is generally considered the birthplace of modern feminist theory. In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir published her seminal work, *Second Sex*, still considered by many the bible of the modern women’s liberation movement. In terms of its cultural and artistic output too, France seemed to be on the vanguard in the 1950s. In 1956, for example, the French new wave director Roger Vadim’s “And God Created Woman” sparked an international scandal with its erotic depiction of the adventures of a village seductress (played by a young Brigitte Bardot). But in terms of the everyday lives of women, France was considerably behind the United States and many of its Western European counterparts in most other respects. De Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*, it is well worth noting, despite its immediate international celebrity, received a rather tepid reception when it first appeared in France, and had even begun to disappear from many French libraries by the 1950s.

After the Great War, which killed or wounded approximately one-fifth of France’s male population, the Third Republic imposed some of the strictest anti-abortion and anti-contraception laws in Europe. These laws were enforced throughout the 20s and 30s, and, during the Vichy regime, the sentences for such crimes were made even more severe. After the Liberation, de Gaulle famously forecasted “a nation one hundred million strong,” and amidst the popular fervor for rapid reconstruction, the pronatalist legislation seemed unlikely to change. In 1944 French women did finally receive the right to vote in national elections—the majority of them voted for de Gaulle for

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48 Ibid., 89-90.
president in 1945—but the vote changed little for women in the short-term. Throughout
the 1950s and 1960s women’s representation in politics was minimal, and the
advancement of women’s issues remained a low governmental priority. The proportion
of women in the National Assembly, for example, varied between two and five percent
during these decades. It wasn’t until the 1990s that the percentage of women in the
National Assembly finally rose above the seven percent it had been in the first
provisional government after the Liberation.\textsuperscript{49}

With respect to family life, it wasn’t until 1966 that married women could legally
work outside of the home without the consent of their husbands, and not until 1970 that
they were finally recognized as fully equal partners in their marriages.\textsuperscript{50} Also, although
family-planning clinics, equipped with the latest birth control techniques, were beginning
to appear in the United States and throughout Europe in the late 1940s and early 1950s,
the first family-planning clinic wasn’t created in France until 1961, and only after many
years of struggle on the part of doctors and feminists.\textsuperscript{51} The birth control pill, which was
in widespread use in the United States, England, and many countries in Western Europe,
remained illegal in France, along with all other forms of contraception, until the adoption
of the Neuwirth law in 1967. The long-overdue Neuwirth legislation, however, did not
lift the ban on family-planning “propaganda,” making public education about these new
forms of contraception nearly impossible. Thus, it wasn’t really until 1972 or 1973 that
modern forms of contraception became widely available to French women.\textsuperscript{52} French
women in the 1950s and 60s, of course, developed their own solutions to problems of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{49} These statistics are from \textit{Histoire du féminisme}, 93-94.
\bibitem{51} \textit{Les lois de l’amour: les politiques de la sexualité en France}, 25.
\bibitem{52} Ibid., 48-61.
\end{thebibliography}
family planning. According to some estimates, France averaged about 800,000 illegal abortions per year in the late 1950s, and about 65 percent of French women defied the State and the Church by practicing some form of illegal contraception.\textsuperscript{53} Public and political discourse about these issues, however, was relatively muted.

Similarly, although homosexual liberation movements in the United States and Western Europe were still a ways off in the 1960s—the Stonewall Riots in New York in 1969 are generally considered the watershed moment for modern homosexual liberation around the world—in terms of the recognition of homosexuality, France was clearly moving backwards in the 50s and 60s. As with women’s issues, the gap between the world of the intellectual and cultural elites and the lives of everyday homosexuals was striking. On the one hand, prominent cultural icons such as André Gide, Jean Cocteau, Roger Peyrefitte, and Jean Genet led openly gay lives and even publicly defended homosexuality in their art and literature. André Gide, who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1947 and later joined the ultra-prestigious Académie française, considered his controversial defense of homosexuality Corydon, first produced in a public edition in 1924, to be his most important work.\textsuperscript{54} In 1955, Gide’s friend and ally Cocteau also joined the Académie française, and in the late 40s and 50s, Jean Genet, who described the criminal and homosexual underworlds he knew so intimately in his novels, was one of the most highly-esteemed personalities of the Parisian intellectual world. Jean-Paul Sartre even penned a hagiography in honor of his revered friend in 1950, Saint Genêt comédien et martyr (Saint Genêt, Actor and Martyr).\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{53} See Seidman, 38.
\textsuperscript{55} Jean-Paul Sartre, Saint Genêt (New York: Pantheon, 1983). For bios of these figures, see Didier Eribon ed. Dictionnaire des cultures Gays et Lesbiennes (Parris: Larousse, 2003).
Once one descended from this privileged milieu, however, French society was as repressive and homophobic as it had ever been. As Hocquenghem described awareness of homosexuality in France in the 1960s:

For the general public, homosexuality exists only in the press’s revelations of a scandalous, secret and debauched underground. To this day, there has been no other state of mind toward homosexuality than the one which we see in the great morality trials of fifty years ago.\(^{56}\)

Although early initiatives to change attitudes towards homosexuality had gained some momentum, in the 1920s in many places in France, Germany, and Holland, the rise of fascism, the Second World War, and the beginning of the Cold War set the European movements back to square one in the postwar years. The German pioneer Magnus Hirschfeld, for example, worked tirelessly through the first three decades of the twentieth century to convince European governments to consider homosexuality as a biological fact and treat homosexuals humanely. His movement, however, was destroyed, along with his pioneering *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* (Institute for Sexual Science) in Berlin in 1933. (Hirschfeld died two years later after taking refuge in France.)\(^{57}\) In France, in 1942, Marshall Pétain introduced into Vichy law the notion of “unnatural” acts (contre-nature) which criminalized homosexual acts and a range of other sexual relations. Such laws had been notably absent in the Third Republic. In fact, laws against sodomy had not existed in France since they were expunged from the Old Regime by the French revolutionaries in 1791.\(^{58}\) After the Liberation, these Vichy-era laws were taken up into the French constitution of de Gaulle’s provisional government in Algiers, where they

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\(^{57}\) “Magnus Hirschfeld,” in *Dictionnaire des cultures Gays et Lesbiennes*, 244-246.

\(^{58}\) Girard, 14.
remained more or less in tact throughout the Fourth and even into the of the Fifth
Republcs. (It wasn’t until 1981 that they were fully retracted!). The defense of
homosexuality in the 1950s and 1960s thus was largely limited to the literary world and
to a small, brave minority in the medical and psychiatric community.

In 1948, the Kinsey Report - translated into French the same year it appeared in
English - sparked a heated debate in France and helped rekindle the homosexual cause.
Among the many surprising statistics in Kinsey’s study, perhaps the most shocking was
that 37% of white American males had had at least one homosexual experience in the
previous three years. In the early 1950s, the Kinsey Report helped inspire a handful of
short-lived publications aimed at promoting a scientific and humanistic defense of
homosexuality. (If homosexuality was “unnatural,” then how could one account for the
fact that if effects about 37 percent of the adult male population?) The most enduring and
influential of these attempts was the movement known as Arcadie. Founded by the
former Jesuit theologian and philosophy professor André Baudry, the first issue of
Arcadie’s journal, available by subscription only, appeared in January 1954. It included a
drawing and a letter of support from Jean Cocteau, and benefited from the patronage of
the former diplomat and novelist Roger Peyrefitte. Like its closest American counterpart,
the Mattachine Society, Baudry’s “homophile” organization preached tolerance and
acceptance of homosexuality as a biological and social fact and encouraged its readership
of several thousand subscribers to cultivate the kind of discreet respectability that would

60 For example, the review Futur, which lasted from 1952 to 1955. See Girard, 31-38.
help further this aim. (*Arcadie* discouraged, for example, cross-dressing and other forms of feminization.)

Sensing perhaps that the homophile cause was gaining momentum and that attitudes were slowly beginning to change, the deputy Mirguet, a conservative Catholic known to represent the concerns of the Church, decided to take action. In 1960, he delivered a famous speech to the National Assembly in which he declared that homosexuality had become a "*fléau social*" (social scourge) and pushed through an amendment to the Vichy-era laws criminalizing homosexuality that gave the government greater power to prosecute homosexuals. The punishments for crimes "against nature" were, accordingly, doubled. According to the Mirguet amendment, "When the outrage against public values involves cases of acts of unnatural acts with a member of the same sex, the punishment will consist of an imprisonment of six months to three years and a fine of 1,000 to 15,000 francs."

When Hocquenghem arrived at the Lycée Henri IV in 1962, there weren't very many options for socialization open to French homosexuals. On the one hand, there was – as there had always been - a murky network of bars, nightclubs, and discreet public meeting places. This homosexual underworld, however, had become an increasingly dangerous place to frequent, particularly after the passing of the Mirguet amendment in 1960. At the height of the Cold War, France seemed to be undergoing something of a "pink scare." During the Fourth Republic, the Catholic Church had found a powerful political ally in the *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* or MRP, the dominant center-right political party. Under the MRP, *the Cartel D'Action Morale* (Moral Action Cartel) was

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61 For a history of Arcadie, see Girard, 39-73.
62 Quoted in Mossuz-Lavau, 287-288. See also Girard, 15-18.
created in 1949 to combat prostitution, transvestism, homosexuality, and other forms of public debauchery. Among its first initiatives were the closing of Paris’s historic brothels and bars of ill-repute known to cater to homosexuals, prostitutes, and transvestites. The Cartel also demolished Paris’s famous street urinals (pissotières), which had, for decades, been notorious sites of homosexual cruising.\textsuperscript{63}

In the 1950s and 60s, the repression of homosexuality appeared to wax and wane according the whims and resources of the city officials and police. So while homosexuals continued to adapt and invent new ways of socializing, they could never relax and let their guard down. One never knew when the city authorities might suddenly take a renewed interest in enforcing the plethora of city ordinances designed to crack-down on homosexual activities. City officials, especially in Paris, didn’t have to work very hard to come up with excuses to round up homosexuals. Since 1949, it had become illegal in Paris for men to wear women’s clothes in establishments that served alcohol or to dance with other men in public (though there was no mention of women cross-dressing or dancing with one another). One could even be arrested and fined for public cruising if it was deemed by the police that one’s “gestures or words” were aimed at “provoking debauchery.” In Paris, there was even a specific police brigade whose job it was to monitor the “social scourge,” the \textit{Groupe de contrôles des homosexuels}, and if a public employee was caught in one of their raids, he risked more than just a beating, a fine, or jail time; he could also be publicly outed and fired from his job. According to an article dating to 1946, all civil servants were bound to a strict code of “good morals” (\textit{bonne moralité}).\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{63} Girard, 18-22.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
If this shadowy world of underground homosexuality wasn’t one’s cup of tea, one could also choose to live one’s homosexuality charily, among one’s family of close friends, preferably somewhere away from the bustle of city. Such was the lifestyle of René Schérer, Hocquenghem’s new philosophy professor at the Lycée Henri IV. Schérer spent his weeks in a small hotel room in Paris and his weekends and vacations with his self-fashioned family in a large home outside of the city. Like many homosexual professionals, he was aware of Arcadie in the 50s and early 60s, and he even subscribed to its journal which arrived once a month, discreetly wrapped and modestly titled Revue littéraire et scientifique (Literary and Scientific Review). But Schérer didn’t consider himself a homosexual activist. His passions were philosophy, literature, and art - not politics. Born in Tulle in 1922, Schérer studied at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris before completing his aggregation (a prestigious teaching certificate) in philosophy. Like many in his generation, his earliest philosophical influences were Hegel and Marx. Also like many of cohorts, he abandoned Marxism in the early 1950s—and the French Communist Party with it—in search of new sources of philosophical insight. Schérer turned first to Husserl, Heidegger, and phenomenology before embracing Charles Fourier, the philosophical muse who inspired his thought ever since. Schérer’s elucidations of Fourier’s utopian philosophy would have a profound influence on Hocquenghem and help shape the theory of early homosexual liberation movement. If

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65 Girard, 40-41.
Hocquenghem was homosexual liberation's dashing firebrand in the 1970s, then Schérer was its humble philosophical guru.  

When Hocquenghem arrived in Schérer’s classroom on his first day of school, eager to discover “this strange idea of ‘philosophy’” he was initially surprised by the short, stocky figure who spoke in a thick Alsatian accent and resembled a “tanned farmer (paysan) more than an intellectual.” Schérer recalled from their initial meeting being astonished by Hocquenghem’s uncharacteristic poise for his age. Belying the awkwardness of his poorly fitting sweater and lanky limbs, he possessed “a natural grace, the elegance of a young prince.” Later in the year, as they came to know one another, Schérer invited Hocquenghem over to his Paris flat where Hocquenghem, for the first time in his life, made love with another man. Riding back home on the metro from Schérer’s apartment that evening, Hocquenghem could not stop repeating to himself:

If the people around me only knew... knew that I’d just made love to man. How would they react? The dim-witted domestics with their melancholic faces, the petty functionaries in their dirty suits, the students in their glasses...  

The two began an affair, and Schérer started taking Hocquenghem to his vacation home in the country, which they referred to affectionately as the “Moulin” because of its derelict water mill that once pumped mineral spring water. At the Moulin, Hocquenghem met for the first time ‘real’ homosexuals, Schérer’s family of friends. Like Schérer, they were, for the most part, unassuming professors, lawyers, and businessmen by week. Hocquenghem did not really consider himself a homosexual then, not at first at least.

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66 For a biography and a bibliography of René Schérer, see Ron Haas, René Schérer’s Hospitalités, Radical Philosophy Review 8 (November, 2005): 157-162.
67 AM, 63.
68 Ibid., 65
69 Ibid., 111-112.
70 Ibid., 65-66.
Initially, he recalled, he “knew nothing about homo- or heterosexuality. Only vice interested me, as a kind of avant-garde, a secret aristocracy...” Hocquenghem thought of himself as a “pervert” (perver, which can also mean fag or queer) before anything else. Later, when he became a regular guest at the country house, he found a lover his own age. It was only then, he remembered, that he started to think of himself as a homosexual, too.

Hocquenghem relished this opportunity to live a secret, forbidden life, one that defied all social and moral conventions, just as he had enjoyed absconding from grade school in Boulogne to sneak cigarettes as a young adolescent or feigning not being related to his family as a young boy. At the same time, Hocquenghem was intrigued by Schérer’s weekend family, with its eccentric personalities, its complicated interpersonal dynamics, its parodying of bourgeois family life, and its queer, improbable harmony. This world came abruptly to an end for Hocquenghem the day the Moulin burned down in an accidental fire. Hocquenghem associated the burning of the Moulin in his memoirs with the closing of an era for homosexuals, the era of Arcadie, an era of fear and discretion, but also one of camaraderie. At around the same time, however, Hocquenghem was beginning to spend more and more time with friends his own age, particularly those who shared his political ideas, but he and Schérer would remain close throughout his life.

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71 Ibid., 61.
72 Ibid., 60.
73 Ibid., 79.
As in the United States, the place where the generational clash finally came to a head in France was the university. With the postwar baby-boom, student populations throughout Europe swelled, but the most dramatic increase by far occurred in France where, according to long-standing tradition, a passing grade on the *Baccalauréat* (or Bac), a university entrance exam usually taken in one’s last year of *Lycée*, entitled one to a free university education. Whereas there had been only 60,000 students in institutions of higher education in 1938-1939, there were some 280,000 in 1961-62, and over 600,000 in 1967-1968 – an increase of approximately tenfold in one generation. In Paris alone, there were 160,000 students in 1968.\footnote{These statistics on the growth of the student population are from Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*, 18-19.} The French government recognized the coming crisis in the late 1950s and accordingly began expanding old campuses, creating new ones, and augmenting budgets. Between 1958 and 1968, university spending increased six fold.\footnote{Ibid., 20.} Whereas the percentage of the national budget devoted to education was about 10% at the end of the 1950s, in 1965 it had surpassed 17%, well beyond the one-sixth that Jules Ferry, founder of the national education system in the Third Republic, had considered ideal.\footnote{Didier Fischer, *L’histoire des étudiants en France de 1945 à nos jours* (Paris, Flammarion, 2000), 268.} Despite its efforts, however, the Fifth Republic was simply outmatched by demography. University housing quickly became limited and overcrowded – in 1960 for example, less than one out of four students seeking university housing was successful.\footnote{Ibid., 284.} Classes were overbooked and overstuffed, often with students standing in the halls and by the doors listening to lectures, and, despite the hiring of thousands of new faculty – generally at the adjunct and associate levels – student access to professors had become severely limited.
The composition of the student body, too, was changing dramatically. Whereas women made up only about 33 percent of the student population in 1950, by 1965 the ratio was nearly one to one. Also, whereas in 1950 only about 17 percent of students came from the lower-middle classes of artisans, shopkeepers, and industrial workers, ten years later that percentage had doubled. 78 There were, however, limits to these democratizing trends. In the 1960s, French universities remained solidly bourgeois in comparison with their American and Western European counterparts. Among the major industrial nations, for example, France still had the lowest percentage of students from industrial, working-class families – about 10%, which was considerably lower than even Italy. 79 And although the female to male ratio was almost even, a large percentage of women were still being oriented towards teaching careers, and women remained extremely under-represented in the elite professional schools such as law and medicine.

Also, the greatest swell in enrollment during this period occurred not in the science departments, but in the humanities. Especially popular were the newer social sciences such as sociology and psychology. The percentage of students enrolling in the sciences and medicine, on the other hand, was on the steep decline. 80 This meant that students in the humanities and social sciences suffered not only the worst university conditions in terms of course availability and overcrowding, access to professors, and access to books and libraries, but also the worst job prospects after graduation. Anxiety among the general university population in the 1960s was mounting, and not without reason. Between 1962 and 1968 the number of unemployed people under the age of 25

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78 Seidman., 19-20.
79 Ibid., 20.
80 Fischer, 270.
increased by a factor of three. The exponential rise in the number of university graduates generated fierce competition on the job markets, which, while still expanding in many sectors in the 1960s, simply could not keep pace. Students in the humanities and social sciences were perhaps the most acutely aware of the impending employment crisis, not only because they faced the worst odds after graduation, but because they had been supplied with tools and the mindset with which to analyze themselves and their society.

Furthermore, for those lucky enough to find university housing in the 1960s, the living conditions were dismal, perhaps the worst in all of Europe. University administrators in the 1960s continued to govern dormitory life according to a rigid in loco parentis theory of higher education, setting strict curfews, regulating student socializing, and, perhaps most significantly, limiting contact between male and female students. Towards the end of 1962 the issue of male access to female dorms touched off a major conflict between students and authorities at a university residence just south of Paris. On the campus of Antony, male students intent upon gaining entry into a female dormitory destroyed a warden’s lodge guarding it. Later, about 2,000 male students staged a protest against the construction of a new warden’s lodge by physically blocking workers from completing their work. The administration was finally forced to bring in city police to guard the site of the new lodge day and night, but by the time the lodge was completed, the protests had spread throughout the student body. Soon the students were organizing strikes and marches for a variety of new demands, such as the opening of more student restaurants, the creation of day-care centers, and the lowering of student rents.

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81 Seidman, 19.
82 At least according Arthur Marwick, 555.
83 On the student strikes at Antony from 1962 to 1965, see Seidman, 37-44 and Marwick, 556.
Many of the students’ demands were eventually met by the administration in part or in whole. More significantly, however, the “Love Wars” at Antony as the presses referred to it at the time, helped transform the student unions into a potent political force. The largest and most influential of these unions in the 1960s was the UNEF (*Union national des étudiants de France*), which had played a central role in previous years in uniting French students with the major trade unions to protest the war in Algeria. Such activities had made the UNEF the bane of Education Minister Christian Fouchet, who reacted by cutting the unions’ state subsidies. This, however, only made the UNEF more appealing to young leftists, as well as to the leftist trade unions who happily picked up the financial slack. During the events at Antony the UNEF held a national conference in Dijon and voted to transform their organization from a representative council into an activist trade union with the power to call strikes or organize demonstrations. Like its counterparts in the United States and Western Europe – such as the American Students for a Democratic Society and the German SDS - the UNEF was not a homogenous organization, but one in which different factions competed for influence and control. In the course of the 1960s, it was the radical leftist groups, such as the anarchists and the Trotskyites, who were slowly gaining the upper-hand.

Nowhere was the university crisis--and the government’s powerlessness to resolve it–more evident than at the university campus at Nanterre. Located just west of Paris in a dreary working-class suburb, dominated by government subsidized housing and immigrant shanty-towns known as “bidonvilles,” Nanterre was hastily erected in 1964 in a record time of less than one year. When it opened its doors that fall, it was still lacking basic amenities, such as cafeterias, sports facilities, and even a library (the library at

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84 Marwick, 556.
Nanterre did not open until 1968!). The metro lines that provide easy access to Nanterre today had not yet been completed either. Most shocking, however, at least to the casual observer, was that apparently no thought had been put into the aesthetics of the campus itself; the ugly concrete and steel buildings had few windows, and the grounds had not even been landscaped. Designed originally to accommodate some 2,000 students, many of whom were forced to commute from the Paris city center, Nanterre was notoriously overcrowded. In the fall of 1965, it greeted approximately 4,600 students, (more than twice the intended number) and by 1967, it had close to 10,000.\textsuperscript{85} Henri Lefebvre, a sociology professor who moved to Nanterre from the University of Strasbourg, described the campus as:

\begin{quote}
...a desolate and strange landscape...conceived in terms of the concepts of industrial production and productivity of an advanced capitalist society.

...The buildings and the environment reflect the real nature of the intended project. It is an enterprise designed to produce mediocre intellectuals and junior executives for the management of society. [At Nanterre] unhappiness becomes concrete.\textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

Hocquenghem was for the most part spared the misery that faced other first-year students at campuses like Nanterre all over France. In 1965, with the help of René Schérer, he joined the one hundred or so other students selected to attend the \textit{École Normale Supérieure} in Paris's Latin Quarter. Admission to the ultra-prestigious ENS guaranteed a healthy stipend and a spot somewhere in a university dormitory – both precious commodities for students in France in the 1960s. Originally founded during the

\textsuperscript{85} Seidman, 22.
First Republic in 1794 as a teacher-training college, the ENS had developed in the course of the 19th century into one of the most elite educational institutions in all of Europe.\textsuperscript{87} Since the late 19th century, it had also acquired a reputation as a training-ground for leftist theorists and activists of all stripes – in the two or three decades prior to Hocquenghem’s matriculation, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Pierre Bourdieu all attended. In the 1920s, Jean Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty passed through the halls and, a generation before them, France’s great socialist leaders Jean Jaurès and Léon Blum both matriculated. The ENS in the sixties was certainly no different. Describing a leftist gathering at the ENS in the 1960s, Hocquenghem wrote:

A leftist (gauchiste) meeting in one of the school’s classrooms. Marble busts of historians and archeologists stare down through their empty ocular orbits at the longhairs in jeans who, through their regime of cigarettes and all-nighters, and as if ravaged by worry, had achieved the whitish pallor fitting of a true revolutionary. A revolutionary with a tan? That was nonsense.\textsuperscript{88}

1965 would prove to be a watershed year not only for student politics, but for French society as whole. The eminent French sociologist Henri Mendras famously argued that 1965 marked the beginning of a new phase in the evolution of postwar French society, the dawn of the “Second French Revolution” as he dubbed it. According to Mendras, the revolution that began in 1965, a revolution of French institutions, and, moreover, of “the social structures which organize the lives of groups and individuals”\textsuperscript{89} was as far-reaching and profound as those which took place in the years following 1789. 1965, first of all, witnessed the first major shift in the postwar demographic and

\textsuperscript{87} On the history of the ENS, see Jeannin Pierre, Deux siècles à normale sup’: petite histoire d’une grande école (Paris: Larousse, 1994).
\textsuperscript{88} AA, 89.
\textsuperscript{89} Henri Mendras with Alistair Cole, Social Change in Modern France: Towards a Cultural Anthropology of the Fifth Republic (Cambridge University Press, 1991), vii. For an overview of the “Second French Revolution,” see 1-12.
economic trends. It was the first year since the war that the birthrate dropped, and while the population continued to grow steadily after 1965, much of the increase after 1965 was due to immigration, especially from North Africa. At the same time, life expectancy and the general standard of living continued to increase, while the length of the work week and the age of retirement decreased. Consumption rates continued to grow exponentially, and, gradually, the economy began to shift from one driven by production to one driven by consumption. 1965, tellingly, was also the year when supermarkets, a recent invention in France, began to spread throughout the cities and the countryside.

Beyond economics and demographics, 1965 also witnessed a number of important milestones in the evolution of French values and mores. It was, first of all, the year of the Second Vatican Council in Rome, which significantly reformed the discipline and the rites of the Catholic Church. It was also the first year that nudity appeared in magazines and on the big screen. 1965 furthermore witnessed two new trend-setting developments in the family: a decline in the annual number of marriages and an increase in the number of divorces. The French began waiting longer to get married, having fewer children, and spending more time with their hobbies. Not everyone, of course, was able to benefit from this newfound economic security and the slow relaxation of traditional values--unemployment rates were on the rise, and students, immigrants, and young adults in general were the most effected. But on the whole, according to Mendras:

The French people appeared suddenly to have become aware that a hard twenty-year effort to reconstruct the nation was about to bear fruit, that they could take a break, work less and have fewer children, in order to start enjoying the rewards of their labor.90

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90 Ibid.
Taking after Antony’s “love warriors,” many students in 1965 were eager to accelerate this process of relaxation. Students on the radical left began to incorporate the new demands for freedom into their Marxist worldviews. While they continued to read passionately Marx and Lenin, a number of more contemporary, and less orthodox, thinkers began filtering into the discussion. Although it is often assumed that the writings of Frankfurt School theorist Herbert Marcuse—particularly *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and *One-Dimensional Man* (1964)—played a key role in igniting the student movements, a far more significant stimulus came from another unorthodox Marxist, Wilhelm Reich. Reich received his training as a psychoanalyst under Freud in Vienna in the late 1910s before founding his own practice in Berlin in 1930. Although he had never been an orthodox Freudian, while Reich was in Germany, his ideas began to diverge sharply from those of his master. (He was eventually banned from the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1934.) Unlike Freud, for example, Reich did not believe that society was doomed to its “discontents.” A committed Marxist, Reich believed that sexual repression in modern society was a result of the bourgeois capitalist system, and that the sexual liberation of the proletariat, the most sexually repressed of the social classes, was a necessary step towards the creation of a socialist society. The communist movement in Germany in the 1930s had fallen short, he believed, because it had failed to address the sexual frustrations of the proletariat. Similarly, Reich would later argue that Nazism had succeeded in Germany because its leaders knew how to

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manipulate the repressed sexual energies of the masses. (Such heretical views also made him unpopular with his fellow communists, who denounced him to the Nazis in 1933.) In the 1930s, Reich founded the German Association for a Proletarian Sexual Politics (better known as “Sexpol”) and agitated for sexual liberty, the right to abortion, and the legalization of contraception. Widely read and discussed in France in the 1960s, particularly on the campuses of Nanterre and Antony, Reich’s works provided French students with an early theoretical apparatus for bridging their concerns to those of the working classes.\(^2\)

Another important influence in the late 1960s, situationism, was inspired by the avant-garde art movements of the first half of the century. Originally a pan-European organization founded in Italy in 1957, the Situationist International (SI) aimed, like its predecessors Dada and Surrealism, to abolish art by incorporating it into the fabric of everyday life. Art, for the SI, was either revolutionary or nothing at all. Although the SI never had more than forty or so members at any given time – it was plagued from the beginning by factional disputes and scissions – its ideas spread rapidly throughout Europe and continue to outlive the organization which disbanded in 1972. In the late 1950s, situationist ideas began to infiltrate the Paris art world at the same time as the American “happening” movement was crossing the Atlantic. The most important figure in this cultural exchange was, without a doubt, Jean-Jacques Lebel, a close friend of Marcel Duchamp who frequented the art scene in the United States. In 1964, Lebel created the first Free Expression Festival to showcase French performance art. The festival was repeated each following year and often ended in confrontations with the police and

\(^2\) Hamon and Rotman, 386-8; 399-403
arrests for "outrage aux bonnes moeurs" (affront to public decency). Between 1964 and 1967, such "happenings" multiplied throughout France. 93

It wasn’t until 1966, however, that situationism became overtly politicized in France. At the beginning of the academic year, six situationist fans who had been elected to the UNEF council at the University of Strasbourg decided to contact the Paris section of the SI for help creating a scandal. They then arranged to use their union’s funds to print and distribute 10,000 copies of Mustapha Khayati’s pamphlet, "On the poverty of student life..." at the ceremony marking the inauguration of the new year. The pamphlet opens:

We might very well say, and no one would disagree with us, that the student is the most universally despised creature in France... He may be worth the contempt of a true revolutionary, yet a revolutionary critique of the student situation is currently taboo on the official left. 94

The harsh reactions of the university administrators and the generous press coverage from all corners of France turned the event into a national scandal. As a result, the Strasbourg UNEF chapter was closed and the Strasbourg situationists were stripped of their offices.

In short, the lampoon was an enormous success. The pamphlet was immediately translated into ten different languages and distributed throughout the world. 95 In France alone, more than 300,000 copies of the pamphlet found their way into print in the period leading up to May 1968. 96 Khayati’s pamphlet was also followed by the publication of

94 "On the poverty of student life considered in its economic, political, psychological, sexual, and particularly intellectual aspects, and a modest proposal for its remedy" repr. in Beneath the Paving Stones: Situationists and the Beach, May 1968 (Edinburgh: AK Press/ Dark Star, 2001), 9-27.
the two most important treatises of French situationism, Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* and Raoul Vaneigem’s *The Revolution of Everyday Life. (Traité de savoir-vivre à l’usage des jeunes générations* is the original French title.) After the Strasbourg Scandal, it became common for students to think of themselves as a unique revolutionary force, the proletariat of the future.

One often overlooked native influence on the student movements was the existential Marxism of the well-placed philosopher Henri Lefebvre. In the early 1960s, Lefebvre taught sociology at the University of Strasbourg where he mentored the students who instigated the situationist scandal in 1966. After 1966, he moved to Nanterre where he advised Dany Cohn-Bendit and a number of other would-be student leaders.\(^7\)

Although he had a fractious relationship with many of his student disciples—Lefebvre did not appreciate their constant disruptions of the university’s activities—his students nonetheless developed a profound respect for the man and his philosophy, even if they did not always show their gratitude. In 1949, Henri Lefebvre was one of the first Marxist intellectuals to criticize the French Communist Party, which he finally broke with in 1956. Collaborating with such dissident Marxist groups as *Arguments* and Jean-Paul Sartre’s circle at *Les Temps Modernes*, Lefebvre dedicated much of the rest of his career to elaborating a Marxist “critique of everyday life” based Marx’s early writings on alienation. For the early Marx, according to Lefebvre, “Changing the world meant first of all changing everyday life, real life.”\(^8\) On the eve of May 1968, Lefebvre published what was probably his most influential work for the student movements, *Daily Life in the*

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\(^7\) On Henri Lefebvre’s career, see Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* (New Jersey: Princeton University, 1975), 209-262.

Modern World. Echoing the analyses of his contemporaries Herbert Marcuse and Wilhelm Reich, Lefebvre posited “desire” as an irreducible mole of resistance in the struggle against modern forms of alienation, and he advocated total revolution—political, economic, and cultural—as the only possible revolution in the age of consumer capitalism.

Finally, in the late 1960s, there was also a resurgence of interest in a number of indigenous utopian and anarchist thinkers such as Charles Fourier and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon on French campuses. Fourier’s philosophy in particular had enjoyed a significant influence on the French avant-garde since his rediscovery by André Breton and the Surrealists in 1940s. In 1966, Fourier’s personal notes, long thought to have been destroyed, suddenly resurfaced in Paris, leading to the publication of Le Nouveau Monde Amoureux, (The “new world of love,”), a satirical diatribe against the sacred ideas of love and marriage that arrived just in time for the sexual revolution.\footnote{La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).}

From these various sources, French students began to piece together the “counter-utopia” that Alaine Touraine described as the dominant ideology of the May ’68 student uprising. Against the technocratic utopian vision of the leaders of the Fifth Republic, which reduced all social problems to matters of modernization, adaptation, and integration, the students in May, Touraine argued, constructed their own “utopian communism.” “The message of the technocrats who controlled society was adapt yourself, to which the May movement countered express yourself.”\footnote{Charles Fourier, Le nouveau monde amoureux (Paris: Anthropos, 1966). Recently re-edited by Raoul Vaneigem as Des harmonies polygames en amour (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2003). On the history of Fourier’s recovered manuscripts, see Vaneigem’s introduction, “Une oeuvre au future,” 7-35.} But although broadly influential, particularly for students in the humanities and social sciences, this
utopian vision remained marginal in the years leading up the May revolt. Most students in France were pre-occupied with more pressing concerns, such as finding a place to live, getting the courses they needed, and finding a job after graduation.

Like many of his peers, Hocquenghem’s political trajectory in 1965 was moving steadily in more radical directions. Although he remained active in France’s largest student union, the UNEF, he quit the official communist student organization, the Union des Étudiants Communistes (UEC) during his first year at the ENS. Due to its institutional ties to the French Communist Party, the influence of the UEC in student politics had been on the wane since the late 1950s. (The UEC, consequently, would play only a minor role in the events of May ’68.) One of the worst blows to the organization came in 1965, when the Communist Party Central Committee was forced to intervene in the affairs the Sorbonne Humanities (Lettres) chapter in order to rid it of certain heretics who had come to hold positions of power within its ranks.\(^{102}\) In years prior, this chapter had been taken over by a variety of anti-Soviet factions. Most significantly, it had been infiltrated by a group of rebellious Trotskyists led by the history student Alain Krivine. The final straw for Krivine and his followers came with the Communist Party’s official endorsement of François Mitterrand, the leader of the Socialist Party, for president in 1965. Krivine and his comrades circulated a tract accusing the Soviet Union of being hopelessly revisionist – the worst insult one communist could level against another - and the PCF of being its unwitting pawn. The international communist movement, they

\(^{102}\) This episode is described in Richard Johnson, *The French Communist Party versus the Students: Revolutionary Politics in May-June 1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 54-57.
argued, had been led astray by the Soviet Union's abandonment in the 1920s of Trotsky's theory of "permanent revolution" in favor of "socialism in one country" and its decision to pursue a peaceful coexistence with the capitalist West. Since that time, furthermore, the Soviet Union had been using the foreign communist parties like the PCF primarily to further their own diplomatic ends while repressing any indigenous strategic or theoretical developments. After circulating this tract, Krivine and his friends didn't need to hand in their UEC membership cards; the Communist Party simply replaced them (and subsequently instituted a new screening process for evaluating future UEC leaders).

Hocquenghem was well acquainted with the factional wars within the UEC, and he knew personally and sympathized with many of those in Krivine's circle at the Sorbonne. Thus, when Krivine helped found the *Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire* in opposition to the UEC -- and, more importantly, the PCF -- in April 1966, Hocquenghem decided to jump on board. Although a Trotskyist organization of sorts -- it had no official ties to any Trotskyist party, but many of its leaders, like Krivine, had been involved in the Trotskyist *Parti Communiste Internationale* -- the JCR followed no strict doctrine and took as much inspiration from Fidel Castro and Che Guevara as it did from Trotsky. Strongly influenced by Rosa Luxembourg, the leaders of the JCR emphasized spontaneity and direct action over organization and believed in establishing close ties with the workers by joining them in their struggles. Also, like some of their revolutionary heroes, Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro, and Che Guevara, they had come to believe that youth represented the new revolutionary vanguard and that the younger Marxist movements of the third-world held out the most promise for re-invigorating the international workers movements.

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In the beginning of 1966, the JCR, which had some 300 members, was only one of many radical leftist groups beginning to emerge in opposition to the Communist Party. It soon established itself as the cutting edge of the student left, however, by taking a leading role in the anti-war movement -- the American war in Vietnam, that is. After the conclusion of the war in Algeria in 1962, American involvement in Vietnam, and American imperialism more generally, began to play an increasingly central role in the mobilization of the student Left. In the first issue of the JCR’s paper *Avant-garde Jeunesse*, the editors promised that “in the months to come the war in Vietnam will be one of the central axes of our struggle.”\(^{104}\) To this promise they held true. Although a number a different leftist groups worked to organize protest against the war, from 1966 to 1968, it the was the JCR who formed the front flank. In the fall of 1966, JCR leaders formed the *Comité Vietnam National* (CVN), an organization which quickly spread throughout all of France’s university towns and which, by 1967, could boast the active support of many of France’s leading intellectuals and media celebrities. The anti-war movement in France also provided the JCR and other student leftist groups with the occasion to assert their autonomy vis-à-vis the PCF.\(^{105}\) Although the PCF too tried to organize opposition to the “second Vietnam War,” their timid call for “*Paix au Vietnam*” (Peace in Vietnam) in the years leading up to 1968 was drowned out by the more belligerent student cries of “*FNL vaincra!*” (The Vietnamese National Liberation Front will triumph!) and “*Ho! Ho! Ho Chi Minh!*”\(^{106}\) Much as it did in the United States, the Vietnam war served as a political initiation for many youth in France, particularly for


\(^{106}\) Ibid., 165.
those who were too young to have experienced the war in Algeria. But whereas the anti-
war movement in the United States brought together a large spectrum of political and
religious tendencies, in France it functioned primarily to further radicalize the student
Left.\footnote{For an extended comparison of the Vietnam War protest in France in the United States, see Geneviève
in Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand et al., eds., Les Années 68: Le temps de la contestation, 49-68.}

In the JCR, Hocquenghem quickly established a reputation for himself as a
creative thinker, a charismatic debater, and a talented writer. Not long after joining, he
was put on the editorial staff of Avant-Garde Jeunesse. But there remained something
mysterious about his presence in the group. As the former JCR leader Daniel Bensaïd
recalled:

Guy attended intermittently. He was somewhat distant, distracted,
removed, or aloof. His periodic presence contributed to his aura of
mystery, which was further enhanced by the fact that he was the only
among our ranks who came from the Maoist culture of the rue d’Ulm [the
ENS].\footnote{“Presence de Guy Hocquenghem,” Cahiers de L’imaginaire, 24.}

Though active among the leadership of the JCR, Hocquenghem remained an outsider for
a number of reasons. To begin with, as Bensaïd noted, he was the only Ulmard or
Normalien among them. If Hocquenghem never boasted his privileged status as one
France’s most elite students, it was probably less out of modesty than out of a concerted
effort to distance himself. During these same years, the radical leftists of the ENS, too,
were searching for ways to cut their umbilical cord to the PCF. Much more insulated
from the misery of student life and more deeply entrenched in academic Marxism, they
were, however, following a very different trajectory.
First of all, unlike the student radicals of the Sorbonne, Nanterre, and the other campuses around France, the Normaliens didn’t look as far as Asia or South America for revolutionary heroes. They had found their own within the walls of the ENS in the person of Louis Althusser. The story of Althusser’s rise to eminence is, as one historian put it, “one of the most bizarre episodes in modern French intellectual history.”

Himself a graduate of the ENS, Louis Althusser had been quietly preparing students for the aggregation in philosophy at the ENS since 1948 and was hardly known at all beyond the small world of the school. The key moment in the birth of his legend came in the spring of 1961. At a time when most student radicals in France were still under the spell of Castro’s revolution, the event that sent shockwaves through the ENS was Jean-Paul Sartre’s visit to speak on his recently completed first volume of The Critique of Dialectical Reason. All of the ENS professors, and many of its most accomplished alumni, were in attendance at the lecture hall packed well beyond capacity. The master intellectual was apparently not in top form that evening, so when Althusser quietly objected at the end of the lecture that Sartre’s theory of praxis was little more than a refurbishment of the Cartesian cogito, Sartre stepped into a debate he was bound to lose. The scientific clarity of Althusser’s arguments that evening contrasted sharply with Sartre’s literary meanderings, and by the night’s end, in the minds of the Normaliens at least, Althusser had clearly deposed Sartre as the next great Marxist philosopher.

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When new students arrived at the ENS each year thereafter, they were inevitably greeted with “Have you seen Althusser yet? It’s serious business, it’s awesome!”

In the early 1960s, Althusser elaborated an interpretation of Marxism that rejected Marx’s early philosophical writings—the “humanist” Marx—in favor of his later writings, exemplified by Capital—the “scientific” Marx. Using the tools of psychoanalysis and structuralism, he sought to decode the objective truths of Marx’s writings, truths that Marx himself did not have the capacity to fully understand. These “truths” were the immutable laws of historical materialism, which acted completely independently of human agency. Althusser’s Marxism was thus a Marxism without a subject; any Marxist doctrine that privileged human experience or human agency, he believed, was scientifically false. Althusser further attributed the reformist and revisionist tendencies of the Soviet Union and the modern European communist parties to the humanist Marxist tradition, represented by Sartre in France, but also by the leadership of the PCF.

Althusser’s radical mission to recover the universal truths of Marxism drew students at the ENS to him like cult initiates. Indeed, participants in his famous seminar on Marx’s Capital believed they were hearing the gospel from on high. As one former participant recalled, “We had the impression we were acquiring without effort the key to an organized universal knowledge, an intelligent Marxism.” Althusser’s Marxism was thus both iconoclastic and orthodox - iconoclastic in that it ran counter the humanist traditions dominant at the time, and orthodox in that purported to adhere to the core of truth at the heart of Marx’s writings. Although Althusser continued to support the PCF, perhaps in the hopes that he could change its philosophical orientation, it was clear from

111 Ibid., 213.
112 Thmoas Ferenczi, quoted in Les Normaliens, 215.
his writings and his seminars that he was also sympathetic to Chinese Communism, which, unlike Soviet and European Marxism, had not, he believed, strayed into humanist heresies.\footnote{On Althusser’s Marxism and his divergence from the Marxist humanism of the PCF, see Arthur Hirsh, 159-77. See also Sunil Khilnani, 83-120.}

Although Althusser was not in the long run able to influence the course of the PCF, he did have an enormous impact on student politics at the ENS. As Althusser’s radical interpretation was slowly gaining recognition outside the ENS through the publication of his writings, the PCF faced a major dilemma. On the one hand, they enjoyed the intellectual prestige Althusser brought to the party image—especially after Sartre and so many other intellectuals had abandoned the party after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. On the other hand, Althusser’s doctrines ran counter to the humanist Marxism of its secretary general, Waldeck Rochet, and its more established theoreticians, such as Roger Garaudy. In March of 1966, the Central Committee of the PCF convened in the town of Argenteuil and decided to issue an official rebuke of Althusser’s interpretation. Althusser himself quietly accepted this criticism to avoid a confrontation with the party. His students involved in the UEC, however, were less gracious. Under the leadership of Robert Linhart, who matriculated two years before Hocquenghem in 1963, and Benny Levy, Hocquenghem’s cohort, the Althusserians of the rue d’Ulm retaliated by circulating a tract denouncing the PCF at the UEC annual meeting. The Central Committee promptly expelled the Normaliens—just as it had expelled Krivine and his Trotskyist comrades a year earlier—who, in turn, took the opportunity to form a
new, Maoist-inspired student communist organization. In December 1966 the *Union des Jeunesses Communistes* (*marxiste-léniniste*) or UJCM was thus born.\(^{114}\)

Chinese communism had been making waves on the French Left since 1962, when Chairman Mao clinched the Sino-Soviet split by publicly denouncing Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization campaign as “revisionist.” In order to stem revisionist tendencies in China, Mao claimed, it had become necessary in 1966 to launch the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.” Unaware of the political scheming that actually lay behind the seventy-two year-old dictator’s last, and in retrospect most disastrous, campaign, the UJCML was quick to latch on to Mao’s latest crusade. Had not Mao entrusted the Cultural Revolution to the young Red Guards, pitting his new revolutionary elite—most of them still in their teens—against the middle-age party cadres? As the young Maoists of the UJCML were fond of quoting, youth, for Mao, were like “the sun at eight or nine in the morning,” the bright future of the revolution. With the Chinese Cultural Revolution as their inspiration and justification, the UJCML decided to sever all ties with the PCF and all other “adult” forms of Marxism. Their new revolutionary hero, the icon of youthful revolution himself, was henceforth Mao Tse Tung.

Like the young Maoists of the ENS who would later form the notorious *Gauche Prolétarienne* (Proletarian Left) after May ’68, Hocquenghem had participated in Althusser’s seminars at the ENS. He was never lured, however, into the inner circle of initiates and never joined the UJCML. Many years later, he ridiculed his ENS classmates whose fervor for theory turned them into blood-thirsty Stalinists.\(^{115}\) For Hocquenghem,


\(^{115}\) In Hocquenghem, L.O. On Benny Lévy in particular, see 40-44.
the “petits chefs” of the ENS epitomized an unfortunate ideal of masculine virility that had predominated on the Left since the nineteenth century. “Love on the barricades, the militant with dirtied hands that his girlfriend caresses after the just fight.” But although he found their clique to be too dogmatic and militaristic for his tastes, his analyses of French society and the capitalist West more generally were probably not all that different at the time. Hocquenghem too believed that Althusser was “serious business,” and seems to have maintained a reverence for the man and his ideas at least until the 1970s. Moreover, Hocquenghem’s political sensibility at the time was founded on the same unquestioned presupposition that only the working classes could lead the revolution. In the end, a sense of not fitting in—or a desire to not fit in—may have played an important part in his decision to steer clear of the Maoists of the rue d’Ulm.

But there was another reason that Hocquenghem avoided his classmates at the ENS and remained somewhat of an outsider in the JCR; it was with great difficulty that he managed his “double-life” during his early years of political activism. When Hocquenghem entered the ENS he was provided with a dormitory single in the Latin Quarter, which he clandestinely shared with his less fortunate boyfriend, a theater student. Eventually the nosy concierge (a grumpy old peasant woman Hocquenghem recalls) realized the two were a couple, and from that time forward, Hocquenghem lived in constant fear of being denounced to the authorities. Although later in life Hocquenghem would extol the “mad, inexhaustible charm of the double-life,” it doubtlessly took much effort and energy to keep up the ruse. As he described the stress of this period:

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I was permanently haunted by the thought that these two, irreconcilable worlds would one day collide. If I left for the weekend with my homosexual friends, I would tell my parents that I was attending a workshop for the Jeunesse Communistes, and my political comrades that I was going home to see my family.\textsuperscript{117} His boyfriend recalled that if he happened to be attending a student union or leftist meeting with Hocquenghem, he might receive a nudge or a kick under the table for behaving too effeminately (like a \textit{folle}).\textsuperscript{118} Although sometimes condoned in the student Marxist circles, homosexuality was not openly tolerated. Although Karl Marx himself had been silent on the question, the Marxist tradition tended to associate homosexuality with the decadent culture of the bourgeoisie. Even Wilhelm Reich, the great Marxist theorist of sexual revolution, considered homosexuality to be a degenerate form of love caused by male sexual repression. For the student leftists in the 1960s, it wasn’t so much a moral question as it was a question of security. Having known homosexuals in one’s organization might draw undue attention from the authorities or deligitimate one’s revolutionary credentials in the eyes of the working classes.

One day, during a debate between competing JCR factions, Hocquenghem learned this lesson the hard way. As if to put an exclamation point on his arguments, the leader of the opposing faction suddenly blurted: “And what’s more, Hocquenghem is a homosexual. Your group admits vicious and degenerate \textit{petits-bourgeois} (sic.).”\textsuperscript{119} According to Hocquenghem:

\begin{quote}
It was the first time someone publicly made this accusation against me. My heart stopped beating for a moment, and then I had a strange, icy sensation – as though I had suddenly been stripped nude in front of everyone. How could he have known? I had constructed a wall between my private life – my weekends in the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{117} DH, 29-30.
\textsuperscript{118} AM, 85-86.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 89.
country, my first excursions to "the bars," and my love for Romain — and my embryo of a public life, a wall I believed was insurmountable.\textsuperscript{120}

Afterwards in a café, one of Hocquenghem’s friends asked him if the accusation was true. “Are you nuts? That’s crazy!”\textsuperscript{121} Not long thereafter Hocquenghem’s allies in the JCR would learn the truth—many of his close friends already knew—but years later Hocquenghem was still haunted by his knee-jerk denial. In late 1960s, the radical Left simply did not have a discourse with which to defend homosexuality, even though all of the elements for such a discourse were swimming in the air.

The year 1968 began with throngs of protesters in the streets challenging the Gaullist powers, but it wasn’t the students who were leading away, and the protests had nothing to do with the “poverty of student life.” In early February, the Ministry of Culture, headed by André Malraux, and the administration of the Cinémathèque Française decided to find a replacement for its eccentric founder Henri Langlois. A passionate collector and restorer of old films, Langlois had been at the helm of the famous Cinémathèque since creating it single-handedly in 1936. In the 1940s and 50s, the Cinémathèque served as the institutional center of the pan-European “New Wave” movement, and its obscure founder had achieved as much world renown as the ciné-auteurs he sponsored, from French directors François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, and Jean-Luc Godard to Eric Rohmer, Louis Buñuel, Roberto Rossellini, and Fritz Lang. As one of Langlois’s defenders put it, “Since the beginning, Langlois has been invested with

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 90.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 92
the divine right and omnipotent power because he is the museum of cinema, in the same way, if you will pardon the example, that the General de Gaulle is France in the eyes of the Gaullists." Dozens of French directors immediately staged a protest at the Cinémathèque's location at the Palais de Chaillot and issued a statement declaring they would withdraw the rights from the Cinémathèque to screen their films. Within days, actors and directors from around the world, including such names as Orson Welles and Charlie Chaplin, had joined the boycott. Malraux's decision to restore certain functions to Langlois as a compromise failed to quell the revolt, and by the middle of February there were several thousand protestors each day in front of the Palais de Chaillot chanting for Langlois's return. (Hocquenghem was among them). The French intelligentsia, led by Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, and even the UEC and the UNEF became involved, forcing Malraux and the Ministry of Culture to back down completely from their miscalculated decision.  

At the outset of 1968, the "Langlois Affair" seemed destined to be the year's biggest headline. Meanwhile, however, in the shadows of the events in Paris, a handful of rabble-rousers at Nanterre were preparing to steal the lime-light.

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122 Alexandre Astruc, quoted in Les Clercs de 68, 61-62.
123 For a chronology of the Langlois Affair, see Ibid., 61-65 and François Truffaut, A Passion for Films: Henri Langlois and the Cinematheque Francaise (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 140-160.
Chapter 4

The Spark (1968)

It only takes one spark to set fire to the entire plain\(^1\)

-Mao Tse Tung

January 8, 1968. Nanterre’s students have just returned from their Christmas holidays. A group of men in expensive business suits is navigating its way through the campus’s crowded walkways. At the head of their cortège is the French Minister of Youth and Sport, François Missoffe. *De rigueur* for new ministers, Missoffe has just published a book to bolster his credentials, *A Survey on Youth*, which discusses the problems facing French youths in the year 1968. According to Missoffe:

> The young French people of today wish to marry early in life but worry about bringing children into the world before they have the means to raise them properly. Their primary goal, therefore, is professional success. In the meantime, with their modest means, they save up as much as they can, the young man to buy a car, and the young lady to assemble her trousseau.\(^2\)

Missoffe has come to see firsthand his latest expenditure, a brand-new Olympic-sized swimming pool on the Nanterre campus. To avoid a likely confrontation with the students, the exact date of the visit was not announced, but Nanterre’s radicals had

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\(^1\) Mao Zedong, *Oeuvres choisies*, tome I, p. 129 (5 January 1930).

somehow caught word far enough in advance to arm themselves with rotten eggs and tomatoes. To the embarrassment of Nanterre’s dean, the cortege pauses for a moment in front of a poster announcing “Orgy at the swimming pool, tonight at 6:00!” Other posters point the way to the pool with giant phalluses. It’s a bad omen. Later, after admiring the new pool, Missoffe and his entourage find themselves surrounded by a crowd of students. For the moment everything is calm. Then, a disheveled student in a dirty jacket, tennis shoes, and a torn sweater approaches Missoffe. It’s Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Nanterre’s worried Dean, M. Grappin, quickly recognizes the student and lurches to grab him by the collar. (Despite Nanterre’s infamous congestion and impersonality, everyone knows Daniel, who’s also rumored on campus to be dating the Dean’s daughter). Egging on the crowd like a street mime, Daniel lets himself be led like a school boy away from the cortege. But moments later, Daniel reappears in front of Missoffe with a cigarette in his mouth.

Missoffe: What can I do for you?

Daniel: Do you have a light?

Missoffe: Sure.

(Missoffe lights Daniel’s cigarette. Daniel takes a long, leisurely puff, then continues.)

Daniel: Mr. Minister, sir, I read your “Survey on Youth,” a real bunch of bullshit, and in six hundred pages you don’t say a single word about the sexual problems of youths.”

Missoffe: I’d be happy to discuss my work with someone serious, which you clearly are not. I prefer physical education to sexual education.

Daniel: That’s what they say in all totalitarian regimes.
(Missoffe, turning his heels to leave, replies): *In any case, if you're having sexual problems, why don't take a dip in the pool.*

Missoffe may have won the repartee, but Daniel’s consolation prize was the immediate respect and admiration of the entire student body. For over a year Daniel had been making a name for himself at Nanterre as a campus radical. Though influenced by the situationists and sympathetic to the anarchists and some of the Marxist-Leninist groups, such Krivine’s JCR, Daniel was strongly allergic to anything that whiffed of dogma or ideology. In another time and place, he would’ve have probably been a better candidate for class clown than student leader, but somehow his charisma, sense of humor, and natural knack for provocation made him one of the few students who was able to bring together Nanterre’s diverse political tendencies. The previous year, Daniel and some of his friends had been responsible for distributing the situationist tract, “On the Misery of Student Life...” which had created a scandal at Strasbourg in 1966. They had also helped make Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* and Vaneigem’s *The Revolution of Everyday Life* standard reading for student militants in 1967. Determined to create their own “happenings,” Nanterre’s radicals began interrupting courses on a daily basis in the fall of 1967. Especially hard hit was the Sociology Department, where Daniel and many of the *enragés* studied. There they harassed, among other professors, Michel Crozier, a well-respected expert on American society: “Professor Crozier, How is American-style bureaucracy working in Vietnam? And is it efficient enough in liquidating the Vietnamese.”3 They also began to organize their own “university within a university,” creating seminars and workshops on topics ranging from Wilhelm Reich to the war in Vietnam.

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3 Mouvement du 22 Mars, *Ce n’est qu’un début continuons le combat* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001), 15
The administration tried its best to stem the outbreak of campus radicalism. At the start of the academic year, Daniel received a letter in the mail from the administration: “Mr. Cohn-Bendit, since you live in the 15th arrondissement of Paris, there is no reason for you to be at Nanterre; why don’t you try the Sorbonne?” \(^4\) (By the same logic, the administration could have excluded the nearly one half of the student body who lived in Paris’s central arrondissements.\(^5\)) It took an intervention on the part of Daniel’s professors to get the decision reversed, but news of such maneuvers, the increasing presence of “plain clothes” police on campus, and fresh rumors that the university was compiling “black lists” of student radicals only further fueled student rage at the beginning of 1968. After January 8, Daniel’s confrontation with Missoffe quickly became a legend that spread throughout the campus and grabbed the attention of students in Paris. From that day forward, the uncontested leader of Nanterre’s radicals, the “enragés” (the “enraged” or the “maniacs”) was known simply as “Dany.” To his enemies, he became known as “Dany the Red,” a misguided allusion to his political colors (“black” for anarchism would have probably been more accurate) or perhaps to the color of his unkempt hair.

In 1968, resistance to the war in Vietnam helped the student movements of the world develop an international identity. The Têt offensive, begun at the end of January, exposed to millions the vulnerabilities of the American Goliath and the gruesome nature

\(^4\) Ibid., 12.
\(^5\) About forty-five percent of Nanterre’s students came from arrondissements in central Paris. Seidman, 22-23.
of the war in South East Asia. For the Marxist-influenced student groups, it also
provided a new model of revolutionary hope and heroism in the form of Ho Chi Minh
and the brave guerillas of the National Liberation Front. United in their rejection of the
American war in Vietnam, though not always for the same reasons, students around the
world began seeking each other out in early 1968 in the hopes of forging a common
front.

Although students were mobilizing in France too, particularly in opposition to
Vietnam, as of March the situation in France still did not appear to be an explosive one.
Many of the leaders of the student movements, in fact, believed that their country was
lagging behind the rest of the world and looked to the movements in the United States,
Italy, and Germany in particular to lead the way. In the third week of February, the
German SDS (German Socialist Student Federation) called for an International Congress
on Vietnam to be held at the Free University in West Berlin. The response was
overwhelming; student movements from all over Europe and around the world sent a
total of approximately 10,000 representatives. The congress ended with a march of some
20,000 students from all over the world through the streets of West Berlin chanting “Ho,
Ho, Ho, Chi Minh!”, “Che Che, Che Guevara,” and “The NLF will triumph!” The
French delegation included Dany and a few Nanterre radicals but was made up most
mostly of members of the JCR, which had been the principal force behind the French
anti-war movements since its creation of the CVNs in 1966. The French delegation

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6 On the internationalization of the student movements in 1967-68, see Mark Edelman Boren, Student
Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject (New York: Routledge, 2001), 122-183. See also Geneviève
in Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand et al, Les Années 68: Le temps de la contestation (Paris: Éditions Complexe,

7 On the International Congress on Vietnam, see Tariq Ali and Susan Watkins, 1968: Marching in the
returned from Germany at the end of February determined to redouble its efforts and bring France up to speed with its European and American counterparts.

Berlin also provided the French delegation with some fresh new ideas for stirring up trouble at home. The JCR had already figured out that it wasn’t necessarily the size of the protest or the persuasiveness of the message that made an action successful. With many fewer adherents than either the UNEF or the UEC, the JCR had spearheaded the anti-war movement through clever, well-planned and well-executed provocations, or "exemplary actions." Exemplary actions did not aim to confront the forces of order head-on, but rather to "call their bluff," that is, to expose their inability or unwillingness to defend the status quo. Three days after returning from Berlin, on February 21st, the JCR’s Comité de Vietnam National (CVN) swarmed the Boulevard Saint-Michel for "National Anti-Imperialism Day." Testing out some things they had seen in Germany, they draped new signs along the way, renaming the central artery of the Latin Quarter "Boulevard of the Heroic Vietnamese." In front of the historic Saint-Michel Fountain they burned an effigy of L.B.J. dressed in an American flag. No French forces intervened.°

Berlin also broadened the JCR’s perspective on students’ struggles around the world. They were particularly astonished by the bravery of the students of Eastern Europe who were fighting a different kind of imperialism much closer to home—they learned of their Eastern European comrades through other contingents, as no delegation from Eastern Europe was able to attend. In early March, optimism for change in the East mounted as Czech "socialism with a human face" cautiously made progress under

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8 On the philosophy of "exemplary actions," see Mouvement du 22 Mars, 59-74.
9 In Hamon and Rotman, 416-417.
Alexandre Dubcek’s leadership (The Soviets would put an abrupt end to the “Prague Spring” later that August). Polish students inspired by the Czech example, however, were having much less success in their attempts to spark a thaw of their own. The imprisonment of two well-known Polish dissidents and the censorship of a controversial production of Adam Mickiewicz’s classic play, Dziady, in Warsaw earlier that year had set off a wave student protests that spread in early March from the capital to all of Poland’s major university towns. The Polish government responded heavy-handedly, arresting thousands of students and building a strong police presence on university campuses. During the crackdown in Poland, the JCR blockaded the Polish embassy in Paris with hundreds of students shouting, “Solidarity with the Polish students!,” and “Poland awaits its own Dubcek!” Visitors to the embassy were heckled with the latest jokes imported from Poland, such as this one:

- Do you know who has the smartest police in the world?

- No, who?

- The Polish.

- Why?

- Because the Polish police are always going to college!\(^{10}\)

While the JCR was multiplying “exemplary actions” such as the blockade of the Polish Embassy, the Maoists of the UJCml were experimenting with sill more aggressive forms of protest. Under the leadership of one of Hocquenghem’s ENS classmates, Olivier Rolin, they formed a paramilitary wing, the “Groupe de protection et autodéfense” (GAP), to engage in street-fighting with ultra-nationalist youths, PCF unionists, the cops, and anyone else that stood in their way. Inspired by the radical factions of the Japanese

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 420.
student federation, the Zengakuren, which clashed openly with police in the streets of Tokyo, some of the UJCMl militants began studying karate and wearing improvised combat gear.\textsuperscript{11} Their first test came on February 7\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{12} Various extreme right organizations had decided to hold a congress on that day in support of the American-backed South Vietnamese government at the Mutualité Amphitheatre in the heart of the Latin Quarter. Most significant among these groups was the nationalist youth movement Occident. Founded in 1964 by Pierre Sidos—the son of a Marshall Pétain collaborator who was executed after the liberation and himself a former leader of the OAS—Occident fiercely opposed both the communists and President De Gaulle, whom they believed had let down the white settlers, or pied-noirs in Algeria.\textsuperscript{13} Their decision to hold the congress at the Mutualité, the bastion meeting ground of the Left, was clearly intended as a provocation, and the UJCMl wasn’t about to turn the other cheek. On the day of the congress, some three hundred UJCMl militants arrived at the scene armed with truncheons and sporting construction helmets purchased at the nearby BHV department store. The police had somehow been tipped off and were already there waiting for them. Outnumbered, the Maoists retreated eastwards toward the St. Germain Cathedral where they were met by more police. This time, however, they stood their ground. Taking the police somewhat by surprise, they attacked head on and with vicious force. It was first the offensive maneuver of this sort by students that France had witnessed in many decades, and it foreshadowed the violent confrontations shortly to come.

\textsuperscript{11} Hamon and Rotman, 438. On the Zengakuren, see Mark Edelman Boren, 123-126.
\textsuperscript{12} The events of this day are recounted in Christophe Bourseiller, 85-86.
\textsuperscript{13} On the history of Occident, see Frédéric Charpier, Génération Occident: De l’extrême droite à la droite (Paris: Seuil, 2005).
As global political activism intensified in the early months of 1968, so too did activism against the university system. Adding to the student's grievances that year, in the beginning of the fall 1967, the new Minister of Education, Alain Peyrefitte, confirmed rumors that the plans for university reform conceived by the previous minister, Christian Fouchet, were finally to be implemented. A Gaullist, like his predecessor Fouchet, Peyrefitte firmly believed in the need to adapt the universities to the demands of the marketplace and to make admissions more selective. Reinforcing students' perceptions of the university as an authoritarian institution, the new measures of the "Fouchet Plan," furthermore, were to be implemented by ministerial decree, thereby bypassing parliamentary debates. Most troubling among the new measures for French youth was the proposed transformation of the Baccalaureate, which previously guaranteed university acceptance, into a certificate not unlike the American high school diploma—that is, only one condition for university enrollment among others. Some students receiving the Bac would henceforth be eligible only for two-year programs—in lieu of the traditional four years—and others would simply be turned away. Sweeping university reforms were long-overdue in 1968, but although some of the proposed reforms might have been implemented with much less resistance in the early or mid-1960s, Peyrefitte's decision to ram them through all at once was disastrously timed and may well have been the straw the broke the camel's back in 1967-68.\(^\text{14}\)

Although student discontent was growing on university and high school campuses throughout the country, Nanterre again led the way in the spring of 1968. On January 26th students held a rally to protest disciplinary procedures underway against Dany and a number of other campus enragés, including one who had been expelled for squatting in

\(^{14}\) On the Fouchet Plan and its implementation in 1967-68, see Seidman 53-56.
one of the dormitories. Already inflamed by the administrations’ previous attempts to expel Dany and other campus radicals, the protestors denounced the growing numbers of plain-clothes police and distributed enlarged photos identifying the administration’s supposed moles. Breaking with a long-standing French university tradition, the Dean made the mistake of calling in the police to intervene, an act that only confirmed student suspicions of an imminent crackdown.  

Although there were no reported injuries, the ensuing scuffle with police on campus grounds, the first of its kind in Nanterre’s short history, shocked the student population and even most of the faculty. Undeterred by the increasing numbers of police, two weeks later on Valentine’s Day, the male enragés organized an occupation of the women’s dormitories to protest gender segregation. Then, as examinations approached in March, students in the sociology and psychology departments called for examination strikes and went so far as to impede other students who wished to take the exams. In one introductory psychology class, students invaded the examination room with picket signs and distributed the tract “Nanterre or the Fattening of the Geese.” Stealing the microphone from the instructor, the enragés demanded that introductory lecture courses be replaced by small-group seminars focusing on analysis and debate rather than on the regurgitation of information. By mid-March, the everyday functioning of Nanterre was beginning to break down.

Many of the instigators of the attacks on the university happened to be the same radicals involved in the anti-war and anti-imperialist movements, but as of March, there was still little unity between these two moments of student contestation. If any one person or group might be credited with bringing them together, it would be Dany Cohn-

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15 Seidman, 61-63.
16 Ibid., 67-69.
17 On this disruption of exams in March, see ibid., 71-72.
Bendit and the *Mouvement du 22 Mars* (Movement of March 22\textsuperscript{nd}), which was born, accidentally, at Nanterre.\textsuperscript{18} On Wednesday, March 20\textsuperscript{th}, a small group of anti-war protestors, many of them from the JCR, gathered near the affluent Place Vendome square in central Paris, an area well-traveled by American tourists and home to numerous American businesses. Some militants had already tried to set the nearby TWA office on fire a few days earlier, thus the streets were heavily guarded by police. As the peaceful protest was coming to an end, a handful of radicals exposed their iron clubs and smashed the windows of the American Express office before making a run for the nearest metro. The vandals managed to escape without a chase, but early in the morning of Friday, March 22\textsuperscript{nd}, several CVN agitators – whether or not they were actually involved in the incident is not clear – were arrested at their homes. That afternoon, news of the arrests reached Nanterre. One of those arrested was a well-known campus *enragé* and friend of Cohn-Bendit. That afternoon, Dany and his friends ran up and down the halls shouting into the classrooms that there would be a meeting in the amphitheatre at 5:00 to “discuss what can be done in the face of the repressive plot that threatens us.”\textsuperscript{19}

Six or seven hundred students showed up that evening, many more than expected, but it took them only about half an hour to decide upon a course of action. Dany first suggested occupying the sociology department, which had become the hub of campus radicalism in recent months, but seeing as students from all over the university were represented in the amphitheatre—and that there were far too many of them to fit in the sociology building—the decision was made to occupy a more common, symbolic—and larger—area, the central administrative building. Once inside the administrative

\textsuperscript{18} On the events of March 20-22 and the creation of the “Movement of March 22\textsuperscript{nd},” see *Mouvement du 22 Mars, Ce n’est qu’un début continuons le combat* and Hamon and Rotarnn, 425-433.
\textsuperscript{19} *Mouvement du 22 Mars*, 15.
building, the occupiers quickly moved to the top (ninth) floor where it would be more
difficult to forcibly remove them. Fears of a reprisal by the administration or an invasion
by police reduced their initial numbers to about 60, but a hundred or so more joined them
later when it became clear that the administration had no immediate plans to bring in law
enforcement. A few of the occupiers advocated looting and pillaging. Others argued for
a scavenger hunt to find the supposed “black lists,” but in the end, calmer heads
prevailed. Aside from about 15,000 francs worth of stolen or destroyed property, damage
to the facilities was limited largely to situationist-inspired graffiti on the walls such as
“Never Work,” “Professors, you are old and your culture is, too,” and, foreshadowing
events to come in May, “Take your desires for reality.”

Inspired by the examples of the German “critical universities” and the American
sit-ins, the occupiers instead ate, drank, sang, and discussed everything from the war in
Vietnam to students’ sexual frustrations into the wee hours of the morning. As a nod of
respect to Fidel Castro’s “Movement of July 26,” they dubbed themselves the
“Movement of March 22nd,” and, amidst their celebration, they found time to approve the
manifesto which became the foundation of their movement, “The Manifesto of 142,” an
allusion to the most recent head count before the vote of approval. The Manifesto
denounced police repression in all of its forms and promised reprisals for every act of
state aggression against the students. The Movement of March 22 then evacuated the
administrative block sometime around 1:00 or 2:00 A.M. to continue their celebrations
elsewhere, about an hour before the police were finally called in to remove them by
force.

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20 Seidman, 73.
The following week, news of the Nanterre occupation inspired similar actions around France. In Toulouse, for example, campus *enragés* overran the university amphitheatre and founded their own "Movement of March 25th." Not all student radicals, however, approved of the occupations. The fanatically pro-worker UJCmI, for example, sided curiously with the PCF and the university administration in denouncing the occupations as the irresponsible actions of spoiled bourgeois children. Any movement that did not center on the struggles of the workers was, in their narrow point of view, counter-revolutionary.21 Meanwhile, at Nanterre, as the administration was considering what course of action to take against Dany and the Movement of March 22nd, class disruptions and examination boycotts intensified to such a degree that Dean Grappin finally made the decision on March 28th to shut down the entire campus until the following Monday. The next day, several hundred students arrived to protest the closure shouting "One, Two, Three Nanterres!" – an allusion to the anti-war chant "One, Two, Three Vietnams!" This time, students at the Sorbonne also occupied some of their buildings in a show of solidarity. Realizing that calling in the police would unnecessarily exacerbate the situation, the administration at the Sorbonne decided wisely to tolerate the mostly peaceful gathering. A month later, in similar circumstances, they would respond less prudently, and with ruinous consequences.

The closing of Nanterre did nothing to calm tensions as the Dean had hoped; when the campus reopened on April 1st, the disruptions and boycotts picked up exactly where they had left off. The Movement of March 22nd had declared April 2nd "Talking Tuesday," and requisitioned, without first seeking approval from the administration, the campus auditoriums for the approximately 1,500 students who came to participate. The

21 Seidman, 75-76
administration once again tolerated the disruptions, hoping that the two-week Easter break starting on April 4th would break the movement’s momentum. Over this two-week period, however, events abroad helped keep the students’ anger and enthusiasm alive. The assassination of Martin Luther King on April 4th and the attempt on German SDS leader Rudi Dutschke’s life by a disgruntled fascist youth a week later sparked massive waves of protest throughout the United States and Europe, reminding the Nanterre radicals that they were not alone in their battle against the old world order.

Students at Nanterre returned from the Easter break in the third week of April to find the protests in full swing. The Movement of March 22nd led the students of Nanterre in chanting: “Long live the struggle of the German students,” and “Springer, Assassin!”—a reference to Axel Springer, Germany’s most influential press baron and arch-conservative who was blamed by German students for inciting the assassination attempt on Dutschke.22 Like Dutschke, Dany too had been become the anathema of French right-wing presses, whose harangues stopped just shy of calling for his head. The following day, Dany lead an assembly of several thousand students in support of Dutschke and the German SDS in the Latin Quarter. By this time, Dany and Nanterre’s enragés, whether loved or hated, had become dinner table discussion throughout France. Aware that the whole country was watching, the Movement of March 22nd was even more determined to create a model “free university,” or, at the very least, bring the old university to its knees. With May 1st, the largest holiday of the traditional left approaching, the Nanterre radicals, in conjunction with their counterparts in Paris, decided to hold rival protests on May 2, which they had declared “Anti-imperialist Day.” That day, a handful of Nanterre enragés were arrested by police while distributing tracts

22 Hamon and Rotman, 434-436.
in the high schools throughout Paris, but, caving in to the protestors’ demands, the authorities quickly released them. Meanwhile, at Nanterre, students once again tried to invade the administrative building, this time in order to screen a film on the Black Panther movement. They were ejected from the main auditorium, but later they were permitted to screen the film in another building. It was clear to the Movement of March 22\textsuperscript{nd} and the JCR now that they held the upper-hand; they had called the administration’s bluff and won. Seeing that his university had slipped out of control, Dean Grappin made the fateful decision at the end of the day on May 2\textsuperscript{nd} to shut down the entire campus. Nanterre would not re-open for the rest of the year.

With their campus closed down and locked-up and student contestation at a fever pitch, the Movement of March 22\textsuperscript{nd} and the JCR made the logical decision to shift their focus to the Latin Quarter. Along with a number of other student organizations, including, most significantly, the UNEF, they called for a massive demonstration in the courtyard of the Sorbonne on May 3\textsuperscript{rd}. The immediate excuse for the protest was the scheduled appearance of Dany Cohn-Bendit and a handful of Nanterre radicals involved in the March 22\textsuperscript{nd} occupation before the main university disciplinary court on May 6\textsuperscript{th}. In the fashion of the UJCMl, many of the protestors had begun wearing helmets and carrying billy clubs, as much out of fear of reprisals from nationalist youth movements, such as Occident, than out of a fear of police repression. Occident, too, had been stepping up its activism, trying desperately to keep pace with the student leftists by organizing counterdemonstrations. They had ramped up their rhetoric too in recent weeks, calling openly for violence against leftist radicals, especially the hated “Dany the
Red," in their publications like *Minute*. After the attempt on Rudi Dutschke’s life, radical
leftists were not about to leave their own security in the hands of law enforcement.

Clearly unaware of the severity of the situation, the rector of the University of
Paris, Paul Roche, gave orders to the Paris Prefect of Police Maurice Grimaud to
evacuate the student protestors from the Sorbonne Courtyard. The police began their job
gingerly at first, mindful of the high explosive potential, either between the counter-
protestors from Occident and the student radicals, or between either or both of these
groups and themselves. Most of the demonstrators were also eager to avoid confrontation
and allowed themselves to be removed peacefully from the Sorbonne, but the sight of
hundreds of students being bundled into paddy-wagons in the heart of Paris stirred
emotions not only in those militants who managed to escape arrest, but also in on-lookers
and passers-by, many of whom decided to stick around and get involved. The police
evacuation went more or less smoothly until, suddenly, a group of radical leftists went on
the offensive, wielding their clubs and hurling paving stones found at a nearby
construction site — the famous *pavés* that quickly became a symbol of the May revolt.
Female protestors, whom the police were too chivalrous to manhandle, surrounded the
police vehicles set to carry off their male comrades and began chanting for their release.²³

It was then that the police lost their sang-froid and responded with tear gas and
truncheons. By the end of the protest, approximately 80 policemen and several hundred
protestors had been injured, and close to 600 students were arrested.²⁴ The university

²³ Seidman, 94-95.
²⁴ For complete statistics on injuries and arrests during the peak of the student phase of the May revolt—
May 3 to May 13—see Maurice Rajsfs, *Mai 1968: Sous les pavés, la repression* (Paris: le cherche midi
administration decided to cancel classes at the Sorbonne and close the premises indefinitely.

Friday May 3rd marked the beginning of the student phase of the May revolt. The police invasion of the Sorbonne and the subsequent arrests generated widespread public support for the student movements and attracted media attention from around the world. Cracking down on the Sorbonne was the university’s first miscalculation. Their next misstep was the hasty decision to levy harsh sentences upon the students arrested on May 3rd in emergency courts over the weekend. About a dozen of the demonstrators arrested, many of whom were only casually involved in the ruckus, received jail sentences of up to three months. The leaders of the JCR, the Movement of March 22nd, the UNEF, and other student groups involved in the incident at the Sorbonne continued their protests throughout the weekend, denouncing the cruelty of the police and demanding, once again, the immediate release of their peers. The invasion of the Sorbonne, they insisted, evidenced the fascism that had all along been intrinsic to the Gaullist state, if not to bourgeois capitalism itself. Although most French people did not share this radical point of view, the sight of students being dragged out of the Sorbonne in police vehicles by the hundreds rallied them behind their cause. That weekend, prominent intellectuals and public figures began speaking out on behalf of the students. Among them, of course, were the stalwart figureheads of the Left, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, but there were also many not previously known for political activism who felt a need to take a stand, such as the Nobel Prize winning physicist Alfred Kastler. In the
pages of *Le Monde*, Kastler pleaded with the government and university administration to offer "a gesture of conciliation in order to begin the process of de-escalation."^25

The events of May 3rd at the Sorbonne also rallied many of France’s high school and university professors behind the students. Most significantly, the SNESup (*Syndicat national de l'enseignement supérieur*), a left-leaning teachers union which represented about 20 to 25 percent of all French teachers and which was especially influential among younger teachers of lower rank, decided to commit itself one-hundred percent to the burgeoning movement.^26 Their leader was a 29-year-old physicist, Alain Geismar, who was elected head in 1967 on a platform that broke with the union’s former communist (PCF) leadership. The Maoist-inspired platform, articulated in Geismar’s "For a Cultural Revolution in the University," recommended a radical breakdown of the bureaucratic and teaching hierarchies that went well beyond what the socialist and communist teachers had envisioned.^27 At 10:00 o'clock in the evening on May 3rd, the SNESup called for a general teacher's strike in solidarity with the students, making it the first worker’s union to join the student movement and marking the first time since the war in Algeria that teachers took to the streets *en masse.*^28 Soon thereafter, Geismar became, along with Dany Cohn-Bendit, one of the media-recognized spokesmen for the May movement.

On Monday the 6th, thousands of protestors took to the streets in preparation for France’s version of the trial of the Chicago Seven. Dany Cohn-Bendit and seven other Nanterre students involved in the March 22nd occupation were scheduled to appear before the top university disciplinary court, coincidentally located inside the Sorbonne. While

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^25 Brillant, 183.
^26 Seidman, 98.
^27 Hamon and Rotman, 424-425.
waiting in the hallways to be called into the tribunal, the Nanterre Eight broke into a
chorus of the *Internationale*, then sang a parody of *la Carnagnole*—a revolutionary
hymn from 1792 redubbed “la Grappignole,” in honor of Nanterre Dean Grappin. They
then insisted on being tried as a group rather than individually, a request to which the
tribunal finally acquiesced.²⁹ Although the hearing was not open to the public, some of
the accused took the opportunity to sermonize. Others sat casually on floor, as though
they were meeting for another sit-in. One of the accused refused to answer questions on
the grounds that the judges really worked for the CRS.³⁰ The defendants probably had
little to fear, as it was widely believed that the “trial” was merely a perfunctory measure
towards their expulsion. Surprisingly, a number of professors who’d been the target of
the Nanterre *enragés* relentless disruptions, such as Alain Touraine, Paul Ricoeur, and
Henri Lefebvre, came forward to support them. Their weak defense: the eight accused
had broken university rules thousands of time before without being called before the
disciplinary court.³¹ After the four-hour circus, Dany quipped as he left the court, “I
think a good time was had by all.”³²

The previous week, Dany had prophetically announced to a group of
demonstrators that his judges would not be able to pass their sentence in peace. Although
it was probably not what Dany had intended, many of the judges who were to preside
over the Nanterre Eight received death threats, and some of them were too intimidated to
appear. Closer to what Dany did probably have in mind, about three thousand protestors
engaged the police in a cat and mouse game in an effort to disrupt the trial at the

²⁹ Joffrin, 82.
³⁰ Seidman, 98-100.
³¹ Joffrin, 82.
³² Ibid., 82.
Sorbonne. Leading the protestors was the JCR, but a number of other student organizations, as well many students who had joined the movement only days prior, also attended. The protestors were handily dispersed by the police that afternoon, but around six o’clock in the evening they managed to regroup at the Place Denfert-Rochereau, on the southern periphery of the Latin Quarter, only to find themselves encircled by fresh CRS troops. For the JCR, there was no question of backing down. With an amazing degree of organization and efficiency, which took even the protestors themselves by surprise, the student cortège began advancing up the Boulevard Saint-Germain towards the police, tearing up the streets as they went along and raining pavés down on the dumbstruck CRS. The CRS responded with truncheons, tear gas grenades, and water canons, but, outnumbered and outmaneuvered, they were finally forced to retreat. It took the CRS approximately three hours to regain control of the streets, though skirmishes continued well into the night. The next day, the Boulevard Saint-Germain looked as though it had been hit by a tornado: streets signs had been uprooted to dig up the paving stones, cars had been pushed aside, rolled over, and in a few cases, burned, and the streets were littered with broken glass and debris. According to official estimates, close to five hundred students were injured. Out of the 80 or so protestors arrested, about half were incarcerated.\(^{33}\)

The attention of France’s student leftists was now one-hundred percent on France itself. Even the explosive war in Vietnam took a backseat. The events were also attracting international attention. Representatives from the student movements in England, Germany, and Italy in particular flocked to Paris to take notes. Having paralyzed the educational system, the French students already scored an unprecedented

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 87.
victory against the Gaullist state. The question was: what next? Leaders of the UNEF, the SNESup, and Movement of March 22nd jointly agreed on May 7th to three demands that had to be met prior to any negotiations with the government or the university administration: the release of all students arrested in the previous weeks' protests, the retreat of the CRS troops from the Latin Quarter, and the re-opening of the Sorbonne. According to a poll taken the next day, 61% of French people were behind the student leaders demands; only 16% of those polled found them unjustified.34 Beyond that, however, there was much disagreement among the student leaders. Was May '68 just about reforming the educational system? How much further could it go? The Marxist-influenced student organizations began to entertain much greater ambitions. What if the students could rally the workers of France to strike, too? A unified student-worker general strike might paralyze the nation and bring an end of the Gaullist regime, maybe even the Fifth Republic. The “revolution” they had studied for years, debated endlessly in lectures halls and cafés, and followed intently in far off regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, seemed to be growing within reach.

Hocquenghem sometimes boasted that it was he who threw the first pavé in May 1968. Whether he meant this literally or figuratively, it is certainly true that he was never very far from the center of action. When the student revolt erupted at Nanterre, he was 21 years old and in his third year at the ENS, the year during which Normaliens generally study for the aggregation, the prestigious certificate that allows one to teach in French universities. Hocquenghem decided to take a bet on the revolution instead. Having

34 Joffrin, 103.
already made a name for himself as a skilled writer and orator in both the UNEF and the JCR--the only student Marxist group that was centrally involved in the movement at the time--Hocquenghem unhesitatingly dropped everything to become a full-time militant. Earlier that year he had traveled with the JCR's core leadership to the International Congress on Vietnam in Berlin, and like the rest of the French delegation, he returned to Paris with a profound faith in the revolutionary potential of Europe's students. After the closing of Nanterre on May 2nd, Hocquenghem and the JCR opened the doors of their strategically located offices on Rue Monsieur-le-Prince to the Movement of March 22\textsuperscript{nd} and representatives of other key student groups such as UNEF and SNESup, and from that moment forward, he worked tirelessly with his new comrades, putting his other "life" temporarily on hold. Hocquenghem's boyfriend was also fully engaged in the movement, working on a committee of student actors and theater professionals, but the two rarely crossed paths.

The state-run radio and television media in the control of the ORTF (Office de la Radio et Télévision Française) had been keeping a tight grip over news of the events. And although some of the mainstream presses such as Le Monde and Le Nouvel Observateur showed more sympathy with the students, there was, as yet, no student-run paper to give direct voice to the students' demands.\textsuperscript{35} Hocquenghem and a handful of militants thus decided that the first order of business was to create such a paper. In the early days of May, ideological affiliations meant little; action, the only unifying thread, meant everything. Appropriately they named their paper ACTION, a title that also made allusion to a short-lived newspaper of the French Resistance. Though it was officially supported by the SNESup, the UNEF, and the Movement of March 22\textsuperscript{nd}, ACTION's team

\textsuperscript{35} On the responses of the mainstream presses to the events of May 1968, see Brillant, 307-330.
was comprised mostly of former dissidents of the UEC in Paris who, like Hocquenghem, were never enticed by the doctrinaire Maoists of the UJCM. Also collaborating on the paper was a young philosopher by the name of André Glucksmann, an assistant to the eminent philosopher and political scientist Raymond Aron who had just published his dissertation *Discours de la Guerre* (The Discourse of War).\(^{36}\) Glucksmann’s dissertation—which was, in essence, a philosophical justification of guerilla warfare—would later become one of the core texts of the Maoists after May 1968.

*ACTION’s* first issue appeared on May 7\(^{th}\). Modeled after the hip English leftist paper, *Black Dwarf*, *ACTION* featured situationist-inspired drawings and the very first cartoons of political satirist (Georges) Wolinsky. The new student newspaper was an instant success. The 35,000 copies printed sold out before the end of the day. (For the next issue 100,000 copies were printed.)\(^ {37}\) In the centerpiece article of the first issue, entitled “Pourquoi nous nous battons” (Why we struggle), Hocquenghem hazarded an early attempt to give meaning and direction to the student rebellion, characterizing it, in terms reminiscent Herbert Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man*, as a kind of “great refusal.”\(^ {38}\) The youth of 1968, he explained, “refuse the future that the existing society offers them … And when they revolt with violence, they are conscious that they are rendering this refusal more visible and clear.”\(^ {39}\) Defending the students arrested at the Sorbonne on May 3\(^{rd}\), he wrote, “Their sole crime: refusing a university whose only goal is to produce business leaders and docile pawns of the economy and refusing an authoritarian and hierarchical social system that tolerates no radical opposition. . . for this

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\(^{39}\) Pourquoi nous nous battons,” *Action* 1 (7 May 1968), repr. in Hocquenghem, AMF, 45.
crime they are beaten and thrown in prison. By coincidence, Herbert Marcuse was in Paris that same week, having been invited to be the keynote speaker at a conference commemorating the 155th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx. Few of the students, however, knew who Marcuse was at the time, and fewer still took any notice of this “obscure German-American philosopher,” as he was referred to in Le Figaro.

The French students, Hocquenghem insisted, were by no means alone in rejecting the repressive bourgeois capitalist system. Situating the events of May '68 within a larger, global context, he optimistically asserted:

Decapitating Nanterre will not suffice to stop the student revolt; what is being born in France knows no boundaries. In Berlin a few thousand students brought down a strong and reactionary state. The SDS, too, began with only a handful of agitators. Today, it represents the only significant force standing in the way of the fascistization of West Germany. In Italy too, thousands of students have asserted their right to contest the social system. In the face of violent repression, they have responded with demonstrations even more violent than those of last Friday. In Spain, England, Brazil, Belgium, and elsewhere in Europe and throughout the world, the students are confronting the forces of the bourgeois order in the streets.

Finally, weighing in on the question of “what next?” Hocquenghem made his convictions clear:

The students have become aware of what is to be made of them: white collar cogs in the existing economic system, paid to make it run more smoothly. Their struggle concerns every worker, because it is theirs as well. The students refuse to become professors in the service of an educational system that privileges the children of the bourgeoisie at the expense of everyone else, sociologists who fabricate slogans for electoral campaigns, psychologists responsible for influencing the workers according to the needs of their bosses, or functionaries in charge of

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40 Ibid., 43.
41 Quoted in Jean Dumont, vol. 1, 230. Outside a few student circles, Marcuse was not widely read or discussed before or during May 1968. On the history of reception of Marcuse in France, particularly by the student movements, see Michel Trebitsch, “Voyages autour de la révolution. Les circulations de la pensée critique de 1956 à 1968,” in Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand et al, Les Années 68: Le temps de la contestation, 69-88.
maintaining a system that is against the interests of the workers as well as their very own . . . [the students] have become aware that their struggle cannot be won unless the workers understand it and make it their own.\textsuperscript{43}

Years later, Hocquenghem would criticize his naïve faith in the power of the workers, describing his first article for \textit{ACTION} as “laden with a certain imbecility of May.”\textsuperscript{44} As the weeks that followed demonstrated, however, his convictions and his idealism resonated deeply with the ’68 generation, which had been profoundly shaped by the dominant Marxist ethos of the Left.

As the student leaders debated the goals and direction of the student movement during the week of May 6-10, the rioting continued to escalate in Paris and started to spread throughout the rest of the country. By the end of the week, virtually all of France’s major university towns had been hit by strikes and occupations—Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Clermont-Ferrand, Rouen, Caen, Montpellier, Toulouse, Nantes, and Dijon.\textsuperscript{45} Hundreds of French high schools throughout the hexagon were also affected. As the student protesters from the provinces poured into Paris by the thousands, Hocquenghem and the other militants in the headquarters on Rue Monsieur-le-Prince began to realize the enormity of the situation. In approximately one week, what had begun with a few hundred \textit{enragés} at Nanterre had snowballed into an amorphous mob of tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of students, many of whom had never previously been involved in student politics. In the afternoon on May 9\textsuperscript{th}, the rector Roche announced that the Sorbonne would be re-opened (He would change his mind the next day) and that the disciplinary proceedings against Daniel Cohn-Bendit would be adjourned \textit{sine die}. But the government’s apparent willingness to negotiate was too little, too late. There was no

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{44} AMF, 42.
\textsuperscript{45} Jean Dumont, vol. 1, 230-23.2
longer any organization or leader who could pretend to speak for the students. The student movement was no longer a movement, nor was it comprised entirely by students anymore. France was on the brink of a popular revolt.

According to the Leninist dictum, it is the masses (not the leaders) who make history. The events of Friday May 10th and 11th would prove Lenin right. By the 10th of May, negotiations between the UNEF and SNESup and the government ministers were beginning to produce results; the government had already promised to re-open the Sorbonne and was beginning to move its troops out of the Latin Quarter. As for the release of all students imprisoned in the previous day’s riots, however, there was still no agreement. The dominant theme of the May 10th protests was thus “release our comrades.” In addition, a lot of the student anger was directed against the ORTF which continued to censor news of the events. The protests continued more or less peacefully throughout the day, but showed no signs of abating towards the evening. At around 8:00 PM, the streets of the Latin Quarter were still thronged with students when the leaders of the marches realized that all of the bridges leading to the right bank of the Seine were heavily guarded by CRS troops. In fact, most of the Latin Quarter had been encircled by police. As the leaders of the UNEF, UEC, and other student groups were contemplating a possible retreat, protestors were already hurling pavés at the CRS. The leaders appealed for calm, but to no avail; the decision had already been made, by no one in particular, to occupy the whole Latin Quarter. “Power is in the streets!” the students chanted.46

46 Hamon and Rotman, v. 1, 490-491.
The first barricades, made of cars, streets signs, *pavés*, and metal grills, went up around 10:00 PM. While the improvised barricades may have made some strategic sense in 1848 and 1871, they were mostly symbolic in 1968. As Dany Cohn-Bendit described the evening years later,

People did whatever they wanted without really knowing what they were doing. On the Rue Gay-Lussac, there were barricades behind barricades behind other barricades! It didn’t make any military sense. There was simply a desire to build barricades.48

Despite the apparent chaos, when the CRS were finally called in to evacuate the Latin Quarter at around 2:00 AM on May 11, they found themselves facing a well-prepared student army. The students benefited from the tactical support of neighborhood residents, café owners, and merchants who fed them, provided them with materials, and hid them when necessary. In front of the barricades, the students had laid down boards with nails, metal scraps, and gasoline to slow down the onslaught. As soon as the troops approached a barricade, they were besieged with stones and Molotov cocktails, many of them falling from the balconies above. When the students were finally forced to abandon one barricade for another, they simply torched everything behind them. The CRS refrained from firing their weapons, but used their tear gas grenades and truncheons liberally, dragging out and beating anyone they could get their hands on. Unlike the evacuation of the Sorbonne on May 3rd, they treated men and women with equal brutality—many Parisians recalled witnessing, for example, a young lady whose clothes had been ripped off while being dragged away from a barricade and severely beaten. It took the CRS until dawn to break through the last of the barricades and disperse the majority of students. Although, surprisingly, no one died in the night, several hundreds

47 See Joffrin, 109-126 for a full chronology of the “night of barricades.”
48 *Le Grand Bazaar*, 46-47.
were injured, many of them seriously, and upwards of 500 were arrested.49 Storefronts and cars throughout the Latin Quarter were burned, broken, or otherwise damaged. For the first time since 1871, the Latin Quarter had become a war zone.

Hocquenghem and his comrades in the JCR were among the last militants to abandon the barricades. Towards dawn, they managed to avoid the police blockade and take refuge at the nearby École Normale Supérieure where they were finally able to rest and assess their victory. No one had really expected the occupation of the Latin Quarter to hold. Their goal, instead, was to hold it as long as possible in an effort to garner public support, particularly from the workers. The CRS had played their part perfectly, bungling through their assault throughout the night through and lashing-out in violent frustration at everything that moved. In this sense, the barricades were an enormous success. Workers all over France stayed up all night, radios by their sides, following the events closely, many of them wishing they were there. The next day, the news continued to spread and the rumor mills churned overtime. The brutality of the CRS was on everyone’s lips. The newspaper editorial pages and every political party—with the exception of De Gaulle’s—denounced the French “forces of order”. Sensing the contagiousness of the student revolt on young workers, the leaders of France’s two largest trade unions—the socialist CFDT and the communist CGT—called for a twenty-four hour strike on Monday May 13th in a effort to rein in their anger. Other unions soon followed suit.

Over the weekend following the night of the barricades, Prime Minister Pompidou, having just returned from a state trip to Afghanistan, announced that he would grant the students’ demands without delay: The remaining protestors in prison would be

49 Seidman, 113.
released, the police would leave the Latin Quarter, and the Sorbonne would be re-opened. The students greeted the news with a mixture of elation and skepticism. For some, the battle was over; the students beat the university system and now it was time to enjoy the summer vacation. But for the more militant factions of the student Left, the real revolution had just begun. The task ahead: unite with the workers, paralyze the country, and topple the Gaulliste state.

Securing the entire Latin Quarter was an untenable goal. But what if its buildings and monuments were overtaken one by one, slowly transforming the quarter into a student commune? Now that national attention was shifting to the workers, the students might have more freedom to operate. On the night of May 11th, Hocquenghem joined a group of students who wanted to test this strategy at Censier, a campus south of the Latin Quarter. The plan was simple: one student would enter, distract the guard with conversation, then force the door open so that dozens of other militants waiting around the corner could rush in. The plan was carried out without a hitch. No authorities intervened or even seemed to take notice.\textsuperscript{50} Censier became the first “liberated” student space of May, but its occupiers already had their sights set on a much more symbolic locale: the Sorbonne.

On Monday, May 13th, the students organized a victory march to celebrate the government’s capitulation after the night of the barricades. As had often been the case in the previous weeks, Dany Cohn-Bendit, Alain Geismar, and Jacques Sauvegeot (representing the UNEF) headed the cortege. This time, however, they were accompanied by leaders both past and present of the socialist and communist parties and trade unions, including Guy Mollet, Francois Mitterrand, Waldek-Rochet, and a

\textsuperscript{50} Joffrin, 143.
nonplussed George Seguy, the secretary general of the PCF’s trade union, the CGT (Seguy famously refused to shake hands with Dany).\textsuperscript{51} Also, they were followed by approximately three-hundred thousand people marching under all different political banners. Finally, nearly every student organization—from the UEC to the anarchists—was represented. Under the cover of the massive march, Hocquenghem and a few dozen militants from the student base at Censier walked straight through the gates of the Sorbonne and began setting-up camp. The protest was largely peaceful, the mood was jubilant, and when it came time to disperse the crowds at the end of the march, the protestors left willingly. Afterwards, Dany led a crowd of several thousand students to the spacious parks of Champs-de-Mars for further discussions. Upon learning of the Sorbonne’s “liberation,” many then headed back to the Latin Quarter.

Ten of thousands of tracts are printed and sent out by car to every university and high school in the country, carrying the messages of the Paris student leaders. They tried to launch the “Radio-Sorbonne” but the antenna is on the Eiffel tower and the signal is frequently interrupted. The “revolutionary restaurant” delivers hot drinks and various dishes day and night to the members of each committee—the cleaning committee on the third floor in the Leverrier Amphitheater, the printing committee on the second floor, the committee for “cultural agitation” in the old philosophy library, the striking committee in the professors’ wing, the coordinating committee in the Center for Ancient Philosophy, the committee of “rapid intervention” on the second floor. Also on the second floor is the dormitory and, on the floor just above it, there’s a children’s nursery. Posted just above one of the children’s beds is a drawing featuring the slogan “down with the CRS” in a child’s awkward handwriting. In the infirmary there’s a special “hooligan clinic,” a remarkable operation with a blood transfusion station and a re-oxygenation area for gas victims. Some of the surgeons invited to visit are forced to admit that their own clinics pale by comparison. In the Institute for Chinese Studies, the students have created a vast pharmacy, and in the adjacent wings there are

\textsuperscript{51} Dumont, 49-52.
considerable quantities of milk, fruit, vegetables, and jams brought in daily by local citizens and shop keepers...52

For the next three weeks, the Sorbonne was a frenetic experiment in radical democracy and communal living. Discussions and debates raged day and night, punctuated by jazz music and wild celebrations. Manifestoes and political graffiti covered the walls of the amphitheaters, classrooms, and corridors like the Chinese dazibaos of Mao's Cultural Revolution. To the critics of the student movement, it appeared to be total chaos, but to its participants, it was a living laboratory for the society they wanted to create. Soon thereafter, other public spaces of the Latin Quarter were “liberated” by the students—such as the École des Beaux Arts, which immediately began to mass produce May's famous street art, the Odeon Theater, and the offices of the Medical and Architectural Associations (Ordre des médecins, Ordre des Architectes). All over France, universities and lycées fell under the control of the students. Along with some of his new comrades from the barricades and several leaders of the JCR, Hocquenghem served on the central committee of the occupied Sorbonne, which tried its best to oversee the pandemonium.

The political philosopher Castoriadis described the occupied Sorbonne as a model of participatory democracy, where “delegates representing the most improbable and diverse groups—from retirees to the handicapped—stood up to demand that society finally listen to them.”53 If it is true that in May '68, the French “seized the word” just as they had seized the Bastille in 1789, one would expect to have heard at least a few cries from homosexuals, too. A sexual liberation ethos had been an essential undercurrent of the May '68 student movement from its inception at Nanterre, and sexual liberation was

53 Mai 68: La Brèche, 185-186
definitely in the air at the Sorbonne, as countless personal accounts as well as the infamous slogan “The more I make revolution, the more I cum--the more I cum, the more I make revolution” attest. There were, as one might expect, a number of attempts at the Sorbonne to raise women’s issues, but such attempts were largely unsuccessful. At least one group of women approached the central committee about creating some kind of women’s liberation committee:

_Hmmm (responded one of the bearded men in the office.) We’ll see about it later._

_Well . . . later?!_

_How about right now!_

_Shut up! Go to the daycare center, or the kitchen. Make yourself useful._

Another group women from the FMA (*Féminin, masculin, avenir*), an organization founded earlier that year, also tried to get the ball rolling at the occupied Sorbonne. In rhyming prose, their posters read:

_Students who question everything,_  
_Relations between professors and pupils,_  
_Have you ever thought of questioning_  
_The relations between men and women?_  
_Students who join the revolution,_  
_Don’t be duped once again,_  
_Don’t simply follow the others,_  
_Define your own demands._

Radicalized by the events of May, as well as by the chauvinism they experienced at the hands of leftist leaders, the FMA changed its name at the Sorbonne (but not its acronym)

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54 Pierre Sorbon-Lepavé, *Le journal insolite de Mai* '68, 75-76.
56 Repr. in ibid., 12.
to Féminisme, marxisme, action. Some of the founders of the FMA would later help establish the MLF (Mouvement de Libération des Femmes) in 1970.

A few brave homosexual students did speak up. One day at the occupied Sorbonne, a handful of posters mysteriously appeared in the Guizot Amphitheatre with the heading: “Call from the Revolutionary Pederast Action Committee” [Comité d’Action Pédéristaque Révolutionnaire or CAPR]. The manifesto denounced the repression of homosexuals and demanded the freedom of speech and freedom of practice for all sexual minorities. Attacking the discreet homophile culture of Arcadie and the well-known double standard in French society whereby homosexuality was tolerated, even admired, among figures of the cultural elite and oppressed everywhere else, it proclaimed: “For each glorious Jean Genet, there are a hundred thousand shamed homosexuals, condemned to misery!” The posters were quickly torn down, however, and most of the Sorbonne’s occupants never even saw them.

The “CAPR” was by no means an organized movement, or even much of a “committee,” but rather the initiative of handful of individuals who wanted to spark a dialogue. Guy Chevalier, a literature student at the Sorbonne and one of the CAPR’s authors, recalled:

After about a couple of weeks, I said to a friend of mine, “This is great and all, that we can finally voice our anger about the university and society in this kind of student revolution, but our real problem is homosexuality.” We were frustrated. There were all kinds of sexual liberation committees, but they were all explicitly heterosexual.

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58 Ibid., 30.
When the authors of the manifesto later tried to hold a discussion at the occupied Odeon Theater, the other students responded with a mixture of puzzlement and hostility. Chevalier recounts that one student countered, “But haven’t you read Freud? He explained your problem, which is neither political nor revolutionary but personal.”

Hocquenghem was not among the CAPR’s founders. And even though he was friends with some in the group and may have known something of their intentions, he maintained that, like most of the Sorbonne’s occupants, he never even saw the posters and only learned of the CAPR’s existence after the fact. Many years later, Chevalier bitterly insinuated that Hocquenghem himself helped tear down the posters. While the accusation is unfounded, it is true that Hocquenghem worked with the central committee of the occupied Sorbonne, which may have ordered the destruction of the CAPR’s posters. But, if it is true that Hocquenghem had some idea of what his friends were up to—which is not entirely clear—why then did he not join them? Was it his attachment to the “mad, inexhaustible charm” of the double-life that kept him from merging his militancy and his homosexuality in May 1968? Or was it instead a desire to protect his growing reputation within the radical leftist milieu? An experienced gauchiste, Hocquenghem knew full well that, as he put it, a homosexual “occupation of the toilets” at the Sorbonne would have risked delegitimizing the movement. In Hocquenghem’s “coming out” article from 1972, he explained his attitude at the time.

The times I spent with homosexuals in bars and night clubs were, for me, moments of freedom. I was very involved in militancy at the time, and it

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59 Interview with Guy Chevalier, “Le sacerdoce de l’activiste” in Têtu 54 (March 2001): 98. According to Chevalier, these were the words of Phillippe Sollers.
60 DH, 32.
61 Chevalier, “Le sacerdoce de l’activiste,”
was the only activity by which I could escape the world that surrounded me. Militancy had become rote for me: preparing for protests, churning out tracts, writing texts. I gave the working class movements a run for their money! I loved getting up on the soapbox, speaking out, and making beautiful gestures. I had a certain desire to be regarded and desired that I indulged as a *gauchiste* but refused as a homosexual.\(^{63}\)

Despite the failure of the CAPR, May '68 was, in a sense, an important step in the creation of a homosexual liberation movement. In general terms, the events sparked a radical questioning of authority and convention and created an atmosphere of free speech in which the issue of homosexuality was bound, sooner or later, to come up. More importantly, perhaps, the student communes such as the occupied Sorbonne that flourished briefly in May '68 formed a critical social space in which many homosexuals of the '68 generation first came into contact with another. As one former occupant of the Sorbonne described his experience:

> I militated like a sheep in some leftist group close to the anarchists and succeeded in hooking up with a number of working-class types at the occupied Sorbonne. Obviously, we couldn't speak of it the next morning around our "comrades."\(^{64}\)

Another anonymous participant recalled:

> I turned into a "homo" in May '68 at the occupied Sorbonne. A leader of some leftist group "deflowered" me. I became his "chick," sort of, and I ran around with jars of glue sticking up posters. He advised me to keep our relationship a secret, but that didn't stop me from talking about homosexuality in our group.\(^{65}\)

And according to a third:

> The "revolutionaries" didn't want to hear about sexuality or gender roles. Thus, the *gauchistes* quickly clamped down on the CAPR at the Sorbonne. But the "stoners" and the "freaks" of the attitude "You have to change your mind before you change society" lived their sexuality openly. For

\(^{63}\) DH. 32.

\(^{64}\) Anonymous testimony collected Pablo Rouy, "Vive le matérialisme histériique!" *Gai Pied Hebdo* 319 (5 May 1988), 82.

\(^{65}\) Ibid.
them, bisexuality became the norm—that was good enough to get me jumping barricades with them. . .

Just as the students were experimenting with radical democracy at the Sorbonne, however, the worker’s phase of the May events was getting underway. After the legal twenty-four hour strike on May 13th, wildcat strikes began to break out in many of France’s largest factories. On May 14th, workers at Sud-Aviation (a state-owned aircraft manufacturing company) in Nantes left their posts. Over the next two days, they were joined by the majority of workers for Renault, France’s most successful state-owned company since its nationalization after WW II. By that weekend, between three and six million workers were on strike, and their numbers continued to grow. As wildcat strikes swept France in the middle weeks of May, the major trade unions, led by the CGT and the CFDT, formed an alliance to begin negotiations with the Gaullists.

With millions of workers away from their jobs, the atmosphere at the Sorbonne began to take on a new sense of urgency. The revolution, it seemed, was rapidly approaching. Many students believed at the time, and not without some reason, that they were living in a revolutionary moment as significant of those of 1789, 1848, 1871, and 1917, and that decisions made and strategies adopted in the immediacy of the moment would have far-reaching consequences. Beneath the festive ebullition of the Latin Quarter, filled with music, dancing, drinking, and poetry, there lay a nucleus of intense discussion, where matters of revolutionary theory and practice were debated with utmost seriousness. Hocquenghem and his comrades on the central committee of the occupied Sorbonne believed that if the students did not merge forces with the workers, History

66 Ibid.
67 Joffrin, 364.
would leave them behind. The general attitude among student leftists was that the workers’ revolt took precedence; all other “secondary” matters would be worked later.

During the worker’s phase, what had previously been the dream of a radical minority within the student movement became an almost universal aim: a worker’s revolution to overthrow the Gaullist state. As the strikes began, editorialists from the mainstream presses began to make a distinction between the worker’s revolt and that of the students, the latter of which they characterized as a “youth” or generational rebellion. Maurice Duverger, for example, editorialist for *Nouvel Observateur*, a newspaper that was largely sympathetic to the students, argued that any alliance between the workers and the students could only be fragile and temporary.

The two categories of allies have a natural and significant distrust for another. The student movements fear being absorbed by those giant unions and parties. . . .on the other side, the popular organizations fear everything they cannot control. They view the protests fomented by the students as reckless and undisciplined eruptions.68

The student leaders were quick to retaliate that their movement was, in fact, part of a larger working class movement, downplaying as much as possible the movement’s counter-cultural side. In the first issue of *Avant-Garde Jeunesse* to appear since the beginning of the events, the JCR, for example, typified the new sentiment.

In France, the student movement has proven that it has reached a level of political maturity that is probably superior to that of its German and Italians counterparts . . . contrary to the *Nouvel Observateur*’s allegations, Marcusian ideology plays only a minor, secondary role: the student militants on the avant-garde recognize almost unanimously the historical role of the working class as defined by Marxist theory.69

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Even Dany Cohn-Bendit, who helped spark the events by demanding sexual freedoms at Nanterre, began to change his perspective. In an interview from late May, he explained:

The March 22\textsuperscript{nd} Movement has entered a new phase. We have not abandoned purely student demands, but the best way to bring the university into question is to intensify the workers’ movement. . . We won’t succeed on our own; we cannot make a revolution by ourselves.\textsuperscript{70}

Hocquenghem would later regret the self-censoring of May 1968’s libidinal side during the worker phase of the movement. In particular, he lamented the repression of the CAPR at the Sorbonne, which, in his opinion, may have set back the homosexual liberation movement in France several years.\textsuperscript{71} Given the trajectory of events, however, there was probably little chance of starting a homosexual liberation movement in 1968. Just as soon as the student commune was created, the momentum of the events shifted dramatically to the working classes. Moreover, what was critically lacking at the Sorbonne in 1968 was a discourse for defending homosexuality that could be integrated into the Marxist-dominated lingua franca of the Left. The CAPR had tried to appeal to the student movement on the common grounds of police repression. What the larger student body had begun to experience in 1967-1968 was only a taste, they argued, of what they had been enduring quietly for generations. Beyond that, however, there was no language for expressing homosexuality’s subversive potential and hence its legitimate place in the larger project of revolutionizing society. Such a language would have to be created in the aftermath of May 1968.

\textsuperscript{70} Daniel Cohn-Bendit et al, \textit{The French Revolt: the Leaders Speak}, 51.
\textsuperscript{71} DH, 32.
Up until the massive worker strikes in the second half of May, there had been one notable absence among the alliance of student organizations in the Latin Quarter: the Maoists of the rue d’Ulm. After proving their street-fighting prowess in February against Occident and the Paris police, the UJCml was nowhere to be found during the student occupation at Nanterre, the crackdown on the Sorbonne on May 3rd, or even the violent clashes of the night of the barricades. As Christophe Bourseiller, historian of the radical left, wondered in his study on French Maoism:

Is there not a great paradox? For most historians and observers, Maoism is considered an essential component of the movement of May 1968. The fact of the matter, however, is surprising. It appears that on the whole the pro-Chinese missed out on ’68, joined the movement only belatedly, and had no determinant role on its evolution.72

In contrast with the UNEF, the SNESup, the Movement of March 22nd, and most of the other groups involved in the student revolt, the UJCml was not a particularly democratic organization. Self-proclaimed Leninists, they had a sovereign leader: Althusser’s star pupil Robert Linhart. In March and April, Linhart denounced the student movement at Nanterre as a “petit-bourgeois” distraction from the real struggle—that of the workers, of course—and warned his followers against joining them.73 Siding with the established left against the students, Linhart’s cortege even marched arm in arm with the loathed PCF during the May 1st parade. Stranger still, after the riots at the Sorbonne on May 3rd, Linhart became firmly convinced that the student movement was playing directly into the hands of a “social-democratic plot orchestrated by the Trotskyists that aimed to strip the working class of its legitimate leadership over the working class

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72 Bourseiller, 89.
73 Ibid., 89-94.
struggle to the benefit of the *petite bourgeoisie.*"^{74} Accordingly, during the night of the barricades, Linhart’s trained street-fighters stood by and watched from their headquarters at the ENS and even tried in vain to persuade the students to return home. Not all of the Maoists were convinced by this paranoid logic; a few free-thinkers in the UJCml participated in the events even at the risk of being ostracized as a "counter-revolutionaries." Only when the workers decided the following day to call a general strike in solidarity with the students did it become clear to even the most doctrinaire UJCml militants that they had made an error in following Linhart’s orders and, consequently, had nearly missed their rendez-vous with history. In the middle of the worker phase of the events, Linhart, largely abandoned by his flock, suffered a mental breakdown. In manic state of desperation he sought out the diplomats of the Chinese Embassy in Paris who curiously granted the delirious *normalien* an audience. The UJCml, he tried to persuade them, had strayed from the true path, and should no longer be recognized as a legitimate "Maoist" organization. The Chinese, he further argued, would do well to sever all ties to the French students and should even perhaps revisit some of the core principles of Mao’s philosophy. A surrealist scene it must have been. Shortly thereafter, Linhart underwent psychiatric care and quietly disappeared. In the middle of the May events, the UJCml lost its leader.^{75}

The eccentric and unstable personality of Linhart goes a long way in explaining the Maoists’ absence in May ’68, but the Maoists also differed fundamentally from the other student groups in their philosophy. Although virtually all of the student militants in May ’68 believed that a student-worker alliance was essential to the movement’s success,

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75 For the full story of the UJCml in May ’68 and Robert Linhart’s collapse, see ibid., 89-94.
the Maoists took their *ouvrièrisme*, or "workerism" one step further. The task of the
student militants was not to lead or ally themselves with the workers, but to *immerse*
themselves in their struggles. For the UJCml, this entailed abandoning one’s studies to
become *établi* or "implanted" among the working classes in the factories. At the
beginning of the school year in 1967, the UJCml sent its first 20 *établis* to work in
factories around Paris.\(^{76}\) With a fervor and discipline that could only be described as
religious, hundreds more soon followed.

In 1968, therefore, the Maoists were not terribly interested in reforming a
university system that they had already given up on, and even less interested in the kind
of counter-cultural debates that flourished at the occupied Sorbonne. When, however, the
action shifted from the Latin Quarter to the factories in the suburbs of Paris, they began
to rethink the significance of the events. As one former UJCml *établi* explained:

> During this whole period, I never once set foot in Paris. I was too
occupied with my work in the factory... I must say that all that stuff with
the student movement, gender-mixing at Nanterre so the girls could stay
with the boys, etc., for me, it was all bullshit. Only when the students
began going out to the workers did I try to integrate the student movement
into my discourse.\(^{77}\)

Many of the UJCml’s militants were already implanted in striking factories
around Paris and were thus well-placed to lead the student-worker alliance committees
that sprung up in the latter half of May. The Maoists may have missed the boat during
the student phase of the movement, but they were determined to make up for lost time by
redefining student activism in the "next phase" of the ’68 revolution.

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\(^{76}\) Bourseiller, 83. For a comprehensive study the *établi* movement, which included militants from many
other groups in addition to the Maoists, see Marnix Dressen, *De l’mpi à l’établi: les étudiants maoïstes à
l’usine (1967-1989).*

\(^{77}\) Virginie Linhart, 37-38.
By May 29th, the hexagon was almost completely paralyzed. Some nine or ten million workers were on strike, the students controlled of most of the Latin Quarter, public transportation was at a standstill, and there wasn't enough gas in the pumps for Parisians to leave for summer vacation. The workers' strikes, furthermore, had generated a fierce political crisis, with the various factions of the Left jockeying for power. The previous day, for example, both the socialist leader François Mitterrand and the communist leader Waldeck Rochet announced during separate press conferences their readiness to lead a new provisional government. To compound matters for the government, on the morning of the 29th, General De Gaulle mysteriously disappeared. Not even his prime minister knew his whereabouts. Rumors spread throughout the country that he was preparing his resignation, had fled out of fear for his life, or even perhaps that he had been killed. In truth, the General had made a secret trip to Baden-Baden where General Massu and a large number of French forces were stationed. According to De Gaulle, he simply needed "some fresh air and good a night's sleep," but it is generally believed now that De Gaulle was contemplating using his French troops in nearby Germany to restore order in Paris. Suddenly there was a vacuum of power at the center of the Fifth Republic; the collapse of the Gaullist regime seemed only a matter of days away.

But the General had not given up. Just as he had in 1940 and 1958, he proved his political cunning by orchestrating a stunning return to power. On the 30th, he returned to Paris rejuvenated and addressed the French people by radio. Sounding more like the De Gaulle of 1940 than the aloof and out of touch leader of previous weeks—De Gaulle had

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78 Joffrin, 266-291.
79 Ibid., 255-265.
80 Ibid., 292.
spent most of May out of the country on official states visits, leaving Pompidou to manage the crisis—he declared that he would not abdicate and leave the Republic vulnerable to a dictatorial menace from the Left.\textsuperscript{81} He also announced plans to dissolve the National Assembly and hold new popular elections late in June. Later that evening, the Champs-Élysées was the sight of the largest march since the beginning of May. This time, however, it was the Gaullists and their supporters among the “silent majority” calling for a return to law and order. The previous week, Prime Minister Pompidou had begun negotiations with the trade unions (apparently without De Gaulle’s consent) which culminated in an agreement on May 27\textsuperscript{th}, known as the “Grenelle Accords,” that would have most workers back on the job in the first week of June. Then, on May 31\textsuperscript{st}, gas finally returned to the pumps in Paris, permitting its residents to leave for the traditional August vacation. The revolutionary fervor of the students quickly began to fade. In the middle of June, the police finally evacuated those occupants who still remained in the Sorbonne, the Odeon Theater, and others spaces in the Latin Quarter. Plans were underway to reschedule national examinations that had been cancelled amidst the student revolt. When, at the end of June, De Gaulle’s promised elections were held, the conservatives not only re-instated De Gaulle, but swept the National Assembly as well. Just as suddenly and mysteriously as the May revolt had begun, it was over by July.

For the militant core of the student movement, however, May ’68 “was only the beginning.”\textsuperscript{82} May ’68 exploded the horizon of what previously seemed possible. Revolution, the student militants believed, was not only achievable in France, it was imminent. The bravado of the Maoists, who continued to fight alongside radical

\textsuperscript{81} De Gaulle’s speech from May 30 repr. in Ibid., 295-297.
\textsuperscript{82} According to the famous slogan of the Movement of March 22\textsuperscript{nd}.
elements of the working classes through June, not only restored the marred reputation of their organization, but helped established them as the new revolutionary avant-garde.

Now under the leadership of the number two in charge, Benny Levy (A.K.A. Pierre Victor), the Maoists of the UJCml founded a new journal, *La cause du peuple*, whose aim was to rally the energies of the student movement to the worker’s revolution in the coming months.

A new era in the history of the French people has begun; the storm of popular revolt created an atmosphere of enthusiasm and joy among the people. For weeks the workers, masters of their factories, were able to speak, unify, and fight, and the youth have now joined their assault on the decadent society of old.\(^{83}\)

Hocquenghem too was swept by the new revolutionary optimism after May 1968. As he described the mood of the months following May, “One had to be as far left as possible; even the Trotskyism to which I’d previously adhered began to seem tepid and opportunistic.”\(^{84}\) Like the trenches of the First World War, May served as the rendezvous for the ’68 generation, bringing diverse elements of French society together under a common cause. The ideas, the organization, and the *esprit* were now in place for the French Cultural Revolution, but as long as France seemed on the brink of a working class revolution, the cultural revolution would have to wait.

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\(^{84}\) AM, 86-87.
Chapter 5
The Crystallization (May 1968 to 1971)

The slogans of May '68 have faded, but they are taking on a new, corrosive meaning, eating away at bourgeois culture...the revolutionary combat on the cultural front, long considered a secondary objective, has become fundamental, at the same time as this front expands.¹

-L'idiot liberté, December 1970

Following De Gaulle's return to power in June the student movements entered a period of intense reflection and reorganization. The May events were cause both for celebration and lament. One the one hand, the students had succeeded beyond anyone's expectations prior to May, sparking the first general strike in a modern industrialized society, paralyzing the country, and even creating a brief vacuum of power at its center. On the other hand, it was the Gaullists who triumphed at the end of the day, negotiating an end to the majority of the work stoppages and effecting a more or less complete return to law and order. Most of May's militants remained convinced that de Gaulle's return was only a temporary, albeit serious, setback to their movement. The results of the June elections—from which many leftists abstained—did not evidence, they believed, popular support for the Gaullists, but rather the absence of a viable political left and the fascist inclinations of the frightened bourgeoisie. The fact that the General's days seemed

numbered, however, did not mean that the students could let up one bit on their pressure; in the coming months, the need for organized resistance would be no less urgent than during the days of May. As the editors of the Cahiers de Mai, a new student paper founded in June by a group of UEC and UNEF militants, described the crippled regime after May '68, "Gaullism today is a fatally wounded elephant; it will continue to do damage, but the end is approaching." 2 The immediate task of the student movements was thus to absorb lessons from May '68's successes and failures, regroup, and recommence. As thousands of students chanted in the streets of Paris on June 1, "May '68 is only the beginning, we must continue the struggle!" 3 And according to Cahiers de Mai, one of the first new post-68 student radical newspapers to appear:

Should we now feel only bitterness and deception? An extraordinary new epoch has just announced itself in France and Europe more broadly. We can see now that a socialist revolution in a highly industrialized society—the conditions hoped for by Marx in other words—is getting underway. The revolution will transform the face of socialism in the world. During the events of May, the revolutionary fermentation in France produced surprising and unprecedented results. Without haste we must recognize, study, and understand them. They hold a treasure of knowledge and resources for the working class movement in France and abroad. [May '68] is war chest for the battles to come. 4

The '68ers were mostly right about de Gaulle; despite his triumphant return in June 1968, his political reputation was seriously damaged. Less than a year later, in April 1969, de Gaulle held a public referendum on his plan to reform the Fifth Republic by transforming the Senate into an advisory body and giving more power to regional councils. The referendum was defeated, demonstrating that the French people no longer held confidence in him to lead the nation. As promised, de Gaulle respectfully resigned as

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2 "Pourquoi les 'cahiers de mai'," Cahiers de Mai 2 (15 July 1968), 2.
3 BDIC (Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine), Mai 68: Materiaux pour l'histoire de notre temps (Paris: 1988), 299.
4 "Ce qu'on cherche à nous faire oublier," Cahiers de Mai 1 (15 June 1968), 3.
a result. However, Georges Pompidou, de Gaulle’s faithful Prime Minister since 1962, was subsequently elected the new president. The “Gaullist elephant” would thus stagger on for several more years. Undaunted by Pompidou’s new campaign of anti-leftist repression, the 68ers’ continued to fan the flames of revolution, helping to spread it to nearly every sector of French society within the span of a few short years. In 1970, a team of leftist journalists headed by Bernard Kouchner decided to publish a broad survey of the various new struggles that had emerged in France since May, from the high schools and universities, to the factories and farms. Introducing their final product, *Savage France*, they wrote:

> In the lovely month of May 1968, the forces of order managed to stem the spring from spilling over into the summer. The crowds at the aborted celebration left the streets and dispersed to the universities, the high schools, the factories, and France’s overlooked ghettos. The scent of Nanterre lingers everywhere in the air. A taste for political adventure has returned to the West. The new society navigates itself poorly . . . it’s the beginning of the savage struggles to come.  

May 1968 was the key galvanizing moment for the student militants and the ’68 generation more broadly. Although pockets of contestation had existed all over the hexagon prior to May, it wasn’t until that summer that the various protest groups finally came into contact with one another and began working towards common goals. The relationships forged during the battles of May proved to be more significant in the years that followed than prior group affiliations. Thus, few of the student militant groups that existed prior to May and participated in the events survived the encounter, and the period

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of reflection that followed, intact. The organizational shake-up after May resulted in large part from the government campaign to repress organizations involved in the May uprising. Responding to the student threat, de Gaulle appointed Raymond Marcellin as the new Minister of the Interior on May 31, 1968. A man who never hid his admiration for such European dictators as Franco in Spain and Salazar in Portugal, Marcellin immediately called for a ban on all protests leading up to the elections in late June and also made known his intentions of going after May’s provocateurs.\(^6\) On June 12\(^{th}\), less than two weeks after taking office, he banned eleven political organizations, most of which had been instrumental during the events of May. Among them, the Movement of March 22\(^{nd}\), the Trotskyite PCI (Parti Communiste Révolutionnaire), and the JCR were the most heavily targeted. (Marcellin believed, or at least claimed to believe, that Dany Cohn-Bendit and the Movement of March 22\(^{nd}\) were being manipulated by the Trotskyites of the JCR and the German SDS.\(^7\) Dany had already arranged to be smuggled back to Germany by this time, having already judged that there was little more he could contribute to the movements in France as a man on the run. Alain Krivine, on the other hand was immediately arrested in his home, along with his wife, and thrown in prison. His crime: “reconstituting a banned organization.”\(^8\) In the days that followed, dozens more militants, many of them from the JCR, were arrested for the same crime. Some of them were held for weeks or months, sometimes without any formal charges. Marcellin also inaugurated a campaign of censorship targeting certain leftist publications, beginning with *Action*. In June and July, vendors of the paper were randomly searched

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\(^7\) Ibid., 178-182.

\(^8\) Ibid., 42.
and arrested, copies of the paper were seized, and its offices ransacked.⁹ Like many other leftist organizations, the JCR was forced to disperse and go underground. Many gauchiste leaders during this period took on noms de guerres and fled the cities for the countryside. Many others left the country altogether and tried to regroup abroad, whether in Italy, Germany, or even Cuba.

More importantly, however, it was lessons learned from the events of May that directly led to the restructuring of the student movements after May ’68. First and foremost, the students realized that if they wanted a revolution, they would have to bring it about themselves. Although the official Left, and the PCF most significantly, had briefly regained some of its lost reputation among the students by supporting the workers in the second half of May, its signing of the Grenelle Accords with Pompidou later that month was regarded as sheer treason. May ‘68 did more than just underscore the obsolescence of the traditional organizations of the Left, it also brought into radical question all previous styles and strategies of political organization. The groups who were most effective in leading the May ’68 rebellion were not the large parties and unions, but the relatively tiny “groupuscules,” such as the JCR and the Movement of March 22nd, who were able to read the events, adapt quickly, and respond effectively. The revolutionary situation in France, the students realized, demanded a certain amount of theoretical and strategic pragmatism. Thus, with “Direct action,” as their new shibboleth, many of the students of May regrouped into smaller, more fluid groupes de bases (grassroots organizations) which were centered usually around a particular university campus or major protest site, such as the as Renault automobile plants in the Parisian suburbs of Flins and Billancourt. The months following May witnessed a mass exodus of

⁹ Ibid., 134-136.
student radicals "de l'amphi à l'établi" as one historian put it (from the university
amphitheaters to the factories).\textsuperscript{10}

The students also learned that they could not rely on the workers to represent their
concerns. The Grenelle Accords were a crushing deception for the students, although
they did not blame the workers themselves so much as their leaders who "sold them out."
All the same, the students realized that their alliance with the workers in May '68 had
been largely one of convenience, not substance. Rather than coming away discouraged
from the experience, however, the student militants became even more convinced that
constructing a true student-worker alliance was the next priority. The central task in the
wake of May was to synthesize the working class movements and the new cultural
demands that emerged in May '68. In the meantime, however, the students' would not
simply put off their demands for another day. The willingness of many French workers
to go back to work once they had achieved their meager gains, the bourgeoisie's massive
demonstrations in support of de Gaulle in late May, and de Gaulle's electoral triumph in
June all pointed to the conclusion that France was perhaps not as ready for revolution as
they thought. The masses needed much more ideological preparation; bourgeois ideology
needed to be attacked head-on. What France required, in other words, was a "total"
revolution--political, economic, and cultural.

Finally, May '68 had destabilized the regime and ignited revolutionary passions
across France, and there was no time to waste if the movement was going to capitalize on
this momentum. Because the next revolutionary opportunity might present itself at any
time, many student militants abandoned their studies and plans for the future after May
'68 and wagered instead on the coming of another May. As they busily prepared for this

moment, their utopian dreams were fueled by two powerful new intellectual currents, one that blew from the East and the other from the West. The twin “cultural revolutions” taking place in China and the United States at the end of the 1960s, radically different though they were, seemed to represent two related revolutionary idioms. Although their influence was short-lived, in the period lasting from the May uprising until the very early 1970s, Mao’s China and “Woodstock Nation” exerted a powerful sway over France’s cultural revolutionaries.

After de Gaulle’s electoral triumph at the end of June, Hocquenghem took a much needed break from the frenetic activity of the previous weeks. With some friends he traveled to Greece, where he did some research, relaxed, and wisely avoided Marcellin’s crackdown. Returning to France refreshed, he rejoined some of his comrades who were hiding out in the countryside of the Jura near the Swiss border. The assorted group included a number of JCR militants as well as Hocquenghem’s younger brother Joani, younger sister Anne, and his boyfriend. As Hocquenghem was the natural leader among them, the group became known as the “bande à Guy,” or Guy’s gang. They decided to return to Paris in the fall and form a new groupe de base at the campus of Censier in Paris’s 13th arrondissement. To keep the spirit of the occupied Sorbonne alive, they also decided to build a new commune in which everything would be shared, from chores and expenses, to money, food, and even clothes. Even the doors on the bathrooms, they
agreed, would be removed to "combat against egoism and bourgeois notions of selfhood."  

As a gang of young, long-haired radicals, finding a space to rent for their new commune wouldn’t be easy. Hocquenghem and the girlfriend of one of his fellow communards volunteered to clean up and play the part of a young married couple. Using a borrowed car and borrowed clothes, they managed to secure a lease on their commune’s first locale: a rundown villa in the working-class suburb of Ivry. As Hocquenghem recalled the villa:

A dirt path, sandwiched between a wall barrier and a junkyard of automobile carcasses, led to our wing of the building. An enameled plaque with a rose bush painted on it read, “The Rose Villa.” The only roses to be found anywhere, however, were the one on the plaque.  

Taking the ruse one step further, the two of them even faked their own marriage. By pretending to their parents and relatives that they wanted to start a family in Ivry, they were able furnish the commune tastefully with weddings gifts and heirlooms. There were, of course, practical and financial advantages to living communally, but for Hocquenghem, it provided the added excitement of living a social experiment. In their commune, relationships were fluid and open. Workers from the neighborhood came by, ate, drank, slept, and occasionally outstayed their welcome. Drugs flowed freely, hashish at first, and later LSD, and Hocquenghem’s secret life was, if not completely out of the closet, at least tolerated, understood, and even admired by some.

Of the many periods in his life Hocquenghem recounts in his memoirs, it was this one that he seems to remember most fondly.

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11 AM, 97.
12 AM, 97.
We were more than a political organization. We were grasping for something, like children in the dark seeking to latch on to one another, grasping for the evanescent idea of absolute happiness, a life completely reconciled with itself. But what we were trying to grasp, this apparition of freedom, always eluded us. We pondered this together late into the evenings, without realizing that this happiness . . . had already taken us by surprise, without our even recognizing it.  

When the commune at Ivry became uninhabitable from overpopulation and overuse, Hocquenghem and the *bande à Guy* formed a smaller, tidier, and more “bourgeois” commune in the working-class neighborhood of Asnières near Nanterre. Though the size and composition of the *bande à Guy* varied over the years, Hocquenghem continued to live communally in and around Paris throughout most of his life.

Meanwhile, with many of its leaders in jail or in hiding, the JCR was on the brink of collapse. In the fall months of 1968, its militants finally managed to regroup into a handful of small, competing camps. The largest contingency, led by Daniel Bensáïd and some of the JCR’s original founders, favored merging with the ex-PCI to form a new French section of the Trotskyite Fourth International. For the old guard Trotskyites of the PCI, rebuilding “the party” was top priority. For Hocquenghem’s *groupe de base* at Censier, on the other hand, there was no question of going back to the days of hierarchy and orthodoxy; the May revolt had already demonstrated the futility of “party” and “ideology.” Hocquenghem led an opposition camp, known as the “third tendency,” in the debates against the hardliners who favored joining the Fourth International, but failed to influence the majority opinion. In the spring of 1969, the leadership of the JCR met in Strasbourg to vote officially on the matter of joining the *Ligue*. Although the *bande à Guy* sent a handful of representatives, Hocquenghem himself did not attend. As it turns

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13 AM, 94-95.
out, the other leaders had already barred him and the “third tendency” from joining the
Fourth International. On the surface at least, the bande à Guy, having already moved
beyond the Trotskyism of the JCR, did not seem to care. On the night of the JCR’s final
rupture, they even celebrated with Champagne.\textsuperscript{15} At the same time, however, they knew
that by isolating themselves they risked not being a part of the movement.

Despite what some of those close to Hocquenghem suspected, his banishment by
the former leaders of the JCR probably had nothing to do with rumors of his
homosexuality. Hocquenghem and the bande à Guy were ejected, rather, for their
spontaneité (spontaneous or “direct action”) ideas. Although the Trotskyite leaders
recognized the importance of spontaneity in the early stages of May, it was now time,
they believed, for the student rebels to pass the torch on to an organization capable of
planning for the long arduous battle that lie ahead. As the leaders summarized their
position:

The student movement, in a sense, played a provisional role in leading the
revolution by pointing the only possible path of resistance: the street, the
strikes, and revolutionary violence. It usurped this role, it should be said,
from the Stalinist direction of the workers movement. But this role has
become a dangerous substitute now that the revolutionary wave has spread
to the workers.\textsuperscript{16}

The time for improvisation, in other words, had passed. “The bourgeoisie does not
improvise.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Hamon and Rotman, v. II, 197-198.
\textsuperscript{16} “Editorial,” La Nouvelle Avant-garde 1 (June 1968), 2.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 2.
Moreover, the Trotskyites attributed the *spontaneiste* philosophy to their biggest rivals, the Maoists of UJCml. Like the JCR, the UJCml had succumbed to factional disputes after the collapse of the May revolt and was undergoing a process of transformation. Its decision to support the PCF over the students in the early part of May had been unpopular with many of its members, and, even though Benny Lévy had taken over the helm, the UJCml had not quite recovered from Linhart’s breakdown. At the same time, the self-sacrifice and discipline of the UJCml’s *étalís* in the automobile factories around Paris in late May had impressed many in the student movements and, in June and July, these *étalís* remained among the only students actively involved in those worker hotspots that continued to foment rebellion despite the Grenelle Accords. For the Maoist militants who had supported the PCF in May, the Grenelle Accords were a terrible shock, and they vowed thereafter never again to be held back by these “bourgeois social democrats” who called themselves communists.18 Eager to capitalize on the credibility of their worker committees, and also, no doubt, to make up ground after missing out on much of the May revolt, the leaders of the UJCml decided to disband the organization and reorganize their militants along the decentralized model of their *étalís*. In the fall of 1968, they re-launched their newspaper, *La cause du peuple*, this time with a portrait of Mao Tse Tung prominently displayed on its masthead.

Under the leadership of Hocquenghem’s ENS classmate Benny Levy, the *Gauche Proletarienne* (Proletarian Left or “GP”) was thus born in the fall of 1968. The Maoists of the ENS may have been out of step with rest of French youth in May, but this time Benny Levy (who adopted the *nom de guerre* Pierre Victor) and the leaders of the former

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18 On the former UJCml’s denunciation of the “treason” of the PCF and CFT, see, for example the June 1968 tract, “Les Tâches immédiate des communistes dans l’usine” repr. in Kessel v. II, 85-92.
UJCml who founded the GP had read the times correctly. For the new student Left, energized by the events of May '68, China provided an inspiring new model of revolutionary heroism. Numerous leftist groups fell under the sway of Maoism after May '68, but the GP was the most “hardcore” (pur et dur). The GP never minced words about its ultimate goal: preparing the workers for an armed revolution. Quoting Mao Tse-Tung in their first new issue of *La cause du peuple*:

The central and supreme goal of the revolution is the conquest of power by armed struggle, resolving the problem by war in other words. This revolutionary principle of Marxism-Leninism is valid everywhere, in China as in other countries.  

The GP’s theoretical bible was a large, convoluted volume that Serge July and Alain Geismar composed after May while they were hiding out as guests of the Cuban revolutionary government. The title said it all: *Towards the Civil War (Vers la guerre civile).* May '68, its authors argued, had initiated an irreversible revolutionary process. The awakening of the working classes would continue to spread throughout France and Europe like wildfire. “The bourgeoisie must of necessity attempt to thwart this process. This will lead inevitably to a direct and physical confrontation with the revolutionary movement of the masses. . . . May, in France is the beginning of a prolonged class war.”

July and Geismar even attached a date to their prophecy of European capitalism’s final demise: 1972.

Among the Maoist groups, the GP also attracted the most followers and the most public attention. By 1971, the word “mao,” in fact, had become a catch-all term for any young radical leftist in common parlance. At the height of their prestige, the GP boasted

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21 Ibid., 17.
the patronage of France's preeminent intellectuals, including Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Michel Foucault, as well as the avid support of many of its towering cultural figures such as the film-maker Jean-Luc Godard and the leaders of *Tel Quel*, France's most prestigious journal of the literary avant-garde throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Many militants flocked to the GP in the years following May '68 simply because it seemed to them the most daring, innovative, and in short "happening" scene, even though they knew little about the GP's philosophy and even less about revolutionary China. As a former militant of the GP confessed years later:

> What attracted me to the GP was a certain vitality. At the time, the buzz was all about the GP one might say. It was the GP who was front and center at all the protests and who seemed to rekindle the extinguished flame of May '68. That's what led me and many others who didn't really have a taste for violence in and of itself or for a certain kind of totalitarian thought into the group, which, I must say, even had a sexy side to it.²²

At the same time, however, the enormous popularity of the GP reflected the widespread desire for total revolution in France after May '68 as well as the belief that total revolution was within reach. After the surprising success of May 1968, was it really all that unreasonable to "demand the impossible"?

At Nanterre, another group of former UJCml militants, in conjunction with some of members of the Movement of March 22nd, decided to launch a different kind of a cultural revolution. Although they shared the GP's admiration for Chairman Mao and its philosophy of direct action, they were repulsed by the GP's authoritarian structure and its Spartan view of revolutionary militancy. Unlike the GP, in which orders were handed down from a central committee that met privately, the Maoists of Nanterre functioned

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more or less as a democracy of like-minded individuals. The group, which called itself at first *Vive le communisme* and later *Vive la révolution* (VLR), was animated by two central figures—Roland Castro, a former leader of the UJCMl and founder of the original *Cause du peuple* in May 1968 and Tiennot Grumbach, a law student who also happened to be the nephew of Pierre Mendès-France. But aside from Castro and Grumbach, there was nothing that resembled leadership in the traditional sense—they had no central committee, no interior bulletins, and no charismatic personalities. 23 The VLR also rejected the GP’s model of strict revolutionary discipline, which shunned sex, drugs, and music as distractions. Much more inspired by Wilhelm Reich, Henri Lefebvre, and the situationists than by Althusser, the Nanterre rebels believed that the revolution of society and the revolution of everyday life went hand in hand and that it was critical to keep the festive spirit of May ’68 alive—“*La Fête est révolutionnaire!*” 24 (celebration is revolutionary!) was one of their slogans.

The story of Maoism in France after May 1968 is one of the most famous and yet least well understood episodes in the history of postwar French intellectual and political culture. According to noted French journalist and historian of the Left, Christophe Bourseiller, Maoism’s meteoric rise can be attributed largely to its malleability. Revolutionary China was so exotic and so far removed from everyday life in France that young militants could project onto it almost any idea or aspiration. Maoism, Bourseiller concludes, was “a convenient vehicle in which one could invest whatever one wanted . . .

23 Bourseiller, 180.
a giant black hole...Maoism does not exist. It never existed. Without a doubt, this explains its success."²⁵

Maoism in France, as Bourseiller shows, was able to accommodate a wide variety of political and cultural impulses in France after 1968, from the libertarian VLR to the austere Leninism of the GP. To treat it as a "black hole," however, does not help us understand why it resonated so profoundly with young militants at this particular time. To this end, we might consider a particularly insightful passage from Roland Castro's memoirs.

_The first message we received from China: revolution within the revolution. The second message we received (though fewer of us this time): revolution of civilization. The third message we received: Seven hundred million Chinese people is not a kibbutz; it's not a phalanstery; it's not a splinter group. It's a quarter of the world, an empire in the center of the world, in the center of the world that it was about to implode. We could hear the implosion._²⁶

In 1966, the seventy-two-year-old Mao initiated his final—and in retrospect his most disastrous—revolutionary program, the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution."

The audacious ambitions of the new campaign—nothing short of the complete transformation of Chinese society by a new generation of youth—made it the instant buzz of the student movements throughout the world. But although the Chinese Cultural Revolution stirred up excitement among many on the French Left, too, in 1966 and 1967, it was its "chic" value that was most remarkable. As the "mode Mao" vogue spread in 1967, French bookstores couldn't keep copies of the fashionable Little Red Books on their shelves, and the trendy boutiques of the Champs-Elysées couldn't stock enough "col-maos" or Mao-collared coats to meet the demand of their modish clientele. Even the

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²⁵ Bourseiller., 300.
popular men’s magazine *Lui*, the French equivalent of *Playboy*, decided to jump on the bandwagon that year, printing—in conjunction with an article extolling the new China of “one-thousand virtues”—an eight page spread of its models scantily-clad in straw hats, red stars, and various pieces of the Chinese Red Guard uniform. The captions beside the photos are all citations from the Little Red Book. One photo, for example, reveals a young woman, outfitted with only an automatic rifle, emerging from an enormous white cake. The selected citation: “The revolution is not a dinner party.”

Beginning in May 1968, however, the Chinese Cultural Revolution took on a whole new significance for the French student movements. In hindsight, the upheaval of May 1968 in France and the Cultural Revolution in China shared little in common: an impromptu student protest that ignited a general workers strike in the first case and a state-led campaign to train, arm, and unleash youth on so-called vestiges of bourgeois capitalism in the second. The timing of the two events, however, made their association, however inappropriate, inescapable. As the events in France unfolded that summer, Mao Tse-Tung’s portrait could already be seen along with those of Fidel Castro, Ho Chi Minh, and Che Guevara, bobbing up and down the streets thronged with demonstrators, his revolutionary sayings scrawled on walls and sidewalks. After the events, for those militants who believed that “May ’68 is only the beginning,” Mao became the single greatest revolutionary inspiration.

*The first message we received from China: revolution within the revolution.*

The Cultural Revolution signaled a “revolution within the revolution,” in several important senses. It was, first of all, an attempt to jumpstart the revolutionary process in

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China that, according to Mao and his avatars in France, had been stalled by an ever-
expanding bureaucracy, a resurgence of bourgeois values, and a wane in revolutionary
spirit. Grand though Mao’s expressed ambitions were, the Cultural Revolution in China
was, in actuality, primarily an effort to unseat Liu Shaoqui and regain the power and
authority he had lost as a result of the disastrous Great Leap Forward in the 1950s.28
Unaware, if somewhat willfully so, of the on-going power struggles behind the scenes,
the French youth were most impressed by the fact that Mao entrusted this “revolution
within the revolution” to the young Red Guards. In the midst of their own, though very
different, generational conflict, the French ‘68ers latched-on to Mao, not only as a great
revolutionary leader, but as a proponent of youth, as even an icon of eternal youth. Of
the many heroes of the Marxist tradition, only Mao had had the courage, it seemed to
them, to put into practice the principle, shared by every youth movement that has ever
existed, that while the adults may have wisdom, the youth possess truth. When the older
generations refuse to hand the world over to them, then their hand must be forced.

The Cultural Revolution also marked the culmination of Beijing’s ideological as
well as diplomatic separation from Moscow, a “revolution within the revolution” in the
larger context of international communism. This “revolution within the revolution”
really began in the early 1960’s, when Mao Tse Tung began openly criticizing
Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization campaign as “revisionist.” Khrushchev’s laxity in the face
of resurgent bourgeois impulses within the party, Mao argued, had brought about the
bureaucratic engorgement that now plagued the Soviet Union. Mao’s new campaign
aimed precisely to steer China away from a similar fate. For many dissident communists

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28 On the history of Chinese Communism, see, for example Maurice Meisner, Mao’s China and After: A
around the globe, Mao’s courage to voice this critique and then back it up with a new revolutionary campaign in China inspired a renewed faith in the socialist ideal. News of Mao’s new campaign was particularly welcome in France, where the Communist Party’s prestige was all but dead after the events of May ’68.

If ever there was ever a ripe opportunity then for a new revolutionary idiom to take hold of the young French Left, it was on the eve of the May 1968. The student radicals’ appropriation of Mao’s philosophy, however, wasn’t exactly whole cloth. There was also an “adult” or official Maoist party in France, the PCMLF (*Parti Communiste Marxiste-Leniniste*) whose goal, since its founding in 1965, was to represent Chinese Communism in France. Although they occasionally paid homage to puzzled diplomats at the Chinese Embassy in Paris, the student Maoists more or less abandoned any pretense to represent Beijing in France. For them, the new revolution in China was not a blueprint for their revolution, but rather, a demonstration that no such blueprints exist. The most important lesson they claimed to have learned from Mao’s example was that each people was essentially different and hence needed to blaze its own trail towards socialism. Mao himself had realized in the course of the 1950s that what worked for the Soviet Union would not work for China. Stalin was able to use existing surplus from rural areas in order to develop industry in the cities and rebuild the economy. In China, however, there was no surplus anywhere; industry, agriculture, and trade had all been ruined by decades of war and foreign occupation. Mao was convinced, moreover, that socialism could not be built in China without the full participation of the masses of peasants and their indispensable repertoires of local knowledge. With the Great Leap Forward, Mao thus began to forge a uniquely Chinese socialism, based on the continuous transformation of
countryside and city. So too, the student Maoists reasoned, would socialism in France have to be uniquely French, and the strategies required for achieving it would have to be fashioned by the French militants themselves.

It wasn’t the model of Chinese society then that they looked to—most of the militants knew and cared little about China—but Mao’s model of revolution making. The VLR, for example, defined itself vis-à-vis the PCMLF, the PCF, and every other “adult” party by contrasting “isms,” Maoism included, and what they called la pensée-maotsétung.29 Whereas “Leninism,” “Maoism,” and “Trotskyism” signified mindless obedience to foreign revolutionary doctrines, “la pensée-maotsétung demands that communists think for themselves, beginning from concrete circumstances . . .”30 This did not mean junking all previous revolutionary programs or keeping out foreign influences, but rather drawing eclectically from various sources. The militants of the VLR sometimes borrowed the term from the Korean Workers Party, djoutché, to express the same idea. The VLR defined djoutché as

counting on one’s own abilities in all domains, in essence, finding solutions befitting the material and historical conditions of one’s own country. . . applying djoutché in one’s political struggle entails rejecting the ready-made solutions of others, because what is good for one country, in one particular epoch, is not necessarily good for a different country in a different epoch. . . .31

La pensée-maotsétung embodies the principle that the “revolution within the revolution” is a continual and necessary process. Nothing is sacred; everything must be criticized.

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29 This term was borrowed from the 9th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 1969 where it was coined to replace the term “Maoism” as part of an attempt to put more distance between the Chinese Communist Party’s revolutionary philosophy and the person of Mao Zedong. See Pierre Masset, L’empereur Mao: essai sur le maoïsme (Paris: Éditions Lethielleux, 1979), p. 287.
31 Vive la Révolution, 5 (April 1970), p. 10. Djoutché was a term used by the Korean Workers Party and appropriated by the Black Panther Party in the United States as well as by the VLR.
"Criticize Confucius and Lin Biao," the Chinese newspapers famously proclaimed.\textsuperscript{32} Because there are no universal solutions, the proof of one’s tactics lies always in their results. Applying \textit{la pensée-maoïsé}, therefore, entails willingness to risk error, openness to criticism, and constant reflection upon and revision of one’s strategies. As Mao himself said, “He who is not afraid of death by a thousand cuts dares to unhorse the emperor.”

The student Maoists saw a strong affinity between their philosophy of “direct action” and Mao’s theory of the mass-line. Against Lenin and Stalin, and with Chairman Mao, they believed that it wasn’t the party’s job to educate the people, but the other way around; the party’s job was to learn from the people and immerse themselves in their struggles. According to Mao:

> Because the intellectuals are called upon to serve the masses of workers and peasants, they must in the first instance understand them and familiarize themselves with their lives, their work, and their mentality. We recommend intellectuals to immerse themselves in the masses, going into the factories and into the countryside.\textsuperscript{33}

The French Maoists took very seriously Mao’s directive, known more poetically by the phrase “descending from one’s horse to look at the flowers.” The centerpiece of their theory of practice was the \textit{enquête}, or the “investigation.” “He who has done an investigation has no right to speak.”\textsuperscript{34} In a true socialist society, which they believed was slowly being achieved in China, all social, educational, and occupational barriers are dissolved. In China, they declared, “professors and students are closely connected to the masses... there is nothing extraordinary about being a student; every worker studies, and

\textsuperscript{32} Lin Biao was Liu Shaoqi’s successor, the compiler of the Little Red Book, and Mao’s closest aid during the Cultural Revolution until his fall from grace and mysterious disappearance in 1971.

\textsuperscript{33} Mao Tse-Tung (Speech given at a national conference of the Chinese Communist Party on propaganda work, March 12, 1957).

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Vive la révolution} 5 (25 April 1970), 11.
every student works, the former educates the latter and vice versa.”

All *a priori* theory was to be thrown out the window, or, more precisely, theory was supposed to exist in a dialectical relationship with practice; theory emerged from engagement with the struggles of the people, but always remained secondary and provisional. The emphasis instead was always placed on the people’s own capacities to continually and creatively adapt their struggles to new situations.

The *enquêtes* built upon the tradition of the *établis* and entailed becoming “established” or implanted in the factories. But the workplace was only one dimension of everyday life in France. If the Maoists were going to lead a culture revolution, “expanding the struggle to all aspects of life in capitalist society,” then they needed to learn as much as they could about the everyday lives of the workers. The VLR, for example, insisted that activism begins in one’s own backyard, and their “backyard” at Nanterre happened to be strewn with some of the most dilapidated immigrant and worker shantytowns in all France. Known as “bidonvilles,” because “bidons” or oil drums were literally used as building materials, these shantytowns often lacked basic utilities like electricity and running water. The GP too began investigations in the shantytowns around the factories where they militated. In one of their most famous actions, a GP commando raided the Fauchon luxury foods store in central Paris in broad daylight and distributed their booty of foies gras, fine wines, and caviars in the bidonvilles. At Fauchon, they left behind a stack of tracts that read, “We are not thieves, we are Maoists!”

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36 *Vive la révolution* 2 (15 November 1969), 8.  
Maoists began extending the *enquêtes* to hospitals, mental wards, prisons, and homeless shelters too.

*The second message we received (though fewer of us this time): revolution of civilization.*

The "revolution of civilization" taking place in China encompassed far more than the transformation of the spheres of economic production. It was, the Maoists believed, a total revolution, a revolution of civilization in the most utopian of senses. More than any other aspect of his philosophy, Mao's notion of a "cultural revolution" struck a profound chord with the French Left in wake of May '68. In traditional Marxist thought, culture had always been regarded as epiphenomenal of a society's economic structure. Mao's philosophy of a cultural revolution, however, postulated that the arrows of causality linking economic "base" and cultural "superstructure" could also be reversed. The realm of culture, in other words, could be an equally legitimate location for revolutionary struggle. The French Maoists believed, like all Marxists, that the proletarian revolution was a *sine qua non* for the creation of an ideal socialist society, and they continued their organizing activities in the factories to prepare the workers for this eventuality, but they also believed, with Mao, that socialism could not be achieved or maintained without the fundamental transformation of bourgeois values and mores.

But what exactly were "bourgeois values"? And how could they be tackled head on? Here there was considerable disagreement. The GP, for example, identified anti-Arab sentiment in the process of their investigations as a major obstacle in the path of unifying the working classes. Declaring a "war on racism," they devised strategies that ranged from circulating tracts in the factories exposing racist practices and bullying racist
factory bosses to organizing immigrant rent strikes.\textsuperscript{38} (The \textit{Mouvement des Travailleurs Arabes}, the first all-Arab revolutionary workers organization, and \textit{SOS-racisme} were two organizations that emerged from these initiatives in the early 1970s.) The VLR, on the other hand, which counted many women among its ranks, recognized early on that working women suffer a "double exploitation: that of the boss on the job and that of their husband at home"\textsuperscript{39} and began championing women's concerns, from sexism in the workplace and lack of community daycare facilities to the legalization of abortion and contraception. It wasn't a large stretch for the VLR to bring women's issues to the table of revolutionary discussion because there was already a long tradition of feminism within the socialist movement. As Engels famously quipped a century early, "In the home, the man is the bourgeois and the woman is the proletariat." And Chinese communism, at least in theory, sought total equality for women in the educational system and in the workplace. (One could easily find citations to this effect in the little Red Book, including the phrase "equal compensation for equal work."\textsuperscript{40}) But what about homosexuality? Was "heterosexualism" another aspect of bourgeois ideology that needed to be destroyed? Was it possible to champion homosexual liberation within the context of the cultural revolution?

\textit{The third message we received: Seven hundred million Chinese people is not a kibbutz; it's not a phalanstery; it's not a splinter group. It's a quarter of the world, an empire in the center of the world, in the center of the world that it was about to implode.}

\textsuperscript{38} "Guerre au racisme," \textit{La cause du peuple} 33 (8 January 1971). For more on the GP's activities on the behalf of Arab immigrants, see A. Belden Fields, 113-118.
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Vive la révolution} 1 (November 1969), 9.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Quotations from Mao Tse-Tung} (the Little Red Book), (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1966), 557.
China was certainly not a kibbutz or a commune, but nor was it an Algeria, Bolivia, Cuba, Chad, or even a Vietnam. The mind-boggling size of China alone was enough to place it above the numerous Marxist movements of the third-world that had inspired the Left after its disenchantment with the Soviet Union. Furthermore, many on the French Left believed, and not without some reason, that Mao aimed to unite the movements of the third-world and transform China into the world’s greatest super power. Since the summer of 1963, when the Chinese Communist Party circulated the document known as the “twenty-five points letter” which drew a line in the sand between the “revisionist” Soviet regimes and the true inheritors of the Marxist tradition, Mao had been actively and openly strengthening his relations with the anti-colonial movements in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. For those Marxists who clung to even the smallest hope for international socialism, China seemed to be turning the world on its axis. Could Mao’s revolution really bring about the “implosion” of the old world? The idea was more than utopian; it bordered on millenarian.

Hocquenghem and the groupe de base at Censier, too, felt the winds blowing from the east, but, like the VLR at Nanterre, they had a hard time identifying with the GP’s dogmatic version of Maoism. Nadja Ringart, for example, a former member of the JCR who joined the bande à Guy, recalled her stupefaction when their group was labeled “spontex” or “spontaneïste” by the Trotskyite leaders. Sifting through the pages of the La cause du peuple, she found nothing “spontaneous” about the GP’s doctrines and style
of militancy. "Their was a "cultural revolution" that tolerated neither sex nor culture!" The bande à Guy furthermore rejected the GP's "putschiste" leanings toward militarism and violence. In the summer of 1969, the GP carried through its first violent act against the forces of order. At the open air market in Montrouge, just south of Paris, a commando taunted a group of policemen then led them into an ambush and beat them severely with their truncheons. Later that summer, the GP sent a group of militants to learn terrorist tactics in a Palestinian Liberation Organization camp in Jordan (even though many in the group were Jewish!). Soon thereafter, the GP formed its own clandestine faction, the Nouvelle Résistance Populaire (The "new popular resistance or NRP—an allusion to the Resistance fighters of WWII) to begin guerilla warfare on French soil. The violent actions of ultra-minorities, the bande à Guy argued, only strengthened the determination of their enemies. Continuing in the tradition of the Movement of March 22nd, the task of the cultural revolutionary as they viewed it was not to confront the forces of order head-on—which would amount to suicide in any case—but to transform French society "ideologically," through exemplary actions aimed at exposing social injustices and persuading the masses. To put forward their ideas, the groupe de base at Censier teamed up with André Glucksmann, Hocquenghem's former collaborator at ACTION, and a handful of other militants from Glucksmann's groupe de base at Vincennes to create a new journal, aptly titled Révolution Culturelle.

In his articles for their new paper, Hocquenghem laid out the "cultural revolution" according to the bande à Guy. The cooptation of the political parties of the Left and the

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41 Nadja Ringhart, in the words of Hamon and Rotman, v. II, 198.
42 Révolution Culturelle 1-2 (June 1969 ), 47.
43 Bourseiller, 109.
44 Ibid., 113-114.
trade unions, coupled with the landslide victories of the Gaullists after May '68, necessitated the rejection of all forms of "official" politics and pre-existing political ideologies in favor of the new forms of struggle born in May '68. Drawing a parallel with China, Hocquenghem asserted, "The French situation in 1970 requires the same efforts in creative strategizing that were required of Mao in the face of the peasant problem in China."\textsuperscript{45} Although the "cultural revolution" they advocated was, in a sense, "a struggle for power,"\textsuperscript{46} it proceeded not by violence, but by ideological preparation, by targeting, in other words, the deeply-rooted values of bourgeois capitalism. "The European Cultural Revolution will spare no bourgeois institution or value from the critique of the people."\textsuperscript{47} Furthermore, Hocquenghem insisted, because ultimately the goal of the revolution is to "change life," every front must be attacked at one and the same time; there was no such thing, as the doctrinaire Marxist-Leninists insisted, as "secondary" struggles that could wait until later. The struggle for sexual freedom, for example, was no less urgent than the struggle for collective ownership of the means of production; both struggles touched upon vital aspects of everyday life, and neither one could fully succeed without the success of the other. The task facing the revolutionary movement in 1969 was thus to synthesize the various struggles emerging throughout France. "The generation of May, despite its tardiness in recognizing the revolt, is not yet disenchanted; to charge it with the task of bringing together the various revolts on all fronts is to point in the direction of a concrete re-organization of everyday life."\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45} "Changer La Vie," \textit{Faire la révolution} 2 (April 1970), repr. in AMF, 59
\textsuperscript{46} "La Révolution Culturelle ne tombe pas du ciel," repr. in AMF, 49.
\textsuperscript{47} "Changer la vie," AMF, 52.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 62.
Elsewhere in Révolution Culturelle, philosophers André Glucksmann and Jean-Paul Dollé criticized the French university system and the revisionism of the PCF and spelled out the differences between their philosophy of "anarcho-Maoism" and the doctrinaire Maoism of the GP. In the spirit of May, the journal was also strewn with situationist-inspired cartoons and détournements (recuperations) of popular advertisements. Impressive as the journal's first issue was, it was also to be its last. The main reason for its discontinuation was the meteoric rise of the GP, particularly on the University of Vincennes campus, and André Glucksmann's subsequent decision to split with Censier and merge his groupe de base at Vincennes with the GP. The University of Vincennes (officially known as the Vincennes Experimental University Center) opened its doors to students in the fall of 1969. A direct response by the Ministry of Education to the 68er's demands for university reform, Vincennes was a radical experiment in anti-authoritarian education. Professors were elected by their peers and evaluated by their students, not by deans or administrators, and the curriculum was resolutely interdisciplinary. Perhaps most radical of all, the university was open to all candidates from all backgrounds, not just those who had completed the bac. As René Schérer, one of the first professors elected to the philosophy department, described the experiment, "Vincennes was the 'outside' entering the university and, simultaneously, the university opening itself to the outside."49 Predictably, and according to the intentions of the Ministry, Vincennes immediately attracted the most radical factions of the Left. It was the Maoists, however, who were most successful in infiltrating the campus in its first two years of existence. Glucksmann was a member of the philosophy department, which was headed by Michel Foucault and dominated by GP Maoists. His decision to join the

bandwagon signaled the end of his collaboration with *bande à Guy* and the end of the *Révolution Culturelle*.

Meanwhile, Roland Castro and Tiennot Grumbach sought to move the VLR in a still more "libertarian" direction. In his Castro's words, "The revolution should entail the death of politics, it's time to transform life (changer la vie), to fuse politics with the pursuit of happiness, but we are still, without a doubt, too political, and not nearly focused enough on everyday life." The VLR would continue to work in the factories around Paris under the leadership of Tiennot Grumbach, but it would also expand the scope of its investigations and give more attention to the everyday life struggles of immigrants, students, professors, women, and, in short, all oppressed victims of bourgeois capitalism. In a special supplement to *Vive la révolution*, the VLR announced its new direction: "What the gauchistes want: changer la vie." Their central aim:

... to help express, develop, and unify these revolts everywhere, to organize them into a single force capable of destroying the old world and constructing a new one. To this end, we will be present everywhere where rebellion exists, everywhere where there are victims of capitalist oppression: in the factories, in the projects, in the suburbs, in the high schools, in the universities—but principally where the revolt is most profound, among the workers ...

To help move the VLR in this new direction, Castro invited Hocquenghem to help them launch a new journal. Hocquenghem was reluctant, but the departure of Glucksman and the groupe de base at Vincennes left him with few options. The deal was considerably sweetened by the fact that the VLR had recently secured substantial financial backing from Sylvina Boissonnas, the prodigal inheritress of the Schlumberger family fortune. Sylvina had just footed the bill for a massive free-jazz festival at the Mutualité, sponsored

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51 "Changer la vie," supplement to *Vive la Révolution* 6 (June 1970).
by the VLR, to raise money for the Black Panthers. Even though the headliner Archi Shepp was unable to attend, the event was a huge success and helped boost the VLR’s reputation as an avant-garde Maoist organization that was serious about “cultural” revolution. Thus, with the bande à Guy’s approval, the general assembly of the VLR voted on the inclusion of Hocquenghem and his friends in June 1970.52

Hocquenghem met Boissonnas at La Coupole, a swank restaurant and long-standing intellectual and cultural institution of the left bank, to discuss his grand ideas for a new journal. The “quiznomadaire” (appearing every fifteen days) would feature the acid-inspired cartoons of Robert Crumb (which were public domain) rather than the well-known caricatures of French cartoonists. The large-format paper would have two covers, one on the outside and one on the inside fold, and the whole thing would be printed in full, bright colors. Hocquenghem wanted to produce something, in short, unlike anything the Left had ever seen, unlike anything France had ever seen. The paper would be called TOUT: ce que nous voulons! or TOUT for short. (What we want: EVERYTHING). The inspiration for the title came from the bande à Guy’s frequent trips to Italy to work with the Italian student movement, Lotta Continua. As in France, the focus of student activism in Italy had shifted from the universities to the factories since 1968, and Lotta Continua, a “spontaneous” Maoist movement much like the VLR, was one of the key players in the Fiat and Pirelli automobile plants. During a particularly fierce battle at the Fiat plant in Turin, in which the bande à Guy found itself once again fighting behind barricades, Lotta Continua hung a sign on the embattled streets that read: Cosa Vogliamo? Tutto! (What

52 Bourseiller, 179.
we want: Everything!).\textsuperscript{53} Boissonnas loved the idea and immediately made out an obscenely large check to Hocquenghem personally, thus ensuring that he would retain creative control over the project. Leaving \textit{La Coupole}, Hocquenghem and a couple of friends joked about running off to Tunisia with the money instead. The prospect must have been extremely tempting.

Many years later, Hocquenghem explained that he had reluctantly agreed to join the VLR “on the guarantee that it was really more about anarchism than Maoism.”\textsuperscript{54} Although he certainly was hesitant to merge his group with another “organization,” even one as seemingly open and democratic as the VLR, the \textit{bande à Guy}’s goals and ideas at the time were undeniably similar to those of the Nanterre Maoists. Thus, in the summer of 1970, Hocquenghem and some of the militants close to him, including those who had participated in \textit{Révolution Culturelle}, began collaborating with Castro, and in September the first issue of \textit{TOUT} finally appeared. In the first editorial, Hocquenghem and the staff explained that since May 1968, the dream of one generation’s poet—“changer la vie” (Rimbaud)—had become the social struggle of another.

May: an unprecedented cultural upheaval, a faint apparition of a civilization other than this putrid, lamentable, and decadent one we know. Subway, work, sleep, hobbies, television, car. An immense upsurge of resistance has appeared against the moral misery of a country whose economy can theoretically satisfy the needs and desires of all. This paper aims to abet this resistance.\textsuperscript{55}

\textit{TOUT}’s aim was to help unify the various groups in nascent revolt—workers, youth, women, and immigrants, for example. This unification, they believed, was France’s only path towards a ‘true’ cultural revolution. But rather than attempt to speak

\textsuperscript{54} LO, 133.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Tout: ce que nous voulons!} 1 (23 September 1970), 2.
for the voiceless, *TOUT*’s collaborators sought to create a forum “where all disenfranchised, frustrated, and dissenting groups can express themselves … [because] in order for the revolution to succeed, the people need to have an understanding of the whole of history’s movement.” The reader thus could expect in future issues to see less work from the “intellectuals” in the VLR, and more from the people themselves. In a brief missive reprinted in the issue, Jean-Paul Sartre explained that he had agreed to be *TOUT*’s titular director, not because he necessarily agreed with its content, but in order to help protect it from censorship. Six months earlier he had agreed to do the same for *La cause du peuple* after its editors were arrested for violating a new “anticasseur” (anti-rioting) law. (The editors were arrested on the very same day the proposition was voted into law.) According to the new legislation, newspaper editors could be held responsible for inspiring the riotous acts of others. Understanding of course that no one would dare “imprison Voltaire,” Sartre further challenged the “bourgeois class” to either begin defending their very own laws protecting the freedom of the presses, or to throw him in jail.

Also in the first issue, Hocquenghem laid out *TOUT*’s cultural agenda. His article, “It’s Personal: Everyone’s Talking About it,” began with the disclaimer: “This article is really just a haphazard bunch of ideas I’m throwing out there for discussion. My comrades have already criticized me for neglecting the question of state power.” The disingenuously unassuming disclaimer became a trademark of his many articles for *TOUT* and other publications throughout the 70s. According to Hocquenghem:

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56 Ibid., 2.
57 Ibid., 8.
Dutchke [sic] and Cohn-Bendit already said it: if the revolutionaries aren’t making revolution, including in their own lives, then who is going to believe them? We all know that the people in rebelling everywhere have great ideas for revolting, but some strange ideas about social life. We also know the gauchistes ideas aren’t much better in this regard, appropriated from the proletariat who appropriated them from the bourgeoisie with all their baggage.⁵⁹

By “social life,” Hocquenghém meant everyday social relations and, of course, the key bourgeois institution that orders these relations: the family, Hocquenghém’s favorite bête noire. Since 1968, the youth had begun to demonstrate their capacity for “living differently” (vivre autrement). “Let every collectivity of youth,” Hocquenghém declared, “serve as a living negation of a society in which the reproduction of the family imposes itself as though it were a natural given.”⁶⁰

Hocquenghém did not spell out all of the implications of his thorough-going “anti-familialism,” but next to his article appeared an image of Black Panther Minister of Defense Huey Newton and a translation of what Hocquenghém titled Newton’s “declaration in support of the homosexuals and the women’s struggles for liberation.”⁶¹

As Hocquenghém explained in a long footnote beneath the speech, Newton’s address had been published shortly after the Stonewall Riots of the summer of 1969 in New York, when the gay clientele of the Stonewall Inn on Christopher Street famously decided to fight back against police repression. Those riots sparked the formation of the American Gay Liberation Front (GLF) which soon spread to nearly every major American city. Somewhat naively, if not dishonestly, Hocquenghém explained that the GLF was a resolutely revolutionary organization “whose members could not conceive of their

⁵⁹ Ibid., 7.
⁶⁰ Ibid., 7.
⁶¹ Ibid., 7.
liberation outside of the hypothesis of a global socialist revolution.\textsuperscript{62} Although there were some revolutionaries (in the Marxist sense) among the early leaders of the GLF, in truth, they represented only a minority trend within the movement that decreased in influence as the GLF evolved into a national organization.\textsuperscript{63} Newton’s argument for a defense of homosexual liberation itself was quite simple: regardless of the endlessly debatable nature and causes of homosexuality, the homosexual’s history of oppression in capitalist society alone makes him or her a valuable revolutionary partner. Not only could homosexuals be revolutionaries, he insisted; their particularly severe history of oppression makes them “likely to be among the most revolutionary of revolutionaries.”\textsuperscript{64}

The declaration by Newton and Hocquenghem’s long footnote was the first mention in a Leftist publication, or any publication for that matter, of homosexual liberation in France. In hindsight, hiding behind Huey Newton may seem like a strange and perhaps timid way to have broached the issue. In context, however, the strategy made perfect sense. For the gauchistes, the central question remained whether or not homosexuals and homosexual liberation could be considered revolutionary. And if there was any single group whose credentials could not be questioned, it was the Black Panthers, idolized as much by the GP as by the VLR for its courageous resistance in the heart of the evil empire itself. For the French radical Left in 1970, Huey Newton publicly defending homosexual liberation was as good as hearing it from Mao himself.

From its first issue, \textit{TOUT} became one of the most read and discussed of the new presses. Its printing volume, ranging from 50,000 to 80,000 copies per issue, was hardly

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{63} On the early history of the GLF, see Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, \textit{Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America} (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 21-105.
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Tout: ce que nous voulons!} 1 (23 September 1970), 7.
sufficient to meet demand. In his articles for TOUT that appeared “every fifteen days,” Hocquenghem continued to rail against that most sacred bourgeois institution: the family. For example, when, in December 1970, President Pompidou addressed the nation in a futile attempt to bridge the growing generation gap, Hocquenghem struck back, “Pompidou, we are not your families!” As a counter-measure to the social confusion of the era, Pompidou proposed to bolster the “family,” the institution “best situated to resist the shocks, because it is founded on nature, on the law of the species.” In the family, Pompidou continued, “everyone finds a way to be both a unique self and part of a whole.” Not surprisingly, the President of the Republic’s solution for reconciling the demands of the ‘68ers with traditional French society did not persuade anyone in the offices of the VLR. What is surprising is that his message did seem to reach something like a “moral majority,” receiving little criticism from the mainstream press and differing little in fact from the discourse at the time of the French Communist Party and the major trade unions. Hocquenghem perceived in Pompidou’s speech and its silent reception on the Left a resurgent nostalgia for the moral order of Pétain’s Vichy France: Work, Family, Nation [Travail, Famille, Patrie]. Although France had been rid of Pétain for over two decades, the pétainiste moral order continued its repressive reign, Hocquenghem argued, in the form of the Gaullists’ pro-natalist vision of a “nation one hundred million strong.” In order to create “our next family,” a socialist society in other words, Pompidou’s “family” would have to be the first victim.

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65 On TOUT’s success, see F. M. Suelson, Il était une fois Libé… (Paris: Seuil, 1979), 83-88.
66 “Pompidou, nous ne serons pas tes familles,” Tout 5 (December 1970), repr. in AMF., 136
67 Quoted in ibid.
68 Quoted in ibid.
In the pages of *TOUT*, Hocquenghem also launched an inner-critique of the *gauchistes*, the GP in particular, who failed to grasp the meaning of *la pensée maotsetung*—who continued, in other words, to use dogma rather than concrete everyday experience as their guide. Thus, for example, in May 1971, as the movement for Bengali independence was being suppressed by the Pakistani government with the support of China, Hocquenghem took the Maoists of the GP to task for withholding all criticism on the premise that “there was not enough information.” Singling out André Glucksmann, who had become a journalist for the GP’s *J’Accuse*:

“I’m disgusted to see that our revolutionaries are justifying a massacre following China’s lead that they would surely otherwise condemn. … I believe that there is a kind of general sentiment, immediate and intuitive, that is part of politics; that one can later make corrections to this impression, but one cannot begin by simply denying it. The overwhelming general sentiment is that the Chinese are supporting a reactionary government that is committing genocide on a people in revolt, and that it is the Chinese who are providing the guns with which the Pakistanis are executing the Maoists of the Bengali people.”

Interestingly, Hocquenghem accused the Chinese Communists and their French avatars not of being too Maoist, but of not being Maoist enough. Even before Richard Nixon’s historic visit to China in 1972, the beginning of a rapprochement even the most loyal Maoists had trouble swallowing, the VLR had begun to question just how revolutionary Chinese society and the Chinese Cultural Revolution really was. In 1971 the Belgian sinologist Pierre Ryckmans published *The Chairman’s New Clothes*, a severe indictment of the atrocities of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Living in Hong Kong at the peak of the Cultural Revolution, Ryckmans was able to gather enough evidence and personal testimony to denounce it for what it was: an uncontrollable bloodbath

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69 “Vive le Bengale libre,” *Tout* 13 (May 1971), repr. in AMF, 90.
resulting from the Chairman’s attempt to wrest power away from the Chinese Communist Party. Coming at the height of Maoism in France, *The Chairman’s New Clothes* was immediately condemned by the radical Left as bourgeois capitalist propaganda. Ryckmans predicted this reaction and, fearing retribution from Maoists at home and abroad, published the book under the pseudonym “Simon Leys,” the name by which he is still known today.

But even though the Chinese Cultural Revolution ceased to be a point of reference for Hocquenghem and the VLR, they continued to take *la pensée maotsetung* seriously and use it as a measure for judging other revolutionaries, the Chinese included. Using *la pensée maotsetung* meant first of all sparing nothing and no one from criticism. “Criticize Confucius and Lin Bao” as the Chinese newspapers famously proclaimed that same year, but criticize Chairman Mao and the Chinese Communist Party, too. Applying *la pensée maotsetung* furthermore entailed thinking for oneself and beginning from concrete experience rather than abstract principles. One of the greatest errors of the GP, however, “which it seemed to me was beginning to disappear in recent months but which has forcefully reappeared with the events in Pakistan,” Hocquenghem wrote, “is that which consists of judging whether or not a people is revolutionary according to an ensemble of *a priori* principles, as though these people did not really exist and did not really suffer.”

Another dangerous tendency of *gauchisme* that Hocquenghem reproached in the GP was its penchant for creating authoritarian cults of personality. In October 1970, Alain Geismar, the former leader of the SNESup who had since become a leading spokesperson for the GP, appeared before a court after a five-month pre-trial detention. Geismar had been arrested for violating the new “anti-rioting law” after a public speech

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[71] Ibid., 89.
calling for the release of the two editors of *La cause du peuple* who had been sentenced to a year and a half in prison (for violating the same law). Since his arrest, Geismar had become something of a revolutionary hero in France, a new Dany Cohn-Bendit whose image was ubiquitous. But Geismar was only one of hundreds of *gauchistes* then imprisoned under Marcellin’s severe hand. While expressing his solidarity with Geismar in *TOUT*, Hocquenghem also tried to inject a lone discordant note in the Left’s paean. Commenting on the Left’s encomiastic coverage of the trial of Geismar, he wrote:

Let’s not kid ourselves: Geismar’s trial is not the people’s trial, and Geismar is not the people. The “people” do not even recognize themselves yet as such, so they certainly do not recognize themselves in those who pretend to symbolize them. ... Let’s liberate Geismar from prison, but also from the role with which we have imprisoned him.\(^2^2\)

Among the hundreds of other *gauchistes* imprisoned were several of Hocquenghem’s comrades in the VLR, including his longtime friend and member of the *bande à Guy*, Marc Hatzfeld. Hatzfeld had been arrested after a raid by VLR on the city hall of Meulan, outside of Paris, in March 1970. The purpose of the raid was to bring public attention to the city hall’s complicity in an underground traffic of illegal immigrant laborers. In this regard, the raid was a success; the “raid on Meulan” made the headlines the following day. As was often the case, however, the mainstream newspapers—who generally did a poor job of distinguishing among different radical Leftists—attributed this action to the most well known Maoist organization, the GP.\(^2^3\)

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\(^2^2\) “Geismar, c’est Geismar” *Tout* 3 (October 1970), repr. in AMF, 87-88.

\(^2^3\) On the raid on Meulan, see *La France Sauvage*, 185-192.
As Hocquenghem and many in the VLR were having growing doubts about the cultural revolution in China, they turned their attention increasingly to the "other" cultural revolution: the American cultural revolution. The French Left's affair with the "other" side of American culture has a long history dating back to the early days of jazz and the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and '30s. Prior to 1968, authentic "American culture" for the French Left still referred primarily to the emancipatory music, dance, and literature of America's former slaves. Rock and roll, or "pop" music as it was still referred to in France at the time, was still regarded both with aesthetic disdain and furthermore as a product of the bourgeois culture of consumption. In 1968 and 1969, the Left's preoccupation with the struggle of the African-Americans continued—though they unanimously preferred the virulent "black power" culture of the Black Panthers to the civil disobedience of the Martin Luther King, Jr. However, they also began to discover an all-new America: "Woodstock Nation," the America of Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Weathermen, Yippies, Freaks, and Timothy Leary.\textsuperscript{74}

Abbie Hoffman published the manifesto \textit{Woodstock Nation} only a few months after the Woodstock Music and Art Festival took place late in the summer of 1969. At the time, Hoffman was preparing for the highly anticipated Chicago conspiracy trial stemming from the infamous 1968 protests at the Democratic Convention in Chicago. For the American left, 1968 had been an \textit{annus horribilus}. The assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, the defeat of anti-war candidate Eugene McCarthy in the democratic primary, and the election of Richard Nixon as the 37\textsuperscript{th} President of the United States had left many young political activists jaded and demoralized. Like many other leftist agitators, Hoffman, too, had grown weary of "political" revolution. The

success of the Woodstock festival, on the other hand, seemed to augur a new direction for the American student and youth movements. As Hoffman explained:

    Political revolution leads people into support for other revolutions rather than having them get involved in making their own. Cultural revolution requires people to change the way they live and act in the revolution rather than passing judgments on how other folks are proceeding.75

For weary French radicals, too, Woodstock Nation seemed to offer a refreshing alternative to the tired ideas of the traditional political left. For many veterans of May, the years 1969 and 1970 were a time of deep reflection and soul-searching. Having abandoned their studies and professional aspirations on the barricades of May, they now faced the question of what to do with the rest of their lives. One thing many 68ers did was travel. Starting in the summer of 1969, they began traveling all over the world, but the pilgrimage to the “other” America, which was popularized, for example, by Jean Genet’s famous sojourn with the Black Panthers in 1970, became one of the more popular itineraries.

They returned to France from places like San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York with stories of the vibrant American underground, and often, too, with many of the trappings of the new American counter-culture. LSD, for example, hit France in earnest in 1969. In 1967, France had become the first country to outlaw the substance. French legislators’ decision to ban the drug, however, was influenced by alarmist news coverage of the American psychedelic movements rather than by actual usage. According to one

estimate, fewer than one hundred or so Parisians had tried LSD before 1968, and perhaps no more than two hundred people had been exposed to the drug in all of France.\textsuperscript{76}

The noted author and publisher Jean-François Bizot, for example, first traveled to the U.S. in the summer of 1969 as a journalist and cultural commentator for \textit{L'Express} and \textit{Le Nouvel Observateur}. He began his journey a devout jazz aficionado and critic but returned to Paris that fall a fanatic of Frank Zappa and advocate of LSD.\textsuperscript{77} Along with Bernard Kouchner, Jean-Paul Ribes, and Michel-Antoine Burnier, all veterans of the barricades of May, in 1971 he took over \textit{Actuel}, a music and culture magazine that previously focused almost exclusively on American Jazz. \textit{Actuel} soon became France’s premier counter-cultural magazine which was largely responsible for introducing the French to the Rock and Roll, transcendental drugs, and communal living experiments of the Americans in the early 1970s.\textsuperscript{78} Soon, dozens more such magazines appeared, almost all of them inspired by similar voyages to the U.S. Coming on the heels of \textit{Actuel}’s instant success, for example, \textit{Le Pop} and \textit{La Parapluie} (the latter founded by former Movement of March 22\textsuperscript{nd} leader Henri-Jean Enu) joined the effort to spread the American counter-culture’s fan base. The noted writer, philosopher, and media mogul Jean-Edern Hallier, too, founded his first magazine, \textit{L'idiot liberté}, in 1970 in the spirit of the American cultural revolution. Soon thereafter, he found support for his burgeoning career from Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{77} For more on Bizot, see his literary biography \textit{Un moment de faiblesse} (Paris: Grasset, 2003).
\textsuperscript{78} For the complete history of \textit{Actuel}, see Jean-François Bizot, \textit{Underground L'histoire} (Paris: Denoël, 2001).
\textsuperscript{79} On this history of \textit{Le Pop}, \textit{Parapluie}, and \textit{L'idiot liberté} (which became \textit{l'idiot internationale}), see F. M. Samuelson, 75-93.
Converting the ethnocentric French to the American counter-culture was no small task. France was one of the few countries in the West where “Beatle mania” had never made in roads. In 1968, for example, traditional French “chanson” music still accounted for 90% of national record sales. At the occupied Sorbonne in May 1968, there was, to be sure, plenty of music to be heard, but none of it was Rock and Roll. By the early 1970s, the spread of pop festivals and pop magazines had millions of French youths turning away from Brassens and Brel to the Doors and Dylan. And just as jazz music had stirred French curiosity about the “other” America a generation earlier, so, too, did the new Rock and Roll sounds inspire the imaginations of the 68ers.

Hocquenghem also discovered the United States in 1970. He and a small group of friends arrived in New York that summer, bought a used car, and headed out leisurely towards their final destination, San Francisco. As Hocquenghem described his impression of the west coast:

The scent of revolt from People’s Park exuded from the swarms of disheveled people decorated in flowers along the Pacific, from the pregnant women, smiling and dirty, in their long flowered dresses, and from the moustached men (in the style of Buffalo Bill) who greeted me with an affectionated “brother.”

Hocquenghem ventured into the gay hotspots of San Francisco and New York, too, and although he seemed deeply impressed by American homosexuals’ openness and tantalized by the erotic possibilities they enjoyed, he was also apprehensive of their sectarian tendencies. The point was not to build a better ghetto, he believed, but to destroy the regime that ghettoized homosexuals in the first place. Hocquenghem was

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81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 On the spread of pop festivals in France in 1969 and 1970, see Bizot, Ibid., 104-114.
84 AM, 108.
more inspired at the time, it seems, by the birth of Woodstock Nation, and he tried to bring the new ethos of the American underground to France with articles like “Do it!” and “Here and Now!” (Faitez-le!; Ici et Maintenant!). In addition to the speeches and communiqués of the Black Panthers, TOUT soon added interviews and texts by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. Whereas “culture” in France was still imprisoned in libraries and galleries, in America, Hocquenghem exclaimed, “Everything is passing from books into life!” Even the avant-garde surrealists and situationists maintained the trappings of the old culture. The point was not to write about it, but as Jerry Rubin urged: “‘Do it,’ now. Don’t keep your dreams for tomorrow. Look what became of your parents’ dreams. Let’s not let ourselves be had again. Seize the moment.” Hocquenghem and the staff of TOUT also tried to keep their readers abreast of new American social movements with articles on topics such as the American experiments in education and the ecology movements (the first Earth Day was held in the U.S. in April 1970).

Like the fervor over China, the gauchistes’ enthusiasm for “Woodstock Nation” also proved short-lived. It’s not that they stopped paying attention to cultural developments in the U.S., but they no longer viewed them in the same revolutionary light. In short, the trip began to wear off after a couple of years. Not long after its founding, Actuel, for example, was already bemoaning the commercialization of Rock and Roll and beginning to wonder just how subversive the “Woodstock” communities really were. Also, when heroin began to replace LSD and Marijuana, giving birth to the modern junky, American drug cultures began to seem much less revolutionary. In the early 1970s, Hocquenghem voraciously consumed every drug he could get a hold off,

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84 Ici et maintenant,” Tout 2 (October 1970), repr. in AMF, 84-85.
85 Ibid.
86 See for example, the special issue on Rock music, “Le Rock à la chaine,” Actuel 37 (December 1973).
from LSD, Peyote, and mushrooms, to all kind of pills and liquids in mysterious viles. It was a time when, he recalled, "it seemed impossible to live without this continuelle exhilaration of vitality or death." By the end of the 1970s, after witnessing some of his closest friends fall prey to heroin and cocaine addiction, he came to loathe the new drug cultures from the other side of the Atlantic (though he continued to enjoy marijuana and hashish).

Moreover, for those who still took *la pensée maotsetung* seriously, the American model of revolution was, at most, only a slightly better fit than the Chinese one for the French context. Perhaps the peculiar associative character of the Americans, described by Alexis de Tocqueville a century and a half earlier, made the proliferation of "Woodstock communities" a suitable strategy on their continent. In France, however, the omnipresence of the "republic," founded on the fascist principles of "Travail, Famille, Patrie," seemed to require a more centralized, aggressive, and direct strategy of attack.

Meanwhile, a number of female *gauchistes* were returning from the United States in 1970 with ideas of their own. The American author *Kate Millet* had just published her radical critique of male patriarchy, *Sexual Politics*, which, along with Betty Friedan's seminal *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), was helping fuel feminism's "second wave." The National Organization of Women (NOW), formed in 1966, had developed chapters all across the American landscape and was at the time engaged in intense, divisive

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87 AM, 107.
debates over the place of lesbianism in the movement. The Equal Rights Amendment, which had been introduced into congress every year since 1923, was finally gaining popular and political support in 1970; its eventual passage seemed a forgone conclusion. In short, as the female gauchistes discovered, in the U.S., in the belly of the imperial capitalist beast itself, the everyday lives of women being taken much more seriously. The female gauchistes did not, however, begin to rethink their Marxist principles, at least not immediately. Rather, they attributed the success of the women’s movement in the U.S. to the civil rights movement on which it was modeled. They remained convinced, for the most part that, as Chairman Mao himself had written, “Genuine equality between the sexes can only be realized in the process of the socialist transformation of society as a whole.” Strategically, however, the Americans were clearly on to something.

The critical difference, the gauchistes realized, was that instead of trusting their concerns to the existing student and leftist organizations—dominated mostly by male leaders, of course—the American women, like the African-Americans before them, had decided to organize exclusively amongst themselves. Many of the leaders of the U.S. Women’s Lib movement had been introduced to activism through organizations such as the SNCC (Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee) and the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), where they had to fight, to their dismay, against the same chauvinist attitudes they experienced in their rest of their daily lives. For women in the French leftist movements the situation was no different. Like their American counterparts, French women found themselves trapped in the very same gender roles. Whether they

90 Quotations from Mao Tse-Tung, 557-558.
were at home or at leftist meeting it was they who prepared the food, watched the kids, and cleaned while the men went about their “serious” business. As one gauchiste expressed her frustrations in verse:

“No You Were Not Dreaming”

The evening in your kitchen
When your child has gone to bed
And your husband is reading Marx
It is late and the day is coming to an end
Your friends have left
Leaving their dirty dishes and ashes spilling
Over the ashtray around the table

No, you were not dreaming
With your words tired and ill
Your simple words
That cry for time, love, and life
All things drowned in the dishwasher
And in the cinders of the ashtray

No, you were not dreaming
[but] the time to speak has come
the time to cry has come
the time to shout has come
the time to be has come
Man will die in his garbage
That you will not take out.92

In the course of 1969 and 1970, many female gauchistes thus began forming their own “women’s caucuses” along the model of the Americans. The women of the VLR were among the first to form their own clique, the “groupe femme du VLR,” and like female militants all over France, they quickly realized that when they met amongst themselves the social dynamics and the language changed dramatically. Françoise Picq, for example, a leader in the VLR (known to many in her entourage as “Tiennot Grumbach’s girlfriend”) recalled the first time she made this disconcerting observation.

One day, as she was relaxing on the lawn with Nadja and Anne, two other VLR members, listening to them recount their experiences in jail after the VLR raid on Meulan, Daniel, a male comrade approached. Suddenly, “The voices of the two other girls softened, and the vocabulary they used to describe jail became more ‘political,’ more coded. The conversation lost its spontaneity and freshness.” Although some of the male leaders accepted the women’s caucuses within the groups, the general attitude was dismissive, if not sometimes hostile. In May 1970, for example, a loose coalition of these women’s caucuses organized a debate at the University of Vincennes. As the women were speaking, some of the men in the amphitheater began to heckle them with boos and chants such as “à poil, à poil!” (take your clothes off!). Such displays of inveterate machismo helped push many more women towards the conclusion that it was time to form an exclusively female organization.

Despite this hostility, women’s debates and conferences began to proliferate in 1969 and 1970. Who better to analyze the everyday lives of women, “the proletariat of the family,” than the women themselves? But talk was cheap. It was time for action. Some women from the VLR, joined by another faction from Vincennes and a handful of women from the FMA—the Marxist group that had tried, unsuccessfully, to launch a debate at the occupied Sorbonne—gathered in the summer of 1970 to plan some media stunts aimed at “raising consciousness,” an approach inspired, again, by the Americans. On August 26th they staged their first action, the placing of a wreath to “the unknown soldier’s wife” on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the foot of the Arc de Triomphe.

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93 Quoted in Hamon and Rotman, v. II, 217.
Their banners read: “There is someone even more unknown that the soldier, his wife.”

Retroactively, the day became enshrined as the birthday of the Women’s Liberation Movement (Mouvement de Libération des Femmes or MLF). The date itself was significant, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the victory of women’s suffrage in the U.S., a day on which hundreds of thousands of women all over America marched together in the streets. The wreath incident would have gone unnoticed, of course, had the women not already contacted the media, whose numbers far outnumbered the nine women who actually carried out the stunt on the planned day and time. The Paris police—who also apparently had been notified—quickly intervened, removing the wreath and peacefully escorting the women away from the Arc, but they weren’t quick enough to keep the team of photographers and journalists from gathering enough information and images to create a scandal in the following day’s newspapers.

Weeks later, the journal Partisans published a special double issue organized by some of the women from the VLR and a feminist circle at Vincennes known as Psychanalyse et Politique or “Psych et Po” entitled “Women’s Liberation: Year Zero.”

The title, announcing a clean break from “Mommy’s feminism,” the civilized feminist traditions of the past, was inspired in part by Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation, a collection of articles published by a coalition of American radical feminists that same year. The issue of Partisans also contained a number of essays translated from the Notes from the Second Year, including Anne Koedt’s “The Myth of the Vaginal

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Orgasm,” which turned out to be the most controversial of the contributions. According to the editors of “Women’s Liberation: Year Zero,” “Women, whether they are bourgeois, working-class, or black, suffer a specific form of oppression... and every oppressed group must arrive at an awareness of their specific form of oppression and take control of their struggle.” And, “We must cease accepting to be a postscript to Marx and Mao Tse-Tung... Only the oppressed can analyze and theorize their oppression and choose their proper means of struggle.” Although the French contributors to the issue spoke from a variety of perspectives—Marxism, psychoanalysis, and literary criticism—they shared overall a commitment to a “revolutionary” approach. In “L’ennemi principal,” for example, Christine Dupont reminded feminists that the “principal enemy” was bourgeois capitalism, not patriarchy—which is only one facet of bourgeois ideology—and that the central theoretical task that lay ahead was to conceptualize the role the exploitation of women played in the larger picture of bourgeois capitalist domination. Another article (collectively signed) denounced the conditions of working mothers and defended abortion in Marxist terms as a woman’s right to strike:

The obligation to have children is inseparable from the material conditions of motherhood. If these conditions were not oppressive—if women were positively motivated to have children—they would not have to be forced to do so. Inversely, if women were free to have or not have children, they would not accept to have them under the present conditions. To perpetuate the production of children and a cost-effective means of raising them, that is, the uncompensated production and raising of children by women, it is necessary to not let them have this choice.

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99 Ibid., 4-5.
100 Ibid., 4-5.
101 Ibid., 157-172.
In 1970 and 1971, an increasing number of the new leftist presses, such as Hallier’s *L’idiot international* and *TOUT*, and even a few mainstream publications agreed to publish articles by the MLF. In April 1971, *Le Nouvel Observateur* decided to publish the MLF’s petition for the legalization of abortion on its cover. The petition was signed by “343 women who admit to having had abortions,” and included the signatures of such celebrities as the writer Christine Rochefort and Simone de Beauvoir (One does not imprison Voltaire’s partner either). The petition, later dubbed the “manifesto of 343 sluts” in mocking respect by the political humor magazine *Charlie-Hebdo*, marked the birth of the Movement for the Legalization of Abortion and Contraception (MLAC) and the beginning of a long political battle for the rights of women over their bodies. With the help of *L’idiot international*, the MLF did finally establish its own paper in May 1971, *Le Torchon brûle!* (The burning rag!), which was modeled in format and style after the extremely popular *TOUT*. At the same time, the MLF continued its campaign of media stunts aimed at consciousness raising. In October 1970, as the entire French Left was marching in the streets to free Geismar, an MLF cortege chained themselves to the front gate of the Petite-Roquette prison where Geismar was being held. According to the tract they distributed: “Prostitutes, thieves, abortionists, cleaning ladies, single mothers, homosexuals, heterosexuals, protestors, and militants—we are all sisters. When we are ourselves, we are outside of the law.” The following month, a group of MLF protestors crashed a conference on “the problem of women” sponsored by the illustrious *Elle* magazine. The high-profile conference was attended not only by France’s media

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103 “Liste des 343 femmes qui ont eu le courage de signer le manifeste ‘je me suis fait avorter’,” *Le Nouvel Observateur* (5 April 1971).
104 On the petition and the movement to legalize abortion and contraception, see Picq, 56-73.
106 Quoted in Picq, 18.
moguls, but also by several ministers, including Prime Minister Jacques Chaban-Delmas, as well as by Communist and Socialist Party leaders George Marchais and François Mitterrand. Prior to the event, *Elle* magazine had distributed 80,000 questionnaires in order to present women’s attitudes on topics of “importance” to them, such as love, marriage, children, and fashion. The MLF contingent managed to infiltrate the meeting and distribute a questionnaire of their own which included such mocking questions as:

*Who is best suited to decide the number of children you have?*

A. The Pope, who doesn’t have any  
B. The President, who’s having a hard enough time with his own  
C. The Doctor, who values the life of your fetus more than your own life  
D. Your Husband, who plays with them a for few minutes each day when he returns from work  
E. *You* who carry, birth and raise them

Hocquenghem followed closely the evolution of the MLF and began attending their weekly meetings in the fall of 1970 at the *École des Beaux Arts*. He also knew many of the founders personally through the VLR. In late 1970, a faction of lesbians, lead by Françoise d’Eaubonne, began attending the MLF meetings as well. D’Eaubonne had just been expelled from the homophile group *Arcadie*—where lesbians had long formed a tiny minority—after a confrontation with André Baudry, Arcadie’s leader.

“You say that society should integrate homosexuals, I say that homosexuals should disintegrate society!”

Although uttered half-jokingly, Françoise’s words to Baudry sent her and the lesbian contingent packing on their way. Soon thereafter, the women

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107 Quoted in Ibid., 22.  
108 This confrontation which lead to the lesbians’ exodus from Arcadie is recounted in Jacques Girard, 81.
began debating homosexuality at the meetings of the MLF. Françoise was eager to get a homosexual group started and began organizing separate meetings with a smaller group of the MLF, first at the home of a friend and eventually at the École des Beaux Arts.

Soon d’Eaubonne’s group was joined by a number of men, some of whom had participated in the short-lived CAPR at the Sorbonne. Among them most notably was Pierre Hahn, a respected journalist and writer, and Phillipe Guy, who had just returned from extended stays in the U.S. While in New York, Phillipe Guy even had the opportunity to witness the Stonewall Riots first hand. In the very beginning, the CAPR authors were the only masculine presence in what would soon become the Revolutionary Homosexual Action Front (FHAR).

Although he wasn’t present for the very first meetings of this new group, Hocquenghem started attending meetings as soon as he heard about them. As he recalled his first encounter with the FHAR:

I entered the small room where there were about thirty people . . . People were talking to one another about their lives, their dreams, their desires, with whom they had slept with, how, and why . . . Some of them had been in the United States and seen the Gay Liberation Front. They dreamed of creating something similar in France.109

Kindred spirits, Hocquenghem and d’Eaubonne hit it off immediately. She and some of her lesbian friends nicknamed him “Antinous,” because “his slenderness, his Hellenic profile, and his curls of lamb’s fleece” reminded them of Emperor Hadrian’s notorious lover who drowned in the Nile at a tragically young age.110 D’Eaubonne’s group faced a major problem: what press would accept the risk of defending revolutionary homosexuality? Hocquenghem had already used TOUT to publicize the MLF, and, in a

109 DH, 33.
roundabout way at least, had already broached the question of homosexuality in TOUT's first issue. Since he carried the most weight on the paper's editorial staff, why not put it in the service of homosexual liberation?

As Hocquenghem spent more time with the MLF and his new homosexual friends, he was sensing again that the times were changing. Three years after May '68, the eruption of another revolutionary opportunity seemed increasingly improbable. The fervent "workerism" of the student Left was growing out of touch with the reality that French workers were becoming more complacent. Hocquenghem's insufficient reverence for and attention to the hallowed "workers struggle" in TOUT had already begun to cause friction within the VLR. The leaders of the VLR envisaged a news organ that gave voice to the emerging social and cultural struggles, but they also wanted a product that could be distributed at the factories gates. As they would soon learn, they could not have their cake and eat it, too. Some of the militants in the VLR's worker committees had already expressed reservations about TOUT's content, which did not seem to appeal the workers nearly as much as the hard-edged La cause du peuple. Some of the more disgruntled among them simply moved to the GP—where issues of women's and sexual liberation were sure never to surface. Also, it seems, Hocquenghem was beginning to sense first-hand the limitations of gauchiste tolerance towards homosexuals, even within the notoriously libertarian VLR. As he admitted once during a meeting of the FHAR in the summer of 1971, his homosexuality, of which his VLR comrades were more or less aware, had not raised any serious problems until he volunteered to join one of the VLR's committees at the Renault automobile plant at Flins.111 Factory militancy at

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the time was fairly muscled work, involving frequent physical confrontations with unionists and factory security, and it had a very “macho” aura about it. Though somewhat lanky, Hocquenghem was certainly capable of this kind of work, as he had already proven beyond any doubt on the barricades of May. But what if the workers learned that he was a homosexual? As at the occupied Sorbonne in May ‘68, homosexuality remained a problem of “security.”

Hocquenghem understood that a special issue of TOUT on homosexuality would put the paper and maybe even the VLR itself at serious risk. But then again, perhaps the VLR’s time had come. Hocquenghem, in any case, was ready to move on. In the previous year, his philosophy of cultural revolution had begun to chafe at the constraints of gauchisme. In the pages of TOUT and elsewhere, his criticisms of the gauchistes, who refused to “live” the revolution, grew more stringent. Whereas the gauchistes clung ever so tightly to their illusions about the proletariat, the Americans of Woodstock Nation, he wrote, “teach us something: the class struggle is also a struggle for the expression of desire, for communication, and not simply an economic and political struggle.”

As much as he and the editors of TOUT prodded, however, the French Left, on the whole, still seemed reluctant to embrace fully the revolution of everyday life. On the other hand, the successes of the recently formed MLF, the American Yippies, and the American Gay Liberation Front seemed to point in a new direction. Though relatively few in number in comparison with the ranks of établis, these groups, through provocation and “consciousness raising,” had managed to muscle their own agendas into the center of public discussion. They had succeeded, in other words, in transforming the personal into the political, a first step towards revolutionizing politics and society.

112 “Pour une conception homosexuel du monde,” in AMF, 164.
As Hocquenghem was plotting TOUT’s “coming out” issue, d’Eaubonne, Hahn, and their small niche of homosexual militants began taking action. Their inaugural “happening” came on March 10, 1971. On that day, a popular public radio program—with approximately one million listeners—had planned to discuss “Homosexuality, the Painful Problem.” For the live debate, the show’s host Ménie Grégoire had gathered a panel of “experts”: André Baudry, the father of Arcadie, a priest, a psychoanalyst, the singing group Les frères Jacques (the reasons for their presence are not clear), and Pierre Hahn, the journalist who, unbeknownst to the others, was a mole for d’Eaubonne’s gang.¹¹³ As the discussion began, Grégoire, who supposedly represented the “moderate” middle-ground of public opinion, interjected such insights as “happy women are those who have men who have satisfied them,” and “there is all the same a negation of life . . . in homosexuality! It seems to me that we can say that without offending anybody!” Baudry cautiously defended the apparently controversial position that homosexuals too are “capable of love” and therefore not beneath the rest of humanity. Then the priest added: “I too welcome many homosexuals, my colleagues as well, who come to talk about their suffering, that suffering, we cannot be indifferent to.” Suddenly, a voice from the audience shouted:

*Stop talking about your own suffering!*

MÉNIE GRÉGOIRE: *Listen, well then, I have to say that there is something completely extraordinary happening, because the crowd has invaded the podium and because the homosexuals . . .*

¹¹³ For a detailed account of this event, see Michael Sibalis’s excellent introduction to the FHAR, “Gay Liberation Comes to France,” in Ian Coller, Helen Davies, and Julie Kalman, eds. French History and Civilization. Papers from the George Rudé Seminar, v. 1 (Melbourne: The George Rudé Society, 2005), 265-276, which is also available online at www.h-france.net. All of the following citations are taken from and translated by Sibalis in ibid. See also Girard, 82. The full transcript of Ménie Grégoire’s interrupted program, “L’Homosexualité, ce douloureux problème” (March 10 1971) repr. in *La Revue d’H 1* (Summer 1996): 52-59.
A SHOUT IN THE MICROPHONE (Pierre Hahn): Liberty! Liberty!

MÉNIE GRÉGOIRE: homosexuals of all sorts, men and women . . .

A SHOUT: We want liberty, for us and for you!

ANOTHER SHOUT: Fight, fight!

At this moment, the microphones turned off and the program cut to bumper music. About thirty homosexual militants, mostly women, had stormed the stage, overturning the tables and chairs on their way. Pierre Hahn, as planned, joined their ranks, continuing to shout for “sexual liberty!” Probably directed at Baudry, someone else shouted “Down with Daddy’s homosexuality!” Another voice could be heard crying “Transvestites with us!” Meanwhile, one of the lesbians was busy pounding the priest’s head against the table. “We’re not the ones suffering!” After the ruckus had ended, Grégoire, sipping scotch in her office, quipped to a journalist, “I wasn’t mistaken, it’s a hot subject.”

That evening the group decided to call itself the Revolutionary Homosexual Action Front (*Front Homosexuel d’Action Révolutionnaire* or FHAR), though its officially registered name, using the same acronym, was the Humanitarian Anti-racist Front (*Front Humanitaire anti-raciste*). A few weeks later, the planned issue of *TOUT* appeared. The cover of issue number twelve featured a large, brightly colored image of woman’s butt with a slogan in small print “There’s plenty of ass for everyone.” The title boldly proclaimed:

*Yes, our bodies belong to us!*

*Free and legal abortion and contraception!*

*The right to homosexuality and all sexualities!*
The rights of minors to the freedom of their desires and their fulfillment!\textsuperscript{114}

A hodgepodge of anecdotes, confessions, manifestoes, and tirades, the bulk of the issue was concerned with denouncing the general treatment of sexuality, especially homosexuality, by the medical, legal, and psychoanalytical “experts.” Making few allusions to the working classes and even fewer references to the sanctified texts of the Marxist tradition, number twelve was hardly recognizable as leftist publication at all. In contrast with Hocquenghem’s previous attempt to broach the issue of homosexuality, this time he and his comrades spoke in their own voices, from their own experience. Among his own contributions to the issue, Hocquenghem, alluding to the scandal in the \textit{Nouvel Observateur} a few weeks earlier, composed a “Manifesto of 343 fags who admit to having been fucked by Arabs,” daring \textit{Le Nouvel Observateur} to publish it as well—a challenge \textit{Le Nouvel Observateur} of course declined.\textsuperscript{115} Next to the manifesto, Hocquenghem included the following citation from Jean Genet: “Perhaps if I hadn’t slept with the Algerians I never would have been drawn to the FLN...in any case, it was homosexuality that made me realize that the Algerians were no different from other men.” Hocquenghem was finally beginning to cultivate the trademark style for which he is still remembered in France.

Responding to the immediate complaints of politicians and magistrates around the country, the government banned the issue and managed to seize and pulp about ten thousand copies (approximately one-fifth of the entire printing). The nominal director of the publication, Jean-Paul Sartre, was brought up on charges of “obscenity” (\textit{outrage contre bonnes mœurs}), a first in his long career of leftist militancy (the charges were later

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Tout} 12 (23 April 1971).
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 7.
dropped). At least one vendor of the magazine in Grenoble was arrested, and the offices of the VLR were raided by Marcellin’s vice squad. The issue was universally decried by the French presses, and perhaps most vehemently by the publications of the Left. The Trotskyite paper *Lutte Ouvrière*, for example, which considered the fight for sexual liberty “petit-bourgeois,” wondered what could possibly possess “revolutionaries” to edit a revue whose content was “worthy of bathroom graffiti.” Even the main Maoist bookstore in Paris, Norman Bethune, refused to carry the issue, and so too did many of the VLR militants themselves. As a piece of provocation, in short, it was an enormous success. Three years after May ’68, number twelve signaled, as Jacques Girard, historian of the FHAR, phrased it: “the May ’68 of the homosexuals.”

At the next meeting of the FHAR there were a few hundred participants rather than the usual few dozen. Not all of them were “homosexuals.” Some were militants of libertarian or anarchist tendencies who had never felt completely at home in the doctrinaire Marxist groups in which they circulated. There were also some curious heterosexuals who came from liberal backgrounds that taught respect for homosexuals but who had never actually “seen” one. That week, the offices of the VLR were barraged with readers’ letters; some of them were angry, but most of them came from ecstatic young homosexuals from all regions of France.

...*You have shouted at the top of your lungs what we’ve long been whispering into one another’s ears. It gives me immense happiness.*

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117 On the repercussions of *TOUT* number 12, see Le Bitoux, 88-89, and A. Belden Fields, 100-101.
118 Girard, 84.
...When they had succeeded in making me feel like a monster, I wanted to commit suicide, but no longer, because I know now that there are many of us...

...Your issue of TOUT is a great breath of fresh air. Will we finally have in France the equivalent of a “Gay Liberation Front,” instead of these small organizations of self-righteous people who whine silently within the ghettos of their clubs or confidential revues?...

...Out here in the country, it's not easy to live one homosexuality...we are incredibly isolated out here, but I want to be supported, and to help support those like me who live in a black hole...

...At last something in the French press in support of homosexuals! And in a revolutionary press at that! Maybe I won’t end up ruing forever the day I was born...

...Can us forty-something year olds join you too?...

Hocquenghem and the FHAR managed to hold on to enough copies to hand out a month later at the grand annual leftist gathering, the May 1st parade. That year the MLF and FHAR marched together in the streets, arm in arm, for the first time—there was still considerable overlap between the organizations. The FHAR’s banner read “Down with the Dictatorship of the ‘Normal’!” From the far back of the parade, well behind the rest of the trade unions and political parties where parade organizers had placed them, the FHAR protestors chanted such slogans as “We are a social scourge!” (“fléau social”—in the famous words of Fifth-Republic French deputy Paul Mirguet) and “Worker’s of the

120 This is a sampling of some of the readers’ letters which appeared in the “Courier” section of the following issue, TOUT 13 (17 May 1971), 2.
121 TOUT 13 (17 May 1971), 10.
world fondle one another!” Among them was a small group of drag queens who called themselves the “gazolines” and were dressed to a tee for the occasion. The gazolines called for the nationalization of the sequin factories and sang the communist anthem “la lutte finale” in bel canto. In their lewd sense of humor, the gazolines referred to themselves as the revolutionary “rear-garde,” but to Hocquenghem they seemed much more avant-garde than the gauchistes with whom he had been associating for the last five or six years.

As the MLF and the FHAR were just beginning to take off, the VLR was coming unglued. Even more damaging than Hocquenghem’s highjacking of TOUT in the name of sexual liberation was the collective decision of the VLR’s women to abandon the VLR completely for the MLF. There had already been some tension between the Femmes du VLR and the VLR’s male leadership (which led to a number of nasty break ups). Not long after the publication of TOUT’s twelfth issue, these tensions finally came to a head, but not, it seems, over the issue of homosexuality. In its 14th issue, TOUT decided to publish an angry letter from one of its Arab militants named Mohammed. Apparently unsuccessful in his attempts to sleep with his female comrades, Mohammed accused the women of the VLR of racism, a serious accusation that took the VLR’s women quite by surprise. In the next of issue of TOUT, the women struck back viciously in a series of responses under the heading: “Your sexual liberation is not ours!” A “liberated” woman, they retorted, was not the same thing as a whore. In fact, they argued, it is not even clear that a woman who allows herself to be penetrated by a man has the right to call

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124 “Votre liberation sexuelle n’est pas la nôtre!” TOUT (30 June 1971), 3.
herself “liberated”—on this point there was some disagreement among the women. According to one of the enraged women: “Sure, we’ll suck out all of your sperm, and then we’ll suck out your guts too, leaving only your hollow, fleshless, skinless bones, and then we’ll throw your bones to Boudou (our dog).”\textsuperscript{125} Shortly thereafter, the women left en masse.

The VLR’s fate was sealed. The task of keeping the festive spirit of May ’68 alive—with all that entailed—was unimaginable without women in the group. But there was a still more serious problem. Sylvina Boissonas, who had been bankrolling most the VLR’s activities, including TOUT, left with the VLR’s women join to the MLF. At the end of June, Roland Castro convoked the VLR’s last general assembly and announced that “The time has come for us to break up.”\textsuperscript{126} He encouraged his members to keep up their activism—the étals in the factories, the youth in their high schools, the women in the MLF, and the homosexuals with FHAR—but was forced to admit that there was no longer any point in trying to unify the various fronts. Approximately one year after Hocquenghem and the bande à Guy joined the VLR and started TOUT, the paper’s sixteenth and final issue appeared on July 29\textsuperscript{th}, 1971, just before France’s summer vacation period. As in the previous few issues, the newspaper spoke little of politics, dedicating the majority of its pages instead to the thoughts and ideas of those involved in the youth, women’s, and homosexual movements. In his final editorial “What we want: to live,” Hocquenghem explained that in the coming vacation period:

\begin{quote}
Corruption will surely spread the length of the news columns: How much are they going to make off the demolition of Les Halles? How many elderly will they have to evict to pay for the apartment of a deputy?
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{126} Bourseiller, 189.
Politics is not on vacation. Nor is diplomacy. How much will the Vietnamese suffer as a result of the Nixon-Mao alliance?

But, strange enough, despite all of this, we don’t seem all that concerned. At the end of July in Paris, you’d think a revolutionary paper would take advantage of all this political news, good and bad, filling it pages with it from beginning to end. But what’s there to say that the whole world doesn’t know already? Minute and the Canard Enchaîné do a better job than we do of describing the reign of money . . . in this era, in which the desire to live . . . is restricted to a few sunny weeks, why should we force ourselves to play the role of political analysts? . . . What if, instead, we begin anew, from our lived desires, starting with the desire for autonomy, in order to smash through the spectacle of politics . . . the youth wish to thrive, not just survive; women and homosexuals seek to re-invent love, and people living communally desire to share everything. So here are some of our inchoate and provisional thoughts . . . provisional because we don’t have much to say yet about this immense desire to live that is now being transformed into a force of action.\textsuperscript{127}

The VLR, the great Maoist experiment in cultural revolution, was over. Years later, Hocquenghem explained that the VLR, for him, represented

\ldots a strange kind of Maoism, whose attraction resulted from its conjunction of numerous different currents that were thought to be irreconcilable: ‘respect for and attention to the masses’ in the Chinese fashion, individualism in the grand tradition of French Anarchism, American-style communitarianism, and soon enough the emerging sexual liberation movements.”\textsuperscript{128}

Given this improbable conflux of tendencies, the apposite question is not why the VLR was so short-lived, but how it was able to exist in the first place. The VLR was emblematic of a widespread utopian desire, spurred by May and fueled by ideas from both the east and the west, to synthesize the traditional working-class movements with

\textsuperscript{127} “Ce que nous voulons: vivre” TOUT 16 (29 July 1971), 1.
\textsuperscript{128} AMF, 83.
the new social and cultural struggles of the '68 generation. As the events of May receded into the past, this dream, too, began to fade. Not long after the new social movements were born out of the gauchiste milieu, they managed to escape its orbit. The reason for this lies partly in the rapidly evolving ideas of the new social movements, ideas which fit poorly into the traditional categories of the radical leftist thought. Moreover, the "revolution of everyday life" inevitably invited a certain sectarian logic. If every oppressed group must speak for itself and only for itself, because only it can analyze its own suffering and decide the proper course of action, then no one is left to speak for the oppressed as a whole. Against the centrifugal force of this logic, the VLR tried futilely to act as a centripetal counterweight.

Both the MLF and the FHAR soon enough encountered the same problem as their ranks began to swell. The FHAR, for example, began as a predominately lesbian group, but by the summer of 1971, as their numbers climbed into the hundreds, the males largely outnumbered the females. By the end of 1971, there were nearly a thousand people trying to cram into the FHAR general assemblies at the École des Beaux Arts each Thursday night, the vast majority of them men who had come primarily to meet other men.\(^{129}\) As one member, at the time an adolescent, described his first meeting in the summer of 1971:

I climbed that stairs up to the summit of the amphitheater and found myself in a room of several hundred homosexuals who were talking, caressing, and kissing in the calmest of manners. I had never seen anything like it! My heart was beating quickly. The air was heavy with the scent of patchouli and a lot of the men had hair died with henna. From the top of the room I made the vertiginous realization that all eyes had turned towards me. They were staring at me, smiling, and recognizing me as one of their own. I finally belonged to a group. 'They' became 'us.'\(^{130}\)

\(^{129}\) By 1972, there 1,500 according to one estimate. See "FHAR: il y a 10 ans," *Gai Pied* 25 (April 1981).

\(^{130}\) Quoted in Girard, 85.
With no leaders and no real program, the meetings of the FHAR eventually degenerated into a chaos of erotic frenzy. “Cruising” replaced discussion, and “backrooms” replaced the seminar rooms. According to one FHARiste, “It was impossible for any single group to take control or impose a discourse. This explains the richness of the FHAR, but also its limits.”\textsuperscript{131} Many of the lesbians were less sanguine about this development. Fed up with the bedlam of the École des Beaux Arts, and particularly enervated by the pestering troupe of drag queens, the gazolines, a number of them left to form their own group, the Gouines Rouges (Red Dykes) in 1972. During its short, volatile existence, the FHAR had to constantly stave off this sectarian impulse. In 1974, when it could hold itself together no longer, the FHAR was finally dissolved.

In 1971, tensions were also beginning to mount in the bande à Guy’s commune. With the birth of the FHAR, more homosexuals came into the household. Some of the heterosexual couples who had formed enduring relationships over the years now wanted to have more privacy. Some complained that the homosexuals stayed up too late and made too much noise. Reluctantly, the bande à Guy finally decided to enforce segregation: the heterosexuals would sleep in the bedrooms downstairs, leaving the entirety of the upper floor to the homosexuals.

\textsuperscript{131} Alain Huet, quoted in Girard, 88.
Chapter 6
The Dissemination (1971-1974)

May '68 taught us to read the writing on the walls, and since then we have begun to decipher the graffiti in the prisons, the mental asylums, and now in the public urinals. It's a "new scientific spirit" that is being born!¹

-Felix Guattari (1973)

The VLR epitomized the brief and frenzied search for a revolutionary synthesis after May '68, and its dissolution in 1971 was followed by a rapid dispersal of the various currents of the French Cultural Revolution. Some of the more level-headed gauchistes, such as Hocquenghem’s former Trotskyite comrades of the JCR (now merged with Fourth International) were moving in a more parliamentarian direction, organizing their own trade unions to compete with the CGT and even backing their own political candidates. The GP, on the other hand, continued to prepare for class warfare, and as the worker strikes begun in May '68 grew more sparse and sporadic in the early 1970s, the Maoists in desperation began to ratchet up their violent rhetoric to perilous new levels. At the outset of 1972, it seemed only a matter of time before the GP took matters into its own hands like the Italian Red Brigades and the German Red Army Faction. As the liberal political philosopher Tony Judt once described the folly of doctrinaire Marxism:

“Where the cunning of History fails, men will intervene on its behalf.”\textsuperscript{2} The counter-culture was still thriving: urban and rural communes spread throughout the hexagon, French youths “turned on” to new and heavier drugs, and “freak” culture began to express itself in creative new ways through music and art. But the counter-culture, though still loosely connected with the radical left, was becoming just that: culture; as it spread to new and younger audiences, generating its own consumer practices, the counter-culture became increasingly commercialized and depoliticized.

The MLF and FHAR reached their peak of creativity and influence during the period from 1971 to 1974 as they gradually shed the trappings of their \textit{gauchiste} origins. Although tensions between the two groups occasionally flared, and although both groups remained internally divided among various philosophical and political lines, together they led a more or less unified assault on Gaullist “phallocracy.” The efforts of the MLF began to bear real fruits during these years. The 1967 Neuwirth law legalizing contraception was finally enforced by decree, family planning centers spread throughout the country, and the birth control pill became widely available for the first time—and even covered by health care. Also, in 1972, the case of a sixteen year-old girl from the Parisian suburb of Bobigny who had an abortion after being raped was about to change legal history with the help of the MLF and the MLAC. The FHAR, on the other hand, would not survive long enough to see its agenda reflected in mainstream politics, but in the early 1970s it was the primary force behind the galvanization of the homosexual movements.

In the first half of the 1970s the utopian dream of a French Cultural Revolution faded gradually as its various components moved off in different directions. The 68ers' fervor for radical social change, however, did not abate during these years. Then, in 1974, Gaullism came to an abrupt and unexpected end when President Pompidou died with two years left in office. The election of the moderate candidate Valéry Giscard d'Estaing announced a new era of social reform and political openness. The French Cultural Revolution was, in large measure, a reaction to Gaullism's inflexibility. When the era of de Gaulle came to a close, so too did the French Cultural Revolution.

After the successes of TOUT's twelfth issue and the FHAR's "coming out" at the May 1st parade, Hocquenghem dedicated his energies fully to spreading the message of sexual liberation. Along with d'Éaoubonne and a handful of other FHAR founders, he began work on a manifesto that would announce the birth of homosexual liberation in France. Like the MLF's special issue of Partisans, "Women's Liberation: Year Zero," the FHAR's statement would signal a clean break from past traditions of homosexual reclamation—specifically, the humanistic "homophile" movement represented in France by Arcadie. The Champ Libre publishing house, the radical press founded by situationist Gérard Guégan in 1970, eagerly agreed to publish the volume.3 Penned primarily by Hocquenghem, d'Éaoubonne, and Pierre Hahn, the resulting Rapport Contre la Normalité (Report against Normality) did not claim to present a revolutionary program, but simply

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to "represent the current state of the movement" in all of its diversity and contradictions.4

The Rapport furthermore announced a break from radical leftist politics, as well as "politics," in the traditional sense, altogether. Hocquenghem in particular was eager to move the FHAR beyond the petty debates within the left and extend its message to a more diverse audience. As he explained in one of his contributions to the volume:

I'm not for making any hasty clarifications, identifying oneself, defining oneself vis-à-vis the gauchistes. We don't need "Daddy" anymore in the form of a political foundation. What point would there be in saying that we are against American imperialism, for the workers at Renault, and against the bourgeoisie, other than trying to re-assure the ex-gauchistes among us? "We are more than homosexuals, because we also want revolution," "We must adopt a general position on the class struggle." This is what some of us have been saying...those of us, that is, still impressed by the idea of politics. It seems to me, however, that we need no other point of departure than our consciously lived homosexuality. 5

Employing the same aggressive, mocking tone as TOUT, the Rapport opens with Hocquenghem's "addresses," reprinted from TOUT's twelfth issue.

Address to those who consider themselves "normal":

You don't think of yourselves as oppressors. You fuck just like everyone else. It's not your fault if there are sick and criminal people out there. There's nothing you can do if you're tolerant, right? Your society—because if you fuck like everyone else, it is indeed yours—has treated us as a social scourge, a national epidemic, an object of scorn for 'real' men and a subject of dread for mothers. The same words you use to designate us are the worst insults in our language...We are telling you now that we've had enough, that you will no longer kick our asses, because we will defend ourselves. We will root out your racism against us, down to our very language...We are not against "normals," but against "normal" society. You ask: "What can we do for you?" You can do nothing for us so long as you continue to represent normal society and so long as you refuse to acknowledge secret desires that you repress. You can do nothing for us so long as you do nothing for yourselves.

Address to those who are like us:

5 "Pour une conception homosexuelle du monde," RCN, 72.
You dare not say it out loud. Perhaps you won’t even say it to yourself. We were like you a few months ago. Our Front will be what we make of it together. We want to destroy the family and this society because they have always repressed us... We continue to suffer daily repression, risking investigation, prison, and beatings, enduring mocking smiles and commiserating gazes... We are for a homosexual Front whose task is to fight and destroy “fascistic sexual normality.”

Even more so than the MLF, the FHAR had few theoretical precedents on which to build. In the dominant Freudian and Marxist discourses of the day, there was little that could be easily applied in the service of a “revolutionary” homosexuality.” A new language had to be invented. The Rapport thus came with its very own glossary which included some pejorative terms repossessed by the movement as well as a number of coined words. Some of the entries included:

Phallocratie [phallocracy]: a form of social domination based on the pretext that the phallus (your dick) is superior to the vagina or the clitoris. All state powers are founded on this “little difference.”

Hétéro-flic [heterocop]: one who erects his heterosexuality as the only “normal” form of love and takes advantage of those who do not imitate him.

Homo-flic [homocop]: a homosexual who apes the heterocop, believing that he can compensate for the real inferiority of his situation by assuming an ultra-virile attitude. These homosexual fascists... are all the more misogynistic for ignoring their secret femininity. Commonly found in the army.

Tantes, pédés, pédales, fiottes, tatas, tapettes... [all synonyms for “faggot”]: our brothers in the language of the heterocops.

Gouines, lesbiennes, gousses... [synonyms for “dyke”]: our sisters

Despite the new terminology, the FHAR remained heavily influenced by gauchiste thought. “Normal” society for the FHAR essentially referred to bourgeois capitalist society, though the emphasis was placed on its ideological institutions—“Work,

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6 RCN, 9-11.
7 RCN, 14-15.
Family, Nation. We don’t get off (cum) in this system!”8 It was unimaginable in the early days of the FHAR that genuine sexual liberation could be achieved without the revolution of the workers and vice versa. Many in the FHAR thus continued to prioritize the unification of their movement with that of the workers. As the workers waged political revolution on the shop floor, they would mobilize a “tourbillon des folles” or “whirlwind of fags,” according to one of their metaphors, to lead the assault on bourgeois values (The expression is a play on the stock phrase tourbillon des feuilles meaning “whirlwind of leaves”).9 During their meetings in 1971, the FHAR continued to debate ardently such questions as: “How does homosexuality fit in to the global struggle against American imperialism?” and “How are the lives of homosexuals improving in Communist China and Cuba?” During a massive leftist march in solidarity with the people of Vietnam in 1972, for example, their FHAR’s tract read:

Why is the FHAR in the streets today in support of the revolutionary struggle of the people of Vietnam?? We homosexuals are oppressed by the domination of the bourgeoisie! The people of Vietnam are oppressed by the domination of imperialism! Our liberation, like that of all oppressed people, is part of larger political struggle against every form of domination: ideological domination; imperialist domination; the domination of women; sexual and racial domination... etc.10

Like its predecessor TOUT, the Rapport was banned and seized, not for political reasons, but for obscenity (outrage contre bonnes moeurs).11 Once again, however, Interior Minister Marcellin’s vice squads were unable to keep the message from getting out. By 1972, there were dozens of FHAR groups around the country. Inside of Paris, the FHAR had outgrown the École des Beaux Arts, and meetings were being held by

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8 FHAR Tract #2, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 4 WZ 10828 (1971).
9 Le Fléau Social, 2 (October 1972), 2.
10 FHAR Tract #1, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 4 WZ 10828 (1972).
11 Girard, 83-84.
neighborhood FHAR groups, some of which began printing their own newspapers. In Paris's fifth arrondissement, for example, the "Group 5" began its own paper in the summer of 1971, the title of which reclaimed Deputy Mirgues's famous description of homosexuality to the Senate: "Le Fléau Social" (The Social Scourge). Soon thereafter, the FHARists of the eleventh arrondissement created L'Antinorm. Other radical presses also began to lend their support. Both L'Idiot Internationale and Actuel, the two main news organs of the counter-culture, opened their columns to the FHAR in 1972. So, too, did the ephemeral "S" Magazine, a pornographic review whose main political goal was to defend films, books, sex toys, and sex shops against Marcellin's vice squads. From 1972 to 1974, "S" ran a regular column by Georges Danjou that followed the evolution of the homosexual movements, "The Homo Soap." The FHAR was even beginning to spread its influence beyond French borders. In 1972, the "Group 5" and other FHAR groups helped the Belgians establish their own movement, the MHar (Mouvement homosexual d'action révolutionnaire) and began collaborating with the Italian homosexual liberation group, FUORI. In September of that year, Groupe 5 merged with a number of its European counterparts at a "Sex Festival" in Denmark to form the IHR (Internationale Homosexuelle Révolutionnaire), the first pan-European movement.

Insisting on its "revolutionary" character vis-à-vis what it considered to be the "reformist" tendencies of the Anglo-Saxon countries, the largely francophone IHR introduced itself on the first day of the Danish Sex festival by starting an orgy in the cafeteria during lunch.12

Contrary to Hocquenghem and the FHAR's hopes, the Rapport, like TOUT, circulated primarily in leftist and counter-cultural circles, and because of the constant

12 On the FHAR's international connections, see ibid., 107-111.
threat of censorship, the editors of *Le Fléau Social* and *Antinorm* had an enormously difficult time finding vendors for their papers.\textsuperscript{13} Eager to break out of this milieu, Hocquenghem decided it was time to try a different approach. Towards the end of 1971, he befriended a journalist from the *Le Nouvel Observateur* who was curious about the FHar. The mainstream magazine's editors were not about to publish a "Manifesto of 343 fags who'd been fucked by Arabs," but they were interested in some kind of "human interest" piece on the homosexual revolt.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, on January 10, 1972, *Le Nouvel Observateur* published Hocquenghem's article entitled "The Revolution of Homosexuals." Despite its title, the article read much more like a confession than a manifesto. There was no mention of bourgeois capitalism or its destruction, and also absent was the aggressive tone that characterized the *Rapport*, for example. Beginning modestly, "My name is Guy Hocquenghem. I am 25 years old," it related instead in frank detail the story of Hocquenghem's self-discovery as both a leftist militant and a homosexual, from his years as a *Lycéen* at Henri IV and then a *Normalien*, up through May '68 and the foundation of the FHar.\textsuperscript{15} Although written with a "good dose of exhibitionism,"\textsuperscript{16} as he admitted years later, the article was more remarkable for its moving account of the tribulations of growing up homosexual in the 1950s and 1960s. Appealing to French homosexuals from all different backgrounds, Hocquenghem lamented, "Each one of us is mutilated in an aspect of our lives that we know is essential, that which we call sexual desire or love."\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{13} These problems are recounted, for example in "Éditorial," *Le Fléau Social*, 2 (October 1972), 2.
\textsuperscript{14} DH, 25.
\textsuperscript{15} DH, 25
\textsuperscript{16} DH, 25.
\textsuperscript{17} DH, 37.
Hocquenghem’s public confession, the first of its kind in France, was, at least in some respects, genuine: although his homosexuality was no secret among his circle of friends, he did finally come out to his parents days before the article was to appear in order to prepare them for any media scandal that might ensue. (The following week, Le Nouvel Observateur published an emotional response from Hocquenghem’s mother who proved to be very understanding.) At the same time, however, his “coming out” article, as it came to be known, was also a calculated provocation of sorts. Hocquenghem never believed that the confession, in and of itself, was a gesture of liberation. Nor did he ever believe that simply by the act of confession one could authentically assume a homosexual identity. Being a homosexual for Hocquenghem--like being a Jew for Jean-Paul Sartre in Anti-Semite and Jew--entailed an existential problematic, for it was not homosexuals who invented homosexuality, but rather homophobic society. Homosexual identity, as Hocquenghem explained that same year, was a “perverse trap”: “Homosexual desire has gotten entangled in a game of shame, and it is no less perverse to turn this into a game of pride. In fact, one is always a little bit ashamed to be proud of being a homosexual.”¹¹⁸

Hocquenghem’s “coming out” piece was not a call to arms like the Rapport, but in the context of Pompidou’s repressive France, where even the most celebrated homosexual literary and cultural giants did not dare to speak of homosexuality in the first person, it was indeed an act of rebellion.

As Hocquenghem expected, the article was a bombshell, but to his surprise, the public response was almost universally positive. Congratulatory letters poured into the offices of the magazine, and soon other journals and magazines, some of them

mainstream, began asking him for similar contributions. In the small world of Parisian intellectuals, Hocquenghem became a celebrity overnight. In cafés and on the streets, people soon learned to recognize him by his mop of brown curls, his boyish face, and his trademark tight blue jeans and black leather jacket. As Hocquenghem complained in an interview less than a year later:

\[\ldots I've become a public representative for homosexuality. People no longer reproach me for being a homosexual. On the contrary, they congratulate me! It’s not unlike the way we sing the praises of an Algerian who’s become a political leader \ldots So society recognizes you as a homosexual, are you therefore more liberated? No, you’re only more confined. Society is only too happy to have you play this role. They even turn to you when they need a specialist on homosexuality. As a result, I have no personal life. Everyday I run into dozens of people whose gaze reveals to me that they are speaking to a representative of homosexuality.\]^19

Hocquenghem regretted almost immediately having publicly confessed his homosexuality in such unambiguous terms. Reflecting on his own so-called “coming out” article five years later, Hocquenghem noted that it was the only occasion on which he referred to “homosexuality” in a positive and unequivocal way. Everywhere else in his writings where he invoked “homosexuality”—a word that “still fills me with horror” he wrote in 1988—it was either “as a pretext to distance myself from it, or to warn against a false homosexual ‘positivity’.\[^20\]

The *Nouvel Observateur* article also created problems within the FHAR, which had long prided itself on being a movement without leaders. As Hocquenghem himself insisted in “The Revolution of Homosexuals”:

> Now and again still, some or our friends get a small taste for power and try to hold a discourse during our meetings. But they don’t have a grip on reality, and the others quickly begin heckling or simply move to another

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^20 AM, 38 ; DH, 23.
room. For there to be *leadership* (sic.), there first has to be a perceived need for it. Currently at the FHAR, however, the primary "militant aim," whether one likes it or not, is for everyone to get together and discuss." . . . the idea of *leadership* loses all meaning.\textsuperscript{21}

Nonetheless, Hocquenghem unwittingly became the figurehead for the homosexual cause that the media had been looking for, and his celebrity drew ire and resentment from some within the FHAR. The lesbians in particular, already uneasy with the group's overwhelming masculine presence, reproached him first of all for breaking with the collective ethos of the movement and, moreover, for giving the group a masculine public persona. Not long after its publication, the radical lesbian faction of the FHAR split off to form the *Gouines Rouges* (Red Dykes).\textsuperscript{22} The *Gouines Rouges* rejected contact with all males, regardless of their sexuality. As Anne-Marie, one of their founders, explained in an interview in 1973: "For us, men don't even exist. We experience neither desire nor repulsion for them. No more disastrous experiences with husbands, lovers, fathers, or brothers, nothing."\textsuperscript{23}

Finally, his newfound celebrity also brought with it an acute personal dilemma that Hocquenghem would struggle with for the rest of his life. Hocquenghem never wanted to be known for his homosexuality—the point of the FHAR, he believed, was to "destroy" homosexuality along with heterosexuality, both of which were categories invented by bourgeois society. After 1972, however, it was his homosexuality for which he was famous. Homosexuality opened doors to him as a writer and a thinker, and, on a more practical level, provided him with him a source of income. After his confession appeared in the *Nouvel Observateur*, he was immediately sought out by other

\textsuperscript{21} DH, 35.
\textsuperscript{22} Girard, 103.
\textsuperscript{23} Interview with Georges Danjou in "S" *magazine* 12 (February 1973), 18.
publications, including Jean-Paul Sartre’s prestigious *Les Temps Modernes*. In 1972, he was even offered a position teaching seminars in homosexuality in the philosophy department at the Experimental University of Vincennes. Hocquenghem was France’s first professional homosexual “expert.”

Teaching at Vincennes proved to be a watershed for Hocquenghem’s career. There he was re-united with his former professor René Schérer, and his passion for philosophy, which had fallen by the wayside in May ’68, was immediately re-kindled. He also became closely acquainted with his fellow faculty members in the philosophy department, including Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and François Lyotard. Thus, not surprisingly perhaps, Hocquenghem’s vision of a cultural revolution began to undergo a new transformation. The sexual liberation movements were moving away from their *gauchiste* origins, but not nearly fast enough it now seemed to him. The point was neither to substitute the ‘homosexual’ for the proletariat as the new revolutionary subject group, nor was it to integrate sexual repression into the larger analysis of bourgeois capitalist oppression. Rather, Hocquenghem believed, one had to start anew, from concrete lived experience and from the reality of human desire.

Hocquenghem’s tolerance for those in the movements who took themselves too seriously was waning. By the end of 1972, he was losing patience with what termed the “Stalinist” factions within the FHAR and the MLF. “Groupe 5” of the FHAR, for example, which maintained *Le Fléau Social*, continued to invoke sexual liberation as a
"means of approaching the vaster subject of global communist revolution." Similarly, L’Antinorm, the other major newspaper of the FHAR, remained steadfastly within the framework of Wilhelm Reich’s philosophy and aspired to rebuild something like the failed German Sexpol movement of the 1930s. For L’Antinorm, the politicization of sexuality was essentially a means of destroying capitalism and creating socialism.

"Against capitalist Alienation! For a liberating socialism!"  
Within the MLF also, the “class struggle” feminists remained one of the largest contingencies. Many of these militants continued to participate in other leftist groups and considered themselves revolutionaries first and feminists second. “Class struggle” feminists venerated the image of the “guérillère,” the brave, feral female armed to fight patriarchy and imperialism. During Vietnam War protests in the early 1970s, for example, they chanted the praises of the Vietnamese women of the liberation army who “had freed themselves from the confines of maternal and domestic roles by taking up arms against the American imperialists.” This image was first popularized in Monique Wittig’s 1969 novel Les Guérillères, one of the most influential texts for the MLF and later the radical lesbian movement. The homoerotically charged Les Guérillères recounts the myth of a band of female fighters living in the woods who lead womankind into battle against their male oppressors of the city. Describing the final apocalyptic battle, Wittig writes:

24 Groupe 5 du FHAR, Le Fléau Social 1 (June 1972), 2.
27 Tract signed by Des Groupes de Quartier du MLF (20 January 1973), 4 WZ 13305 (Bibliothèque Nationale de France).
28 Monique Wittig, Les Guérillères, David Le Vay trans. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985). Wittig was also one of the original founders of the MLF who participated in the August 1970 placing of the wreath on the tomb of the unknown soldier.
They [the women] stand on the ramparts, faces covered with a shining powder. They can be seen all round the town, singing together a kind of mourning song. The male besiegers are near the walls, indecisive. Then the women, at a signal, uttering a terrible cry, suddenly rip off the upper part of their garments, uncovering their naked gleaming breasts. The men, the enemy, begin to discuss what they unanimously regard as a gesture of submission. They send ambassadors and call for the gates to be opened. Three of their number fall struck down by stones as soon as they are within range. The entire army [of women] hurls itself against the walls, with battering-rams, flame-throwers, guns, and scaling-ladders. A great tumult rises. The besiegers utter cries of rage. The women, modulating their voices into a stridency that distresses the ear, withstand the siege, one by one, with arrows, stones, and burning pitch, not quitting their positions except to bring aid to someone or to replace a dead woman... Finally the combatants are visible above the wall, singing without pause, their mouths wide open over white teeth. Their cheeks still glow in their blackened faces. Some laugh out loud and manifest their aggressiveness by thrusting their bare breasts forward brutally.²⁹

In 1969 and 1970 misandrous images such as these helped galvanize the feminist consciousness that built the MLF, but in 1972 and 1973 they threatened to tear the MLF apart as radical factions actually embraced a separatist philosophy akin to that which was famously introduced in the U.S. in 1967 by Valerie Solana’s SCUM Manifesto. (Translated into French in 1971, the SCUM Manifesto was widely and seriously discussed in the MLF and likely had more influence in France than in its home country.³⁰) As the MLF and the FHAR became increasingly bogged down by internal disputes and scissions, Hocquenghem began to lose interest.

As he became reacquainted with philosophy, particularly the utopianism of Charles Fourier, Hocquenghem began to view the liberation of desire not as one component of the “vaster subject of global communist revolution,” but as its precondition. As he argued at a conference on Fourier in 1972, Fourier had for too long

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²⁹ Ibid., 99-100.
been considered merely a “precursor” in a field of inquiry inaugurated by Marx; whereas Fourier had explored the full range of utopian possibilities for human existence, Marx pursued unilaterally only the economic and political dimensions of utopia.\textsuperscript{31} The gradual shift in Hocquenghem’s thought in 1971 and 1972 was also influenced no doubt by his introduction to structuralism at Vincennes, a theoretical approach, first popularized by Claude Levi-Strauss and Michel Foucault in the 1950s and 1960s, that supplants the human subject with universal “structures” as the focus of inquiry. Reminiscent of Foucault’s famous last lines in \textit{The Order of Things}, Hocquenghem argued for example in his presentation on Fourier that, whereas “Marxist thought continues to be dominated by a metaphysics of the subject,” in Fourier, “. . .there is only openness, the contradictory, dominating subject . . . effaces itself and disappears.”\textsuperscript{32}

Even before he began teaching at Vincennes, Hocquenghem seems to have been hinting at a new direction in his writings for \textit{TOUT} and the \textit{Rapport}. In his main theoretical contribution to the latter, “For a Homosexual Conception of the World,” he spoke not of the \textit{individual’s} sexual liberation, but the liberation of all \textit{relations} of love and desire. As a model of this kind of revolution, he touted the novel non-sexual forms of love that existed between men and women within the FHAR. Before factional differences came to the fore in the MLF and the FHAR, Hocquenghem saw the sexual liberation movements as an opportunity for men and women to come together and re-invent social relations. In the pages of \textit{Actuel}, for example, Hocquenghem boasted that the men of the FHAR occupied the enviable position of being the only males who could still experience intimacy with the women of the MLF, precisely because they explored

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} AMF, 65-73.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 66. “. . .one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea,” Michel Foucault, \textit{The Order of Things} (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 387.
\end{itemize}
with them every possibility of love except for "penetration." For Hocquenghem, sex was only one of the many facets of human interactions that stood to be revolutionized in modern society.

Only the bourgeois imagines that the true love is expressed when a cock penetrates a pussy. There are 36,000 other forms of love, even more. This particular form—cock in pussy—is precisely the only one at the present time that is not true.34

But how does one envision a revolution of desire tout court? And how does one mobilize such a revolution? In 1971 and 1972 Hocquenghem was grappling with these questions and contemplating a new collective project to follow up on the Rapport. Then his colleagues at Vincennes, Gilles Delueze, and Felix Guattari, published their philosophical opus, Anti-Oedipus. Hocquenghem devoured the dense treatise in days. Weeks after it appeared, he marched into Guattari’s office with his dog-eared copy of Anti-Oedipus under arm and announced that he had finally found the philosophical framework he needed to write a book on revolutionary homosexuality. Abandoning his previous plans for a new collection of essays by the FHAR, Hocquenghem instead labored alone at a frenetic pace for the next few months. The result was Homosexual Desire, the first discourse on revolutionary homosexuality in France and still Hocquenghem’s best known work.

Because it was directly inspired by Anti-Oedipus, any treatment of Homosexual Desire must begin with a consideration of Delueze and Guattari’s text.35 Often regarded as the central text of the French “anti-psychiatry” movement, Anti-Oedipus is perhaps

33 "Les femmes sont un peu nos mammans!" Actuel 25 (November 1972), 8-9.
34 RCN, 77.
35 For more on the relationship between Homosexual Desire and Anti-Oedipus, see Bill Marshall, 22-41 and Jeffrey Weeks excellent introduction to Homosexual Desire.
best understood as a critical response to Jacques Lacan, and, by extension, the Freudian
tradition. Felix Guattari was a trained Lacanian therapist who had been psychoanalyzed
by Lacan himself. In the 1950s and 1960s, Lacan’s “recovery of Freud” was one of the
single most influential currents in French philosophy and human sciences. In his
notorious lectures, Lacan employed a structuralist theory of language to translate
Freudian concepts from the realm of the biological, where Freud had envisaged them, to
the realms of language and culture. Central to his practice as a therapist, Lacan used
Freud’s theories of psychosexual development, culminating in the Oedipus stage, as
metaphors for the socialization process. “Oedipalization,” which represents the
successful formation of the ego, was, for Lacan, a linguistic and cultural process—not a
biological one as in Freud—yet, at the same time, it remained something universal and
ahistorical. It is on this last point that Deleuze and Guattari take issue with Lacan.
Oedipalization, they charge, is not a necessary stage in human development, but rather an
invention of bourgeois capitalism. Psychoanalysis, furthermore, which aims to
understand and guide this process, is the handmaiden of bourgeois capitalism—hence the
antagonistic title of their opus, “Against Oedipus.”

The key to their arguments lies in a re-conceptualization of “desire.” Inspired by
the spontaneous eruption of May 1968, many leftist thinkers in France began to re-assess
the role of desire in the revolutionary process in the early 1970s. As Dollé,
Hocquenghem’s former collaborator on the ephemeral Révolution Culturelle, summed up
this prevailing sentiment in the early 1970s:

... the rise of unemployment, the rigidity of the educational system, the
aging of De Gaulle, the aloofness of our leaders, etc. True, all of this
existed, but it doesn’t explain anything. Something happened in May ’68 that defies all explanation, the desire for revolution.\textsuperscript{36}

If the social sciences could not grasp the ineffable aspect of desire present in May ’68, then neither could, for Deleuze and Guattari, the psychoanalysts. As Deleuze once remarked:

> Psychoanalysis has never been able to tolerate desire. It has to reduce desire, make it say something else. Some of the more ridiculous pages Freud ever wrote are on “fellatio”: such a bizarre and “shocking” desire can have no worth of its own; it must be traceable to a cow udder, and from there to the mother’s breast. Freud thinks we would get more pleasure sucking on a cow udder.\textsuperscript{37}

Whereas Dollé interpreted the “desire for revolution” exhibited in May ’68 as a kind of uncompromising individualism in which “Everyone can say ‘I’,” Deleuze and Guattari, using a structuralist approach, conceived of desire in terms of production, connections, and flows operating beyond the realm of the individual.\textsuperscript{38} Rather than being a ‘lack,’ in other words, desire, in their system, is a plentitude; free from outside constraints infinite varieties and permutations are possible. In their famous metaphor, humans are constructed by “desiring machines”; each human’s machine parts can plug into any of the machine parts of any other. The crucial point, however, is that capitalist society requires that this infinity of possible connections be restricted to those that contribute to its own survival, namely those relating to the reproduction, both biological and cultural, of the family. Here psychoanalysis comes in; psychoanalysis, both in its Freudian and Lacanian forms, abets the formation of subjects according to capitalism’s needs. The possibilities for revolt, for Deleuze and Guattari, lie not within the simple

\textsuperscript{36} Jean-Paul Dollé, \textit{Le Désir de révolution} (Paris: Grasset, 1972), 307. [my emphasis added]


\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Le Désir de révolution}, 307.
negation of these subject identities in favor of "schizophrenia"—capitalist society needs "schizophrenia" to serve as normality's foil—but within a rejection of the false coherence of the "molar" subject in favor of a "molecular" experience of the self as an intersection of freely flowing desires.

While Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of "desiring machines" makes little intuitive sense, its utility becomes somewhat clearer when Hocquenghem employs it to analyze homosexuality in *Homosexual Desire*. On the very first page, Hocquenghem inverts the terms of previous debates over homosexuality: "The problem is not so much homosexual desire as the fear of homosexuality." The real question, in other words, is not what homosexuality is, but why society is so paranoid about it—Hocquenghem uses the term "homosexual paranoia"; the word "homophobia" was not yet used in 1972. After considering some recent examples of homosexual paranoia in France, such as the controversies over the works of Jean Genet, Hocquenghem then challenges the idea propagated by social reformers that society is moving steadily towards the liberalization of attitudes towards homosexuality. Even a cursory look at the history of homosexual repression in Europe in the 20th century reveals this notion to be a myth. The apparent humanization of attitudes in the 20s and 30s completely evaporated with the fascism of the 30s and 40s, and in the frenetic rebuilding of the postwar era, homosexual paranoia continued to intensify. In France, in particular, homosexuality had never been criminalized until the Vichy era, and the number of arrests and the severity of punishments, as Hocquenghem argued, had been on the steady rise since the 1950s.

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39 HD, 49.

In the sections that follow, Hocquenghem described how "capitalist society manufactures homosexuals, just as it produces proletarians, constantly defining its own limits..."\textsuperscript{41} Hocquenghem observed first of all that, while the Christian West has always been hostile towards homosexuality, the current criminological and medical notions of the "homosexual" had a relatively short history—the term "homosexual" was first coined in the 1860s by the German sex researcher and social reformer Magnus Hirschfeld. With the emergence of the concept of homosexuality as a sickness or disease in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, homosexual paranoia became secularized. At the same time, with the advent of psychoanalysis, the homosexual became both a fully rounded scientific category and a social reality. "Homosexuals," in other words, began to resemble the stereotypes society had created for them. "We have escaped hellfire into psychological hell."\textsuperscript{42}

The motor behind all of these developments is what Hocquenghem refers to as the "growing imperialism" of modern society: its growing need to control the population and maximize production.\textsuperscript{43} In order to ensure the continued reproduction of healthy laborers and consumers, capitalism divides up the plenum of freely flowing desire into "heterosexual" and "homosexual" desire. "Heterosexual" desire, which is teleologically directed towards procreation, is established as the norm, and "homosexual" desire becomes its foil. By locating homosexual desire in a particular pariah group—homosexuals—society thereby restricts it; whereas homosexual desire was once considered an inherent possibility for everyone, it is now a pathology associated only with a particular social group. Society needs both "heterosexuals" and the

\textsuperscript{41} HD, 50.  
\textsuperscript{42} HD, 93.  
\textsuperscript{43} HD, 51.
“homosexuals,” but both of these categories are essentially capitalist fictions, arbitrary divisions of the flux of desire.

In reconstructing the history of homosexuality, Hocquenghem makes explicit reference to Foucault’s influential study of madness from 1966, *Madness and Civilization*. Like the madman for Foucault, the homosexual for Hocquenghem is a recent construction of modern society. Four years later, in 1976, Foucault would embark on his own three-volume “history of sexuality,” the first volume of which builds upon many of themes introduced in *Homosexual Desire*. Foucault also famously took issue with a number of Hocquenghem’s key theoretical precepts. Most significantly perhaps, whereas Hocquenghem holds on to the notion of an underlying reality of sexual desire, Foucault posits sexuality as something that is constructed by modern society *through and through*. Consequently, Foucault views the sexual liberation movements, guided by the misguided “repression hypothesis,” as completely devoid of revolutionary potential. It is important to note, however, that Foucault wrote his “history of sexuality” well after the birth of sexual politics in France, and in a dramatically different social and political context.44

Foucault in the 1960s, however, still held out the possibility for a revolutionary return to some kind of authentic substratum prior to the division of “madness” and “reason.” Similarly, Hocquenghem in *Homosexual Desire* argued for the possibility of a revolutionary return to “desire” itself. In particular, the possibility for subversion for Hocquenghem lies within homosexual desire, which, despite being manufactured, “expresses something—some aspect of desire—which appears nowhere else, and that

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something is not merely the accomplishment of the sexual act with a person of the same sex.”45 First of all, homosexual desire is inherently “counter-productive” in the sense that it is non-procreative. Moreover, homosexual desire challenges the domination of the “phallus.” Borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari’s response to Lacan, Hocquenghem argues that capitalist society is essentially “phallocratic;” whether through its presence (castration anxiety) or its lack (penis envy), the phallus is the “universal signifier” and central organizing principal. Against this domination, Hocquenghem proposes a kind of anal revolution. While the phallus, the organizing principle of modern society, is essentially “social,” the anus represents that which is eliminated from society, the realm of the “private,” in other words. Perhaps the answer then lies in “de-privatizing” the anus. “To reinvest the anus collectively and libidinally would involve a proportional weakening of the great phallic signifier, which dominates us constantly both in the small-scale hierarchies of the family and in the great social hierarchies.”46 In other words, as Hocquenghem had previously declared in TOUT! and in the Rapport: “My asshole is revolutionary!”

Thus, according to Hocquenghem, “The ‘heteroclite’ nature of homosexual desire makes it dangerous to the dominant sexuality,”47 and, by extension, “normal” society more generally. At the heart of homosexual paranoia lies a manifest fear of death, the death of a civilization that ceases to reproduce itself biologically. Latent within homosexual paranoia, however, lies the fear of the death of civilized or “normal” society in a more fundamental sense. As Hocquenghem argues in the conclusion, “Homosexual

45 HD, 50.
46 HD, 103.
47 HD, 148.
desire is neither on the side of death nor on the side of life; it is the killer of civilized egos." Perhaps then homosexual paranoia is justified after all.

It is not clear to what extent the "anal revolution" Hocquenghem proposes is real or rhetorical. While *Homosexual Desire* purports to be a philosophical work, Hocquenghem's trademark style and sordid sense of humor shine through on numerous occasions. (How could the "revolutionary de-privatization of your anus" not be tongue in cheek?) As Jeffrey Weeks, who wrote the preface to the first English translation in 1976, observed, Hocquenghem's work "should not be seen as a definitive theoretical statement nor as a clear guide to current practice. Its value lies rather in its summing up of important intellectual tendencies, and their specific application to the question of homosexual oppression." *Homosexual Desire* explores the limits of contemporary theory's (contemporary in 1972) utility in the service of revolutionary homosexuality. More significant than its own conclusions are the debates and dialogues it has inspired since the early 1970s. Although it was somewhat forgotten in France during his own lifetime (Hocquenghem did not live to see his work finally re-edited in France in 2000), *Homosexual Desire* was re-discovered by the founders of "queer theory" in the United States in the 1990s and is now considered one of the discipline's founding texts. Hocquenghem's own estimation of the work, however, is perhaps best summed up by the fact that he abandoned it's philosophical approach soon after it was published.

Characteristic of his attitude towards writing, he rarely even mentioned *Homosexual Desire* in print or in word. Although he would continue to investigate homosexuality

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48 HD, 150.
49 HD, 23.
50 On the importance of *Homosexual Desire* for Queer Theory, see, for example the preface to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University, 1985).
throughout the 1970s and 1980s, he would prefer to do so through the prisms of history, art, and literature, jettisoning the scientific pretenses of French structuralist theory.

More interesting to Hocquenghem in 1972 was the ‘real’ investigation of homosexuality. Although his first seminar at Vincennes, entitled “For a homosexual conception of the world,” explored some of the philosophical themes introduced in the *Rapport* and *Homosexual Desire*, he soon thereafter abdicated his role as seminar leader, preferring to let his invited guest experts speak instead. These “experts” were prostitutes, transvestites, and transsexuals with no connection to the academic world. Many of them Hocquenghem had recruited from famous homosexual cruising spots like the Bois du Boulogne west of Paris. This approach jibed well with the dominant pedagogical (or anti-pedagogical) esprit of the Vincennes’s philosophy department, where prison and mental asylum inmates were also frequent guests. In the early 1970s, France’s radical philosophers were helping to spread May ‘68’s *prise de parole*, or “liberation of the word,” to society’s margins, where, it was believed, the greatest potential for subversion dwelled. In February 1971, for example, Foucault, chair of the Vincennes’s philosophy department, helped to found the *Groupe d’information sur les Prisons* (GIP), an organization which aimed to open a dialogue between France’s prison system and the rest of society from which it had been cut off.\(^51\) Hocquenghem first became acquainted with Foucault through the GIP, which, in collaboration with the FHAR, launched an investigation into the dubious suicide of Gérard Grandmontagne, a young, openly

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\(^51\) For a complete history of Foucault’s philosophical and militant involvements with the prison system, see François Boulland, *Michel Foucault et les prisons* (Paris: PUF, 2003).
homosexual prisoner who was severely beaten by prison guards before dying mysteriously in solitary confinement—it remains unclear whether the cause of death was strangulation or electrocution.52 *Homosexual Desire*, in fact, is dedicated to Gérard Grandmontange.

The Experimental University of Vincennes was the geographical hub of this new approach, and the organization that best embodied it was the CERFI (*Centre d’Études, de Recherches et de Formation Institutionnelles*). The CERFI was originally founded by Felix Guattari and his circle of friends in 1965 in response to what they perceived as the theoretical poverty of PCF and global communism more generally.53 Their aim was to rebuild socialist theory from scratch through an interdisciplinary exploration of ideas from such areas as psychoanalysis, ethnology, sociology, pedagogy, architecture, and even film and music. Their collectively-edited journal, *Recherches*, assembled texts from a wide range of scholars, scientists, and activists from both inside and outside the group. CERFI might have ended up as just another short-lived experiment in radical thought had it not been visited in 1968 by consultants from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. At the time, Guattari was conducting his own investigations at the La Borde mental clinic, which he co-managed along with fellow Lacanian psychoanalyst Jean Oury. The Ministry was keen to understand how the La Borde clinic, with its comparatively minuscule budget and only 150 hospital beds, was able to care for the same number of patients as clinics more than three times its size, so they commissioned the CERFI to assemble a research team of therapists, sociologists, and architects to produce a special

52 Girard, 106-107.
issue of Recherches. Soon thereafter, the CERFI began to receive numerous commissions from the Ministry of Urbanism, Housing, and Transport as well.

After the publication of Homosexual Desire, Hocquenghem proposed the idea to Guattari of gathering a group of researchers for a special issue of Recherches on "homosexualities." Although it would pose a financial risk to CERFI, Guattari eagerly agreed. Six months later, in March 1973, the result appeared: Three Billion Perverts: the Great Encyclopedia of Homosexualities. The volume's long list of collaborators included such personalities as Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze, but it was primarily Hocquenghem, Guattari's close assistant Anne Querrien, and a handful of activists from the FHDR who researched, wrote, and edited the volume. In the preface, Guattari summed up the new "scientific spirit" of radical philosophy in the early 1970s: "May '68 taught us to read the writing on the walls, and since then we have begun to decipher the graffiti in the prisons, the mental asylums, and now in the public urinals. It's a "new scientific spirit" that is being born!"54 The special issue consisted mostly of frank and explicit discussions and interviews on such topics as homosexual cruising, masturbation, sex in the cités (urban subsidized housing projects), and sexual relations with and among France's North African population. It also included situationist-inspired homoerotic recuperations of children's cartoons. Noticeably absent from the large volume, however, was the awkward theoretical language of Anti-Oedipus and Homosexual Desire. The volume's participants, from the "intellectuals" like Hocquenghem to the various people they interviewed, spoke instead in simple language about their own experiences, ideas, and fantasies. Three Billion Perverts was immediately banned, and Guattari, like Sartre before him, was charged with public

obscenity (outrage contre bonnes moeurs), an offense that cost him a small fine, but which did not seem to damage the journal’s financial ties to government ministries.

After Homosexual Desire and Three Billion Perverts, Hocquenghem began devoting more of his energies to the counter-cultural movements. In late 1972, he rejoined some of his former comrades, including Bernard Kouchner, on the staff of Actuel. In November, he helped Actuel organize a special issue on women’s and homosexual liberation in France entitled, “The Shrinking of the Phallus.” (La débandade du phallus), but increasingly he preferred to satirize about French culture and society in his own voice. More and more frequently, he began aiming his sights at the gauchistes and the Left more generally.

In 1973, for example, he published in Actuel the results of a survey on the everyday lives of gauchiste leaders, entitled “The Wonderful Lives of the Gauchistes.” To expose to the public just how those who still proclaimed “changer la vie” lived their own lives, he mailed out fifty surveys to a who’s who list of leftist leaders and counter-cultural gurus, a list that included the unappreciative editors of Actuel. The survey ranged from the benign “questions de concierge” such as “Who does your laundry?” and “What kind of hours do you keep?” to much personal queries regarding personal finances and sexual preferences. Of the fifty surveys he sent out, he received only fifteen responses, twelve of which were polite letters explaining why the recipient had refused to complete the survey. The veteran anarchist and FHAR member Daniel Guérin, for example, explained that he would not speak of his personal life out of fear of reprisal from Marcellin’s vice squads. GP journalist Phillipe Gavi replied that he did not have

time for such trivial matters, and Gilles Deleuze protested that he had no interest
whatsoever in catering to “petit-bourgeois” curiosities. Jean-Edern Hallier, “the most
famous of the gauchiste millionaires,” as Hocquenghem referred to him, apologized that
his girlfriend had thrown the survey in the garbage. When Hocquenghem sent him
another one, Hallier responded that he had his girlfriend to do the same thing with it.
Hocquenghem’s harsh conclusion: the so-called Left was replacing the bourgeoisie as
France’s new moral guardians.

Hocquenghem constantly rankled his editors and publishers with such stunts, but
he was also garnering a reputation for himself as a shrewd polemist and social
commentator. Editors knew in advance that hiring Hocquenghem meant taking on the
risk that they themselves would be his next target, but the cleverer among them also knew
how to assume this risk as a badge of honor and a sign of credibility. With
Hocquenghem on staff, no secrets were safe. As someone who had already publicly
exposed his own most intimate secrets, Hocquenghem demanded the same transparency
of colleagues and superiors. In a roundtable discussion published in Actuel in 1973,
Hocquenghem accused the papers’ editors of lying about the paper’s profits and using the
money to support their bourgeois lifestyles—a damning accusation for the self-
proclaimed counter-cultural gurus.\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Actuel’s} editors didn’t have to run the article, of
course, but it was better perhaps to let Hocquenghem make these allegations in Actuel, in
the context of an open dialogue about the direction of the paper, than somewhere else.
(After this issue, Hocquenghem was not invited to write for Actuel again for another
several years.) It was a delicate double-game that Hocquenghem would play more or less
to his advantage for the rest of his life.

\textsuperscript{57} “Actuel Tout Nu,” \textit{Actuel} 29 (March 1973), 9-13.
Meanwhile, the *gauchistes* didn’t need any help from Hocquenghem or even Marcellin for that matter; they were doing fine job of destroying themselves from within. With the Trotskyite LCR moving in a parliamentary direction, the Maoists of the GP dominated the radical leftist scene in 1971 and 1972. Although the “GP” had formally been dissolved by Benny Lévy in 1970 as part of an effort to de-centralize its activities and decrease its exposure to government repression—the GP officially was a banned organization—it maintained a strong presence in the factories, and its caché among the intellectual and cultural elite continued to swell. Under the directorship of Jean-Paul Sartre since 1969, the GP’s paper, *La cause du peuple*, had become the Pravda of the radical leftist milieu. When it came to mobilizing large numbers of protestors and generating media attention around an issue, no other extra-parliamentary group even came close. While it continued to champion such causes as anti-racism and anti-discrimination, however, the GP demonstrated virtually no interest in the counter-cultural movements and even less interest in women’s and homosexual liberation. The group’s central aim had remained unchanged since its founding in the fall of 1968: preparing the working classes for insurrection.

Given the violent tactics of its worker committees and the dangerous feats of the clandestine NRP (*Nouvelle Résistance Populaire*) headed by Oliver Rolin, it is perhaps surprising that the GP did not suffer its first fatality until February 1972.\(^{58}\) By 1972, physical confrontations between the GP and factory supervisors and CGT leaders had become a daily affair at the Renault plant in Boulogne. In January, the factory directors

\(^{58}\) On the events leading up to the death of Pierre Overney, see Bourcier, 205-211.
fired two immigrant GP agitators in response to a raid on one of their security offices. Another GP militant was also fired soon thereafter when the directors leaned he was a *Normalien*. Despite a leftist media blitz in which Sartre himself was smuggled into the factory to deliver tracts, the Renault leadership refused to re-instate the three Maoists. For Benny Lévy, there was no question of backing down. On February 17th, Lévy led a commando outfitted with helmets and truncheons in a particularly violent clash with the factory security. The tract they distributed read: “Warning to all fascists . . . you will pay for your crimes, whether in a day, a week, a month, or year, or ten years. We are patient. The blood of the fascists will spill.”59

But in fact, Lévy had run out of patience. On the night of the 24th, Lévy again assembled his troops and, despite protestations from other leaders, called for an escalation of the violence: “Blood must be spilled!”60 The following morning, blood did spill, but not from the “fascists.” GP militant Pierre Overney, aged 23, was shot in the throat by a security officer. News of his death spread immediately throughout the country, and a few days later, his coffin was followed by a cortege of some two hundred thousand mourners to its resting place at the Père Lachaise cemetery. At the head of the cortege was Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Foucault, as well as dozens of other high-profile celebrities, including actress Simone Signoret, Jean-Luc Godard, and Jane Fonda (who happened to be in Paris shooting a film with Godard). With this unprecedented outpouring of public support, the GP leaders saw an opportunity to take the gambit one step further. Two weeks later, an armed commando of the NRP kidnapped Renault plant foreman Robert Nogrette. As a ransom, they demanded, among other things, the re-

59 Ibid., 207
60 Cited in Hamon and Rotman, v. II, 393.
instatement of the Maoist workers fired the previous month. This time, however, the GP had seriously miscalculated the French people’s sentiments. The kidnapping was universally denounced, and the public support they had enjoyed just weeks prior began to evaporate. Two days later, the NRP released Nogrette unharmed. As a tragic epilogue to this episode, the Maoist militant Nicolas Boulte, one of the few in the GP’s inner core who had the courage to openly criticize Lévy’s violent tactics, was ostracized from the organization after being subjected to hours of insults and humiliation by a GP tribunal. Seriously shaken and fearing for his own life, Boulte went into hiding and was found several days later lying unconscious in his bed—he had injected air bubbles into his veins and taken an overdose of sleeping pills. Fortunately, Boulte was found in time to be rushed to the hospital and narrowly survived his suicide attempt.\footnote{Bourseiller, 215-6.}

The year 1972 thus did not signal the demise of European capitalism—as GP leaders had predicted in 1969—but rather the decline of the GP and, by extension, \textit{gauchisme} itself. As Althusser, the spiritual father of the GP, quipped on the day of Overney’s burial, “Today they are not burying Pierre Overney; they are burying \textit{gauchisme}.”\footnote{Louis Althusser, \textit{L’Avenir dure longtemps} (Paris: Stock-IMEC, 1992), ??} The GP continued to flirt with violence for another few months—even plotting the assassination of top Vichy collaborator Paul Touvier, who was pardoned by Pompidou in 1971 after spending decades in hiding. But eventually even the most bloodthirsty in the organization were forced to recognize that France had reached its threshold for political violence. Eventually too, many of the GP’s high-profile supporters, including Sartre himself, began to distance themselves from the organization. In September 1972, the GP received another wake up call when the Black September
group (controlled by the Palestinian Liberation Organization) murdered eleven Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. Although the *Le cause du peuple* immediately condemned the murderers, it is worth noting that GP was once contacted by another PLO terrorist faction, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) about securing logistical support for the movement in France in exchange for money and asylum. The PFLP no doubt had intended to carry out similar terrorist plots on French soil. The GP, fortunately, had politely declined the offer. In 1973, the GP leaders, sensing the times were changing, began turning their attention and energies towards their new publication, *Libération*. In November of that year, the organization officially disbanded.

Numerous hypotheses have been offered as to why French *gauchisme* in general, and the GP in particular, never went the way of the Italian Red Brigades, the German Red Army Fraction, or even the Weather Underground in North America. The French Left’s sensitization to violence during the bloody anti-colonial war in Algeria no doubt played an important role as some have suggested. Also, the fact the many of the GP leaders came from Jewish families that had been directly or indirectly affected by the Holocaust may help explain their reluctance to act upon their own violent rhetoric. In the final analysis, however, it seems clear that, had the French police been more aggressive in their pursuit of GP militants, had there been other incidents similar to the murder of Overney, or had even just one of the NRP’s more audacious actions, such as the kidnapping of Nogrette, gone horribly wrong, it might not have been possible for the GP to diffuse its own bomb when it did. (Even if, as former NRP militants consistently claim,

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63 See Bourseiller, 225.
64 See, for example, Alain Geismar, *L’engrenage terroriste* (Paris: Fayard, 1981), 49-59.
their guns were never actually loaded.\textsuperscript{66} As Olivier Rolin, leader of the NRP, confessed many years later (writing under the pseudonym “Antoine Linier”):

There is no doubt in any case that the decisive act, the dissolution in 1973-74 [of the GP] would not have been possible [italics sic.] if a dozen or even fewer militants had been sentenced to prison for long durations—even more so if the mechanism of “vengeance” had been fueled by other deaths, such as that in 1972 at Renault-Billancourt. It would have been unimaginable to offer some gesture approximating a kind of erasure of the past or a farewell to arms in such conditions . . . the terrorist process, I think, would have played itself out at the end of the day, intensifying and accelerating towards the black hole.\textsuperscript{67}

Also present at gauchisme’s funeral in March of 1972 were the FHAR and the MLF. The FHAR’s Gazolines, wearing black dresses and veils, played the role of official mourners, wailing throughout the procession and occasionally shouting slogans like “Liz Taylor, Overney, the same struggle!”\textsuperscript{68} While gauchisme was on its way out, its offspring, the women’s and homosexual liberation movements, were beginning to get their messages into the wider public consciousness, albeit in somewhat diluted forms. During the legislative elections of 1973, there were between two and three times as many females candidates compared to years prior.\textsuperscript{69} With the cooperation of the MLF, the two main political parties of the Left, the Communists and the Socialists (Parti Socialiste Unifié) were beginning to form women’s caucuses to study and address women’s issues, and in late 1972, the movements for the legalization of abortion turned a routine criminal

\textsuperscript{66} Bourseiller, 211.
\textsuperscript{67} François Furet, Antoine Liniers, and Phillipe Raynaud, \textit{Terrorisme et Démocratie} (Paris: Fayard, 1985), 222.
\textsuperscript{68} Girard, 98.
\textsuperscript{69} Michèle Riot-Sarcey, \textit{Histoire du féminisme} (Paris: La Découverte, 2002), 106.
case in the Parisian suburb of Bobigny into one of the most important trials of the decade. After being raped by an acquaintance, sixteen year-old Marie-Claire Chevalier procured an abortion with help of her mother and her mother’s friends. In front of the national media, the young lawyer and founder of Choisir, Gisèle Halimi, with the help of the MLF and the MLAC, successfully defended the mother and three of her friends charged with aiding her. The ruling posed a direct challenge to the 1920 law criminalizing abortion and lead directly to the legalization of abortion in 1974.70

The FHAR was having much less success than the MLF in influencing the agendas of the mainstream left. In 1972, for example, the MLF and FHAR attended a meeting together at the Mutualité organized by the Communist Party on the theme of “Women and the Common Program.” When a FHAR militant grabbed a microphone to ask the communist leaders when they planned to revise their positions on homosexuality, too, the enraged Party leader Duclos responded “Where do you homos get the nerve to come here and ask such questions? Go and heal yourselves. The French women are wholesome. The PCF is wholesome. Men were made to love women.”71 But the FHAR had at least succeeded in bringing the debate out into the open. Since the FHAR’s famous attack on Ménie Grégoire’s program in March 1971, numerous other radio programs began addressing the “painful problem,” and in 1973, homosexuality was debated for the first time on a television program.72 The spurring of a public debate furthermore encouraged a number of homosexual media and literary personalities to take a public stand. Among the more famous examples was that of Jean-Louis Bory, a

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70 See Picq, 147-161.
71 Quoted in Girard, 97-98.
72 Ibid., 114.
popular prize-winning novelist whose homosexuality was the subject of his 1973 bestseller *My Orange Half (Ma moitié d’orange).*

Then, in 1974 something unexpected happened. With two years left to serve in office, George Pompidou died suddenly on April 2nd. (He had been suffering from Kahler’s disease, a rare and untreatable form of blood cancer.) In the presidential campaign his death precipitated, François Mitterrand, head of a leftist coalition of socialists and communists, quickly emerged as the frontrunner. Sensing the unpopularity of the Gaullist government, the conservatives—as well as a group of renegade Gaullists lead by Jacques Chirac—rallied behind the centrist candidate Valéry Giscard d’Estaing instead of the Gaullist candidate Chaban-Delmas. Mitterrand won the first round with approximately 43% of the vote compared to Giscard’s 33% and Chaban-Delmas’s woeful 15%.73 (Representing the Trotskyite LCR, Hocquenghem’s former comrade Alain Krivine won approximately 0.4% of the vote.) In the second round, with a record-high voter turnout of 87%, it was Giscard, however, who narrowly defeated Mitterrand by approximately 400,000 votes. After 16 years of uninterrupted rule, the Gaullist elephant had finally fallen.

One of the first graduates of France’s super-elite ENA (*École Nationale d’Administration*), Giscard was neither a military man nor a populist leader but a technocrat who advocated free-market liberalism and sweeping social reforms. In his victory speech, he announced that “a new era begins today,” and in Kennedyesque fashion he launched a “100 days” campaign to jumpstart his reforms. Among his first actions, Giscard lowered the age of majority and the voting age from 21 to 18. He also

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set about dismantling the monolithic ORTF, the government-controlled radio and television media. His first government included two women, Minister of Health Simone Weil, a strong women’s rights advocate, and Françoise Giroud, head of the newly created Ministry of Women. With Giscard’s backing, Veil was able to push through the controversial law legalizing abortion, still known as the “Weil law,” in November 1974 (not to be confused with the more recent “veil law” that bans the Islamic headdress in schools). For the ’68 generation who had grown up under Gaullism, Giscard brought credibility and hope to the political process. Even for many of those who remained too staunchly anti-capitalist to support Giscard’s reforms, Mitterrand’s near victory was a clear sign of promise for the Left. The oppressive republic of “Travail, Famille, Patrie” was on its way out.

With the dissolution of the GP, gauchisme was reduced to a few dying embers by 1974. Also by that time, the American-inspired counter-culture which seemed to hold so much revolutionary promise in 1969 had become a part of the broader popular culture of the ‘68ers. The Giscardian revolution stole much of the thunder from the MLF, but at the same time, one might argue that women’s liberation was a victim of its own success. By 1974, the women’s struggle had become so widespread and diverse that no one organization could pretend to represent it. And although homosexual liberation was nowhere on Giscard’s agenda in 1974—or any other party’s political agenda for that matter—the rapid transformation of French society in Giscard’s first year of office created a realistic hope in the possibility creating change through political outlets. Also a victim of its own success, the FHAR finally disbanded in 1974. The French Cultural Revolution was over.
As Hocquenghem began spending more of his time with the FHAR in 1972, the
*bande à Guy* slowly disintegrated. Some in the group returned to school to complete the
studies they had abandoned in May 1968. Others found jobs, married, and began having
children. Hocquenghem continued to live communally, moving about from suburb to
suburb and eventually back into central Paris, but his “communes” grew much smaller
and less intimate. When the FHAR broke up, Hocquenghem found himself, for the first
time since joining the student communist union in 1965, no longer a part of a
revolutionary organization. The end of the revolution was both lamentable for
Hocquenghem and at the same time liberating. Hocquenghem was free to live his own
life and speak entirely in his own voice. To earn a living, he began writing freelance,
publishing his journalistic, literary, philosophical, and satirical pieces in a variety of
publications, ranging from Sartre’s *Les Temps Modernes* to *Culbuteur*, a magazine for
motorcycle enthusiasts. In the mid 1970s, Hocquenghem changed addresses frequently
and traveled lightly. His friends recall that he lived out of a small suitcase in the style of
Jean Genet and rarely held on to anything for very long, not even books. His nocturnal
escapes during this period in pursuit of a life of “erotic frenzy” were legendary.

The close of the revolutionary moment opened up by May ‘68, however, did not
fundamentally change Hocquenghem’s critique of bourgeois society. In 1974,
Hocquenghem published a collection of his own articles from the previous five years. In
his self-critical introduction, he explained that, although the “revolution” was over,
“volutions” were still possible:
What they [the *gauchistes*] hide from us with their mythology of the “revolutionary subject,” the “proletariat,” and their sacrosanct “strategy” is the manifold of paths unexplored, uncompleted, or too soon abandoned. . . Rather than measuring the sum of our disruptions against the universal and abstract yardstick of “revolution,” which only indicates to the bourgeois the level of the danger, quantifying it, localizing it, and closing it in, we should be moving in all directions, dispersing through the civilizing powers, burrowing, everywhere possible, mining underneath the edifice, always surprising the enemy from behind, never being trapped where they are waiting for us.
Chapter 7
The Restoration (1974-1988)

The bountiful agitation of the 60s trickles down to its final drops, just as the great mountain peaks diminish to bluffs and foothills before letting themselves be gently domesticated into pastures and vineyards.

-Gilles Châtelet

In December 1974, President Giscard ate breakfast with a team of street cleaners before a host of television and radio journalists, inaugurating a tradition of “dropping in” on ordinary French people for meals. Although such efforts were commonly ridiculed by the public, Giscard did succeed in bringing a much needed atmosphere of transparency and openness to the French government. After his first year in office, Giscard’s zeal for reform started to wear off, and his government began to move gradually in a more cautious, conservative direction. The accomplishments of his first year, however, were impressive. Such measures as the lowering of the voting age, the legalization of abortion, and even the abandonment of plans for the highly unpopular Paris Expressway were both real and symbolic; they demonstrated that Giscard was a man who was responsive to the people. Under Giscard, the Fifth Republic also gained widespread legitimacy in the eyes of the French Left. First of all, in addition to breaking up the Gaullist stranglehold over

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2 See *Presidential Power in the Fifth Republic*, 130-1.
the media, Giscard ended the censorship and repression of the radical Left that had reigned since the days of Marcellin. The new president also met openly with leftist opposition leaders—a first in the history of the Fifth Republic.

Concomitantly, the radical Left lost much of its raison d’être. As repression against it lifted and political passions cooled, gauchisme’s anti-fascist rhetoric soon lost its resonance. Mitterrand’s efforts to revitalize the mainstream Left by unifying socialists and communists, furthermore, had clearly paid-off. Giscard’s centrist government now faced two loyal opposition parties, the Gaullists on the right, and the formidable Socialist Party on the Left. After a decade and half of contentious rule by the authoritarian Gaullists, France, it seemed, had finally returned to politics as usual.

With the exception of handful of fanatical groups, the radical extra-parliamentary Left all but disappeared after 1974. Those few groups who did survive, moreover, no longer attracted the best and the brightest of the younger generation and enjoyed very little public support. Most of the leaders of the GP defected either to the Trotskyist LCR, the Socialist Party, or the editorial staff of Libération, the leftist paper founded by the GP in 1973. As a kind of epilogue to the strange history of the GP, in 1977, a handful of underground militants, claiming to be the inheritors of the GP, decided to exact revenge for the death of Overney by assassinating his murderer Jean-Antoine Tramoni. 3 Tramoni, a husband and father of three, had left security work not long after Overney’s death and was working as a driver’s education instructor when two Maoists on mopeds shot him down on the street near his home. It did not take the police long to hunt down and imprison Tramoni’s assassins who were treated by the media not as radical leftists who

3 Bourseiller, 252-256.
had overstepped their bounds, but simply as political terrorists. Maoism in 1977 was already an anachronism.

The 180-degree turn in French intellectual culture that transpired in the second half of the 1970s, epitomized by the rise of the “New Philosophy,” was as much the result of a certain oedipal logic as it was a reaction to events taking place around the globe. Although Hocquenghem had long been criticizing the *gauchistes*, their conversion to liberalism seemed to him curiously swift and fervent. Could it be that the '68 generation was adopting the new liberal consensus without having first shed its *gauchiste* dogmatism? For his own part, Hocquenghem never publicly renounced his *gauchiste* background like the “Maoists-turned-Rotarians” when it became fashionable to do so in the 1980s. When asked in an interview, for example, how he reconciled his former *gauchisme* with the struggle for homosexual liberation, he replied: “It is very simple: because all aspects of life passed through *gauchisme*, we never imagined we could be anything else.”

In the second half of the 1970s and the 1980s Hocquenghem found himself constantly swimming against the current. He continued to rail against the France of “Travail, Famille, Patrie,” but history no longer seemed to be on his side.

Not surprisingly, Hocquenghem did not rally behind Giscard, despite the new president’s marked interest in social reform. But nor did Hocquenghem flock to Mitterrand’s reformed Socialist Party as did many of his former comrades in the mid-1970s. After the break-up of the FHAR, Hocquenghem took a brief hiatus from the homosexual movements and from political activism altogether. To continue earning a

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living, he published his polemics wherever they were welcome, but also decided to try his hand at fiction. In 1975, he published his first collection of short stories, *Fin de Section*. Based in part on real events, the stories in *Fin de Section* can be read as a series of reflections on the legacies of May ’68. In “False Spring,” for example, Hocquenghem imagines the trial of a leftist militant accused of murder in which the judge and the defense lawyer, former comrades on the barricades, find themselves suddenly reunited after 10 years (The setting for the story is 1979). Reflecting on the rapid transformation of the ’68 generation, Hocquenghem wrote:

Boys in their twenties became men in their forties without any transition; the generation to which I belong has completed its conversion, achieved its maturity, and finally begun its slow conquest by impregnation, forming the matrix of the new society. At the trial, all the elements of the new configuration appeared for the first time before my eyes. Divergent trajectories intersecting once again for a few days in a courtroom.⁵

In 1977, he published his first long work of fiction, *Oiseau de la nuit* (Nightbird) as part of a collaborative work with the prize-winning author Jean-Louis Bory entitled *Comment nous appelez-vous déjà?: Ces hommes que l’on dit homosexuels* (What do you call us again?: The men they call homosexuals). The purpose of their partnership was to present two perspectives on homosexuality with no pretension to “reconcile them or find a middle ground.”⁶ On the surface, Bory and Hocquenghem could not have been more different--born in 1919, Bory was a homosexual of the *Arcadie* generation. They did, however, share at least one thing in common: the dilemma of having become “public homosexuals” against their own will. Although well-known to the French public since winning his first prix Goncourt in 1945, Bory did not come out publicly until 1973, after which time he became French television’s first homosexual personality, appearing on

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⁵ “Faux printemps,” repr. in *L’oiseau de nuit* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), 103, hereafter cited as ON.
such popular programs as “Dossiers de l’écran.” Bory’s contribution to What do you call us again?, tellingly entitled “Living at Midday,” is a frank and personal plea for tolerance, respect, and, most of all, the right to indifference:

There is no point in confessing what one is, because it’s not one’s fault. There is no point in proclaiming what one is, because there is nothing to be proud of. One can simply say what one is because that’s just how it is, without shame, without proselytizing . . . To express one’s homosexuality is to free it from guilt.7

Despite such pleas, Bory was unwittingly caught up in the role of a homosexual caricature in the mid 1970s. (The veteran anarchist and FHAR activist Daniel Guerin once referred to him as a “clown of homosexuality.”8) As the popularity of his media persona grew, interest in his writings plummeted. In the late 1970s, he fell into a deep depression from which he never recovered, and in June 1979 Bory committed suicide.9

In stark contrast to Bory’s “daytime” homosexuality, Hocquenghem’s “Nightbird” explores homosexuality’s after hours. The narrator of the story is a middle-aged married heterosexual who is occasionally prone to late night strolls. On this night in particular he wanders into a curious “mixed” bar near the Opera bar to buy a pack of cigarettes. In contrast to the swank gay bars of the nearby rue St. Anne, the clientele of this bar are difficult to read. There, the narrator is offered a drink by a flamboyant prostitute who first tries to pick him up and then befriends him and introduces him to the establishment’s storied personalities. He is then led by his new acquaintance on a long, rambling tour through Paris’s cruising spots along the bank of the Seine. The two share

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7 Comment nous-appeliez vous déjà? Quoted in “Jean-Louis Bory,” Dictionnaire des cultures gays et lesbiennes, 77.
their lives with another the night through before ending their chaste encounter at daybreak. "Nightbird" has no apparent moral. Nor does it have any of the biting satire characteristic of Hocquenghem's journalistic writings. It simply describes in rich detail the unlikely intersection of two disparate lives.

In the second half of the 1970s, homosexual culture began to flourish, particularly in Paris. As repression lifted, homosexual bars, saunas, and nightclubs quickly opened up. The sex industry also began to thrive, and some of new sex shops, peep shows, and pornographic cinemas catered to the new "gay" clientele—the word "gay," adopted from the Americans, came into popular usage during this time. By 1976, a careful observer in Paris could even make out distinct gay subcultures, from the effeminate gender-bending style of the English, to the virile leather culture of San Francisco. No longer fearing censorship on grounds of "public obscenity," Gay magazines and gay pornography began to hit the kiosks. First among them was *Arcadie's* relatively discreet new review *Dialogues Homophiles* (Homophile Dialogues) in 1975, but much brasher and bawdier publications were soon to follow.¹⁰ In 1978, the first gay bar, *Le Village*, opened in the right bank neighborhood of the Marais. Soon thereafter, more gay establishments followed—not only bars, but boutiques, cafés, restaurants, and bookstores. By the end of the 1970s, the shiny, modern establishments of the Marais had completely replaced the baroque nightclubs of the rue St. Anne as the new gay neighborhood.¹¹ One no longer had to wait until after dark to appreciate homosexual culture; French homosexuals were finally coming into the daylight.

¹⁰ See Girard, 114-5.
Or were they? For Hocquenghem and some of the veterans of the FHAR, the Marais seemed more like a new way of ghettoizing homosexuals. A new kind of homosexuality was emerging, and Hocquenghem wanted little to do with it. (He once compared the gays of the Marais to rats who huddle together for warmth in the basement, the only difference being that rats at least have the decency to scatter when one turns the lights on.) Hocquenghem was, first of all, leary of the commercialization of gay culture, which threatened to divest it of its subversive content and turn young homosexuals into little more than a new niche of consumers. Having spent a lot of time in gay communities along the Californian coast, where homosexuality’s future lay he believed, Hocquenghem had witnessed first hand what he referred to in 1981 as the “Triumph of the Gay Dollar.” Commenting on the extravagance of gay culture in West Hollywood, for example, where, to Hocquenghem’s surprise, one needed chiseled muscles, a perfect tan, and a shiny new convertible to cruise for dates, he wrote, “From anonymity, just beginning to crawl out from its hole, [homosexuality] has passed straight to to extreme exhibitionism.”

Moreover, Hocquenghem remained skeptical of homosexuals’ newfound freedoms. After all, such freedoms in France had been granted and taken away before. As if to prove him right, successive waves of censorship in 1977 and 1978 saw all of the new homosexual publications, except for Arcadie’s, temporarily removed from the kiosks. And with the resurgence of far-right youth movements beginning in the late 1970s, attacks on homosexuals seemed once again to be on the rise. Hocquenghem was in attendance, for example, at the first gay and lesbian film festival in Paris in 1979, when

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13 Ibid., 184.
14 Le Bitoux, 177.
a well-organized commando of neo-fascist youths attacked the famous "Pagoda" movie house on the Left Bank, beating spectators with clubs and destroying the facilities.\textsuperscript{15} The new ghetto walls of the Marais, Hocquenghem believed, provided only an illusion of tolerance. Furthermore, they reinforced the exclusion of homosexuals from the rest of society. As he once expressed his reservations:

Paradoxically, I hardly find this new security reassuring. Rather than being more "accepted" as they say today, homosexuals are simply easier to identify and increasingly considered a separate race. This, of course, is false: homosexuality is a minority of heterosexuality and not a different "genetic code." Contact, dialogue, and mixing with the heterosexual are essential. The imprisonment of homosexuals in ghettos may pose new dangers.\textsuperscript{16}

After the FHAR, a number of new organizations emerged to lead the homosexual struggle in France. Most significant among them were the various branches of the *Groupes de Libération Homosexual* (GLH), which were founded by former FHAR leaders in conjunction with a break-away youth wing of *Arcadie* in 1975 and 1976. Among the leaders of the "second generation" of homosexual movements, one notable absence was Hocquenghem. Although he continued to involve himself in homosexual causes and debates, he always insisted on doing so on his own terms.

One cause that continued to motivate him throughout the 1970 was the campaign to rid the Fifth Republic of the last vestiges of Vichy-era laws criminalizing homosexuality. Even though Giscard had lowered the age of majority from 21 to 18, for example, the age of consent for homosexuals remained 18, compared to 15 for heterosexuals. To bring attention to such legal double standards, Hocquenghem even

\textsuperscript{15} On the attack on the Pagoda, and the history of the French gay and lesbian film festival, see Olivier Jablonski, "De l'ouverture du ghetto à la dépolitisation: les festivals de film gays et lesbiennes en questions," *la Revue h 5/6* (1997).

\textsuperscript{16} "Les 'homos' réclament la justice," *Le Figaro Magazine* (10 November 1979),
agreed to run on the first "homosexual ticket" for the legislative elections in March 1978 along with G.L.H. leader Jean Le Bitoux. Hocquenghem received a meager 45 votes, but the point was not to win, but simply to use the campaign as a platform to inform the public about legal discrimination.\textsuperscript{17}

Though he remained something of a legend in the homosexual movements, Hocquenghem did not, for the most part, ingratiate himself to the new gay activist leaders of the second half of the 1970s. As the movements became more focused on issues of rights and identity—and less interested in transforming society—Hocquenghem's radical philosophy of homosexual revolution became increasingly difficult to recuperate. Occasionally Hocquenghem's struck out at the movements with his vitriolic pen. In 1976, for example, he wrote an article in \textit{Libération} on the occasion of Pasolini's death that caused a scandal. The title of the article set the tone: "We can't all die in bed." Pasolini was murdered by a young hustler in November 1975 near his home in Rome. While theories abounded regarding the real motives of his murderer—the Mafia, politicians, cops, and right-wing fascists were all accused of involvement at one time or another—many in the homosexual movements at the time viewed his murder as a "racist," or homophobic crime and, furthermore, as an argument for better protections for homosexuals. For Hocquenghem, there was a crucial element missing from all of these analyses: Pasolini knowingly risked his life in search of the pleasures of the homosexual underworld. Thus, Hocquenghem wrote:

\begin{quote}
...Pasolini's death seems to me neither abominable or perhaps even regrettable. It's not a bad way to go it seems to me—much less stupid than dying in a car accident. In a way I would wish such a death for myself and all of my friends.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} Le Bitoux, 168-172.
\textsuperscript{18} "Tout le monde ne peut pas mourir dans son lit," in DH, 128.
In his own way, Hocquenghem was celebrating the life of someone who “refused to die of old age,” just as he had celebrated the lives of Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix five years earlier. But Hocquenghem also had a larger point to make about the construction of homosexuality: “Homosexuality remains first of all, though perhaps for not much longer, a category of criminality. Personally, I prefer this state of affairs to homosexuality’s probable transformation into a psychiatric category of deviance.”

Hocquenghem was frequently criticized for his fixation with “dark” homosexuality in the late 1970s. But for Hocquenghem, there was nothing inherent about homosexuality’s link to deviance and criminality. This connection, rather, was part of homosexuality’s historical construction. On an aesthetic level, Hocquenghem was much more attracted to homosexuality’s baroque past than its probable bourgeois future. And, like Pasolini, Hocquenghem preferred to live a life of “erotic frenzy,” traveling about Europe and the United States actively in search of homosexuality after dark. (In 1980 he even published a literary travel guide of his adventures in New York and the European capitals, Le Gay Voyage.)

Hocquenghem lamented the coming of the day when “the homosexual is nothing more than a gentle Club Med habitué who’s been just a little bit further than the others.” In contrast to the colorful myriad of possibilities in homosexuality’s past, in the future, he predicted, there will be a “white homosexuality,” in which “Everyone will fuck within his own social class, the yuppy will savor the bouquet of his partner’s after-shave, and not even the Pope will be able to find anything wrong with it.” Beyond his aesthetic disdain for the new bourgeois homosexuality, Hocquenghem regretted that

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19 “Ils ne sont pas morts de veillesse,” in AMF, 115-119
20 DH, 129.
22 Ibid., 132.
homosexuality was gradually being divested of its subversive potential by the new gay
culture. The time when homosexuality seemed to him to be on the "avant-garde of a new
regime of sexuality,"23 was coming to an end.

Furthermore, in Hocquenghem’s view, the sexual liberation movements, which
were slowly being recuperated by the political organizations of the Left, were letting
themselves become instruments of their own repression. In the late 1970s, Hocquenghem
demonstrated just how out of step he was with the times when he started to antagonize
the women’s movements campaign against rape. Since the legalization of abortion in
1974, the MLF and its sister organization SOS Femmes had made rape one of its central
issues. Their goals were, first of all, to enforce harsher penalties for rape, and second, to
broaden the term’s definition to include, among other things, homosexual rape.

Hocquenghem responded cynically, “In any case, have you ever heard of a homo
complain he was raped? . . . Beaten up--yes, robbed--sure, but raped? . . . It appears that
the homo’s anus is not imbued with the same transcendental qualities as the vagina.”24

When the definition of rape was finally broadened to include homosexuals in 1980,
Hocquenghem then mockingly congratulated the campaigns leaders in the pages of
Libération, “Homosexuals, you now have the right to be raped!”25 Elsewhere
Hocquenghem sardonically suggested that, rather than filling the prisons with more sex
offenders, the justice system should put them in contact with homosexuals who have rape
fantasies.26

23 Hocquenghem, quoted in “Postlude” in DH, 150.
24 "V-I-O-L,” in DH, 137.
Still more controversial, at least by today’s standards, were Hocquenghem’s attacks in the second half of the 1970s on what he viewed as the developing national obsession with protecting children. Consistent with his Deleuzian philosophy of the early 1970s, Hocquenghem believed that sexual repression was inherent to bourgeois society; if repression was lifted in one area, it was bound to resurface somewhere else. The emerging tolerance of “white homosexuality,” for Hocquenghem, entailed, as a corollary, a stricter approach to keeping children safe from the world of adult sexuality. Whatever the nature of this connection, Hocquenghem was certainly right about the timing of these two developments. The early part of the 1970s had witnessed a flourishing of new approaches to education that recognized children as sexual beings. A runaway bestseller at the time, for example, was the translation of English psychoanalyst A.S. Neil’s *A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*, which sold close to half a million copies in France.27 (Neil famously advocated de-shaming nudity and masturbation and giving children opportunities to explore their bodies in school.) Curiously, by the end of the 1970s, all such discussion had ended. For Hocquenghem, there were two forms of repression involved with the new obsession for protecting children. First, this new ethos denied minors the rights to the fulfillment of their desires—especially in the case of homosexual desires, where the age of consent remained 18. Second, just as 19th-century society had created the category of the homosexual in order to isolate homosexuality, in the late 1970s it was creating the “pedophile,” a “new type of criminal . . . so inconceivably

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horrible that his crime goes beyond any explanation."²⁸ The sexual desire for children, once considered a possibility inherent in everyone, was now being localized in the monstrous profile of the pedophile.

Hocquenghem was by no means alone in these sentiments. In 1977, for example, he was joined by dozens of other intellectuals who signed a petition that appeared in *Le Monde* asking for clemency for three "pedophiles" who had already been detained for three years and risked longer prison sentences for "inciting to debauchery" fifteen year-old girls and boys (The facts of the case are disputed, but it seems clear that there was no violence or sexual penetration involved.) According to the petition,

We believe that there is a clear discrepancy—on the one hand between the acts in question and their qualification as crimes deserving of severe punishment, and, on the other hand, between the outdated character of the law and the everyday reality of a society that is moving in the direction of recognizing that children and adolescents have a sexuality... French law contradicts itself when it determines that minors of thirteen and fourteen years of age—which it freely judges and condemns—have some capacity for discernment but refuses to grant them this same capacity when it comes to their affective and sexual lives. Three years in prison for caresses and kisses, that's long enough.²⁹

Among the signers of the petition were Louis Aragon, Simone de Beauvoir, André Glucksmann, Dr. Bernard Kouchner, and Jean-Paul Sartre. A few months later, Hocquenghem joined Foucault and *Nouvel Observateur* editor Jean Daniel in a radio-broadcast debate on the legal aspects of sexual relations between adults and minors. Commenting on the petition in *Le Monde*, Hocquenghem clarified their position:

One the hand, we didn't put any age limit in our text. In any case, we don't regard ourselves as legislators, but simply as a movement of opinion that demands the abolition of certain pieces of legislation. Our role isn't

²⁹ The petition that in *Le Monde* on January 26, 1977 is reprinted in Janine Mossuz-Lavau, 219-220. For more on the petition, see Le Bitoux, 126-8.
to make up new ones. As far as this question of consent is concerned, I prefer the terms used by Michel Foucault: listen to what the child says and give it a certain credence. This notion of consent is a trap, in any case. What is sure is that the legal form of an intersexual consent is nonsense. No one signs a contract before making love.\textsuperscript{30}

In this (extremely touchy) debate, Hocquenghem spoke from a certain amount of experience, having had several lovers of adult age, including his philosophy professor René Schérer, while he was still technically a minor, but Hocquenghem never “advocated pedophilia” (whatever that would mean) as has sometimes been claimed, nor did he confuse “pedophilia,” the sexual desire for children which rarely culminates in sexual acts with children, with rape or sexual predation.\textsuperscript{31} In the 1970’s, what is sometimes confusingly referred to as a “pedophile movement,” was in fact a movement of opinion, born of May ’68, that questioned modern society’s general treatment of children and adolescents. As René Schérer, for example, summarized this once widespread sentiment:

\ldots pedophilia and the psychology of the pedophile are expressions of a general politics of childhood that consists, first of all, of isolating the world of children from the world of adults under the pretext of protecting them, of prolonging their minority status, and, consequently, postponing their age of sexual majority.\textsuperscript{32}

Hocquenghem and Schérer resented that in modern society the psychiatric and psychoanalytic communities monopolized the discourse on child and adolescent sexuality—and that any one else who expressed an opinion was suspected of being a pedophile. In 1976, Hocquenghem collaborated with Schérer on \textit{Co-ire: album systématique de l’enfance}, a very Foucauldian work that explores through a critical

\textsuperscript{31} Frederic Martel, for example, makes this claim implicitly in \textit{The Pink and the Black}, and more recently so has Julian Bourg in \textit{Forbidden to Forbid: Ethics in France, 1968-1981} (soon to be published). With the exception perhaps of a few literary authors, including, most notably, Gabriel Matzneff, no one associated with this group of thinkers, which included heterosexuals too, “advocated pedophilia.”
\textsuperscript{32} “A propos de la pédophilie,” in \textit{Recherches} 37 (April 1979), 94.
reading of Victorian literature and education manuals the "system that creates, defines, and compartmentalizes childhood while maintaining children in a state of subjection, passivity, and torpor." In particular, the authors focus on the Victorian preoccupation with such themes as child vagabondage and kidnapping (evident for example in Stevenson’s Kidnapped and Dicken’s Oliver Twist, two of the novels the authors consider). Their expressed aims were neither "political nor even theoretical but essentially descriptive." Schérer and Hocquenghem, however, were clearly engaging in a social critique of the bourgeois moral order when they lamented, for example, that in modern society:

Children are made scarce, and not because there are fewer births... If you are not a father or mother in possession of children, if you are not in charge of their education, if you are not a policeman, psychologist or psychoanalyst... then you may live your life without ever encountering one.

Co-ire’s broader critique of the construction of childhood in modern society, however, was apparently lost on French censors, who immediately banned the book. Co-ire was never re-edited and remains unpublished in France today.

Hocquenghem was never one to hold back in his criticisms, and he was not above ad hominem attacks. Sometimes, even his closest friends admonished him to exercise restraint, as his vitriolic pen occasionally did a disservice to causes that he genuinely cared about. In 1979, for example, Hocquenghem became particularly involved in the

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34 Ibid., "Prospectus."
35 Ibid., 42
effort to gain recognition for the mass murder of homosexuals in the German
extermination camps of World War II, a cause that sometimes placed French
homosexuals at odds with prominent Jewish Holocaust survivors such as the Minister of
Health Simone Veil. In 1981, he wrote the introduction to the French translation of
Heinz Herger’s groundbreaking personal account of the “men of the pink triangle.”
Hocquenghem declared Heinz Herger to be the “anti-Anne Frank”; whereas the Jewish
victims of the Holocaust had won the moral battle in the postwar years, and Anne Frank
had become a celebrated martyr, the homosexual victims had been forced to keep their
stories secret for decades out of the fear of further persecution. Unlike Anne Frank’s
father, who published her diary after her death, Heinz Herger’s father committed suicide
during the war because he could not bear public shame of his son having been deported
for homosexuality. Still wary of persecution in the 1950s and 1960s, it wasn’t until 1972
that Herger finally revealed his story. How many thousands or tens of thousands of
others still lived in silence, Hocquenghem wondered, particularly in the Eastern Block
where homosexuals were scarcely freer than they had been during the war?
Hocquenghem’s juxtaposition of Anne Frank and Heinz Herger was problematic enough,
but Hocquenghem then refused to delete a sentence from the introduction in which he
declared: “I wouldn’t have wanted to be in the same barracks where Simone Veil was a
kapo.” Simone Veil was sixteen years old when she was deported with the rest of her
family from Nice to Auschwitz. Only Simone and her sister survived. In 1989, French

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36 On the history of this movement, see Jean le Bitoux, Les oubliés de la mémoire (Paris: Hachette, 2002),
37 Preface to Heinz Herger, Les hommes au triangle rose: journal d’un déporté homosexual, 1939-1945,
38 Ibid. 21.
homosexuals did finally receive official recognition of the deportation of the “men of the pink triangle.”

When Hocquenghem returned to an investigation of homosexuality in the late 1970s, his approach was more scholarly than militant. In 1979, for example, he published one of the first histories of homosexuality, entitled *Race d’Ep: une siècle d’images d’homosexualité* (“Race d’Ep: a century of images of homosexuality”). The term “race d’ep” is backslang for pederast. As Hocquenghem explained the significance of the term, and the inspiration for the book, in the introduction:

> I was walking down the street, lost in a neighborhood on the edge of the city, looking for a certain public urinal of disrepute. On a nearby bridge, a couple of hoodlums were waiting on their motorcycles. As I passed, they shouted, not in a menacing way, “race d’ep!” As I was drunk, it took me a little while to comprehend. Fags don’t speak backslang. “Rasdep” for pederast. For a moment I sensed the shadow of another race lingering behind me. This shout I experienced less as an insult than as a confirmation of my belongingness to another world, another history.39

Beginning with the coinage of the term ‘homosexual’ in the 1860s, *Race d’Ep* traces the evolution of ideas about and images of homosexuality, and, in turn, the evolution of the homosexual “race,” through a series of historical vignettes: Baron von Gloedden’s turn of the century erotic photography; the German physician Magnus Hirschfeld’s humanist homosexual movement in 1930s Berlin, the persecution of homosexuals by the Nazis and the Soviet Union, and, finally the re-birth of homosexual culture in the European capitals in the 1960s. This history ends with some thoughts on the current domestication of homosexuality: “Society is in the process of swallowing and digesting one of its most essential barriers. The important thing now is not to repress homosexuality, but to get to

know it, model it, and divest it of its sulfurous aspects." 40 One of the underlying ironies of this history is that the same images used to promote the humane treatment of homosexuals in the late nineteenth-century were later used for the sake of persecution by dictatorial regimes in the 1940s, a persecution so bloody that it took almost another thirty years for a vibrant homosexual culture to re-emerge. As one of the themes of *Race d’Ep* is homosexuality’s construction through images—homosexuality was invented around the same time as the photographic image—Hocquenghem decided to team up with filmmaker Lionel Soukaz to make the book into a film. The film was immediately censored as “pornographic.” 41

François Mitterrand’s election to the presidency in 1981 appeared to many to signal the long-awaited rise to power of the ’68 generation. Mitterrand was the Fifth Republic’s first true leftist candidate, and his victory was due in large measure to his ability to incorporate the ideas and the leadership of France’s new social movements. Mitterrand even courted the homosexual vote—albeit somewhat discreetly—with promises to erase all forms of legal discrimination. 42 Not long after winning the presidency, Mitterrand made good on this promise. At long last, the Mirguet era was over. Homosexuals, once a “social scourge,” were now a publicly recognized political force. As another sign of the changing times, *Arcadie* ceased to exist not long thereafter. It was the dawn of a new era for France and for French homosexuals in particular, or so it

40 RD, 166-7.
41 Michel Foucault later led a successful petition to declassify the film’s original “X” rating which is usually reserved for pornographic materials. For a brief history of “Race d’Ep?” the film, see Olivier Seguret, “’Race d’Ep!’ rase les rayons,” *Libération* (10 July 1996): 32.
42 On the homosexual organizations’ qualified support for Mitterrand, see Le Bitoux, 209-214.
seemed. Even Hocquenghem was cautiously optimistic, declaring 1981 to be the “1789 of homosexuals” in the pages of *Libération*.\(^{43}\)

At the time of the “Restoration of Mitterrand the 1\(^{st}\)”, as Hocquenghem referred to it in the *Open Letter*, Hocquenghem had just embarked on his radio career, pushing the envelope on the airwaves. In February 1982, he was invited to participate in a radio debate on Europe 1 on the topic of homosexuality with a group of “usual suspects”—doctors, psychoanalysts, and a representative of *Arcadie*. In the program’s opening segment, he read a personal classified (*petite annonce*) seeking a sexual encounter. The other invitees were enraged, and the station was immediately bombarded with hundreds of angry calls.\(^{44}\) During the commercial break, Hocquenghem and his homosexual contingent were kicked out of the studio. Not long thereafter, Hocquenghem created a popular “personals” radio program for the fledgling *Fréquence Gaie*, France’s first gay radio channel. By 1984, *Fréquence Gaie* had become one of France’s top ten stations.\(^{45}\)

Later, Hocquenghem was even invited to co-produce his own program on Europe 1 with fellow *Libération* journalist Jean-Luc Hennig. Entitled, “*Il suffit de le dire*” (it suffices to say), the program featured anonymous studio guests who confessed their most intimate secrets—sexual fantasies, racist thoughts, past transgressions, etc. The program was the inspiration for Hennig and Hocquenghem’s collaborative sociology of French morality, *Les Français de la Honte* (The Shamed French).\(^{46}\)

But immediately following the abolition of the infamous article 331 criminalizing homosexuality, the backlash began. In October 1982, three teachers at the “Coral,” a


\(^{44}\) See Le Bitoux, 234.

\(^{45}\) On the history of *Fréquence Gaie*, see *Dictionnaire des cultures gays et lesbiennes*, 201-2.

school for mildly handicapped children in the south of France, were accused of committing indecent acts with young boys. The accusations initially stemmed from a disgruntled former employee who had made the tour of the local and national newspapers claiming that the Coral was the center of a vast pedophile ring. As there were no other testimonies or pieces of evidence to corroborate his claims, only the extreme-right paper *Minute* agreed to cover the story. Soon thereafter, however, the mainstream media, impelled by conservative politicians as high up as the National Assembly, joined the bandwagon, transforming the “Affaire Coral” into a national witch-hunt for members of a supposed pedophile cult operating throughout the entire country. Because of his numerous writings critical of modern conceptions of childhood and his associations with other supposed pedophiles, René Schérer was one of the first inculpated in the affair, despite the fact that there was no evidence linking Schérer to the school. Schérer was released not long after his arrest, but by then the damage was already done. Dozens of prominent homosexuals were “outed” and publicly dragged through the mud before the hunt was over. It took almost a year before doctored documents implicating Mitterrand’s Minister of Culture Jack Lang convinced the media that the whole affair had been a fabrication from the start. Hocquenghem watched helplessly as Schérer and other prominent homosexuals suffered through the witch-hunt. He pleaded with the mainstream media to debunk the scandal, and begged Foucault to play the role of a modern day Dreyfus, but no one, not Foucault, not *Libération*, dared to speak out. As the affair was transpiring, Hocquenghem serialized a roman à clef based on the events for *Gai Pied Hebdo*. Later published in its entirety, *Les Petits Garçons* was intended to be a

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47 On the Coral Affair and its coverage in the press, see *Gai Pied Hebdo* 45 (27 November 1982). See also *Gai Pied Hebdo* 46 (4 December 1982), 57 (19 February 1983), and 59 (5 March 1983).
call to arms, a "novel of corailienne resistance."\textsuperscript{48} In it, Hocquenghem denounced the Left for "sacrificing a few innocent people in order to remain silent about calumny," but the book was met with complete silence by the press and the media.\textsuperscript{49} Those whose lives were ruined by the Coral never were vindicated; the media never apologized for its role, and those behind the witch hunt never were prosecuted. By the end of 1983 the whole affair was quietly dropped and forgotten.

Hocquenghem was distraught and disillusioned by the events, and around 1983 he seems to have retreated somewhat from public life, preferring to spend more and more of his time writing in the countryside, away from the limelight of Paris. Although he was happy to speak about his novels—his 1981 novel \textit{Love in Relief} had met with some success\textsuperscript{50}—he frequently turned down requests from gay journals and magazines to speak about homosexuality, explaining either that he had already said all he had to say about the subject, or that he was only interested in homosexuality as an aesthetic—not a political—question.\textsuperscript{51} In 1985, when a new gay and lesbian literary revue entitled \textit{Masques} asked him to submit a response to the question, "Where is homosexuality in 1985," he hesitantly agreed. In his brief response, which he titled "Where is homosexuality in '85? Or why I don't want to be a gay writer," he wrote:

\textbf{Where is homosexuality?} Oh, these homosexuals! When you were asleep, \textit{Arcadie}, still licking the boots of the cops who were kicking your asses, I found you cowardly, afraid of your own shadows, panic-stricken by everything; when you became militants, I found you arrogant, limited, Stalinist in your own way; now that you take yourselves to be artists, you who pretend to have explored the limits of a territory for which you

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Les Petits Garçons} (Paris: Albin Michel, 1983); Citation quoted in Gérard Bach-Ignasse, "Celui qui ne s'est pas renié," in "Présence de Guy Hocquenghem," 16.
\textsuperscript{49} Quoted in ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{51} See, for example, Rommel Mendès-Leite, "L'homosexualité existe-t-elle encore?" in "Présence de Guy Hocquenghem," \textit{Cahier de L'Imaginaire} (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992), 68.
haven't passed the doorstep, disillusioned and prosaic amateurs of a sentimentality fit for consumption, how could you expect me not to find you pathetic, aged by your fear of aging, stereotyped by your own precisely sculpted identities, all exactly the same in your individualism? 52

The editors at Masques printed his response in full, but he wasn't solicited again.

Several years earlier, during his involvement in the movement to gain official recognition for the "men of the pink triangle," Hocquenghem wondered whether homosexuals' shared history of oppression might serve as a reference point for the construction of a collective identity, just as it had for the Jews after the Holocaust.

"Perhaps that's what it means to be a homosexual today: knowing that one is linked to a genocide for which there are no reparations in sight." 53 The Holocaust, however, was the Jewish people's catastrophe. The same year Hocquenghem wrote those words, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported a new strain of pneumonia found in homosexual men in Los Angeles. Originally dubbed, GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency), health authorities soon changed the name of the syndrome to AIDS when they identified it in non-homosexual men. Within a couple of years, the epidemic had spread to France and most of Western Europe.

The first case of AIDS was diagnosed in France in March 1982, but in the two years that followed, the French homosexual movements were relatively slow to recognize

52 "Ou est l'homosexualité en '85?" Masques 25-26 (Spring/Summer 1985): 113.
and respond to the epidemic, at least compared to their American counterparts.\textsuperscript{54} Although the first AIDS action group in France, \textit{Vaincre le Sida} (Conquer AIDS) was founded in early 1983, the general attitude of the homosexual movements up until mid-1984 was one of suspicion.\textsuperscript{55} In an open letter published in the gay magazine \textit{Homophonies}, for example, the C.U.A.R.H. (\textit{Comité d'urgence anti-répression homosexuelle}), one of the largest and most active of the homosexual movements in the late 1970s, downplayed the severity AIDS, comparing the risks of infection to those incurred playing contact sports or driving a car.\textsuperscript{56} Efforts to control the epidemic were hampered, first of all, by rampant misinformation that spread through the rumors mills and the mainstream media—it wasn’t until 1985, for example, that some newspapers finally stopped referring to AIDS as the “gay cancer.” Also, French homosexuals’ general mistrust of the psychiatric and psychoanalytic communities—which, in France, had been particularly intransigent to recognizing homosexuality as anything other than pathological--seems to have slowed efforts.\textsuperscript{57}

Furthermore, French homosexuals had seen waves of repression come and go since the passing of the Mirguet Law declaring homosexuality a “social scourge” in the 1960s. Thus, when they were suddenly asked to let themselves be examined by doctors and give blood samples, there was widespread suspicion that the medical community was involved in something akin to a “Tuskegee” experiment—James Jones’s book exposing


\textsuperscript{55} On Vaincre le Sida and early AIDS organization in France, see “Sida (les associations),” in \textit{Dictionnaire des cultures gays et lesbiennes}, 430-2.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Homophonies} 18 (April 1982), 4.

\textsuperscript{57} On the inveterate homophobia of psychoanalysis in France, see Didier Eribon, \textit{Échapper à la psychanalyse} (Paris: Éditions Léo Scheer, 2005).
the Tuskegee Syphilis Study appeared in 1983. Even those who did not subscribe to such conspiracy theories remained skeptical. *Homophonies*, for example, wondered in 1982:

Is there really a pathology specific to homosexual men? Or is this the moralists’ latest attempt to set us back on the path to normality? It’s important to keep in mind that sexually transmitted diseases have long been used as a scare tactic against the liberation of morality.

It can only be described as an irony of history that AIDS hit France as homosexuals were still celebrating their “1789” and beginning to enjoy unprecedented freedoms. In the tragic history of France’s response to the AIDS threat in the 1980s, marked by blunders, missteps, and confusions, there are very few heroes and villains, just victims.

After the death of Michel Foucault in June 1984, his companion Daniel Defert helped form *Aides* (*Association de lutte contre le sida*), the organization that was finally able to bring together the medical community and the homosexual movements under a common cause. The subsequent “conversion” of the homosexual movements to the side of protection was swift and complete. Like most other French homosexuals, Hocquenghem initially greeted the AIDS threat with suspicion but quickly came to recognize it for the indiscriminate and deadly epidemic that it was. As soon as the first HIV test finally became available in early 1985, Hocquenghem had himself tested, even though he was not experiencing any symptoms at the time. A decade earlier, Hocquenghem had controversially celebrated the life and untimely death of Pasolini, a man who, in his view, lived out his desires and assumed the risks. AIDS, however, was

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61 See Nicolas Dodier.
something altogether different. It is one thing to risk to one’s own life in search of pleasure, but quite another to place the lives of loved ones in jeopardy as well.

Hocquenghem understood this difference, and he urged his lovers to take the test and use precaution. For most of his circles of friends, however, it was already too late. No one was quite sure when or where he was infected, but somehow almost everyone already was.

Not long after testing positive, Hocquenghem began to experience symptoms of the disease and immediately sought out treatment from Dr. Willy Rozenbaum, a member of the original team of French doctors who first identified the virus in 1983. By 1987, Hocquenghem was already spending long periods of time in the hospital under Dr. Rozenbaum’s care. Some of his experiences as an AIDS patient are fictionalized in his novel, Eve, which is dedicated to “Willy Rozenbaum and his entire team whose actions deserve far more the bitter humor of my last pages.” From 1985 until his death in 1988, Hocquenghem worked furiously. As he explained in his unfinished memoirs, written on his death bed:

Writing saves. Doctors know this. The impulsion to write that is at the origin of a book assures the continuity of life. One doesn’t die in the middle of writing a novel. . . Each time I began a book, I knew that I would make it to the end. This is the challenge I assume with this book, one more time.63

If Hocquenghem was unwilling to play the role of public homosexual in the 1970s, he was even less willing to become a media spokesperson for AIDS in the 1980s. Moreover, by the time of the AIDS epidemic he was no longer the known media quantity he had once been. (That role would eventually fall to the writer and journalist Jean-Paul

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63 AM, 24-25.
Aron, the first French celebrity to finally break the silence and give AIDS a human face.)
Hocquenghem never publicly admitted to having AIDS—though he never denied it either—and he was generally reluctant to comment on the epidemic. In 1988, he did finally speak out, not to confess he had AIDS, but to express his disgust over the moral backlash the epidemic had provoked. As early as 1982, some deputies in the French parliament were calling for a new campaign to “inform youth of the dangers of homosexuality,” and by the mid 1980s, AIDS had become a symbol for the Right of the immorality of the 68ers and their children—the “sida mentale” in the unfortunate turn of phrase coined by the conservative Figaro Magazine editor Louis Pauwels. Responding to Pauwels himself in Figaro Magazine, Hocquenghem observed, “AIDS is no longer considered a misfortune, but a punishment; the social ill that brought down the terror, an invention of the heavens in all its fury to punish the crimes of the earth.”

Most people’s final memories of Hocquenghem were of him writing, revising, and editing manuscripts. He always wrote longhand and kept a pen and pad by his bedside, even in the hospital. Hocquenghem would have died writing had his right hand not grown too weak to grasp his pen before his death. Weeks before that moment came, he began to compose his memoirs. Cast in the form a roman à clef, Hocquenghem’s “anticipated memoir,” Amphitheater of the Dead is set in the year 2018, decades after, he imagines, modern medicine has triumphed over AIDS. Hocquenghem further imagines

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64 From Deputy Jacques Godrain’s open letter to the Minister of Health, repr. in Homophonies 18 (April 1982), 4.
66 Roland Surzur, preface to AM.
that he has survived the catastrophe only to have settled into the same comfortable lifestyle he derided in his former comrades the “Maoists turned Rotarians”: a successful writer, financially secure, contented in his small social world. Frail and weak, approaching his seventy-first year, he finally sits down to put his life story to paper. *Amphitheater of the Dead* is the only book Hocquenghem never finished. Fittingly, the narrative ends sometime around 1970, during that period in time, when, as Hocquenghem wrote:

... humanity, for the first time in its long history, ceased to be afraid ... a parenthesis in the history of man when the ancient fears, culpabilities, and self-limitations receded slightly. A breath of a fresh air punctuating a litany of catastrophes, repressions, and societal nightmares.\(^{67}\)

Hocquenghem’s final completed work, *Frère Angelo*, appeared just days after his death. A historical novel like *The Wrath of the Lamb*, his earlier account of the life of the apostle John, *Frère Angelo* is set in another pivotal period in the history of modernity, the discovery of the Americas in the 16\(^{th}\) century. Born to a wealthy family of Florentine merchants, Angelo joins the Franciscan Order and travels with the Spanish Conquerors to Mexico full of hopes and dreams for the New World. After witnessing the death and destruction wrought by the Spanish, he accompanies Itzcoatl, the son of the former emperor Moctezuma, into exile. However, when Itzcoatl is later poisoned for his treasure, Angelo is blamed. Taken back to Rome, he is burned at the stake for heresy. Angelo’s story is told through his correspondence with his boyhood friend, Annibal. In his last letter to Angelo, Annibal writes, “... you were doubtless a man of the past. Your militant, wild Faith is that of centuries gone by. It is what has caused your downfall

\(^{67}\) AM, 27-28.
in these new times of skeptical hypocrisy... you were not made for this period of order.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{68} Frère Angelo, 310.
Conclusion

From Gay Liberation to Gay Marriage: The End of Utopia

There’s one headline at least that always makes me laugh: the death of a journalist, which usually makes the front page. It’s not the death of the man as such that matters, but the consequences of his death for the newspaper’s subscribers and the hired mourners of the press... When a “great signature” abruptly leaves a newspaper, that newspaper only loses one subscriber.

-Guy Hocquenghem¹

Almost all of the memoirs of great writers are shot through with the presence of death. We read them in haste and ask ourselves, “How many more pages can he hold on?”

-Jean-Edern Hallier²

On July 5th 2004, the former Green Party presidential candidate Noël Mamère conducted France’s first same-sex marriage ceremony in the small southwestern town of Bègles where he is mayor. Same-sex marriage had not traditionally been a central priority of the homosexual movements in France, at least in comparison to the movements in the United States. First of all, the French in general are less likely to marry and do not seem

to regard the institution itself with as much veneration as do the Americans. Moreover, with the notable exceptions of marriage and adoption, France’s statutes authorizing “PACS,” a form of civil union, now provide homosexual couples with most of the same rights and benefits as married heterosexual couples. Since the controversial passing of the PACS law in 1999, the homosexual movements have been focusing their efforts more on extending these rights—to include, for example, the right to file joint tax returns, the right to inheritance, etc.—rather than on the right to same-sex marriage.

Nonetheless, much the same as in the United States, the issue of same-sex marriage has provoked a disproportionate reaction from conservative elements in French society. The marriage in Bègles was declared null and void by a Bordeaux court one month after the fact, a decision that was upheld in a court of appeals in April 2005, and Manmère was temporarily suspended from his post as mayor. More recently, an association of French mayors has launched a petition denouncing same-sex marriage in the name of “protecting children.” The association, which calls itself “Mayors for children” claims to already have 12,000 signatures from elected representatives around the country.4 Where as Jacques Chirac’s ruling conservative party, the UMP (Union pour une Majorité Présidentielle), staunchly opposes gay marriage, the Socialist Party and almost every party to its left have come out in favor, and it now appears that gay marriage will be a key debating point in the upcoming 2007 presidential elections.5

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3 Crude marriages rates in France, for example—the number of marriages per year per 1,000 people—were consistently about one-half of those in the U.S. in the 1990s. United Nations, Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, April 2001.
4 Anne Chemin, “12,000 mai res signent un appel contre le mariage homosexuel,” Le Monde (21 January 2006).
In the spring of 2004, I attended a public debate in Paris hosted by the EHESS (École des Hautes Études en Science Social) on the subject of same-sex marriage. Although the speakers approached the issue from a variety of legal, cultural, religious, and comparative perspectives, the overall assumption was that everyone in attendance was a proponent. Then, to my surprise, René Schérer took the podium. He began:

Just because one defends gay marriage against the unfortunate specters of the Miquet law doesn’t necessarily mean one is for it. I defend it, of course . . . I signed this petition against the stupidity and the moralism of the reactionaries, and I reiterate my support here today. But I can’t say I’m behind the cause wholeheartedly, or that I do not lament what has been lost in the narrow perspective of the movements of today: the grandeur, the heroism—if the word is not too strong—of origins, of a time when the recognition of “homosexual desire” . . . was a revolutionary affirmation, a rejection of bourgeois society and the conformism of its political parties and institutions. It seems to me a strange reversal and a curious paradox that homosexuals have found themselves today obstinate partisans of the institution of marriage—the only ones left aside from the Christians for that matter.\(^6\)

Schérer then continued by quoting Charles Fourier, for whom the “couple” was a supreme form of egoism. The couple, Fourier’s favorite bugbear, creates around itself a void, distancing itself from the rest of society as it clings to itself ever more tightly.

Quoting Fourier, Schérer explained: “Let us take a critical look at the couple itself. The être à deux, which is the epitome of this civilization’s metaphysics of love, is the concentration and the limitation of amorous passion in the weakest combination possible.”\(^7\)

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\(^6\) From the text of Schérer’s talk which he was kind enough to share with me.

\(^7\) Ibid.
Schérer still teaches philosophy today at the University of Paris VIII St. Denis, formerly the University of Vincennes, and he continues to write prolifically in the same utopian vein. For the last decade or so, he has been pre-occupied with “hospitality.” Like utopia, hospitality has been all but banished from the modern world, and yet, as Schérer reminds us:

Everywhere the need for hospitality can be sensed, on our streets and on our borders, and that this obligation is more often than not ignored or refused only renders it more urgent. As with utopia, hospitality endures in a thousand tiny shattered pieces that continue to diffract light from the edges and cracks of our world.  

His first treatise on hospitality from 1993 was entitled Zeus hospitalier: éloge de l’hospitalité (Hospitalable Zeus: In Praise of Hospitality), after “the titular divinity who, in Antiquity, bestowed hospitality upon humankind as a capacity, or a power, that lifted it beyond its mortal limitations.” Alluding to Erasmus of Rotterdam’s In Praise of Folly, Schérer hypothesized that hospitality had become the “madness” of contemporary society: “Should we not extol the virtues of hospitality today, at a time when, in France and around the world, the concern is primarily with restricting it, from the laws of asylum to the laws of national citizenship?” In a more recent collection, entitled simply Hospitalities, Schérer’s philosophical peregrinations lead the reader through the writings of Immanuel Kant and Walter Benjamin, the novels of Thomas Mann, the primeval rites of cannibalism, Charles Fourier’s musings on love, and the now defunct Experimental University of Vincennes in search of these tiny shattered pieces.

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9 Ibid., vi.
Schérer’s speech at the colloquium on same-sex marriage was followed by a moment of awkward silence and then a Q and A session involving the audience. Whether out of a lack of interest or a lack of purchase on the subject, no one had any questions for Schérer. Nor did any of his remarks come up in the lively discussions that followed. Schérer had tried in vain to invoke a time when homosexuality was on the avant-garde of a process of critical reflection about modern society and its institutions, but somewhere along the path from gay liberation to gay marriage, the homosexual movements had ceased to play this role. Had Hocquenghem been alive, he might have enjoyed himself at this gathering. In his prime, he took great pleasure in being the uninvited guest on such occasions. Writing for TOUT in the early 1970s, Hocquenghem labeled the institution of marriage a “social scourge,” an allusion to the Mirguet law, and later as an investigative journalist for Libération, he lamented that even though the French no longer seemed to respect the institution of marriage, they continued to organize social life around the “totalitarian” form of the couple.

The couple, a vigorous, imperious, and essentially modern form of social organization, has become the necessary condition for social being . . . that many couples end up marrying, still today, does not change this phenomenon: before marriage young people already live in couples. Already.\(^\text{12}\)

However inappropriately, Hocquenghem might at least have been able to illicit a reaction from the audience, which is often the first step towards opening a debate.

\(^{12}\)“L’avenir est au couple,” Libération (22 August 1980), 21.
In France today, the forces of reaction seem to have gained a slight upper hand. In 2002, the French Left was dealt a crushing blow during the presidential elections in which the rightwing *Front National* candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen beat Lionel Jospin of the Socialist Party to face incumbent Jacques Chirac in the run-off round. Using the situation to his advantage, Chirac formed a new conservative coalition party, the UMP (*Union pour une Majorité Présidentielle*), which, under the banner of an anti-totalitarian consensus, made considerable gains in both houses of parliament in addition to retaking the Élysée. Emboldened by this unprecedented political triumph, and also by the anti-terror ethos since the events of September 11, French conservatives have redoubled their efforts to turn the tide against the social and cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s.

One of the clearest signs of this is the recent resurgence of anti-May rhetoric. Not since the Gaullist reaction in 1969 and 1970 it seems has May '68 been the target of so much vitriol. Before Le Pen’s triumph over Jospin in the first round of the 2002 elections—which completely transformed the campaign debates—conservatives cast the election as a referendum on May ’68 and its legacies. In the run-up to the election, for example, conservative RPR deputy Claude Goasquen explained in *Le Figaro*: “Lionel Jospin is the last political avatar of the ideology of May ’68 which sapped our society of civility, respect, and security and eroded our civic values.”\(^{13}\) According to Nicolas Sarkozy, who is perceived by many commentators to be Chirac’s successor to the UMP: “Its time to turn our back on this period when values lost all of their meaning, when there were only rights, but no duties, when no one respected anyone else, and when it was ‘forbidden to forbid.’”\(^{14}\) Almost twenty years after the “Maoist-turned-Rotarians” gave

\(^{14}\) Quoted in Ibid.
themselves a show trial and converted en masse to the new liberalism, May ’68 seems to be on trial once again.

This new assault on May ’68 is being spearheaded not only by conservative politicians, but also by many of France’s leading political thinkers and public intellectuals. Not long after the UMP’s crushing victory, the historian Daniel Lindenberg stirred up a heated but confused controversy by denouncing what he termed France’s “new reactionaries” in small book entitled Le rappel à l’ordre (The Summons to Order). Although Lindenberg admitted that France’s “new reactionaries” in no way form an organized movement—the figures he considers range from social and political philosophers like Marcel Gauchet and Pierre Manent to avant-garde fiction writers Michel Houellebecq and Maurice Dantec—he nonetheless cautioned against a nascent intellectual mood, evident to many since 2002, and characterized by a certain lifting of taboos. Thus, for example, it has recently become possible in the political mainstream to speak of the “anti-white racism” of youth in the cités or the “anti-French racism” of high school professors in the cités who teach an unfairly negative version of the history of French colonization in North Africa. Among the fashionable targets of the “new reactionaries”—a list that includes feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism, and “political correctness” (a term which no longer requires translation in French discourse)—is May ’68 itself, often perceived as the root cause of all of the former. To Lindenberg’s list, one might also include homosexuals. Recently, for example, Le Figaro magazine decided to disinter the unfortunate phrase, first coined by Louis Pauwels during the early years of

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15 Daniel Lindenberg, Le Rappel à l’ordre (Paris: Seuil, 2002). On the controversy, see the November 22 edition of Le Monde which contains a front page article, portraits of intellectuals involved in the debate, and responses from some of those inculpated, organized by Jean Birnbaum and Nicolas Weill, 1, 30-31, 34, 36, and page V in the supplement, “Le Monde des livres.”
the AIDS epidemic, of the "Sida Mentale." And not so long ago in *Le Monde*, the well-respected philosopher and historian of law Pierre Legendre compared gay marriage and gay adoption to the folly of Nazi selective breeding.¹⁶

Though Lindenberg's list of protagonists includes some familiar conservative voices—like Luc Ferry, for example, who was chosen to be the Minister of Education in Chirac's new government—many of his faces are new and would recoil from any association with the political right. Hervé Algalarondo, for example, an editor of long-standing leftist sympathies at *Le Nouvel Observateur*, came under attack for his latest book *Securité: la gauche contre le peuple* (Security: the Left against the people) in which he dates the decline of the French Left, culminating in Jospin's loss to Le Pen in 2002, to May '68, the precise moment, in his opinion, when it abandoned concern for the working classes for more abstract pre-occupations such as individual liberties and human rights. In his interpretation, the '68ers' deceptions with the working classes, who failed to stay the revolutionary route towards the end of May and June, led them to jettison the Marxist myth of the proletariat in favor of a new myth: the "angelic immigrant." The Socialist Party thus gradually embraced an ideology of anti-racism, political correctness, and multiculturalism—all legacies of May 1968 for Algalarondo—which prevented it from articulating firm and coherent policies on the issues of crime, violence, and juvenile delinquency which dominated the 2002 presidential debates. Also contributing to this recent failure was another direct legacy of May 1968, which Algalarondo dubs "anti-

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police racism,” epitomized for him by one of the ’68 student movements earliest slogans “CRS = SS.”\footnote{Hervé Algalarondo, Sécurité: La gauche contre le peuple (Paris: Laffont, 2002). “CRS” is the acronym for the Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité, the French anti-riot police who did battle with the students in May 1968.}

Most of the intellectuals Lindenberg considers, however, criticize May ‘68’s legacy of individualism from the standpoint of conservative French republican ideals. In their view, May ’68 inaugurated, or at least accelerated, the arrival of an American-style individualism which threatens French republican values in two ways: first by eliminating space for reflection about the ends of society as a whole, and secondly by effecting a retreat away from civil society into more narrowly defined racial, cultural, and gender-based communities, a process the French refer to, always pejoratively, as communautarisme.\footnote{For more on the French debates on “communitarianism,” see Michel Wieviorka ed., Une société fragmentée? Le multiculturalisme en débat (Paris: La Découverte, 1997).} Since the events of September 11, it has even become common for the Republican critics to associate American-style “communitarianism” or “multiculturalism” with terrorism. According to Pierre-André Taguieff, one of France’s most staunch opponents of the encroachment of democracy à l’américaine: “Intolerance at the outset of the third millennium speaks a language that is communautariste, or, more precisely, multicommunautariste. . .the new cultural code of real intolerance is that of a tolerance that is obligatory and terrorist.”\footnote{Pierre-André Taguieff La République enlisée (Paris: Éditions des Syrtes, 2005), 17.} Intolerance is all the more effective and insidious in the new millennium, for Taguieff, because it has learned to speak the language of tolerance. Lumping feminists, homosexual activists, and anti-racists together with Islamic fundamentalists, Taguieff argues that this “new form of political-intellectual terrorism,” which “threatens with social death any individual who dares to object or
refuses to go along with the injunctions of its pressure groups,” is largely responsible for
the evisceration of French civil society since May 1968.20

According to Lindenberg, one of the common themes of the new reactionary
intellectuals is their critique of democracy, a critique that purports to be “internal” but
which raises questions nonetheless about the depth of its authors’ democratic
commitments. The real danger, in Lindenberg’s estimation, is that behind the new
reactionary climate “floats the phantom of a politics of heroism, anchored in the history
of nations, and fascinated by the representation of a people one and indivisible, a
democracy perhaps, but one the likes of which has never existed on this earth.”21

Lindenberg’s polemic is perhaps too alarmist; aside from the occasional provocations that
he documents, there is little evidence to suggest a breakdown in the democratic consensus
of the political mainstream. *Le rappel à l’ordre* remains, however, an instructive attempt
to describe an inchoate trend in French political culture. Furthermore, since the
publication of his polemic, there does seem to be something of an emerging self-
awareness, the first step toward the creation of a movement, among political
conservatives. In a recently published dialogue between Conservative MP Paul Marie
Coûteaux and Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, president of the Gaullist political movement
“Republic Stand Up” (*Debout La République*) founded in 1999, for example, the authors
describe their fight against the ’68ers as a renewal of the struggle between the Ancients
and the Moderns.

The [‘68] generation is drawing its last breath: They have been ruling
France unchallenged for thirty years (twenty-eight if one dates the rise to
power of the Moderns to 1974, as I do); inevitably, a new generation,
much more classical, necessarily classical, will emerge, a generation that

20 Ibid., 17.
21 Lindenberg, 14.
will rediscover perhaps that ‘only tradition is revolutionary’ according to Péguy’s saying.\textsuperscript{22}

Is there something really “new” about France’s new reactionaries? Political and cultural conservatives have been condemning the events of May since the moment they erupted. There is, however, at least one element that is clearly new about them: their age. Adding their voices to the generation Guy Hocquenghem impugned in the \textit{Open Letter}, many of May’s new critics are too young to have participated in the events of that summer and thus share none of the ‘68ers’ conflicted relationship, oscillating between nostalgia and renunciation, to the seminal episode of that generation. Nicolas Sarkozy, to take one example, was only thirteen in May ’68. Paul-Marie Coûteaux, was hardly ten years old in May 1968, but he recently had this to say about the \textit{soixante-huitards}:

“Thirty years later look at what you accomplished: against the threefold “Work, Family, Nation” (\textit{Travail, Famille, Patrie}) you have indeed triumphed on all fronts, replacing ‘work’ with ‘unemployment,’ the ‘family’ with ‘gangs’ and the ‘nation’ with the empires of the old while drowning our republic in the European soup... You told us that everything was possible, and you were right, everything is possible, including the worst.”\textsuperscript{23}

The threefold “Work, Family, Nation,” it is worth recalling, was the rallying slogan of Marshal Pétain’s Vichy France. As Lindenberg observed, France’s new reactionaries seem to have internalized at least one of May’s dictums: “It’s forbidden to forbid.”

The recent attacks on May ’68 range from campaign mudslinging and provocative “political incorrectness,” to the more intellectually sophisticated critiques of leading academic and public intellectuals. The sociologist Jean-Pierre Le Goff, author of \textit{Mai 68}:

\textsuperscript{22} Paul Marie Coûteaux in Paul Marie Coûteaux and Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, \textit{Ne laissons pas mourir la France!} (Paris: Albin Michel, 2004), 64.
l’héritage impossible, a thorough and critical study of May’s “impossible heritage,” is perhaps the best example of the latter. Though not a target in Lindenberg’s polemic—Le Goff’s last major work appeared around the same time as the Rappel à l’ordre—his writings in the last several years have been giving intellectual depth to conservatives’ ubiquitous grumblings about modern individualism. In May ’68, The impossible heritage, Le Goff argued that the truth of May ’68 revealed itself only later through the forms of leftist agitation it spurred—such as the women’s liberation and homosexual liberation.24 These movements, he argued, were guided by a radical “philosophy of desire” that pushed the ideal of individual autonomy to its paroxysm. The result is that French society has adopted an ideal of the individual that rejects any notion of debt or responsibility vis-à-vis generations past and future. Thus, while they may have believed they were working towards a freer, more democratic society, according to Le Goff, these movements unknowingly played the role of “a kind of avant-garde in a process of decomposition,”25 a decomposition not simply of the traditional ideals of religion, family, and the republic, but of the very “structures of human co-existence (vivre-ensemble)” in a most basic anthropological sense.26 Le Goff’s narrative of May ’68 is a veritable negative teleology, a philosophy of decline that begins in May ’68 and ends with the “last man” of today, the narcissistic individual entirely incapable of moral and social responsibility.

Le Goff’s philosophy of decline is a variant on an anti-May idiom that dates back to some of the earliest psychoanalytic interpretations of the events as an Oedipal conflict on a generational scale. Echoing Raymond Aron’s classic metaphor of the events as a

26 Ibid., 90.
generational “psychosocial drama,” many critics continue to view May ’68 as the beginning of the “infantilization” of French society. In this interpretation, it was the ‘68ers who triumphed in the end, taking control of the French society by the 1980s under François Mitterrand, without however having resolved their collective Oedipal conflict—an observation which can be used to explain any number of their failures as parents and teachers as well as a host of psychological pathologies. According to the well-reputed psychoanalyst and priest Tony Anatrella: “May ’68 inaugurated a magic vision of the “word” and “thought” according to the imagination of the child: it suffices to speak in order for a project to realize itself or a problem to resolve itself without any intervention.” Citing such May slogans as “take your desires for reality,” and the “the more I make love, the more I make revolution,” Anatrella reads contemporary alienation, manifested for example by the rise of clinical depression and sexual deviancy (a category which still includes homosexuality for Anatrella) as a result of the May movement’s reduction of the range of human emotions, desires, and forms of sociability to sex itself. The idea that the liberationist philosophy of the May movement was simply a cover for sexual hedonism is not a new one, but like Le Goff, Anatrella transforms this simple notion into a totalizing theory about the degeneration of French society. The “last man” in this version of the May ’68 philosophy of decline is not only an isolated and alienated being, but also a mental case and a sexual deviant (usually homosexual). Thus, in Paul Marie Couteaux’s recent description of the last man, for example, he is a miserable and lonely aging soixante-huitard, kneeling before a glory-hole in a vain search for true life meaning.

28 *Traité de savoir disparaître à l’usage d’une vielle generation*, 191.
This idea that sexual deviancy today is a direct legacy of May '68 recently made an ugly reappearance in the European presses when Dany Cohn-Bendit, now a Green Party deputy in the European parliament, was forced to take time out from the 2001 European campaigns to deny pedophilia accusations stemming from a semi-autobiographical book he had published twenty-five years earlier. In a section of *Le Grand Bazar* (1975), Cohn-Bendit described his experiences as an educator in an alternative kindergarten in Frankfurt where children were encouraged to explore their own and each other’s bodies. The passages in question relating some of his experiences solicited no reactions from the Left or Right European presses at the time and went entirely unnoticed until they were reprinted suddenly, and under dubious circumstances, in the run up to the European elections by *The Observer* (England), *The Independent* (England), *Repubblica* (Italy), *Bild* (Germany), and the rightwing *l’Express* in France in January and February 2001. The accusations were a boon for May’s conservative critics—not to mention political opponents of the European Greens. If Dany Cohn-Bendit, the May movement’s instigator and one of the most emblematic figures of the revolutions of the ‘60s and ‘70s in Europe turns out to be a pedophile, then what more proof does one need that May was really about the heedless pursuit of sexual pleasure? Or, in the words of the British journalist Robert Taylor who witnessed the events in Paris: “May 1968 was a lovefest, not a revolution; a sexual springtime for frustrated bourgeois youth . . . serious politics . . . the 1968 événements were not.” More than thirty years

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later, this image continues to be reinforced at the expense of all others in representations of the events in the popular media.\textsuperscript{32} This trend recently reached its zenith in Bernardo Bertolucci's 2003 nostalgic tribute to Paris in 1968, \textit{The Dreamers}. In Bertolucci's film, the events themselves serve primarily as the backdrop to the real story. Tucked away in the private world of their Paris flat, three innocent youths, a French brother and sister and their American visitor, explore the limits of a Dionysian and incest-tinged love triangle as drug-inspired guitar riffs caterwaul in the background. (Never mind that many of the tunes, such as the Doors' "Maggie M'Gill," actually postdate 1968, or that there probably was no Rock and Roll to be heard in May '68 for that matter.\textsuperscript{33})

Whether this new spate of attacks on May '68 represents a rightward swinging of the pendulum or just a new conservative backlash remains to be seen. Recently, there have been signs that the French people's tolerance for the new reactionaries is reaching its limits. Due to his extreme unpopularity, for example, Luc Ferry, the imperious Philosopher of Minister of Education, was dismissed from Chirac's government shortly after pushing through the controversial "veil law" in 2004 banning the Islamic headdress and other religious symbols in schools. Even by the standards of the conservative UMP, the republican philosopher seemed out of touch with the concerns of France's ethnic communities. In one of his final failed attempts to rally the French to his republican education reforms, Ferry offered to let France's Sikh population wear hair nets, like those used in the food service industry, in place of the traditional turban. When French Sikhs

\textsuperscript{32} On representations of May '68 in the popular media, see Keith Reader, \textit{The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations} (London: Macmillan, 1993) and Margaret Atack, \textit{May 68 in French Fiction and Film: Rethinking Society, Rethinking Representation} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

\textsuperscript{33} Refer to \textit{Morrison Hotel} and Chapter 5.
rejected this offer of conciliation, Ferry seemed genuinely surprised. Though vague and nearly impossible to enforce, the “veil law” still exists. Recently it has even been extended in some places to include the mothers of Muslim children when they attend school-related functions. Since the rise to power of the conservative UMP, tensions between government authorities and France’s ethnic communities have never been higher, as the nationwide riots of 2005—the largest since May 1968—clearly attest.

In 1979, in one of his finest moments as a polemist, Hocquenghem composed La beauté du métis: réflexions d’un francophone (the beauty of the mixed-race: reflections of a Francophone), a brutal satire aimed at the French fear of “mixing.” La beauté du métis begins:

_We French will never possess the poignant beauty of the métis [mixed race or hybrid]. We are born blind in an insular country bereft of encounters and bereft of mixing. Our whiteness, our insipidness, and the stuffiness that is our birthright are the work of History. We are strangers to the heart, strangers to color, and strangers to music, because five centuries of punctilious discipline have matured us within ourselves. We do not mingle or merge with other peoples. Our history is as straight as an arrow, whereas those of other peoples are sinuous and salacious, winding through continents and spreading their offshoots._

Hocquenghem predicted in La beauté du métis that France would be the last country on the globe to recognize that other cultures not only survive, but thrive within its own borders. Against the sterility of French civilization and the rigidity of its republican ideals, Hocquenghem sang the praises of France’s immigrants:

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35 BM, 9.
Outsider, beautiful and vibrant outsider, how could they not love you? You alone interpolate our maniacal monologue. You interrupt us, smiling at us without understanding, and your smile shatters in me the illusion of my homogeneity... Outsider, you transcend the tight circle in which your French name encloses you. To be from neither here nor there is your special mode of being... Outsider, for us French you are not simply a foreign national: you force us to contemplate mixedness precisely because you are not from somewhere else. For the most rooted people in the world, you will always be a mixed-race, something in between here and there, but living for you is not "being at home"; you are another art of living...  

Under Mitterrand in the 1980s, the Socialist Party founded SOS-Racisme, the anti-racist organization that is still known today for its slogan: “Touche pas à pote!” (Hands off my pal!). Hocquenghem mocked the new campaign which, in his view, perpetuated the distinction between the French and their immigrants, the advocates and the victims. In place of the ubiquitous yellow “Hands off my pal!” badges, he suggested wearing badges that read “Hands on my pal!” “What a shame really that your racism-fighting slogan forbids you from touching your pal. After all, have you looked at him? He’s really quite beautiful.” In retrospect, Hocquenghem’s prediction was rather prescient. France’s strict republican model of integration, for example, has hardly softened since Mitterrand’s presidency, even as French society continues steadily to become more ethnically diverse. As the noted sociologist Michel Wieviorka observed in the late 1990s, the debate over cultural pluralism remains impossible so long as French society can only imagine cultural particularisms as threats to national identity which must kept away from French institutions and political life at all costs.  

36 Ibid., 11-12.
37 "Touche à mon pote!", Gai Pied Hebdo 163 (30 March – 5 April), 9.
38 "Un débat nécessaire," in Michel Wieviorka ed., Une société fragmentée? Le multiculturalisme en débat. Also, in his recent work, François Cusset criticizes the obstinacy of the French intellectual sphere in the last quarter of a century in the face of global academic trends—such as queer theory, feminist theory, cultural studies, and subaltern studies—trends that were, ironically, spurred by "French Theory” abroad. French Theory (Paris: La Découverte, 2003).
Whether French society is truly drifting in a more conservative or traditional direction under the sway of its reactionaries new and old, one thing at least seems clear: the period of opening inaugurated by May '68 is over. Perhaps it was inevitable that the utopian imagination born on the barricades would disappear at the moment when the '68ers found themselves at the helm of French society. In a recent article, Frederic Jameson described the "paradox" of utopia's relationship to politics.

... the paradox might be explained this way: that as one approaches periods of genuine pre-revolutionary ferment, when the system really seems in the process of losing its legitimacy, when the ruling elite is palpably uncertain of itself and full of divisions and self-doubts, when popular demands grow louder and more confident, then what also happens is that those grievances and demands grow more precise in their insistence and urgency. We focus more sharply on very specific wrongs, the dysfunction of the system becomes far more tangibly visible at crucial points. But at such a moment the utopian imagination no longer has free reign: political thinking and intelligence are trained on very sharply focused issues, they have concrete content, the situation claims us in all its historical uniqueness as a configuration; and the wide-ranging drifts and digressions of political speculation give way to practical programmes... 39

Success, in other words, leads to moderation. Such has been the fate of nearly every revolutionary movement that has had its day, and such was the fate of the French Cultural Revolution. Hocquenghem hated moderation and resisted it with every last breath. His voice is sorely missed today.

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Abbreviations of Frequently-Cited Works by Guy Hocquenghem

RCN  Fhar: Rapport contre la normalité
HD   Homosexual Desire
AMF  L’après-mai des faunes
DH   La derive homosexuelle
BM   La beauté du métis: réflexions d’un francophile
RD   Race d’Ep, un siècle d’images de l’homosexualité
LO   Lettre ouverte à ceux qui sont passés du col Mao au Rotary
AA   L’Ame Atomique
AM   L’Amphithéâtre des morts: mémoires anticipées
PI   Pari sur l’impossible: études fourieristes
ON   Oiseau de la nuit
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