May '68

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4 Working to avoid social reproduction

Using a comprehensive approach based on the analysis of life histories, the next two chapters continue our reflections on how an event can impact the individual and collective paths of participants. Having used statistical methods to show what consequences the event produced, we must now seek to understand how it was able to alter the trajectories of protagonists and how they reacted to these biographical changes and the ensuing identity negotiations. Asking how means analysing the mechanisms for setting aside, transferring, converting and importing dispositions for protest, in various spheres of the participants' lives. Asking how means also asking about the political context, the objective constraints (social reintegration, responsibility for children etc.) and the subjective constraints (particularly being faithful to oneself) – that shaped the destinies of '68ers in different ways. Whereas the statistical approach in the previous chapter aimed to be exhaustive, here we focus on a limited number of cases to explore the destinies of '68ers working – both politically and professionally – to break down social reproduction. In so doing, this chapter questions the consequences of activism for social mobility and the consequences of social mobility for activism (Leclercq and Pagis, 2011). It explores the inversed trajectories of the workers who went to university and the établis who left university to work in factories. It also looks at how political interest in “the people” was converted into professional interests for the working classes, particularly in areas of social and community leadership. The study of these trajectories allows us to give the statistical observations of the previous chapter new temporal depth, taking into account the possible interactions between determinisms and encounters (particularly romantic). This will shed light on the much-neglected biographical consequences of breaking down social barriers.

Students in factories and workers in universities: inversed trajectories

We came back from Cuba in September 1967... There was the great proletarian revolution and the sixteen-point plan, it was “get down off your horse” and “go among the masses” ... and working on that, “dare to struggle, dare to win”: we learnt lessons from Lenin, from What is to be done? [...]. We got Peking-information... “power to the people” etc. That was how we created the établi party line [...] it was a commitment ... total
commitment. We were there to listen to the workers, to be at the service of the working class. Colette (a student établi in a factory).

Gérard Miller boasted about having spent two years as a farm worker, I don’t think that the cause of the people progressed much where he had that experience [...] The idea of being an établi for most of the children of the bourgeoisie seemed very romantic, but there was also no risk. Gilles (a worker, who did not graduate from high school, and who went on to university in Vincennes).

The history of the breakdown in social barriers between the worlds of workers, students and farmers is an aspect of the history of May ’68 that is often neglected – even though its “recognition could have become the symbol of May” (Pudal and Retière, 2008, p. 213). In unearthing some of these connections, we can see that – in spite of their fragile, temporary and ultimately ambiguous nature – they constitute a genuine social fact, that is historically situated, made possible, legitimated or reinforced by the critical conjuncture of May ’68.

Whether these encounters are ephemeral or durable, whether the equivocal representations that underpin them lead to feelings of contempt, disenchantment, anger or – on the contrary – recognition, they do not fail to have an impact on the world views and the trajectories of the different protagonists.

**Becoming an établi to “go among the masses”**

Ten of the interviewees worked (for periods varying from one month to six years) in factories as “étabis” (Dressen, 2000). According to Marnix Dressen, the term établi does not imply a specific social origin but rather a deviation from a specific type of socialisation, resulting from the decision of young activists to perform manual work, for which their training had not prepared them. The process of becoming an établi is not the object of this section, instead it provides us here with an almost-experimental situation through which to study the breakdown in social barriers and its consequences. These young étabis, who were university educated, trained to fill intellectual positions, and frequently members of the upper classes, left their positions to work in factories. They were following Chairman Mao’s injunction to “get down off [their] horses” and

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1 Extract from an email received on 18 August 2008. Gilles’ trajectory is analysed in detail below.

2 With the notable exception of the issue of Savoir/Agir: Mai-juin 68. La rencontre ouvriers-étudiants (2008).

3 This phrase from Mao became emblematic among French activists and became one of the motivations of the “établi” movement. See, The writings of Mao Zedong 1949-1976, Vol 11, January 1956 to December 1957 JK Leung and MY Kau (eds.) ME Sharpe, NY, 1992, p 381.
“go among the masses.” Jacques, who was responsible for the Rank-and-File Vietnam Committees within the UJCml in 1966-1967, discussed the origins of the établis movement within the Maoist organisation in his interview:

In 1967 there were long marches, so in the summer, some came here [to his house, in the south of France]: they were looking for the poor farmer, from the lowest level... we returned to the practice of investigation [Following Mao's teachings?] Right: “no investigation, no right to speak” (he smiles). [...]. The établis, that was Linhart’s thing, but he did it with a guy called Daniel K. [...] a young leader among us who had been employed in the Perrier factories in Vergez, with his wife [...] They were our first students to become établis, workers, but it wasn't like Simone Weil, it was a political construction, based on Mao’s writings, for agitprop...

Although for Jacques, the experience of being an établi was as short as it was miserable, others, like Colette, cited in the epigraph, or Paul, became

4 These were among the resolutions of the Cultural Revolution, and the slogans became popular in the famous Little Red Book, from 1966. Mao said that “if you look at flowers on horseback, you’ll only get a superficial impression” [...] you must “get down of your horse and look at the flowers, observe them closely and analyse one “flower”, the injunction being that the elites must go among the people if they are to understand them. In another text, Mao said, “we advocate that intellectuals must go among the masses, and go into the factories and countryside”, “Some of them may just tour around the factories and villages to have a look, this is called “looking at the flowers whilst riding by on horseback” [...] Others can stay a few months [...] they can make friends and conduct investigations, this is called “dismounting to look at the flowers”. See, “Some Experiences In Our Party’s History”, from a talk with Latin American Communist leaders September 25, 1956. Also see, “Speech At The Chinese Communist Party's National Conference On Propaganda Work”, March 12, 1957.

5 Jacques’ trajectory prior to 1968 is discussed in Chapter 1. This extract is taken from an interview on 18 August 2005.

6 Robert Linhart, was the main leader of the UJCml. He was a student in philosophy at the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure, and later a specialist teacher (agrégé). He became an établi in the 1970s at the Citroën factory, and published an account of his experience on the assembly line, see L'Établi (Linhart, 1978).

7 Daniel K. (his name has been changed to respect his anonymity) is in fact one of the interviewees. Born in 1944 into a Jewish family, his father was a low-level employee and former resistant member, and mother worked at home. He was a student in sociology when he became an établi in 1967, and his story is told in the book Generation (Hamon and Rotman, 1988).

8 Jacques was employed in 1968-1969 at the Renault factory in Billancourt, but he left after two months because he had not managed to make any genuine activist contacts, and explained that he had found himself “in a dead-end”.

9 The case of Colette was mentioned in Chapter 1 regarding the conversion of religious commitments into political activism. Her career as an établi is detailed at length in the PhD
blue-collar workers for several years. The comparative analysis of these two latter trajectories is developed in the next section.

*Beginning and maintaining a établi career: a total experience?*  
Paul was born in 1947, the son of a schoolteacher and a white-collar worker, both Communist activists, former Resistance members and atheists. In Chapter 2 we saw how he was a student in 1968, studying history, a member of the UNEF leadership in Grenoble, and an activist with the UJCml. In September of 1968, Paul joined the Proletarian Left (GP). He was appointed assistant teacher in a high school where he taught for one year (1968-1969), but quickly had the “uncomfortable feeling of having gone backward, compared to 1968,” and became an établi.

I hitched, with my pack on by back, and at the sign for Lyon, there was a note saying they were looking for a petrol pump assistant at Carrefour. So, I took the job, because the problem was having work certificates to show, to get a job somewhere more interesting. I moved to Bron, to a public housing estate, so my wife could show up. [*Why this decision to become an établi?*] For me, it was going where things were happening, and my deep conviction was that it would happen there... I had to continue 1968 in all possible ways, whether in the radical struggles of blue-collar workers or in other struggles... But I didn't go looking for different realities, I went to those capable of recreating May '68, that’s all [...] Let's say there was a phase where the construction of a political force implied that we made links we didn't naturally have, and which we were cut out of by the unions.

In Chapter 1 we saw that Colette, born in 1946 to an upper-class catholic family in Marseille, became politicised through the Vietnam War, before joining the UJCml in 1967. That same year she went on a “study” trip to Cuba with her husband, to investigate according to Mao's instructions: “[in Cuba] I met women who were like my mother. Very, very, very, upper-class women who completely devoted themselves to the Cuban thesis that provided the material for this book (Pagis, 2009, p. 382-415). Here it is used as a counterpoint to Paul's trajectory.

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10 The “Proletarian left” was a Maoist group that was active between 1968-1974 in France.
11 The quotations used in this part are from the interview conducted with Paul on 4 July 2008.
revolution, with such generosity... such a wonderful people the Cubans, wonderful...”

These initial comments reveal Paul and Colette’s diverging representations of “the people,” and their approaches to being an établi. Colette’s tendency to present herself as a martyred heroine and her essentialist representations of “the people” must be seen in light of her own class belonging, and her religious socialisation. These both encourage an aestheticisation and appreciation of the Otherness of a “good” people (Lechien, 2003, p. 94) which cannot be seen in Paul’s comments – given his greater proximity to the working class. Beyond these divergences, both interviewees are confronted with the need to disguise their past at university in order to evade the suspicion of the employers and succeed in their career as an établi. Thus, Paul says: “You made up a story, like you were the son of a shopkeeper or something, you didn't go to school between 14 and 20 because you worked for your parents in their shop, or their garage.”

The need to conceal one’s past, both to the employers but also to work colleagues, also implicitly reveals the unforeseeable, socially impossible nature of these transgressions of class boundaries. Keeping this past from others enabled them to integrate into their new social environment, without being accused of madness, and became a condition for living in this new role and protecting themselves from doubt. More generally, this conversion seems to imply breaking links with previous social networks (family, friends, school networks etc.) so that their role would seem credible in the eyes of others, but also (and perhaps primarily) in their own.

This break was more substantial for Colette than for Paul, who grew up in a lower-middle-class intellectual family, from a working-class background. Considering the experience of being an établi as a “total experience” (Goffman, 1968 [1961]) which leads to profound resocialisation, remains heuristic in both cases however.

Colette had an experience as a “regional leader” in the GP from 1968-1974 and the experience of the breakdown in social barriers also profoundly transformed her everyday life, her social environment, her cultural practices (even banning the use of the radio, or the “bourgeois” habit of reading), even her bodily practices and self-presentation. The break with her former...

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12 The quotations from Colette come from the interview conducted with her on 12 November 2005.

13 Colette became an établi with her husband at the Perrier factories in Contrexéville in 1967. She was not able to get a permanent job and thus alternated between phases where she was a worker, and phases of activism, as a worker’s wife and a militant leader in the GP.
identity was all the more radical in that she lived in hiding through this period, because of her status in the organisation, and she thus achieved genuine “metanoia.” More than 35 years later, Colette was still able to say “my experience as an établi constituted my total foundation, in other words, I was what I did.” She thus underlines this dual representation of herself, characteristic of the converted, which here results from her extreme experience of breaking down social barriers.

From 1969 to 1972, Paul worked as a casual employee in several companies but struggled to find a permanent position. As an activist with the GP in Lyon, he also participated in the newspaper La Cause du people (The Cause of the People). Paul was arrested for his activism in 1970 and was sentenced to three months prison:

We had one établi in Berlier who had provoked a strike within two weeks, and three young établis at Norev in Villeurbanne, making little plastic cars. They were all fired on the spot: they’d caused chaos on the women’s lines; so we had planned to go into the factory to speak out about the sacking, but we hadn’t studied the exits very well, and we were picked up by the cops on the way out! [...] And because the GP had been officially dissolved by the government, I ended up in prison, they let us out one by one, but because they had a list from the intelligence services saying I’d been appointed second in charge of the Lyon committee, the judge thought I’d better stay in for a while.

When he came out of prison, he returned to Grenoble to join his wife, who was then pregnant with their second daughter. He worked for a few months in causal positions, with limited political success. It was increasingly difficult to find a position as an établi during this period:

I tried for quite a while, but well, my experience of being an établi was a total failure. Well, according to the criteria of the time ... In other words, I didn’t develop militant practices, or activist groups where I was. Each time I was caught by the cops, or the CGT, very very quickly [...] Once, in Grenoble, I’d been in quite a big factory for three days, when the CGT

14 Bourdieu described metanoia as being “personal regeneration, attested in changes in vestimentary and cosmetic symbolism which consecrate a total commitment in a ethico-political vision of the social world, erected in principle into the whole lifestyle, private as much as public. (Bourdieu 1984, trans. 1988, p. 193).

15 On 27 May 1970 the GP was officially dissolved by Raymond Marcellin, Minister for the Interior.
distributed a pamphlet with my name on the back... And then I was fired immediately, it was things like that...

Shortly afterwards, Paul separated from his wife who suffered from psychiatric problems. In 1971, he set up in a housing estate in Sochaux with a new partner, who was student supervisor in a high school. Hired at the Peugeot factory, he (finally) had the feeling he was able to be politically active:

I was at the exhaust pipes, it was an assembly line, with rhythms and all that, so revolt was always latent. It was the good side of Taylorism (he smiles), the thing where negotiations between capital and labour were direct, so of course, in our discussions at break times, we were quickly talking about working conditions etc.

But his criminal record caught up with him and led to his dismissal within a few months. Whether it is a consequence or a cause of the fact that his break from his previous identity was less radical than some, Paul’s comments do not reflect the same degree of sacredness associated with the working class seen in some of the other établis. He never repressed his intellectual and artistic ambitions, for example, and did not hesitate to bring Lacan’s writings with him to his public housing estate in Sochaux:

When I went to be an établi in Lyon, and then in Sochaux, both times I left with two or three books in my bag. I never left either my Bible or the writings of Lacan, nor one or other commentary on Marx, and I remember one period of ultra-workerism at the GP where that was criticised, but it never stopped me telling those puritans to fuck off.

Paul’s working-class background undoubtedly explains why his critique of the bourgeoisie does not involve a rejection of cultural practices, nor a populist attitude idealising working-class thought and lifestyle (Grignon and Passeron, 1989), as we can see in these contrasting representations of the work of établi:

Paul
I worked for a month with Fiat in Grenoble, worked nights, retreading certain tyres: it was quite tough, and I was stuck with all the divorced proles

Colette
The political work on the assembly line was wonderful, [I was] only with women, putting little pieces in locks and it went very, very fast, but the oppression was such that: it
who were working nights to earn 20% more. It was a deeply unbearable sector of the working class – a bunch of 30 and 40-year-old proles who spent their time denigrating the women who had left them (he laughs); you can imagine the sexist jokes you can accumulate in an 8-hour night-shift. It got to the point where I couldn’t take it anymore!

was easy to work in the proletariat at that time, I can’t take any credit for it, the young female workers were just waiting for that! The repression, there were these little bosses, who harassed them, half-raped them when they were getting dressed [...] I just had to listen to them and share their situation [...] I discovered extraordinary men and women, and friendship, solidarity that you don’t find anywhere else.

If the aspect of self-purification through the repression of all aspirations unknown to the working class is lacking in Paul’s comments (unlike Colette’s), his position as an établi was still an experience that gave new meaning to his existence, making it part of a collective history that perpetuated the utopia of May ’68:

I had an image of May ’68 and the factories during the general strike [...] That capacity for revolt, we had lived through it in 1968 and we had found this total investment in a cause in 1968. That’s what we were trying to maintain in the years that followed [...] a sort of “total experience,” inevitable, and which in fact doesn’t really exist outside of war [...] we were looking for a radical new beginning.

This search for “total” experiences becomes meaningful when we situate it in the individual and generational relations that many ’68ers maintain with the Second World War and more particularly with the Resistance.

_Becoming an établi while waiting for war? The memory of the Resistance_

In 1972 Paul participated in the sequestration of a man who had injured students during a leafleting operation, and in the interview he discussed the motivations that drove them (within the GP) to resort to this course of action:

Our idea, at the time, was that we were moving towards civil war, a war that the people unleashed, not the factions, but we were supposed to increase symbolic actions. We were very influenced by the model of the
Tupamaros, and yes, the NRP\textsuperscript{16} and abductions like Nogrette, seemed like a good idea […]. We gave ourselves the right to abduct and to operate a parallel system of justice, controlled counter-violence, to throw the system into crisis... there was another kind of legitimacy that emerged after 1968.

Colette's husband also justified the use of abductions in the context of war, in an interview from 1971: “It could very well be war. That's why we're going to be établis. If it is war, we'd prefer to organise it. [...] Sequestration for example, if it was really organised everywhere, sequestration of the bosses in response to sequestration of the workers, that would be good, wouldn't it?”\textsuperscript{17}

Colette herself talks about normality, fairness, and even order when describing the clandestine “actions of partisans,”\textsuperscript{18} organised by the leaders of the GP. It is difficult to understand this relation to justice, to the state and to one's own role in history, without returning to the place that the Second World War occupies in the imagination of these young adults, born in the early 1940s. More specifically, identification with the figures of the resistance fighters or the persecuted Jews emerges in several discourses, more or less clearly, more or less fantasized, from Colette’s allusion to the “deportation trains”\textsuperscript{19} in her account of her experience as an établi, to more theoretically founded comparisons. Paul therefore mobilises his family history to justify this identification, and the fact that this was “their war:”

People don’t understand anymore, that at the time, we were still at war... And for some of these people, first of all us, World War Three was coming, beyond a doubt. The theme of the “New Resistance” was obvious for me, it was even oedipal: my parents were in the Resistance, I had to do the same. We were coming out of colonial wars, like in Kusturića's film on Yugoslavia, we were still in the underground, like the Japanese on their island who hadn't been told that the war was over.

\textsuperscript{16} The NRP was the Nouvelle résistance populaire (New Popular Resistance), the clandestine armed branch of the GP.
\textsuperscript{17} Extract from an interview conducted with Colette and her husband, available on a digital archive website.
\textsuperscript{18} With this expression she is referring to the famous “Chant des partisans” (translated into English as the “Partisans' Song”) that was the hymn of the Resistance during the Second World War, and thus making a parallel between the "partisans" (Resistance members) and members of the GP.
\textsuperscript{19} Colette describes her husband’s work at Perrier: “they had to put [the bottles] on their shoulders in the freight carriages of Contrexéville, on the gloomy plain, sorry, it was pretty much like the deportation trains"
We can see the transmission of a family history of resistance or persecution, as foundational for dispositions to activism. The examples are frequent and all mobilise the spectre of the war to come: “World War Three.” The feeling of being part of a persecuted minority sheds light on the apparent irrationality of the activist practices of certain interviewees, in the years after 1968. Geneviève, who dedicated more than ten years of her life to *Lutte Ouvrière* thus told me:

> I am from a Jewish background, my first husband was from a Jewish background, so it’s important to specify that in my subconscious it was clear that I was going to end up in a concentration camp [...] that was part of a whole lot of things that were culturally transmitted to me.

The rhetoric of the necessary recourse to illegality and the legitimacy of minority actions is also written in the recent history of the Resistance, which is not limited to the children of Resistance members themselves (like Paul) or persecuted Jews (like Colette’s husband). The general strike in May ’68, the flickering power of politicians who seemed to not understand the stakes of the crisis, provided a context favourable to many ’68ers “joining the Resistance,” and then waiting many months, and even years for their war. Anne, who was an *établi* in 1971-1972 said:

> when the vote, and the political game appear rigged, disconnected from reality, violent confrontation is the only outcome. On the other hand, for this generation that “discovered” that the image of the France that resisted was a myth, that what they’d been taught was false, the major reference was that: make the right decision, even if it’s marginal, with the secret hope that a good conflict would reveal everything.20

Without aiming to explain the *établi* movement, this development on the attitude to war allows us to shed new light on the apparent recklessness of the *établis* regarding their social destinies, often – over-hastily – reduced to the bourgeois origins only some of them actually had. When we are persuaded to live in suspended reality, social mobility is not necessarily a primary concern.

20 Extract from an email sent to me by Anne, received in July 2008. Anne’s case will be discussed in the next chapter.
Etablis threatening the dominant social order?
Many members of the GP spent time in prison after the group was officially dissolved in May 1970, and this experience contributed to and reinforced their identity conversion. Indeed, the prison, as a total institution, strengthened the extraordinary nature of the experience of being an établi. Moreover, the loss of civil rights associated with imprisonment accentuated the break with their former social identities and closed off some possible exits from the établi movement. Colette said:

I was given a two weeks’ suspended sentence, had my civil rights revoked and was banned from returning to [area around] Doubs... And that, when you're 22-23, politics was finished! [...] I didn't kill anyone but Capital was so afraid that the repression was terrible! When the farmers asked me to be on their ballot, that would have been an anchor for me, it would have made us legal, but that repression we had been subject to, and having your civil rights revoked, it stopped us young people returning to civilian life.

At the same time, having an experience of prison was a significant form of symbolic capital, in a specific context (1970-1972) where repression was proof of the threat that the établis posed to the social order. At other points in her interview, Colette thus associates this repression with the efficiency of her work as an établi. More generally, we can hypothesise that if repression often seems disproportionate to the facts (Paul was sentenced to three months of prison for having denounced unfair dismissals in the factory), it is because the penalties do not merely sanction the illegal acts, but also the social transgression. Indeed, through their very existence, these social migrants may well represent a (symbolic) threat to the social order, because they abolish class barriers in their own trajectories. Through the symbolic reversal that their status as établis represents, they are, in a certain sense, working against social reproduction.

The political, professional and familial costs of ending the établi experience
For Colette, the end to her experience as an établi was all the more violent because it was imposed on her. In 1974, the GP was dissolved and the father of her children left her. The causes of this separation can be found in the inseparable connection between the political, family, and professional spheres of the couple. They got married in 1967 and remained faithful to the revolutionary cause until 1974, when both political organisation and conjugal ties were dissolved. Colette's case represents an ideal type, because there is no possibility to renegotiate one's identity in such a brutal end to her role. The
return to everyday life is thus marked by “a period of identity incoherence, of which serious somatization is a strong symptom” (Pudal, 2005, p. 163), characterised by the impossibility of maintaining personal integrity. When no form of continuity is possible, what remains is “regression to primary habitus” (Dobry, 1986). Colette returned to live in Marseille, to her family home, where she picked up her studies and raised her children, making her living as a teacher in the private sector (she did not have the degrees required to teach in public schools). In the early 1980s she married again, this time to a high school teacher, a practicing Catholic, and became involved in a religious group with him. But this attempt to repress her past as an établi was in vain. Colette separated, began psychoanalysis, and set out in search for former Maoist comrades, to try and pick up the pieces of this broken thread. “Everywhere I went I looked for Maoists, every time,” she said during our interview. The limits of a sociological analysis of this tragic quest for a confiscated identity are clear. Yet we can hypothesise that the psychological troubles that Colette has suffered from since 1974 are not unconnected to her inability to mourn for her lost leftist identity. In this respect, her trajectory echoes those of the (many) ’68ers who committed suicide in the 1970s and 1980s.

The end of Paul’s experience as an établi was much happier, and reveals – by comparison with Colette’s – the conditions for professional conversion from a revolutionary past.

Paul left Sochaux for Belfort at the end of 1972, and once again tried to find a job in a factory before participating in a movement in support of sexual freedom for students. He was sanctioned by the GP for this involvement, which was considered bourgeois. Paul in turn criticised the organisation for “turning its back on all the new struggles: youth, feminist movements etc.” He turned towards these causes as a travelling companion on the road to Larzac, or Besançon, in support of the Lip workers.

Paul’s experience as an établi came to a close more progressively than Colette’s, which made it easier; the principle of conversion lying in the time it takes for dispositions to evolve. After having suffered various setbacks in Belfort (he never lasted very long in a given factory), Paul returned to Paris to finish his studies. His decision to leave his experience as an établi behind him was linked to the increased costs associated with this action, given that the symbolic returns he had benefited from waned over time and extreme-left activism was increasingly frowned upon. Like for so many others, the fatigue of his revolutionary objectives (in the face of a revolution that was so long coming), as well as the need for social reintegration, eventually got the best of his activism:
[What was your motivation to stop being an établi?] I’d say it was the era [...] There is a personal calculation on one hand, like rushing into a dead-end street (long silence) and the feeling that the pursuit of May ’68 would no longer continue on a single track [...] So the GP being dissolved wasn’t such a drama for me [...] The spirit of the times had shifted, both for the proles and for us: historically it was no longer a Messianic period.

When he returned to Paris, Paul was put in contact with Robert Linhart, through an activist friend, and worked with him for a time on a study of the sociology of work.21 However, given the lack of stable prospects in this sector, and with the help of a former comrade, Paul found work with the newspaper Liberation.22 This opportunity allowed him to reconcile his aspirations of perpetuating May ’68, whilst also achieving social reintegration, after his years as an établi:

At that time, at Libé, it was like, we dissolve the GP, but we keep the NRP on one hand and Liberation on the other, both extremes [...] the idea was that to be on the lookout for what happens next, the rebirth of the revolution in a way, we had to have an instrument for debate, for contact with the people. [Did you still see yourself as a revolutionary?] Yes and no, because I began to get enormously involved professionally. Libé was an expanding institution where you could do so many things, it was an extraordinary opportunity to make something of yourself, a new form of total experience.

Thus, for Paul (but the schema is valid for many ex-’68ers) Libération appeared to be one of the possible answers to the “conditions for the possibility of perpetuating a ‘political youth’, and saving past ideals, even though everything surrounding it had changed” (Collovald and Neveu, 2001, p. 79). The newspaper allowed Paul to convert his dispositions for revolutionary action into the professional sphere in a way that was progressive and invisible on an everyday level. Moreover, he found himself in a social position with significant symbolic capital in activist circles in the 1970s and 1980s: “When you realise after a few years that you’re at a dead-end, personally and collectively, it hurts... I don’t know what would have happened to me without Libé, it literally saved me, by allowing me to manage a whole lot of contradictions.”

21 The conversion of far-left activists to the study of social sciences is the subject of a specific discussion at the end of the chapter. See Box 4.
22 Liberation remains one of France’s three most important daily newspapers.
After having been editor of the social desk, before moving onto the news desk, Paul was eventually fired in 1989 following disagreements on the political evolution of the newspaper. If *Libération* allowed him to perpetuate his political ideals whilst obtaining social reintegration, the very specific nature of this transitional space was made clear in his inability to find an equivalent work environment. “The constantly renewed reprieve” (Bourdieu, 1978, p. 18) that his work as a journalist at *Libération* provided him came to an end. He worked at *Infos-Matin* for two years, participated in the launching of several (ephemeral) newspapers, accepted a job at the (Catholic) weekly paper *La Vie*, just to pay the bills, and then resigned. Partly unsuited for the labour market that he had entered through the back door, via his activism, Paul found himself unemployed. When I met him, he was recently retired, on a small pension, after long years of unemployment.

Although they are difficult to compare in numerous respects, the two trajectories analysed here share prolonged experiences of overcoming social barriers; this left biographical imprints that we can try to summarise here. Firstly, the political action of an *établì* was the source of situations of downward mobility (more or less accentuated depending on the experiences in question). The cost of reintegration was all the greater for the *établìs* who, like Colette and Paul, had given up their university studies to work in the factories. However, if they did not return to the professional spheres that they had begun their training for, this was partly because the experience of social transgression led to new professional appetites. As a professional journalist Paul was able to convert his past political experience into the professional sphere, and remain faithful to it:

> Finding myself in the sociology of work or in journalism, for me it’s almost like being an *établì*: ‘no investigation, no right to speak!’ [he is quoting Mao again here] If you can’t be an *établì* you have to at least bend down to pick the flowers, if you stay on your horse, you’re just a rider and nothing more... I continued to investigate in very different social areas, and my experience served me well of course: I had seen what work in a factory was like up close!

After leaving business school in his final year and spending six years as an *établì* in a factory, Colette’s then husband moved into sociology (1974-1975). Prolonged experiences of the breakdown in social barriers thus left lasting impacts on the professional desires of these young men and women. In different ways, sometimes painfully, they converted their militant interest for “the people” into a professional interest in the working classes, in investigation
(journalistic or sociological) or in the breakdown in social barriers. These social migrants filled positions that did not (really) correspond to their titles. They were moved by aspirations that did not (really) correspond to their qualifications. They frequently found themselves in contact with working-class actors in their professional lives, or had cultural practices that did not (really) correspond to those of their colleagues etc. Ultimately, the experience of overcoming social barriers seems to have become constituent of their way of being in the world.

**Workers at university: Gilles, from postal worker to professor**

Whilst certain students were “getting down off their horses” to go and “investigate” among the masses, workers, employees and farmers were going the opposite way (Pagis, 2009, p. 430-444), coming into contact with students and intellectuals. Gilles’ trajectory sheds light on this aspect of class transgression.

Gilles was born in 1943 in a working-class suburb of Paris, where his father had a stall at the market and his mother worked in a factory and then as a secretary in a bank. His parents divorced when he was three and Gilles was raised by his mother and step-father (an Armenian invalid who had caught tuberculosis whilst in captivity). Gilles grew up in Grasse; his family was poor and they did not discuss politics. They did read a lot (in particular the *Canard Enchaîné*)²³ however, and he developed a taste for reading early in life. Gilles repeated a year at school in order to sit the exams to become a teacher, but he failed. He started work at fifteen, as a courier for the telegraph and telephone company (PTT).²⁴ He joined the CGT union shortly afterwards, and then joined the Communist Party in 1960, his political conscience becoming more accentuated with the Algerian war.²⁵

In 1962 Gilles passed the internal exam in the PTT and was appointed as a “switchboard girl”²⁶ in the Central Inter-Archival Offices in Paris. He was then 19 years old, lived in a company residence, and was an activist with the PCF. This is when he met his future wife, Marlène, also a Communist from

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²³ *The Canard Enchaîné* is a satirical political newspaper.
²⁴ His job consisted in transporting letters and parcels from office to office.
²⁵ After an initial telephone interview with Gilles (8 July 2008), we began an intensive email correspondence. Between July and December 2008, Gilles sent me more than 30 emails, and attached documents responding to my questions.
²⁶ The “démoiselles de téléphone” or switchboard girls were most often recruited among young unmarried women, hence their name.
a working-class family. It is important to emphasise the homogamy of this first union, given that Gilles’ subsequent partners were from increasingly privileged social backgrounds. Gilles went to the (Communist) party schools during this period, which provided a kind of substitute school and reinforced his disposition for learning (Ethuin, 2003). They were married in 1963, and their daughter Nathalie was born the following year, whilst they were living in a hotel room, waiting for access to public housing. In order to mind their daughter, Gilles worked at night whilst Marlène worked during the days.  

Up until this point, Gilles had presented all the characteristics of the sub-group situated in the lower left-hand quadrant of Figure 7 of the previous chapter, mapping the futures of the ‘68ers interviewed. He is male, from a working-class background, a PCF activist, his political opinions were set before ’68, and he was working at the time of the events. But his meeting with Claudine, in 1967, would begin his social and political shift.

1967-1968: romance, social transgression and break from the PCF  
Gilles fell in love with a young upwardly mobile student from a working-class background, who was an activist with the UJCM.

With Claudine, I discovered another kind of love, enriched by the intellectual stimulation that she brought me. [The University of] Nanterre, political radicalism, brilliant friends. It was the first time I had had contact with this kind of people, and I saw discussions between students, between politicised intellectuals […] In the evenings I went to pick her up, but I was just a little prole …

He continued living with his wife and being an activist at the PCF, but had an increasingly distant and critical relationship with the party. Gilles went with Claudine to the Nanterre Campus on 22 March 1968. He went on strike in May, and participated in the general assemblies in his workplace (he was very shy, and fainted the first time he had to speak in public). But he was rapidly requisitioned to manage the emergencies in the Inter-Archives Service. He worked night-shift, went home to look after his daughter in the morning and met Claudine in the Latin Quarter in the afternoon. The “immense happiness” of the “suspended time” that May ’68 represented for him is inextricably linked to his romantic affair – May ’68 was also an opening up of sexual possibilities – and the breakdown in social barriers that he experienced daily in the Latin Quarter:

Claudine was introduced to him through a friend met during military service.
May ‘68!!! We were so in love, Claudine and I, we were participating in something that deeply shook up society!!! [...] It was the little people who came, discussed, talked about their ideas, not just students... I remember young workers, not used to speaking in public, but wanting to.\textsuperscript{28}

When the strike ended, both his salary and Marlène’s went from roughly 800 to 1300 francs, but Gilles was one of those young workers who tried to delay the return to work, and who felt betrayed by the attitude of the PCF (Vigna, 2007):

The Grenelle agreements did not make the activists I knew jump for joy (nor me either), on the contrary, because for us, it meant the end of a movement, and we dreamed of it going so much further. [...] We had tasted our ability to act. There were still a few of us who believed that it was possible to make things change again.

Shortly afterwards, he was transferred to another telephone station, where the attitude of the other communist activists towards him (“they spread the rumour I was gay”) confirmed his break away from the PCF.

\textit{1968-1972 the opening of possibilities becomes concrete in Vincennes}

In September of 1968 Claudine returned to university, and encouraged Gilles to enrol as well. His aspirations of social mobility, reinforced by socially improbable encounters with activists before and during May ‘68 (Vigna and Zancarini-Fournel, 2009), became feasible with the decision to make Vincennes University accessible to those who had not passed the baccaulaureat. Gilles enrolled in law and was an active militant within the GP in Vincennes, whilst still working at the PTT:

At the time, I thought that law would allow me to learn to fight against injustice on a collective level... I put myself in the current of the ideas of the time, halfway between Marxist and anti-authoritarian ideas. I was sure that I didn’t want to become a manager to implement orders, and to be complicit in the exploitation of labour, so returning to study was a way to better construct my theoretical bases... And it was also a centre of active militancy – that’s where it was all happening, where we were preparing the change...

\textsuperscript{28} Extract from an email received 17 August 2008.
Quite quickly Gilles and his fellow law students (many of whom also did not have the *baccalaureat*) demanded scholarships be open to all students, even those without high school qualifications. They then launched themselves into the creation of a bachelor of political science. Some of them were then employed in administrative positions, like Gilles’ best friend, also a student at Vincennes who did not have his *baccalaureat* (and also among the interviewees here), who became a secretary in the sociology department and remained there until his retirement.

For Gilles, the events of May-June ’68 are thus the source of a threefold shift: social (through returning to study and gaining a degree in sociology), political (breaking away from the PCF and moving towards the far-left), and familial. He finally separated from his wife in 1972, the same year that he met Nicole, who “was very involved in the Tunisian protest movement at Vincennes, which I would discover through her,” and with whom he said he “began to think more freely.” Gilles associates the breakdown of his marriage with the opening up of “the imaginable,” and mentions again the rewards of his new union: each new partner thus corresponds to Gilles’ aspirations (cultural, political and social) at the time of their life together, and helped to increase his social capital by introducing him (or facilitating his entry) into the circles he aspired to. These romantic encounters thus played a central role in his trajectory: launching, accompanying or updating his social and political shifts. After the homogamy of his first marriage, his other relationships were characterised instead by hypergamy. 29

Vincennes thus represents a particular space in which the trajectories we have explored in this section intersect:30 Gérard Miller,31 a student and Maoist activist who became an *établī* in a factory regularly saw Gilles at the meetings of the GP. But his idealistic representations of “the people” prevented him seeing Gilles as one of its representatives, even though the latter continued to work at the PTT, in particularly difficult conditions.

I had a good laugh the day that Gérard Miller or André Glucksman32 told me at the GP that I should go be an *établī*! [How did you react?] Oh, well,

29 This term refers to couples that are formed with a person of higher social status or background than oneself.
30 Claude Fossé-Poliak deals with this question of improbable social encounters based on a study of university students without the baccalaureat enrolled at Vincennes in the 1980s (Fossé-Poliak, 1992).
31 Gérard Miller is a psychoanalyst, a University Professor and a film director.
32 André Glucksman was a French writer and activist; he was one of the “new philosophers”.

those great intellectuals and me I'm just a little guy who didn't graduate... I didn't dare burst out laughing! [...] I was never considered like a worker, it's funny... Well I guess, I mostly worked nights so I was often on campus.

Swapped destinies, misrepresentations – did all this lead to mutual misunderstandings? What did these two groups bring to each other? To this question, Gilles answered, “I have the impression that I contributed my youth and my energy and they gave me a quality of thinking that I admired... There were lots of discussions, even though we also operated with slogans, but I learnt an enormous amount.”

These intellectuals were the incarnation of the “culture” to which Gilles aspired, even as they rejected it as bourgeois, and sought to be re-educated by “the masses.” Can we conclude that these encounters were born of misunderstandings? To a certain extent yes, even if only because they responded to expectations and interests that had nothing in common, as Gilles stressed:

Between choosing to live ‘like the people’ and really being the little guys, confronted with the absolute necessity to work to pay for your food, your children’s food, housing etc. there was a fundamental difference that it was very difficult to talk about.

Another interviewee, Pierre, has a darker perspective on this. He was the son of working-class parents whose union responsibilities at the CGT brought him into contact with the students of the Union of Communist Students (UEC) in the Ecole Normale Supérieure, shortly before 1968:

I was like their mascot you know (he laughs), I don't know if you have read Rotman's book Génération, but at one point they talk about a turner from Rue d’Ulm [the street of the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure], well that was me! Some say everyone has their token Jew, their priest, I was their token worker! [...] What was important was to have been involved in these movements, the education, the exchanges, the ideas all stayed with me... but the people no... I didn't keep in touch... I have to say that intellectuals are so egotistical [...] We clutched at the dust from under their shoes, but they didn't remember which mat they'd wiped their feet on...33

Although often ephemeral, these encounters opened doors and legitimised aspirations hitherto considered heretical in previous social networks. They

33 Extract from an interview conducted on 8 March 2008.
functioned as objective evidence of the perpetuation of the breakdown in social barriers to which both groups aspired in May-June ’68. The existence of activist spaces like the GP in Vincennes, in the political context after May ’68 made these socially improbable encounters possible. Moreover, the connections between the world of the workers and the students, widely fantasized during the events of May-Jun ’68, found the objective conditions for concretization in this space. The University of Vincennes therefore functioned, for a time, as a site for the possible synthesis of activism, university studies and professional activities.34

For the period between 1969 and 1972, Gilles thus joined the “political leftism” sub-group in Figure 7, in the south of the factorial plane (see Chapter 3). In the years that followed, he continued his movement across the plane, and eventually reached the “countercultural leftism” sub-group on the right.

1973-1981: conversion to leftist counterculture

The context that devalued far-left groups, as well as the development of political environmentalist groups led to a radical redirection in Gilles’ activism. Still a student at Vincennes (now in sociology) and still working at the PTT, he said:

Maoism began to regress, the GP decayed... and I changed lovers, so my centres of interest changed to... at that time there were more anti-authoritarian and environmentalist movements emerging and they seemed closer to my ideas. With the Women’s Liberation Movement (MLF) that I’m extremely close to ... and our shattered hope for the proletarian revolution led us to see things in a different light.

He met his new partner, Joëlle, in 1974; she was an anti-authoritarian, feminist environmentalist, and with her, Gilles converted his dispositions for activism into countercultural leftism. For a time, he dreamed of going “back-to-the-land” and even obtained a vocational certificate in repairing agricultural machinery. These aspirations must be seen in light of the increasingly untenable mismatch between his work at the PTT and his extra-professional activities (activist, academic or amorous), as well as the political context in the field of activism in the mid-1970s.

After seventeen years at the PTT, and now quite unsuited to his position, Gilles resigned in 1977. Once again it was a new romantic encounter that provoked his professional shift. Gilles became a community youth worker,

34 Roberte, a feminist activist from the alternative crèche at Vincennes, became a crèche employee when it was institutionalised in 1972, before being appointed to the university cleaning service when the crèche was closed.
a profession that was typical of those that were redefined over the course of the 1970s due to the importation of dispositions for activism (Muel-Dreyfus, 1983). He quit after one year to explore a broader palette of activities, with a different romantic partner at each stage. Retrospectively, he has difficulty accepting certain biographical phases which he only discussed with me after several exchanges of emails:

After a period of unemployment, I decided to make the most of the benefits awarded to the unemployed to enrol at the chamber of commerce as a travelling salesman. I sold oysters, and then jewellery, I had a crêpe restaurant for the summer of 1981. We were in this period that was drowning in “liberal” ideology (the “Long live the crisis!” of Libé and Montand)\(^3\) and, I think, because I was alone (that’s the only excuse I can think of) I was partly involved in that.\(^4\)

At the end of the 1970s, as the alternative movements were running out of steam, and separated from his former social networks, Gilles was tempted by the quest for individual salvation and internal exile.\(^5\) By accepting to discuss the hesitant steps that marked his trajectory between 1977 and 1981, Gilles provided a wealth of material in which we can see the hesitations, incoherencies, adjustments and adaptations that characterise the processes of renegotiating one’s identity at the critical moment of political disengagement and social reintegration. This key moment occurs in many of the different trajectories of the ‘68ers interviewed here.

A class migrant, professor of social sciences

The political context was again decisive for the next phase of his trajectory. Gilles benefited from the wave of teaching assistant appointments after the election of François Mitterrand. In December 1981 he became a high school French teacher. He returned to his studies in sociology once again and met Nanou, a teacher at a vocational high school. He graduated with an

\(^3\) He is referring to the television show “Vive la Crise”, presented by left-wing singer/actor Yves Montand, on February 22 1984, which focused on the neoliberal aspect of the then economic crisis. Libération (Libé), ran a front-page story with the same headline the following day.

\(^4\) Here we can see the great advantage of being able to see the interviewees again (or correspond with them). Without these email exchanges that followed our first interview I would not have been able to deconstruct the apparent coherence of the trajectory of an employee who did not graduate from high school, who returned to study to become a teacher.

\(^5\) Gilles confessed to me, just as I was writing up the thesis (in an email of 17 April 2009) that during this period he “drank a fair bit”.

Honours degree in 1983, joined the union and was appointed to a position as assistant teacher in social and economic sciences in 1985. His son Julien was born the following year. Gilles passed the CAPES teaching exam in the mid-1990s, went through further marital problems, and asked to be transferred to Brittany in 1996. Shortly afterwards, he met his current partner, who is a librarian.

Gilles has been involved in the union since he became a teacher, and has continued to vote for far-left parties in the first round of the elections (sometimes alternating with a vote for the Greens). He continues to go to demonstrations regularly and perseveres in his hope for radical change: “After 1968, I always thought that we had sowed a seed that would sprout one day. I’m beginning to find the latency period a bit long, but I still think that capitalism is the worst operating method, both for people and the planet.”

Although the conditions that made Gilles’ exceptional social mobility possible are to be found before May ’68 (his early love of reading, his frustrated goal of becoming a teacher, his activism and the PCF schools, meeting Claudine), these events nevertheless served to legitimise his cultural aspirations, which he had previously experienced as a form of stigma (his work colleagues considered him strange because he did not share their musical, sporting and literary tastes). May ’68 essentially enlarged the realm of possibilities for Gilles, subjectively at least (it added “the hope that it would be possible”). The University of Vincennes accepting students who did not have the *baccalaureat* provided the objective conditions to make this possible: the breakdown in social barriers and the encounters between intellectuals and workers were actually brought about in this environment. Considered “atypical” among his work colleagues at the PTT, not recognised as a worker in the GP at Vincennes, and considered as a “pseudo-student” by some of the university professors, Gilles shares the same relative social indetermination that characterised Paul and Colette. The experience of class transgression finally left its mark on Gilles’ marital trajectory, punctuated by numerous separations and alliances that are far from anecdotal. Indeed Gilles’ successive partners were from increasingly higher social backgrounds, which facilitated and accompanied his upward social mobility. Male hypergamy and class transgression through conjugal alliances\(^{38}\) can thus be analysed as a biographical consequence of the breakdown in social barriers.

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\(^{38}\) Indeed, female hypergamy (when a woman is in a relationship with a man of a higher social status than herself) is characteristic of most couples. Male hypergamy is on the other hand typical of upwardly mobile social trajectories.
Socially improbable encounters “overlooked”

The detailed analysis of Paul, Colette and Gilles’ trajectories allows us to contribute to the history of how the social barriers between the worlds of students and workers were breached during and after May ’68, which is often overlooked in the memory of these events. Several hypotheses can be put forward to account for this neglect. The ephemeral nature of these encounters is the most important; the fact that they may have led to contempt, resentment and disenchantment is another. Perhaps – or above all – we must seek the explanation in what their deadlocks made it difficult for the protagonists to accept: the dose of illusion and idealisation that fed their intersecting representations of “intellectuals” and “the people.” It appears that grief over the illusions invested in these experiences of breaking down barriers became a screen to their “rehabilitation” in memory. It is as though the entrepreneurs of the “official” memory of May ’68 (Sommier, 1994) were more interested in discrediting these encounters as errors of youth, or even excluding them from the trajectories of ’68ers, which they (re)construct to their advantage, rather than recognising the hopes and the illusions that then underpinned these representations of the world.39

Although they were ephemeral and statistically rare, these encounters were decisive for the different protagonists, to the extent that they were veritable catalysts for shifts (social, professional and conjugal) that were often permanent. Of course, the workers who came into contact with Maoist activists were not just any workers, and the social mobility that these meetings induced was preceded by pre-existing aspirations. The post-’68 conjuncture thus made it possible to create atypical forms of intellectual sociability and localized experiences of social transgression – through the étaubli movement on one hand, and through the University of Vincennes opening access to non-high school graduates on the other.

This social weightlessness, which is visible in the difficulty in finding one’s own place in the social world is undoubtedly one of the main consequences of prolonged experiences of social transgression, as Gilles puts it:

I avoid asking myself [about my social position] (he laughs) [...] no, I have a capacity for reflection... I feel exploited as a prole, as an employee but

39 Whereas, as Bernard Pudal put it so elegantly, “the populist illusions of a whole generation of intellectuals is worth the disillusioned cynicism of those who, having returned without ever having left, have learnt nothing.” (Pudal, 1991, p. 58).
able to talk about things... with you for example... And of course, social classification is difficult and artificial, you know that as well as I do!40

As the incarnation of social deregulation at the individual level (or even conjugal level, through heterogamy), in a way, these social migrants have perpetuated the opening of biographical possibilities that they experienced in May '68, and have made their trajectories an instrument for the symbolic manipulation of the future. Of course, the comparative destinies that we have looked at here, beginning on two opposite poles of the social space, have not completely converged. But they have come closer, due to the biographical consequences of activism and in particular the experiences of breaking down social barriers (leading to upward social mobility for some, downward for others).

Other sectors of the social world also became havens for socially mobile individuals (upward and downward) in the 1970s, particularly around the (re)invention of "new petit-bourgeois professions" (Bourdieu, 1978). The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to one of these professions: community workers.

Activism through popular education

Whereas for some, moving into professional activity meant the end of activism, for others, “the choice of profession can also stem from – and that is a different explicative logic – a realistic arbitration regarding the possibilities of making a difference in a world more resistant that it initially seemed, in order to change it” (Neveu, 2008, p. 313). Several collective profiles of former-'68ers make up the sub-group that are activists through their professions. In this group we find former leftist that have become primary teachers, who fight against the mechanisms of social reproduction through subversive education practices.41 It also includes feminists who moved into professions related to the condition of women;42 interviewees who converted their

40 Why Gilles found an interest in writing more than 40 pages, some of them quite intimate, in answer to the questions of a young sociologist, begs further consideration. Suffice to say that this interest reflects once again his pleasure in intellectual exchanges with women of high cultural capital.

41 This profile (presented in detail in the thesis) is particularly characteristic of the teachers in experimental schools interviewed, like Gégé (Pagis, 2008).

42 Such as Annick, born in 1949, the daughter of socialist teachers, who extended her feminist action into her profession as a “militant” midwife and through her participation in numerous associations to advance the cause of women, legal abortions, and infant and maternal health.
interests for “the people” into a professional interest for the working classes. In exploring the impact that these people had on community professions and vice versa (as well as on the social sciences, see Box 4 at the end of this chapter), we will analyse the room for manoeuvre between the interviewees’ roles and their positions. This will reveal various attitudes towards those roles: conformity, detachment, or militancy (Lagroye, 1997).

In order to do this, our analysis will focus on the trajectories of François (born in 1945) and Louis (born in 1947), who were both active in the community sector in Nantes in the 1970s. The convergence in their paths at this time is all the more interesting to analyse given that nothing predisposed them – whether in terms of social origin or their specific entries into their careers – to meet, become colleagues, and finally to become friends.

François, revolution through popular education

François was born in 1945 in Morocco, where his father was stationed as a soldier. He did not know his mother and was raised by his paternal grandmother in Algeria, where his father was transferred to a position as a public servant. He went to a Jesuit primary school, then to a Catholic high school in Algiers, obtaining his high school diploma at age 16. Close to the FLN he was forced to leave Algeria in January 1962, after having run-ins with the police and OAS militants. Following his father’s wishes, he then entered the air force school at Salon-de-Provence to become a pilot. But after obtaining a diploma as an electronics technician, he was dismissed for “inaptitude for military discipline.” This was in 1966 and François “went on the road, as a beatnik,”43 with some actor friends. He grew his hair long, made jewellery and leather bags and lived surrounded by artists. After a year of itinerant bohemian life, he enrolled in psychology at the University of Toulouse in 1967. There, he became close to a group of anarchists, children of Spanish republican emigrants. From February 1968, there was significant agitation on campus and François’ activism rapidly became his main activity.

François invested the events of May ’68 with a range of interests: his virile and anti-militarist dispositions were activated in confrontations with the police and aggressive workerism (with the Trotskyist JCR but also the Marie’s trajectory, mentioned in Chapter 2, is also emblematic of this form of professional conversion of feminism. By becoming a marriage counsellor, Marie contributed to the invention of a profession adapted to the new political aspirations (stemming from May ’68) of these young graduates from the middle classes.

43 The quotations from François used in this section come from the interview conducted with him in Nantes, on 5 May 2005, at the neighbourhood house that he runs.
workers union CGT), his anti-institutional mood was expressed through drugs and the counterculture, and his cultivated abilities were put at the service of study groups (close to the anarchists) on theatre and revolutions. He did not sit his exams in 1968; for a few months he frequented the circles of militant graphic novelists in Toulouse, before returning to the road again with a friend. Fuelled by LSD and in search of alternatives to a “system” they rejected, the two friends planned to travel to India. But François’ journey ended in Nantes where he met his future wife, Monique, who was a maternity assistant in the hospital there:

there I met the most beautiful woman in the world (he laughed)! The mother of my children... so I didn’t go, and it was the right thing to do because my pal came back like that (he gestures to indicate thinness) completely stoned, hooked... have to say, at the time we really went at it, drugs, good music too... everything that was part of our search for a different life, a better life. We didn’t really know where we were going, but we tried to reset everything and start again differently.

He moved in with Monique, continued to make a meagre living from selling jewellery, rejected the idea of being an employee or participating in elections, and withdrew somewhat, waiting for something to give meaning to his existence. This came with the birth of his daughter, Fleur, in 1971, which provoked new residential and professional stability, and led to a reinvestment in activism:

In 1969-1970, politically I did nothing, it was a bit of a low point, I may have had a bit too much of stuff you shouldn't... and when my daughter was born and we went to Malakoff, then I got involved again, there was nothing in that neighbourhood!

François began to take on casual work as an electrician, to contribute to the material needs of his daughter and Monique’s son. They moved into a state subsidised flat in the working-class neighbourhood of Malakoff, and the lack of sociocultural structures in the area provided François with a new meaning
for his life – “revolution through popular education.” He joined an association that aimed to open a community centre in Malakoff, before joining the PCF, the main militant structure in the neighbourhood: “I didn't really know what I wanted to do professionally, so I looked after the children, whilst being an activist, I was a permanent member of the association, but not employed, and I did that day and night […] I looked for people who were active and their political affiliations didn’t concern me much, as long as they were working towards the same goals as me and they were really active on the ground…”

His precarious material situation (his family essentially survived on Monique’s salary as a maternity assistant) and his lack of clear professional perspectives, contributed to his gradual shift from a militant attitude towards community action, to a more professional involvement. His meeting with Louis also contributed to this evolution.

**Louis: community work through formal qualifications**

Louis was born in 1947 in Brittany, in a working-class Communist family. His father was a railway worker, an activist in the PCF (until the events in Hungary), and a unionist with the CGT. His mother, a shopkeeper’s daughter, was working as a waitress when she met his father. Their three children were brought up Catholic (although their parents were not practicing), and grew up in an environment where political discussions were an everyday event. Louis thus developed a left-wing political conscience in the cradle, so to speak, but did not engage in his own political activities before 1968. In spite of his good results at school, he was expelled many times for lack of discipline, and repeated several years. In 1967-1968 Louis was twenty years old and in his final year of secondary school.

In May ’68 he was involved in occupying his lycée in Rennes. This active participation was the source of a socialisation by awareness raising:

> I felt like I was a part of a great movement, and we felt like it was led by people who had more experience, more practice, so there was a constructive side to it that was interesting […] At the time we were experiencing it, it was all parties and jubilation, organisation everywhere, general assemblies, so many speeches – we didn’t even understand everything – but we took it all in fast. It was very enriching. Today there are things that I use in my work that I tested and discovered during that period! The experience of direct democracy and especially as it had reached an extent that no one had seen coming, well we

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46 A phrase taken from his questionnaire but which he used several times during our discussion.
realised that we had real power! [...] It was a realisation of so many things all at once, through collective analysis, general assemblies, discussions...

The consequences of activism in May ’68 are all the more important for Louis because he was not yet engaged in higher education. He was thus faced with a wide range of biographical possibilities:

In September 1968, I had to do something... I'd been an organiser in a community centre for a few years, and I'd met people I knew were close to the PCF, but they were more social activists than political activists [...] I enjoyed working as a community leader, and in the wake of May ’68 the vocational course “Social Careers” was set up in Rennes, mostly by Communist teachers, so I was among the first graduates.

Louis had developed a taste for sociocultural work before 1968, a militant occupation that he pursued alongside his studies at secondary school. But the events of May-June 1968 reinforced and politicised his aspirations to be involved with the working classes. The creation of specific qualifications established the possibility of making a living from this activity, previously considered simply as a volunteer occupation (Lebon, 2003).

Following a similar process to that of Francine Muel-Dreyfus for community organisers (Muel-Dreyfus, 1983), the importation of militant aspirations and dispositions into the professional sphere of community work, in the context of the institutionalisation of the community sector, had a significant impact on the role of community organisers in the 1970s.

1972: The confrontation between militant approaches to community work and official qualifications

Louis became a community worker after validating his vocational diploma in “Social Careers,” through an internship at the Youth and Cultural Centre in Colombes. He returned to Nantes to work in 1972, to be closer to his partner. The extracts below compare the way that François and Louis remember their encounter in the neighbourhood of Malakoff in 1972. The different ways they recount this experience reflect the contrasting sources of their interest for professional community work:
François
Louis, at the beginning I was his boss \textit{(he laughs)} and then we became colleagues… I also owe him a lot professionally…

\textit{[But why were you his boss?] }I was the president of the association that asked for the construction of equipment and for the appointment of a community worker to begin the action and to set up the community centre, and that’s how we got Louis to come… in 1972 I think.

\textit{[And you were not an employee at the time?] }No, I was an organiser not an employee, but I did only that, activism. [...] I became involved with the Francas [...] because I wanted to be a community worker. I wasn’t one at the time, \textit{I had a knack for it but not the training}. So I became the director of a youth centre that we set up at Malakoff, at the same time as I was president of the association for a community centre. And so I had to get some training and at the time the qualification really was a diploma in popular education [...] and so I was trained and became a trainer at the Francas.47

Louis
I arrived in Nantes in 1972, it was during the big development of community centres… which were a work environment that totally fitted with my more social aspirations. \textit{I wanted to be able to extend what I had experienced in terms of individual involvement in my neighbourhood in 1968 into my profession. [...] }I think that François would say the same thing, but he had a different background, but all the same it was when I arrived as community worker in Malakoff that he pulled his socks up and became a community worker too. [...] I began my profession in Malakoff, where we had to mobilise people, convince them, organise them, and he very quickly became involved, first as a volunteer and then, when we had organised the role and the voice of the inhabitants within the centre, then he became one of the leaders. And it was only after that that he worked as a youth worker and then the structure he was working for suggested he become a permanent worker and paid his training as part of the job. And \textit{at that point we became colleagues}. It took a few years...

47 The Francas, also known as the FFC (The Frank Comrades) relied on a network that was already in place (including the secular scouting movement, the youth hostel movement, the Ligue de l’enseignement, and other movements in favour of alternative democratic education), drawing on working-class teachers. This movement had ties to the left (the radical socialist party and communist party) and was often also linked to the public sector. (Lebon, 2003, p. 14).
Francois claims to be the activist genitor of the community centre in Malakoff and explains that he “got [a community worker] to come” (Louis in this instance) for political reasons, whereas Louis considers that he coordinated the creation of the centre and therefore enabled François to become a professional in that context. Their comments underline the combats and issues surrounding the definition of a still poorly delimited sector; at the crossroads between activism and employment, between professional and volunteer work, between political and social activities, on the cusp of popular education and community work. By specifying that François “didn't have the same background” as him, Louis underlines the different sources of their interest in community work, which nevertheless led them to the same working-class neighbourhood in Nantes.

Thus, in 1972, and the date is significant, the “activist” – older, more bourgeois, with little training (“I had the knack but not the training”) – met the young professional community worker – a recent graduate from a working-class background moving up in the social world. This is a feature of community work; like other ambiguous professions, it is ideal for saving “unqualified ‘inheritors’ from downclassing, and to provide ‘parvenus’ with an approximate pay-off for their devalued titles” (Bourdieu [1979] trans. 1984 p. 150). The comparison of François and Louis’ perspectives thus sheds lights on the two prime registers (professional and militant) of legitimacy of community workers, which incarnate distinct, but non-exclusive, ways of “occupying the position.” The fact that François followed a training program within the Francas between 1972 and 1974, also emphasises the need for social reintegration and the desire to distinguish oneself from amateurs:48 “it really was a diploma in popular education,” he insists.

1975-1983: the golden days of the popular education revolution

Like the humanitarian sector in the 1970s, the community sector functioned as a “market for self-realisation” (Dauvin and Siméant, 2002, p. 74). It constituted a space for the reconfiguration of social and political identities, and provided possibilities for the honourable conversion of activist resources accumulated during May ’68 and in the years that followed. Its novelty, and the fact that it was not yet very institutionalised, allowed François to find his vocation whilst still considering himself an activist (the symbolic

48 The same processes of devaluing amateurism have been observed in the professionalization of unionism (Guillaume and Pochic, 2009, p. 554)
aspect of reintegration), and still obtaining social reintegration (both professionally and materially). Re-establishing himself socially after a period of marginalisation, in a context of significant devaluing of far-left activism, and increasing appreciation of local and “concrete” actions, prevented François’ downward trajectory and awarded him a degree of social recognition. For François:

popular education was one of the best ways to take power, with a smile. It was transforming society through action. I thought, and I still believe, that it is through the development of popular education, culture, that it happens, and not anything else. It’s access to knowledge that creates the conditions. And you can see it clearly, because they want to send fourteen-year-olds off to work again, without teaching them anything.49

Moreover, François seems to have found a certain form of notability in the neighbourhood of Malakoff, a symbolic capital that contributed to his social reintegration:

In Malakoff, we were the soldiers of the Republic, along the lines of the village teacher historically. People stopped us in the street – ‘hey, you’ll see my kid Wednesday, right? And for the summer camp, I haven’t had time to enrol him, but he’s coming ok?!’ I went to people’s houses to fill out forms... And when I sold Humanité Dimanche50 I could have sold two thousand if I’d had the time, there wasn’t a parent who didn’t take one! (he laughs) They didn’t take it because they were party sympathisers, but because it was François. It was village life... a wonderful neighbourhood!

It was as though in this working-class neighbourhood François found the power and the hold on reality to which his social aspirations and his activist background gave him access, but which were otherwise denied by his lack of qualifications and the objective conditions of the labour market.

Louis and François worked together every day from 1972, became friends and even went on family holidays together. In 1974, they participated in the creation of the experimental school Ange-Guépin.51 Together, they oversaw

49 François is referring to a political proposal to lower the legal working age to fourteen, which was being debated at the time of the interview (February 2005), and against which he had demonstrated not long before.
50 Humanité Dimanche is the Sunday newspaper put out by the Communist party.
51 Part of the population of the study is made up of families who sent their children to this school in the 1970s and 1980s.
the recruitment and training programme for the first teaching staff at the open school, and trained the first teachers in active pedagogy. The two friends attempted to open a youth centre associated with the school but the project was never completed. Louis explains,

We positioned ourselves, Francois and I as co-educators, and we wanted to find our place in the school and ensure coherence between the different educative spheres: during school and after school. And well, we never succeeded... The teachers were not opposed to it but they put it off... And there was never really any involvement of the cultural centre in the school... But as parents, yes, we had our place.

The notion of adult “co-educators” mobilised here by Louis, is also used more generally by the teachers of both schools, Ange-Guépin and Vitruve, as well as in the militant texts that challenged the school as an institution at the beginning of the 1970s. The rejection of a vertical pedagogic relationship that socialises the students to relations of authority and hierarchy led them to experiment with new roles for educators. The roles of children, teachers, community workers, and parents were thus redefined around the notion of co-educators. The scheme of the conversion of dispositions for protest into the critique of traditional pedagogical relations is thus characteristic of these activist community workers, as well as most of the teachers interviewed, who participated in redefining the forms of youth and community work during the 1970s (Chamboderon and Prévot, 1973, p. 317).

From 1972 to 1981 the militant and professional spheres of these two interviewees were thus one and the same. They were involved in various projects relating to popular education, including pedagogical experiment at Ange-Guépin, and were members of numerous neighbourhood groups. Louis thus expresses the feeling of “extending May ’68 every day at work,” by participating in the improvement of living conditions in working-class neighbourhoods. Alongside these engagements, François and Louis also participated in the anti-nuclear movement in Brittany, as well as the movement in Larzac. Yet they remained outside the canonical forms of counter cultural leftism of the time, such as communal living, back-to-the-land movements, and the challenge to the family as an institution. In response to the question of whether these experiences affected them, François and Louis responded:
François

“No, that wasn’t my thing... I was about action for transforming society [...] Maximum autonomy, creating responsible citizens... the slogan of the Francas was: the freest child possible in the most democratic society possible. That works through education and that was a motto I adopted [...] I made the decision to try to push things forward from the inside rather than reinventing everything like others tried to do.”

Louis

“No, that notion of back-to-the-land, I never felt it in my environment, even though I knew it existed... and well, you act in accordance with your thoughts and for me, that was – improving living conditions, eradicating a certain number of anomalies, but more to wipe out injustices...”

These comments underline the relative impermeability between the forms of post-'68 conversion that consisted, on one hand, in being an “activist through one’s profession,” and on the other adopting various communitarian utopias. This confirms the results of the factorial analysis we saw in the previous chapter. The belief in the political usefulness of a social action directed locally at people in difficulty, shared by actors that are also searching for a place in society, in order to transform it through their profession (population situated in the lower quadrants of the factorial plane), is indeed clearly opposed to the logic of withdrawing into the margins and rejecting the “system” (population situated at the right-hand side of the plane, analysed in the following chapter). These distinct forms of post-1968 conversion reflect social differences as well as differences in gender, age or forms of participation in the events of May-June ’68. Here, at the beginning of the 1970s, the community sector provided François and Louis – who were both married to women from working-class backgrounds and had children to provide for – the possibility of continuing their militant commitment through the (re)invention of pedagogic action outside the school system.

1980s: professionalization and disenchantment

In 1981 François left Malakoff and moved to a more spacious home in a publicly subsidised low-rent estate (HLM) in a much less disadvantaged neighbourhood in central Nantes. “Louis stayed longer than I did in Malakoff... [Why did you leave?] I’d just had enough really... dog shit in the elevator... that was enough. I needed some air... I left Malakoff in 1981 [...]
I went to another HLM, we had a wonderful 5-room apartment, 120 square meters, for two thousand francs [300euro] a month."

What had been an important part of François’ militant approach – living with the working classes – had become a genuine burden ten years later. Indeed, the symbolic gratification associated with life in a HLM (positive associations with the activist and militant dimension, and local notability) gradually faded with the increasing professionalization of the community sector. In other words, the positive returns associated with militant action progressively disappeared with the professionalization of this sector, previously governed by logics of activism. François then worked as a community organiser in a neighbourhood house and kept in contact with Louis. They both had a difficult time during the 1980s, in particular due to the election of a new Mayor at the municipal elections of 1983. Michel Chautry, the newly elected right-wing Mayor, performed a radical restructuring of the community sector:

François
“I was completely side-lined because I'd been a manager in the previous association, and I was the union representative, so when the right came in they wanted us out, they didn't succeed, and I was put in a cupboard somewhere for three years, and during that time I went and got a degree in management, just for the fun of it.”

Louis
“When the right came in in 1983 there was a desire to get control of things, because community work is always potentially dangerous, it can spark movements etc. Their argument was, we subsidise the associations, and then they openly call people to vote against us – which is clear at least! They couldn’t fire me but my hands were tied...”

For both François and Louis, the 1980s were therefore a period of disenchantment. The professionalization of community work, and the new control of the sector by a right-wing municipality, as well as a national movement towards the rationalisation of the position of community workers all led to the brutal de-legitimisation of the militant attitudes towards their work that they had constructed over the years. François and Louis therefore lost the flexibility and the power to innovate and create that had made them so enchanted with this occupation in the first place. Now in their forties, their desire to change the world through their occupation began to falter, when faced with ongoing inequalities. They had to face up to the reality that the “revolution through popular education” had not taken place.
In addition to this, there was a certain backlash against the activism of previous years. What had been the main attraction of these professions in the 1970s, now led to fatigue, insecurity and sometimes conjugal separations. As François says,

I’m still a unionist, but I’m not a card-carrying a member any more… [because of political disagreements?] No… no… just fatigue you know. Lots of fatigue... We gave it everything. I probably even gave it bits of my kids… I spent my divorce there, because that was also linked to that, to my commitments, my job where I didn’t count the hours I worked… It wasn’t only that of course, I’m not looking for excuses, but you have almost no family life, outside of holidays, even on weekends. On Saturday I worked all day, there were often meetings at night.

François divorced at the end of the 1980s. Overinvestment in activism and in his profession also produced tensions in Louis’ relationship; both he and his wife had had other partners for several years when they finally separated in the early 1990s.

The 1990s: re-enchantment and professional evolution

The left-wing victory in the 1989 municipal elections, with a programme in which the “quartiers,” particularly working-class neighbourhoods, were among the priorities of the new mayor, Jean-Marc Ayrault, led to increased prestige for the social and community sector. François was appointed the director of a neighbourhood house and rediscovered the flexibility and recognition that he had previously lost in his work. Louis came out of “hiding” (he had been working for some years in the office of family services) and was promoted to the position of technical advisor to community centres.

At the beginning of the ‘90s, in Malakoff, it was an election evening, the FN had won 20%, I was in the counting room and people were saying – ‘how can that be possible, what can we do?’ We were looking for concrete ways to prevent people rejecting each other, being afraid of other people, and so that’s how the idea of having intercultural celebrations was born, which I suggested. The first one was at Malakoff, it was ‘Mala-colour’. We had substantial support from the council; the representative was there all day. That led to other projects, we started to innovate... Even me, who hates football, I became president of the football club – there wasn’t one anymore and the kids were dying for it, so I did it, that’s my militant side!
The local political context is thus clearly essential in the perpetuation (or not) of the activist dimension of community work. François and Louis finally succeeded in maintaining (not without difficulty) a social position that, eventually, reinforced their belief in the political usefulness of their profession. François therefore explained his satisfaction in demonstrating alongside the young people he works with:

That was nice because they were so many young people: the local lycée had all come out for the demonstration, we worked with them so I saw heaps of kids I knew from here, who played music, so I was happy to see them there, in the front rows, among the activists, those who are really involved, it makes you feel good, you know! [You felt like you had succeeded at something?] Yeah, our job is not to tell them what to do, but there is a side to it, like ‘get involved, take a side, don’t let them get away with it [...]’ that’s what I said to the kids at the demo on Saturday, a bit like an old soldier’s speech: what do you have in your bag? Two or three beers? And where are your Molotov cocktails? (he laughs) You don’t think it’s time to get them out? (he laughs) Well, from my perspective, that’s where we are [...] we need a big movement to get going, because we are moving towards a fascist society...

Today, François and Louis continue to demonstrate regularly, they vote PCF and far-left respectively for the first round of presidential elections, and they both voted no to the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty. But they do admit a certain fatigue. François says:

I’m nearly retired and in fact, I have two choices. There are people who were communist activists at Malakoff who are today local representatives at Rezé, with Communist tendencies, who want to get out and who are looking for people take their place, in the same vein. So I’m hesitating between that, because that would mean accepting responsibilities, being on the other side – and then saying, I’ve had enough, seeing people are as stupid as they are, I’m not going to spend more than 40 years of my life to get there, that situation of gigantic egos... I don’t get depressed because I act, you know, but it does get tiring [...] I think I’ll go and buy myself a little holiday house in Corsica and that’s it, because right now, I’m tired!

François Lebon has specified on this point that community work is one of the sectors people wish to leave the most. We may conclude that this fatigue is even stronger and more difficult for François to bear because his trajectory has been marked by downward social mobility over several generations, whilst Louis’ is marked by – relatively – upward social mobility through community work.
The renegotiation of past political identities and the conversion of dispositions for protest into the sector of popular education therefore occurs progressively and continually over the years. If the activist dimension of this profession was dominant at the beginning of the 1970s, the job also had an impact on François and Louis, who became trapped in the stakes and plays of the community sector which became progressively institutionalised in the 1980s. The reduction of their room for manoeuvre within their positions was accompanied by a material and social stability for the two interviewees, but also by a certain disenchantment. Even though, their dispositions for activism eventually wore out over time, their political convictions were in fact sharpened. The conditions necessary for maintaining (or even reinforcing) radical political opinions are indeed combined in this collective profile of post-’68 trajectories. Being face-to-face with unrelenting social inequalities in one’s everyday professional life, contributes to the hope of large-scale social change, in spite of (or perhaps because of) fatigue.

Box 5  From Marx to Bourdieu, professional conversions into social science research

Certain interviewees correspond to the profile developed here concerning professional conversion into social sciences research, but this textbox focuses primarily on the trajectories and the (partially) autobiographical studies of well-known researchers including Luc Boltanski, Dominique Damamme, Marnix Dressen, Claude Fossé-Poliak, Daniel Gaxie, Luis Gruel, Isaac Joseph, Bernard Lacroix, Robert Linhart, Gérard Mauger, Erik Neveu, Gérard Noiriel, Bernard Pudal and Michèle Zancarini-Fournel. This is a heterogenous group (in terms of social origin, age, forms of participation in May ’68 and paths of entry in to the academic sphere), and it has not been subject to a specific study. What follows should therefore be read as a simple presentation of hypotheses regarding the conversion of militant interest in politics, into academic and specialized interests in politics.

These researchers belong to cohorts born between 1940 and 1948 and many of them come from working-class backgrounds. Part of the first wave of expansion in access to education, they were led – through their trajectories as

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53 This is true for Jacques in particular, who became an anthropologist and whose trajectory prior to May ’68 is discussed in Chapter 1. It is also true for Daniel K. who is a university professor of sociology.

54 The list is not exhaustive, and we can reasonably assume that the patterns for the conversion of dispositions for social criticism are partially generalisable to many researchers who worked with and around Pierre Bourdieu in the 1970s and 1980s.

55 This section owes much to Pudal’s very stimulating work (1991).
first-generation intellectuals – to become politically active (in the PCF or on the far-left) in the 1960s,56 while they were studying at university. After a period of student activism with UNEF and/or the UEC, some of these apprentice intellectuals were drawn towards Maoism. Joining the UJCml meant adopting part of the symbolic capital attached to the figure of Althusser, becoming members of the community of the intellectual students of the Ecole Normale Supérieure. This offer of salvation goods owes its strength to the juxtaposition between this theoretical elitism and populist practice. Mao's writings provided these students – who themselves came “from the people” – with a justification for their existence, through the role of the intellectual at the service of the “masses,” and this helped them become reconciled with themselves. We find similar attempts to “reconcile the irreconcilable” among the communist intellectuals studied by Bernard Pudal: “By representing the ‘working class’ on the political scene, are they not in fact participating in both worlds? And are they not justified in representing it precisely because of this faithful infidelity?” (Pudal, 1989, p. 133). Familiarity with the working classes linked to their social background, became a resource for those who called for intellectuals to “get down off their horse[s]” and “go among the masses.”57 They therefore found the opportunity to convert a relative social indignity into symbolic capital, whilst the events of May ’68 came to confirm the justification of their revolt (the slogan on the cover of the journal of the UJCml was: “Marx's theory is all powerful because it is true”).

However, having found (in Marx particularly), writings that “revealed” themselves – in the words of one interviewee – by giving meaning to their revolt, and having dedicated years to waiting for a revolution that did not come and in so doing forming an “imaginary people” (Bourdieu, 1982), these young activist intellectuals experienced a collective situation of doubt in the 1970s. Faced with the waning of Marxism in the intellectual field, they found themselves temporarily lacking answers (or at least doubting them), to the existential question of the meaning to give to their position and their role as intellectuals. This new period would be one of disengagement from activism, and social reintegration. They now had to tackle the “work of mourning” (Pudal, 1991, p. 58) for an idealised people, “to the extent that declaring oneself a Marxist was a declaration of faith […], extracting oneself, also involved a feeling of turning one’s back on oneself, scientifically and politically” (Mauger, 2006, p. 19). For many of these (future) researchers, the discovery of the work of Pierre Bourdieu therefore accompanied the shift in their investment: from

56 See Chapter 1: “Upward social mobility and politicisation.”
57 Mao Zedong see note 196 above.
activist investigation to scientific investigation, from activism to the study of collective action, from militant interest in “the people” to academic interest in the working classes. Bourdieu’s theory of domination and symbolic violence therefore operated as a veritable sociodicy of their disillusions. Moreover, it provided them with a new reason for their existence and new tools with which to continue their challenge to the social order. Gérard Noiriel therefore describes the re-enchantment provoked by his discovery of Bourdieu’s and Foucault’s work at the critical moment of disengagement (he was forced to resign from the PCF in 1980): “these authors gave me another solution to persevere in my desire for truth, without abandoning my concern to be of use to the most disadvantaged” (Noiriel, 2003, p. 269). Bernard Lacroix, for his part, discussed the failure of the communitarian phenomena at the turn of the 1980s. He describes the Bourdieusian approach that he adopted as a “pilgrimage of disenchantment if ever there was one, but which saves – or at least we want to believe it does – the gift of lucidity.” (Lacroix, 1981, p. 17).

This is thus a collective profile of ‘68ers who, after having pursued activist investigations, moved into the social sciences to practice scientific investigation. Pudal left the PCF for good in 1977 and “progressively transformed [his] interest in politics into an interest in the history of communism” by undertaking a PhD on the French Communist Party. Jacques, who joined the national research council (CNRS) in 1966 before becoming one of the leaders of the UJCml, intensified his work as a researcher as his political involvement faded and turned towards themes linked to the anthropology of development. After two years as an établi Daniel K. began to teach sociology at the University of Vincennes as a tutor; he then returned to his studies and defended his PhD in 1984, before finally becoming a professor of sociology in the 1990s. During the 1970s, these (ex)activists thus participated in redefining the role of researchers in social sciences, by importing the aspirations they developed in the protest space into the scientific sphere. On this point, Gérard Mauger wrote that the rediscovery of the notion of the everyday allowed for the “affirmation of the

58 Pierre Bourdieu, referring to Weber, talks of sociodicy as a theoretical justification for social success and privilege (Bourdieu 1971). Here it is rather more a theoretical justification of political failures (or at least disillusion) facilitated by the reading of Bourdieu’s work.
59 The date of entry into university is not specified here because there are several distinct generational units among the researchers brought together here.
60 Extract from an interview with a Brazilian researcher.
61 In his interview, Jacques explains that during his years of near-professional activism, he did “the strict minimum to not be fired from the CNRS”. It is important to note here the specificity of these public professional spaces that made it possible for intensive forms of activism to thrive among young activists at the turn of the 1970s (Boltanski, 2008, p. 83-85)
proximity of the intellectual and 'ordinary experience', of 'ordinary people', to reconcile metaphysics and the ‘street corner’” (Mauger, 1989b, p. 85). Bernard Pudal accounted for the affinity with qualitative methodology and the biographical approach with an ‘intellectual style ‘linked to the masses’, at their service, and giving them ‘a voice’” (Pudal, 1991, p. 62). Daniel Gaxie introduced the critical process into political science. The object of his seminal article on the retributions of activism, and its date of publication (Gaxie, 1977), also situates it within the movement surrounding the conversion of dispositions for social critique into dispositions for critical (political) sociology. He indeed specified this himself nearly 30 years later (Gaxie, 2005, p. 161). The trace of the militant past also emerges through research objects.62 Communitarian utopia, deviance, exclusion, the working classes, development, or activism: these are some of the themes that went from being militant targets to objects of intellectual interest.

By shifting their refusal of common-sense preconceptions into the core of their profession, these young researchers successfully negotiated the painful exit from their revolutionary identities, without renouncing their dispositions for social critique. In so doing, they participated in the invention and redefinition of objects, methods and even sub-disciplines within the social sciences.

**Conclusion: activism and social mobility**

Through the trajectories analysed in this chapter, we can see that political involvement sometimes produces downward mobility (as in the trajectories of the établis) and sometimes upward mobility (Gilles). Inversely, it is sometimes the result of upward social mobility (future researchers in social sciences) or adopted as a way of compensating for downward social mobility (François). We can therefore conclude that there are reciprocal effects between political involvement and social mobility.

Although upward social mobility frequently precedes involvement in activism (see Chapter 1), it is also facilitated by the myriad resources associated with political commitments (Leclercq and Pagis, 2011). The study of Gilles’ case allows us to further explore the mechanisms at work in these exceptional trajectories of upward social mobility. Moving into the spheres of politics and unionism produces aspirations that are increasingly out of

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62 This question of the effects of May ’68 on the practice of social sciences was the subject of a special edition of the revue Cahiers de l’IHTP, “Mai ’68 et les sciences sociales”, 11 April 1989. In this issue François Dosse describes a similar movement in studies of history (Dosse, 1989).
Working to avoid social reproduction

step with the positions initially occupied. In addition to this, participation in the events of May-June ‘68 was accompanied by an increase in the range of possibilities through the establishment of the University of Vincennes. Being able to return to university thus meant being able to escape from the condition of workers. It led to a social, political, professional and even conjugal shift. Hypergamy thus became a structural principle of the trajectories of these class migrants, accompanying and boosting the progressive conversion of ways of perceiving the social world.

It is not unusual that aspirations to upward social mobility emerge in the context of socially improbable encounters between activists. We have seen that the context of political crisis contributes to opening up the social networks of activists, thus allowing for the possibility of social shifts. In the 1970s, militant spaces like the GP at the University of Vincennes allowed real connections between the worlds of workers and students. These then contributed to the transformation of the perception of possibilities and beliefs, as well as the social destinies of young students from working-class backgrounds who had not completed high school.

It is important however to be careful not to validate a rose-coloured vision of the link between activism and social mobility. In order to avoid this, we simply need to evoke the situations in which activism is payed for with downward mobility or at least hindrances to professional promotion. In opposition to the representations of a “generation ’68” as uniformly opportunistic and converted into the realm of power, the study of the actual trajectories of ’68ers shows various situations of social downclassing as being among the possible effects – although socially and sexually unequal in their distribution – of participation in May ’68. The experience of Colette, who paid for her years as an étalbé with downward social mobility, marital breakdown and depression, is an extreme case. More generally however, the étalbés all experienced difficulty in re-integrating the professional sphere (more or less depending on the duration of their experience in factories, and the qualifications they had previously) and have poorer retirement conditions today (as is the case for Paul).

Between these two poles, where the effects of activism on social mobility are significant, a large number of post-’68er trajectories are marked by more modest shifts, due to dispositions for criticism being imported into the professional sphere. Here, activism is responsible for conversions towards professions that are initially seen as hybrid, on the hazy border between activism and employment. Many activists therefore moved into community work (like François and Louis), journalism, or social science research, or neo-detective writing (Collovald and Neveu, 2001), thus redefining – or
reinventing – new professions (Bourdieu, 1978). Here there are “fortunate” renegotiations due to the existence of transitional spaces between the militant and professional spheres, such as in the newspaper Liberation or the University of Vincennes (Soulié, 2012), survey centres, research networks, or laboratories such as the Centre for European Sociology (CSE) (Joly, 2012, p. 187-239). These forms of professional conversion are thus historically and socially situated.