May '68

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A ricochet effect on the next generation?

Figure 11  Living with children; drawing from Cabu

Source: Drawing from Hara-Kiri magazine, 154, July 1974, by Cabu. On the banner are the words “Living with children.” Meeting of “La Gueule Ouverte.”

La Gueule Ouverte, (“jaws agape”) and Hara Kiri were satirical political and ecologist magazines published in the 1960s and 1970s. Hara Kiri would go on to become (after its official censorship) the satirical journal Charlie Hebdo. My heartfelt thanks to Cabu for allowing this cartoon to be republished here. Cabu was tragically murdered in the terrorist attack against this satirical newspaper in January 2015, which left 12 people dead.
Initially, the question of the “second generation” was covered from the perspective of the transmission of family memory relating to May ’68, particularly through parental narratives of the events, books, photos, objects or even given names. However, the explicit part of this transmission process proved to be minimal compared to what had remained implicit. I therefore ultimately concentrated my focus on the central vector of this transmission: primary socialisation.

As I specified in the introduction, the material concerning the “children” of 68ers were collected from among students at two experimental schools. Through the subversion of pedagogic relations, the schools of Vitruve (Paris) and Ange-Guépin (Nantes) participated in the wider post-1968 movement criticising social relations based on domination. This particular access to the field therefore specifically selects ‘68ers who adopted and implemented their dispositions for protest and anti-institutionalism within the spheres of family and education. Their children, born between 1965 and 1980 are at the heart of this critical redefinition of educational norms (in the family and then in the school). Research over two family generations allows us to trace what became of these children, and to observe the different effects of these politicised educational practices. However, this book explores only one aspect of these family transmissions – the question of attitudes towards politics and activism. How do these children of ’68ers appropriate their political heritage, and what place does activism have in their collective future? For those who became activists, what structures did they become involved in? Does the repertoire of action circulate from one generation to the next in spite of the transformations of the political context?

Although the question of intragenerational (dis)continuities of activism has been relatively well covered in the literature (McAdam, 1988; Whittier, 1997; RFSP, 2001), the issue of intergenerational continuities and discontinuities has not provoked the same interest. Yet our research protocol, both longitudinal and paired (parents and children) allows us to separate the question of the transmission of dispositions for protest, from that of actual engagement in militant action, and thus contribute to the reflection on the family transmission of dispositions for activism.

After providing a succinct comparison of attitudes towards politics in the two generations within the families interviewed, factor analysis will

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2 I will refer to the interviewees of the second generation as the “children” for simplicity, whilst keeping in mind that they are between 33 and 47 years old today.

once again allow us to demonstrate the diversity of the children of ‘68ers and to construct seven collective profiles of these “inheritors.” Two of these profiles (those in which the children went on to become activists) will be the focus of the following section, which is dedicated to the processes by which dispositions for protest are transmitted within the family.

**Strong family political transmission**

The transmission of political preferences between parents and children has been shown to be facilitated by parental opinions that are strong, homogeneous and highly visible. As such, the families here are prime candidates for such transmission. Indeed 82% of these parents say they are “quite” or “very” interested in politics today (see Table 8 below). Moreover, although in 1968 72% of respondents situated themselves at position 1 or 2 on the political self-declaration scale (where 1 is the far-left and 7 the far-right), 65% of them still position themselves in the same place today. Furthermore, over 80% of them say they had frequent political discussions with their children and there are very few cases of heterogeneity in the parents’ political choices. The corpus here thus presents a rate of nearly 90% of what has been called a “perfect reproduction” of political preferences, compared to a rate closer to 50% among the general population.

The families interviewed here are also particular in their choice of educational models, as we saw in Chapter 5. Indeed, in the years after May ‘68, the family as an institution became a favourite target because of its role in socialising children to social relations of domination. Many interviewees

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4 Percheron, 1993, p. 137.
5 Position 1 corresponds to the far-left and 7 to the far right. By way of comparison, 20% of parents interviewed at the national level in 1975 by IFOP situated themselves in positions 1 and 2 (Percheron, 1993, p. 132).
6 Whereas in the 1975 study, only 15% declared that they often had such conversations (Percheron, 1985, p. 213).
7 Defined in the quantitative studies cited above as the fact of not sharing the same political identification (having one parent who identifies as left-wing and the other as right-wing). Only eight “children” of the 180 in the population said that they were “right-wing” or “centre-right”. Among them, six grew up in situations of parental political heterogeneity, and two have both parents who situate themselves on the left of the political scale (they correspond to the “non-affiliated” category, see Muxel, 1992).
8 The quantitative studies on non-specific populations describe “perfect reproduction” as a case in which a child situates themselves on the left (or the right), and his or her parents do the same. Beyond the various problems in definition raised by this indicator, it is clearly inappropriate (because non-discriminating) for the population studied here.
thus sought to perpetuate their activism by attacking the familial logics of social reproduction. Their countercultural educational practices must thus be seen within a context of redefining norms and family roles.

As far as the children are concerned, nearly 20% consider themselves activists today, whereas that figure is closer to 50% for their parents. Are these figures enough to conclude that there is a non-transmission of dispositions for activism? Far from it. Nearly one third of children declare that they aspire to activism, but struggle to find a political organisation that suits them. This reveals the importance of distinguishing dispositions for activism from the fact of being an activist. The children interviewed are thus surprisingly close to their parents in terms of partisan preferences and political position (see table 8 below). In both generations, roughly 40% voted for the PS in the first round of the elections, 16% and 17% (of parents and of children) voted Green, 18% and 19% voted for an extreme-left party, 5% and 6% voted communist, and slightly less than 5% voted far-right.

Table 8  Two generations of political preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Parents (%)</th>
<th>Children (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong interest in politics (&quot;very&quot; or &quot;quite&quot;)</td>
<td>82*</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current political position:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1- Far left</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 5, 6 and 7 (far right)</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe society needs to be radically changed</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider themselves “activists” today</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in demonstrations over the last five years (&quot;a few&quot; and &quot;often&quot;)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political ideas have an “important” or “very important” place</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Always” vote in elections</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Strongly disagree” with the privatisation of businesses</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Strongly agree” with regularising undocumented migrants</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly or quite in favour of the ratification of the European Constitution</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Little” or “no” trust in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the justice system</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the police</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the traditional school system</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider themselves adapted to current society:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “yes, completely” or “yes, quite well”</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “feel slightly or completely marginal”</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note: Percentages are indicated in bold when the situations are statistically significant (Chi2).
However, politics does not occupy the same place in the everyday lives of these two generations. Firstly, interest in politics, although high among the children (69% say they are “very” or “quite” interested in politics), was transmitted less strongly than political preferences. In terms of activist practice, the second generation also seems less militant than their parents. Indeed, at the time of the study the parents are more likely than the children to be engaged in militant activities (49% compared to 22% among the children), to demonstrate regularly (66% compared to 44%) or to consider that society needs to be “radically changed” (58% compared to 43%).

Finally, the children’s generation appears more trusting of state institutions, such as the justice system, the police or the school system. They are also twice as likely to say they feel “completely” or “quite well” adapted to current society, whilst they are more reticent overall concerning radical ideologies and organisations contesting the established order (see Table 9 below).

Table 9  The limits of family transmission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Union</th>
<th>Activism</th>
<th>Communism</th>
<th>Utopia</th>
<th>Revolution</th>
<th>Make a lot of money</th>
<th>Authority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the higher percentages are indicated in bold, where the differences between parents and children are statistically significant (Chi2).

In spite of the obvious reservations that we may have regarding this kind of overall comparative table,9 it nevertheless emphasizes the influence of the socio-economic context and the current political climate in the conditions required for the appropriation of political heritage. Thus, we can see the congruence of logics of family transmission on one hand, with the influence of context on the other; a context in which the militant activities that were valued and prestigious in the 1970s, no longer necessarily are today. Finally, the parents interviewed here visibly have more trouble transmitting their anti-institutional mood and the challenge to everyday order, than their political preferences. The children are thus more favourable to marriage than

9 These figures obscure a diversity of profiles among the inheritors, as we will see in the rest of the chapter.
their parents and more reserved regarding experiences of sexual liberation.\textsuperscript{10} These two observations are not satisfactory in themselves however, given the diversity of the futures of 68ers’ children, as we will now show.

**Different inheritors, different profiles**

What impact did May ’68 have on the trajectories of the second generation? Do “children of ’68ers” represent a sociologically relevant category? Can we identify *second-generation micro-units* and, if so, what are the conditions of their formation?

The countercultural socialisation of the children interviewed here sets them apart from their peers. During the 1970s, the 68ers invested childhood as a field of political experimentation, seeking to subvert parental, educational and domestic norms. Their educational practices bear the mark of the importation of dispositions for protest within the family sphere. Challenges to the gendered division of labour, rejection of marriage (or even of the couple), refusal of inheritance, experimenting with new ways of regulating gender and generational relations, rejection of authority and the figures of speech that incarnate it, refusal to socialise their children to dominant norms, etc. In this respect, enrolling their children in experimental public schools was a prolongation of the countercultural educational practices in the family sphere – it was therefore the school as an institution and its role in reproducing the social order that was contested. However, the education that these children received was also in many ways opposed to the educational models their parents experienced (and which they frequently sought to not reproduce\textsuperscript{11}). However, given that the transformations of forms of reproduction were the basis for the appearance of distinct generations (Mauger, 2009a, p. 21), we may suppose that the transformations of educational strategies that resulted from the participation in May ’68 produced distinct generational units among the ’68ers’ children. We would equally expect these units to be characterised by a range of norms that set them apart from their peers and from previous generations. Finally, if these generational units are born of familial and educational experiences, they are also a result of their time.

\textsuperscript{10} Annick Percheron speaks about the “secondary role of transmission in the domain of the liberalization of mores” (Percheron, 1982, p. 200). There is a problem here with the format of this note: the line goes too far in the right margin...

\textsuperscript{11} A majority of interviewees had negative experiences of education (either in the family or in school), which influenced their choice to enrol their children in experimental schools.
In other words, they are marked by a specific social, economic and political context. When they left these experimental schools, the children of '68ers therefore found themselves confronted with other, potentially discordant, frames of socialisation (school system, peers, labour market etc.).

**A dissocialised generation**

Overall, the children interviewed here have internalised partially contradictory dispositions between countercultural primary socialisation and the secondary socialisation that they were confronted with as soon as they integrated traditional schooling – this is what I call dissocialisation. However, this process was more or less pronounced depending on parental educational practices, and the fact that often parents’ choice of non-interventionist practices (out of a rejection of authoritarian education) potentially left them in a weakened position in any power imbalance between socialising agents. The question of the efficiency of a non-interventionist education, particularly when it vehicles minority preferences and behaviour, is thus a particularly sensitive issue in the families of these interviewees. Indeed, many of these parents have sought to both “let their children be free” (principle of non-direction), and to transmit principles and systems of values in conflict with those transmitted by other agents in their socialisation. This ambivalence is at the root of many misunderstandings between these generations. This is the meaning behind Cabu’s drawing at the beginning of this chapter, which was sent to me by Gilles (see Chapter 4). He interpreted it like this:

He shows that anti-authoritarian ideas led parents to be totally non-interventionist in education. It was also the time when Dolto was on the radio, saying the same things. So, we see two parents, back to nature, greenies, who let their child follow his own ideas but who are of course shocked by the kid’s choices. I feel like I experienced something similar with Nathalie. I think that the weight of social control over individual choices (and not just for children) is much more vivid than

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12 A concept freely adapted from Louis Chauvel (Chauvel, 1998, p. 16)
13 In some cases, it even led to conflict or intergenerational breaks. These misunderstandings have notably led to various pamphlets mentioned in the introduction, written by children of '68ers who accuse their parents of “not having transmitted” (among other things).
14 Françoise Dolto was a French psychologist specializing in children. She is known for her vision of recognising the child as a person, the importance of “truth” in communication with children and recognising non-verbal forms of communication.
we can understand, not everything comes from the family, especially when the family chooses marginality.\textsuperscript{15}

In other words, the symbolic cost of interiorising non-conformist norms can be relatively high in situations of pronounced dissocialisation. The children interviewed here were thus exposed to genuinely conflicting norms (Elias, 1991, p. 37); dissonance between frames of socialisation encountered over the life course is indeed the source of contradictory injunctions and double bind situations (Bateson, 1980), which they must confront. Acculturation to the traditional school system takes different forms depending on the interviewees, but in most cases is marked by tensions, to the extent that responding to new expectations means divesting oneself (at least partially) of previously internalised habits. Yet this acculturation cannot proceed without a certain disqualification of one’s original world. Like for the first-generation intellectuals we saw in Chapter 1, the confrontation with the dominant academic order through the school system, after several years spent in schools that were veritable counter-institutions, is responsible for tensions and later difficulties in “finding one’s place” in society, to use a frequent expression in the life histories collected. The case of children resisting non-conformism (see Box 6) implicitly reveals the costs of marginality in childhood.

**Box 7  Forms of children’s resistance to non-conformity**

Most forms of resistance and the various ways of refusing one’s inheritance in these trajectories emerge when the children leave the experimental school or as they grow up. They appear at the point when the individual is confronted with agents and forms of socialisation that are (at least partially) dissonant with the parental model. Most of the children therefore say they did not realise their education was unusual until they became aware of the educational model most children of their age experienced, and the difference was then obvious. It is interesting to explore the cases of “early” resistance to this countercultural socialisation, if only to try and evaluate the symbolic costs and benefits for a child in being “different” (to his or her entourage). It is also important to avoid explaining the interviewee’s judgments of their education merely by what became of them later in life.

The most common form of childhood resistance to certain expectations of the countercultural educational model consists in refusing to call one’s parents by their first names. Gilles explains that he tried to instil this “without much

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\textsuperscript{15} Extract from an email from Gilles, received 7 November, 2008.
success." Mathilde, who lived in a commune whilst her daughter Corinne was a child, also failed:

Most of the children called their mothers by their first names, but Corinne, she always refused [...] I would have liked to draw her more towards the first name, but she never wanted to! [...] I have another anecdote about that: at school, they were asked to draw their dream home, to do a floorplan, and Corinne started drawing this little two bedroom flat, so I said: ‘Listen Corinne, you don’t understand, you’re to draw your dream house! You can have a huge house, everything you want…’ But she was stubborn… and I understood that what she wanted was to live with me, just the two of us!

Corinne’s resistance to the counter-cultural family norms also included norms relating to self-presentation, as she refused to wear the clothes her mother proposed: “we always had lots of clothes that were used for everyone, but she always wanted to wear pleated skirts, posh things, chic, well you can’t really be chic when your 7, she didn’t know but she didn’t dress like those in our milieu. She resisted in a lot of ways.”

Antoine, the eldest of Jean and Christiane’s three sons, also reacted to the pressure of conformity by insisting on going to school at Vitruve with a schoolbag, even though it was empty. His mother remembers, amused, “he was bothered by going to school without a schoolbag! He asked us to buy him one and he went to school with his empty bag, or sometimes he put a pair of trainer in it (laughs)!”

The question of bodily hexis was important for many of the interviewees. Thus, Naiima remembers having “specifically wanting certain clothes, even around five or six years old, which [her] mother refused to accommodate.” She explains that her mother “dressed her any which way.” More generally Naïma was highly critical of the educational model she experienced and she developed her critique at length in five double-sided pages that she attached to her questionnaire, unprompted. Interestingly, Naïma has a twin brother, Max, who experienced this shared childhood in a completely different way. We can begin by invoking the divergence in the social trajectories of the twins, and the downward mobility of Naïma (unlike her brother) to explain these discordant retrospective perspectives. Yet, although this aspect deserves attention, their mother emphasizes that their reactions to the education they received in the family and at Vitruve diverged very early on. The fact that they are fraternal twins, a boy and a girl, also allows us to put forward new hypotheses to account

16 Extract from a handwritten letter that Naïma attached to her questionnaire.
for the different attitudes towards their countercultural primary socialisation. We might therefore think that the pressure to conform is greater for girls, who are the first and most visibly affected by challenges to gender norms. Finally, the gendered identification of young boys with their father and young girls with their mother (Vernier, 1999) probably contributes to this divergence in social trajectories and retrospective perspectives on childhood. Indeed the heterogamy of their parents’ couple (their mother was from a working-class background, and their father from a more affluent one)\(^\text{17}\) seems to have had an impact on these twins’ attitudes to school.

Finally, there are other forms of resistance that are easier to explain: those of children who experienced the political activities of their parents as directly competing with the time they could be spending together. This was the case for Gilles’ daughter Nathalie, for example. She got bored during the demonstrations her father took her to and reacted by taking her anger out on the flags: “May 1, 1971 saw the extreme left organise a very significant demonstration – looking at

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17 Their mother Betty came from a working-class background and abandoned her studies at the end of middle school in 1964. She returned to school in 1968 at the University of Vincennes (without a high school diploma) and graduated with a degree in Education Sciences. She then worked as a community worker before becoming a professional storyteller. Their father, Philippe, who came from a more comfortable background, also returned to study at Vincennes (he had previously graduated with a vocational diploma), and became a research librarian in the 1990s. Since then, he has worked at the publications office of a university in Paris.
the number of participants. Nathalie and Manon were with us. They spent most of the march booing the red flags we were carrying and mocking the different slogans (see Figure 12 below, in which Nathalie is sticking out her tongue at the flag). They were 7 years old."^{18}

The children were thus confronted with the question of their social alterity during their childhoods. But how they perceived and experienced this depended on their age and their gender, as well as the material and emotional security they had in the family and school environments, as well as their (more or less substantial) need for recognition from their parents and/or peers. These forms of childhood resistance remind us that the results of countercultural education are as much a question of reception and re-appropriation as they are of parental intentions (Percheron, 1985).

### Dealing with dissocialisation

The children of ‘68ers interviewed here adopt different coping arrangements in the face of the double bind that results from their dissocialisation. Like the first-generation intellectuals (see Chapter 1), these “displaced persons” (Memmi, 1996) left the world they were born in and migrated into another, a host world, to which they were not entirely adapted, and as a result they often felt at home in neither. If these displaced people paradoxically question their “place” in society, this is because their social situation is far from self-evident for them. Several collective responses to the question of their “place” emerge if we observe their future socio-professional trajectories. Using the work of Gérard Mauger on class migration,^{19} of Bernard Lahire on dissonant socialisation, and the empirical material collected from the children themselves, we can distinguish four main arrangements to deal with this dissocialisation: (1) repression of the stigma of one’s origins (and thus of initial countercultural dispositions); (2) a utopian rejection of secondary

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^{18} Extract from an email from Gilles, 28 September 2008. I would like to thank him for allowing us to reproduce this photo here.

^{19} Mauger distinguishes “four autobiographical postures (successive or simultaneous, compatible or not) that must be associated with types of trajectories and/or positions in the social space: erasure of the stigma of one’s origins, populist rehabilitation, social schizophrenia and a reflexive posture.” (Mauger 2004). For Bernard Lahire there are three possible attitudes for an individual incorporating contradictory dispositions. He or she can (1) smother or silence prior dispositions; (2) clearly divide or separate the universes in which they implement such dispositions; (3) constantly suffer from the weight of the contradictions between the dispositions (Lahire, 1999, p. 139).
socialisation; (3) those between the two, a “social schizophrenia” that is more or less successful (Lahire, 1998); or (4) a reflexive posture. These different positions are not mutually exclusive of each other and can be implemented synchronically (or diachronically). The use of the term arrangement, which reflects situations, stages in the trajectory of an individual, thus enables us to account for possible articulations, associations and successions of different arrangements a given child adopts to deal with dissocialisation. We will briefly present this typology before associating the futures of the children of ’68ers with the trajectories of their parents.

Repression of countercultural primary dispositions can be seen in the children who, for various reasons (primarily failure at school and downward social mobility) suffered from the stigma of their difference. These children became young adults who generally rejected the heritage of their ’68er parents, and sought social stability and conformity (in their professions, social relations, the education of their children etc.). Sarah for example left the Vitruve school with the desire to “erase the stigma of Vitruve, and try, with all the strength of a ten-year-old, to move towards the greatest normality imaginable.” In opposition to her education, Sarah got married, and raised her children “in the greatest conformity and very reassuringly […] the complete opposite from us […] above all not treating them as adults.” She enrolled them in a private school. At this pole, we find young adults who express a strong need for social recognition, aspirations that we can see – in light of Elias’ work on the relationship between the established and the outsiders (Elias and Scotson, 1965) – as linked to the suffering and humiliation that they experienced due to their marginalisation.

In opposition to this is the utopian posture rejecting secondary socialisation. This operates through an inability to adapt, to adhere to the school system and the labour market. Instead of responding to the pressures of one’s environment, this consists in seeking to modify that environment to bring it into line with one’s initial, countercultural, aspirations. The trajectory of Chloé, raised by her mother who was an actor (and who lived in a commune for five years) is thus entirely motivated by her attempt to find “niches,” protected spaces in which she could express her countercultural dispositions. Rebelling against the school system (she left after middle school), she explained in the interview that she sought “to prolong the

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20 Which consists, to put it briefly, in putting one’s “secondary” dispositions at the service of the aspirations produced in countercultural primary socialisation.

21 Sarah, born in 1965 was raised by her mother Simone (see Chapter 2), who is a painter.
experience of Vitruve” that had “seared itself into her,” through different artistic practices in particular. She was thus successively a model, an actor, a cameraman, a dancer and a painter. With her own son, Joachim, she reproduced the countercultural educational practices that she knew as a child. At this pole, we find interviewees who, like Mikaël (Anne’s son, see Chapter 5), do not consider themselves to be unsuited to society but rather that society is unsuited to their aspirations: “I wondered if, given all these ‘chaotic’ paths, sometimes broken […] if this ‘unsuited-ness’ to society, is not in fact at least partly due to society’s inability to ‘absorb’ these ‘different’ citizens. […] It is not ‘us’ who are out of step or abnormal, its society that is unsuited to our desires.” 22 Professionally, we find these interviewees in artistic sectors where there are fewer codes and less institutionalisation, and which are particularly favourable to agents who confront their difference through a posture of sublimation. Chloé puts it like this:

My family context and Vitruve meant that I was never completely in the mould […] I was always looking for something that didn’t exist and I’m still looking… […] Since childhood, I’ve had a different world, a dream world, that has of course caused suffering because it is a dream world and today, at 40, I tell myself – go on, achieve your dreams! […] Utopia is a great protection against reality […] The mark of Vitruve is this critical perspective, this right to do things differently, to take a different path […] I will develop this state of being through painting and dance.23

Between these two poles is the posture of social schizophrenia. This brings together the children of ‘68ers who regularly oscillate between the two previous postures, trying to compartmentalise the different spheres of activities in which they activate dispositions that cannot be activated in the same place. These interviewees do not want to (or cannot) prioritise the contradictory injunctions they are exposed to (adapting and integrating socially whilst remaining themselves). They describe themselves as “constantly torn” or “cut in two.” These tensions, born of the dissonance between primary and secondary socialisations, are not necessarily a source of suffering (Traïni,
They give rise to different ways of expressing the plurality of dispositions.24

The final posture brings together interviewees who face up to these contradictory injunctions by taking a critical distance from them or by making them into an object of study, through a reflexive posture. These interviewees tend to have less difficulty “finding their place,” and on the whole turn towards teaching and research or towards journalism; professions that are well-suited to the actualisation of countercultural aspirations, through pedagogic practice or through objects of research and investigation.25 This is the case for Sebastian, for example, a university lecturer who completed a PhD in social psychology on workplace suffering. An activist without ever having been a member of a political party (he became involved in protest movements in 1986 and joined the union when he became a lecturer), he converted his political and countercultural heritage26 into a professional resource, studying marginality and questioning the border between the “normal” and the “pathological” in his research. Thus, where the trajectories of Chloé and Sarah are marked by successive adjustments and a series of shifts that might be analysed as ways of finding the right distance between the “established” and the “outsiders” (Elias and Scotson, 1965), Sebastian found an established position for himself and studied outsiders. It is in this respect that we can describe his position as reflexive: in the same way as the mentally ill and mental health issues pose the question of the border between the normal and the pathological, certain “displaced” people, like Sebastian, use their work to question of the border between “us” and “them.”27

24 Certain interviewees expressed contradictory dispositions at different stages of their biographies. Others expressed them simultaneously by compartmentalising different spheres of their life and activities (employment, friends, relationships, associations etc.) which represent so many scenes in which partially dissonant aspirations can be expressed (Pagis [2009], Chapters, 6, 7, 8).

25 Of course, I would situate myself in this reflexive posture. However, the three other postures are not unfamiliar to me and I have experienced all of them at one point or another (or even simultaneously) during my own trajectory. This relationship to my research object has allowed me to have both a comprehensive approach and a great proximity to most of the children of 68ers during the study, but has also put me in a (relatively) external position regarding each of these postures.

26 Sebastien, born in 1967, is the second son of Jean and Christiane, first-generation intellectuals whose upward social mobility went hand in hand with far-left Trotskyist activism (see Chapter 1).

27 Regarding the question of the upward social mobility of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are part of the positive discrimination programme of preparatory classes for the prestigious Institut d’Etudes Politiques in Paris, and the effects of this social displacement, see, Pasquali (2014).
Political activism could have been identified as the fifth specific approach to dealing with dissocialisation, to the extent that it also constitutes an activity that aims to modify the environment we live in to bring it into line with one's aspirations. However, activism appears to be transversal to the different postures defined above (with the exception of the first, rejecting the primary dispositions), as we see in the remainder of this chapter.

The social space of the second generation

We will once again use factor analysis to represent the diversity of profiles among the children of '68ers and to characterise the inheritance they received. This type of analysis allows us to show the connections between the political behaviour and the futures of the interviewees on one hand, and the characteristics of their primary socialisation on the other. In order to analyse the transmission (or non-transmission) of dispositions for activism and the challenge to everyday norms, a four-category variable is used to account for the various forms of parental activism during the interviewees’ childhood (see Table 10 below).

Table 10  Challenges to the everyday order and the political order

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political activism outside the family sphere during the interviewee's childhood</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>&quot;Activist parents, politicisation of education&quot; (25%)</td>
<td>&quot;Non-activist parents, politicisation of education&quot; (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>&quot;Activist parents, no politicisation of education&quot; (23%)</td>
<td>&quot;Non-activist parents, no politicisation of education&quot; (32%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We must now characterise the education received in the family environment and situate the parents' educational practices in relation to the ideal type of countercultural education (see Chapter 5). In order to do this, a three-category variable will gauge the influence of May '68 on the model of education ("countercultural education +++" (45%),

---

28 Indeed, it is important to distinguish between challenges to the social order and challenges to the everyday order, as Jean-Claude Passeron and François de Singly advised, when they wrote: “taking one's distance from domestic traditionalism does not obey the same socialisation logics as challenging the social order.” (De Singly and Passeron, 1984, p. 62)
“liberal education” (40%), “quite authoritarian education” (15%). Another variable traces the terms of address used by the interviewees to refer to their parents.29 Finally, another variable relates to specific educational practices, and measures the interviewees’ retrospective judgments on the responsibilities they were given at a young age.30 The frequency of political discussions in the family environment during childhood is also included in the analysis.

Having characterised sex, age, social origin and the type of education received, we need to also record what has become of the interviewees. Thus, their professions,31 their interest in politics, how frequently they participate in demonstrations, whether or not they have activist experience (“have been an activist before,” or “have never been an activist”), as well as their electoral behaviour,32 are also studied.

Finally, the following illustrative variables are also added to the analysis: identification with the category “inheritor of 1968,” and the subjective feeling of dissocialisation, recoded into three categories33 (no feeling of dissocialisation [13%], feeling of dissocialisation and suffering [41%], feeling of dissocialisation without suffering [46%]). The objective here is to test the possible links between the internalisation of systems of dissonant dispositions and militant activity (Traïni, 2011, p. 69).

To understand the positions of the interviewees (N = 168) in the factorial plane of Figure 13, let us begin by accounting for the way in which the two axes are structured.34 The x-axis is structured by variables relating to

---

29 Some call their parents by their first names (30%), others “Daddy” or “Mummy” (53%), and other use either form, depending on the situations (27%).
30 These judgments, mentioned in open-ended questions, by those who say they were given responsibilities very young were recoded into two categories – “critical” and “uncritical” of early responsibilisation of children.
31 Workers and low-level employees were combined into a single category, “working classes” (17%), the middle classes were divided into two categories, “middle-class, teachers” (over represented in the corpus, 16%), and “middle-class, non-teachers” (24%). The upper classes were also split, due to the over-representation of “higher education teachers” (10%) compared to the “upper-class, non-teachers” (16%). Artistic professions (16%) and students (4%) remain distinct categories.
32 A variable with seven categories: does not vote (4%), right-wing (5%), PS (40%), Greens (18%), far-left (19%), PCF (6%), and a final category “PS/PC/Greens/far-left” (8%) covering those who identify with the left but not with a particular political party.
33 Based on responses to the question: “Do you feel there is a discrepancy between the values you have inherited and those promoted by the society in which you live? If yes, is this a source of suffering for you?”
34 The first axis contributes 15.5% to the total inertia of the cloud of points, and the second 10.7%.
Figure 13: The social space of the second generation

- Born after 1974
  - Quite authoritarian education
  - Liberal education
- Born 1969-1974
  - Middle class, non teachers
  - Little effects of parental activism
- Born before 1968
  - Working class
  - Reaction/parental engagement

- ACTIVIST PARENTS + NO POLITICALISATION OF EDUCATION
  - Inherit dispositions for activism
  - Far left
- Non activist parents + politicisation of education
  - Disassociation without suffering
  - Regular family political discussions
- Anti-authoritarian inheritors
  - Psychological help
  - Counter cultural education

- Rare family political discussions
- Dissocialisation
- Psychological help
-有近似的继承者
- Far left inheritors (4)
- Anti-authoritarian inheritors (3)
parents' activism, as well as the political behaviour of the children. This axis thus divides interviewees who have activist experience and whose parents questioned the social order as well as the everyday order whilst they themselves were still children (on the right-hand side of the plane), from interviewees who have never been activists and whose parents were not – or not very – involved in activism (on the left of the plane).

The y-axis on the other hand is structured by the children's year of birth, the educational model and the parents' form of activism. It separates interviewees born before 1968, whose parents focused their dispositions for contestation in the family sphere (in the lower quadrants) from a younger group of interviewees, whose parents had a political activity outside the family sphere (in the upper quadrants).

The four sides of this figure therefore correspond to the different kinds of effects May '68 had on parental trajectories: to the left-hand side there were no major effects, at the top there were effects on the political trajectory alone, at the bottom there were effects in terms of critical renewal of everyday life, and to the right there were mixed effects (both political and familial).

An initial reading of this schema reveals several general results concerning the transmission of the inheritance of May '68 in the family environment. Firstly, interest in politics, vote for extreme-left parties and activism appear to be strongly correlated with the frequency of political discussions within the family, and the visibility of parents' political engagements. Indeed, the variables “interest in politics +++,” “demonstrate a lot,” “have been activists” and “frequent family political discussion” crowd together in the upper right-hand quadrant. Whilst Annick Percheron demonstrated that the visibility of parental political preferences facilitate their transmissions (Percheron, 1993), this observation allows us to broaden this finding to include activist practice.

Moreover, identification with the category of “inheritor of 1968” brings together most of the interviewees situated on the right-hand side of the

---

35 Among the ten first contributions to the x-axis are the categories “non-activist parents, no politicisation of education”, “activist parents + politicisation of education”, “have been activists”, “demonstrate a lot”, and “never demonstrate”.

36 The five most important contributions to the y-axis are: “non-activist parents + politicisation of education”, “born before 1968”, “activist parents + no politicisation of education”, “counter-cultural education ++”, “call their parents by their first names”.

37 Similarly, the categories “interest in politics +” and “demonstrate a little”, are clustered with “regular family political discussions”, slightly to the right. Finally, in the lower left-hand quadrant, the categories “little interest in politics” and “have never been activists” are close to “few family political discussions”.

factorial plane. It therefore covers not only the children of political activists, but also those who have witnessed (or been involved in) challenges to the norms of everyday life. Claiming to be an “inheritor of 1968” thus proves to be correlated above all with the greater or lesser dissocialisation of the interviewees (see the proximity between the categories “dissocialisation and suffering,” and “inheritors of 68,” just above the x-axis on the right-hand side, as well as the categories “not inheritors of ’68” and “lack of dissocialisation”). The feeling of belonging to this category of inheritors of ’68 seems to be linked to the destabilisation of parental political and family trajectories, without which the event could not have a ricochet effect on the second generation.

Finally, the parents who converted their dispositions for contestation into the family sphere alone have apparently not transmitted dispositions for activism to their children (in the lower right-hand quadrant). However, they do seem to have transmitted their critical perspective on institutions and conventional political practices (see categories “do not vote” or “inherit mistrust of organisations”).

The statistical classification of the corpus allows us to further refine these initial results, by distinguishing seven sub-groups of the second generation, projected on to the factorial plane (see Figure 13). By combining statistical results and representative life history analysis, we can classify these different profiles according to the nature of the inheritance transmitted and by associating them with the year of birth, sex, social origin and types of parental trajectories, educational practice, and the political and professional futures of these children. We can thus identify the everyday inheritors, the ambivalent inheritors of utopia, the anti-authoritarian inheritors, the far-left inheritors, the distant inheritors, the downwardly mobile inheritors, and the rejection of inheritance (see Table 11 below).

The two groups that cover the greatest number of activists (profiles 3 and 4 in the upper right-hand quadrant) are presented in detail in the rest of the chapter. Focusing on these two groups allows us to study cases of intergenerational transmission of activism, in order to analyse the processes by which parents transmit dispositions for activism on one hand, and on the other, the forms that activism takes for the next generation.

38 Analysis by classification consists in dividing the corpus into n sub-groups according to the dual foundation of internal homogeneity (in terms of sociological characteristics of the interviewees in each sub-group) and external heterogeneity (difference from other sub-groups). This division of the corpus into seven groups takes into account the ten first factorial axes, such that their projection on the two-dimensional factorial plane is purely indicative.

39 The profile of the ambivalent inheritors of utopia is presented in detail in Pagis (2015). Please refer to the PhD thesis for discussion of the others.
Table 11  Synthesis of the seven profiles of inheritance

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ social origin</td>
<td>Upper classes</td>
<td>First-generation intellectuals and middle classes</td>
<td>Middle classes (upwardly and downwardly mobile)</td>
<td>Very varied</td>
<td>Downwardly mobile mothers (from upper and middle classes backgrounds)</td>
<td>Varied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of parents’ activism during childhood</td>
<td>Unified Socialist Party (PSU) sympathisers + critical renewal of everyday life</td>
<td>Far-left + communitarian utopias communities → end of activism in the 1970s</td>
<td>Far-left + countercultural</td>
<td>Far-left, not countercultural</td>
<td>Young parents, not very active in 1968 → social work or apolitical utopias</td>
<td>Single mothers, downwardly mobile, absent fathers</td>
<td>Mothers – strong impact of 1968; Fathers – no impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational model and retrospective judgment</td>
<td>Countercultural; quite positive judgments</td>
<td>“difference” based educational strategies; ambivalent judgments</td>
<td>Countercultural; mixed judgments</td>
<td>Liberal, politicised; very positive judgments</td>
<td>Liberal, not politicised; very positive judgments</td>
<td>Countercultural; feeling of having been “utopian guinea pigs”</td>
<td>Parental dissonance or strict upbringing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of being inheritors of 1968</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes sometimes “in spite of themselves”</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed, tending to no</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11  Synthesis of the seven profiles of inheritance

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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memories of primary school</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Very good; at school they became the “children’s avant-garde”</td>
<td>Good and very good</td>
<td>Bad; criticised for not having sufficiently prepared them for “reality”</td>
<td>Bad; criticised for being too permissive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of the inheritance of May '68</td>
<td>Primarily countercultural</td>
<td>Bodily inheritance (marginality)</td>
<td>Predominantly political</td>
<td>Left-wing values, inherit the gains of May '68</td>
<td>Social marginalisation</td>
<td>Non-transmitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissocialisation and resolution of tensions</td>
<td>Strong but not very binding: reflexive postures and/or artistic sublimation</td>
<td>Strong and marginalising</td>
<td>Strong; activism as a way to resolve tensions due to dissocialisation</td>
<td>Weak dissocialisation</td>
<td>Repression of stigma and aspirations to conformity</td>
<td>Dissonance due to parental divergences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist experiences</td>
<td>No, but demonstrate “regularly”</td>
<td>No, demonstrate “a little”</td>
<td>Yes, anarchist and/or anti-authoritarian</td>
<td>Yes, far-left organisations</td>
<td>None generally</td>
<td>None at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 11  Synthesis of the seven profiles of inheritance

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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political trajectory and electoral behaviour</strong></td>
<td><strong>Everyday environmentalists, feminists, anti-racists; vote Green</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vote PS, Greens, PC, and far-left</strong></td>
<td><strong>Anarchists/anti-authoritarians, reject voting</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vote far-left</strong></td>
<td><strong>Not very interested in politics, humanitarian involvement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Trajectories</strong></td>
<td><strong>Intellectual and artistic trajectories</strong></td>
<td><strong>Profiles rejecting work</strong></td>
<td><strong>Teachers</strong></td>
<td><strong>Middle and upper-middle classes, non-teachers</strong></td>
<td><strong>Trajectories for downward mobility</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact of parental activism</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inherit mistrust of political organisations</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inherit dispositions for activism (critical perspective on the evolution of parents’ politics)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Anchorage of political preferences on the left</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reaction against parents’ involvement, considered destructive</strong></td>
<td>– Rejection of maternal engagements – Or no impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State of intergenerational relations</strong></td>
<td><strong>Harmonious (strong reproduction)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ambivalent (oscillation between admiration and rejection)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pride and disappointment of children/parents and relative downward mobility</strong></td>
<td><strong>Harmonious (reproduction of political preferences)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Harmonious (strong reproduction of parental preferences)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Harmonious (strong reproduction of political preferences)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Highly conflictual (damaged affective economy)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conflictual (Vitruve) Harmonious (A-Guépin)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transmission of activism: intergenerational (dis)continuities?

The anti-authoritarian inheritors and the far-left inheritors share certain characteristics. They were all born between 1968 and 1975 and as children they observed the political activism of their parents (in extreme-left organisations for the most part). They inherited dispositions for activism from their parents that they activated through militant experiences (see the statistical description of these two populations in Box 7 below). The student movement of 1986 represented for them what May ’68 had been for their parents: it gave them the opportunity to come into their inheritance and to appropriate it. This is how Loïc, the son of Jean and Christiane, puts it:

they are very strong memories, and I'm happy that I had that in my political life, so to speak, because I'm sure that at that time, it raised so much stuff in me, something adventurous as well, because when we were kids, the Ligue had become a clandestine group, my parents were clandestine activists, the intelligence agency was always sniffing around below our apartment, ... Can you imagine that, in the mind of a kid! I remember that Ernest Mandel, who was a persona non grata, a Belgian economist from the Fourth International, came from Belgian to hold meetings: well, he came to our place! And someone went to get him on a scooter from Père Lachaise, and brought him back, hiding their tracks, and we, we saw all that, so there was something very adventurous about it, which I rediscovered in 1986. Because in ‘86 we occupied the Uni, we organised our own security, we organised ourselves in commissions, we had the feeling we were a little May ’68... taking a bit of control over our lives, you know.40

The two groups of activist inheritors differ however in the relations these inheritors have to the political sphere. Although they are all “very” interested in politics, and participate regularly in demonstrations, the first (group 3 in Box 7 below) developed a greater distance regarding the party system through which they do not feel represented, they affiliate themselves more with anarchism and some reject the vote altogether. The second group (profile 4) situate themselves on the extreme left of the political field. The first are active in less institutionalised activist networks and proclaim their outsider status with regards to the political field (anti-authoritarian

40 Extract from an interview conducted at Loïc’s home, on 26 October 2005. After the student movement in 1986, he joined Unef-Id, and then SOS Racisme, before becoming a member of the JCR and then the LCR, which he quickly left to participate in the creation of DAL.
and anarchist groups), whilst the second are active in Attac, the LCR, DAL (Right to housing), or in unions such as Sud.

**Box 8  Statistical description of the profiles of activist inheritors**

**Group 3/7: Anti-authoritarian inheritors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V.Test* Characteristic levels of the variables</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest in politics ++</td>
<td>4.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No criticisms concerning responsibilisation</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lots of family political discussions</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countercultural education ++</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call parents by their first names</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-class, teachers</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have been activists</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activist parents + politicisation of education</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not vote</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Group 4/7: Far-left activist inheritors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V.TEST* Characteristic levels</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often demonstrate</td>
<td>6.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have been activists</td>
<td>6.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inherit dispositions for activism</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote far-left</td>
<td>5.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in politics ++</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call parents “daddy or mummy”</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote Communist (PC)</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-class, teachers</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The value test or V-test measures the deviation between the proportion of individuals in the cluster characterised by a particular level, and the proportion in the overall population (expressed in units of standard errors). When this value is greater than 2, the corresponding level is significant for that cluster.

The statistical approach allows us to reveal correlations between parental activism, educational models and the children’s political behaviour. However, it remains blind to the mechanisms by which dispositions for activism are transmitted. Only an in-depth study of trajectories allows us to open this black box of family transmissions and to show that family variables lie at the heart of intergenerational continuity in activism, whereas contextual variables dominate in explaining the discontinuities of forms of engagement.
(Re)inventing anti-authoritarian activism

In order to characterise the profile of anti-authoritarian inheritors, we will follow the trajectory of Olivier, who was born in 1975 in Paris, and Fleur, who was born in 1971 in Nantes. Their trajectories, which are representative of the collective profile, allow us to show that the forms of activism they invest in are intimately connected to their familial and professional futures. The invention of communal lifestyles and forms of activism would indeed emerge as a response to dissocialisation and downward mobility in this category of inheritors.

Childhood immersed in politics

Olivier’s parents belonged to the youngest generational units that discovered activism with May ’68, in their case within the JCR and then the LCR. Lisette, his mother, born in 1954, is the daughter of a primary school teacher and a telephone worker, both left-wing. As a high school student in 1968 she affiliated herself with CAL, and then with the Red Circles, before joining the LCR in the early 1970s. She failed her baccalaureate, enrolled in the University of Vincennes, lived in a commune for several years with Benoît (her husband) and other friends, and participated in feminist movements. Lisette was 21 when Olivier was born and 24 when she separated from Benoît and began to work as an educator in community education networks.

Fleur’s parents are older. Her father, François, was born in 1945 in Algiers (see Chapter 4) and was politicised during the Algerian War. Having participated actively in the events of May ’68 in Toulouse, we have already seen that he was about to leave for India in 1969 when he met Elise, Fleur’s mother and decided to abandon his trip. Born into a Catholic, petit-bourgeois family of eight-children in Nantes, from whom she was by then estranged, Elise was a maternity ward assistant. She had a very young child, Gaël, born in 1968, whom François would raise as his own.

The interviewees in this profile were not direct witnesses to the most intense periods of their parents’ activism and counterculture (unlike the

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41 The choice of the trajectories analysed in this section was not intuitive: Olivier, Fleur and Lydia are paragons of the two profiles studied here. In other words, they are the individuals identified by the software’s analysis as being the most representative of each of the groups.

42 His father, Benoît, did not participate in the study. The data I have access to come from the questionnaire and interview conducted with Olivier. Benoît graduated with a vocational certificate and was a production officer in an IT company when Olivier was born, before becoming a carpark attendant.
ambivalent inheritors of utopia): they were born just afterwards, and in fact their birth provoked a certain return to normality for their parents (or a relative disengagement). François thus explain how he came out of his marginal phase (drugs, refusal to work, street stalls etc.):

it was a desire to move on, and well you know, having children, I stopped selling jewellery in the street when my daughter was born [1971] ... so it was the fact of being confronted with obligations. We had brought children into the world, we had to take responsibility.43

Olivier’s parents stopped their active involvement with the LCR in the second half of the 1970s, so he did not really see this militant phase of their lives:

I was too little to remember all the effervescence of the 1970s, but they told me a lot about that time and I listened when they got together with their mates and told their old war stories! [...] Also, when we were small, we went to all the feminist demonstrations with my cousins. We were on the front page of *Libé*, eating cake at a feminist demo... so yeah demos, I’ve been to loads, loads!44

Like most of the activist inheritors, Olivier and Fleur grew up in highly politicised environments, in which politics was omnipresent. They took to the streets with their parents on numerous occasions during the 1970s. Demonstrations, parental narratives, and frequent political discussions during meals or parties with friends, thus encouraged the transmission of family histories relating to May ’68 (and the years that followed), as well as the development of a political conscience early on in life.

Although these parents had countercultural educational practices, they were more a result of practical necessity than of theoretical construction, as Fleur’s father explains:

My ex-wife worked at the CHU with stupid hours. Me, I was meeting up with the activists in the evening so I would come home really late and we had set up a system. The last one to go to bed would heat the milk for the morning and put it in a thermos on the table with a sweet

43 The quotes from François come from an interview conducted with him on February 10, 2005.
44 Extract from an interview with Olivier, June 16 2005.
little note and they would have breakfast by themselves [...] And they did live in communities a lot because in summer I organised holiday camps and I took them with me, even when they were little, 4 and 5 years old... So they were autonomous and responsible very young, they had to be!

The fact that Olivier was raised by a single mother meant that he also had to be responsible quite young:

My mother worked far away and late at night, so I looked after myself quite young! I cooked for myself when I was very little [...] and then at Vitruve I had to be responsible. They talked to us about responsibility, and so it was a vision of education that was highly politicised [...] with Lisette, I had a feminist education... and Vitruve went in the same direction as my education, in fact.

Olivier went to primary school at Vitruve and Fleur went to Ange-Guépin, and both have excellent memories of these experimental schools, in which they say they learnt “autonomy, initiative, and the ability to say no” (Fleur), or “self-management, collective organisation and commitment” (Olivier). They remain positive in spite of the substantial lacunae in their education when they integrated the standard high school system in sixth grade.

Chaotic school trajectories, family conflicts and political divergences
In 1986 Fleur was in the first year of lycée and participated actively in the movement among the high school students, never missed a demonstration and was elected “strike delegate”45 by her classmates. Olivier was in the first year of middle school: “the first political thing I participated in directly was in 1986. We went on strike for a day and refused to go to classes. The principal was insanely angry, we'd only just begun sixth grade!”

After his baccalaureate, Oliver became active again against the proposed youth employment contract known as the CPE (Contrat première embauche46 (1994)). But it was when he went to university that he became a real activist, during the social movement of winter 1995.

45 The term she used in her questionnaire.
46 This was a specific type of contract proposed by the Balladur government, that aimed to facilitate the recruitment of young people by allowing them to be hired on contracts that paid only 80% of the minimum wage. It was withdrawn due to substantial protest, particularly by young people.
at the beginning, I wasn't in any group. I went to the general assemblies etc. and then I signed up for the anarchist movement and the Scalp group.\textsuperscript{47}  
[Why Scalp?] Because I knew people who opened doors for me... I wasn't that into the Ligue, that was my parents' thing [...] and then a movement is quite educational, we see who does what and how...

Fleur, on the other hand, had enrolled in her first year of university, studying history and geography, and then modern languages, at the University of Nantes from 1989 to 1994, and working at the same time as a youth worker in out of school care. Unemployed in 1995, she also participated in the social movement and was in contact with different collectives for vulnerable workers in which she became an activist and was trained in anti-authoritarian and anarchist practices and readings.

The 1995 social movement represents a turning point in the political trajectories of these anti-authoritarian inheritors. After these events, they became active militants and developed a critical perspective on voting and political parties. They joined anarchist networks and collectives in which they activated both dispositions for political engagement and countercultural dispositions that they had internalised during their primary socialisation. Although they followed their parents’ footsteps in terms of activist practice, this was less true in their vision of the social world. Critical of their parents’ activism, they sought other ways of transforming a society in which they felt themselves to be marginalised.

Of this, Oliver says:

I especially saw my parents and all their friends stop protesting. Over time you see people settle down, and they quarrel because they don’t have the same lifestyle any more ... I saw it like that for the most part, they believed, but now they don’t believe at all anymore [...] Some went back into the ranks, others joined the other side [...] I’m very critical of them for having stopped their activism. When I say “they,” it’s a whole generation, not just my parents [...] and I said to them – if we’re doing this now, it’s because you did bugger all! That makes them face up to the end of their activism, and a life that became a bit more normative, a bit more comfortable.

\textsuperscript{47} Scalp is an acronym for “Section carrément anti-Le Pen”, which translates roughly as the “group completely against Le Pen.”
Growing up in a period where one's parents were no longer activists (or had reduced their activism), yet remained highly politicised, seems to be favourable to the internalisation of a filial duty to prolong one's parents' activist project. “They didn’t go all the way to the end,” says Olivier. As for Fleur, she asks herself, “Their rebellion: where is it now? And their social and political conscience?” If there is a reproduction of activism in the family, these critiques regarding the disengagement of ’68ers are the sources of the transformation of forms of activism and a search for political alternatives. In some cases, they can lead to the breakdown of family ties. This was the case for Fleur who did not see her parents for ten years, criticising them for “only looking after themselves, and abandoning their children and their utopias.” François is not uncritical of his daughter either:

My daughter is a crow. [what do you mean by that?] People all in black... they live on the margins of society, with her guy, they run the car off frying oil, in a godforsaken corner of Brittany, it’s unbelievable! The only coffee shop in France, it’s there! It’s all ‘we don’t fit into society but we’re happy to take advantage of it’; so we were angry with each other for a long time. Rob a bank and I’ll pay you the best lawyer in France, but live off state benefits...

But François’ relationship with his daughter is ambivalent, and at other times in the interview we glimpse his pride in seeing her take up the torch of contestation.

In these complex intergenerational relationships there are also many questions of inheritance and transmission. If children’s activism can be experienced by parents as a successful transmission of a certain number of principles, it can also reflect the negative idea of their own disengagement and renouncement of key ideals.

**Downward mobility and (re)invention of countercultural lifestyles**

Among these inheritors, we can see several lifestyles and types of activism that are characteristic of communitarian utopias in the trajectories of ’68ers, such as the refusal to vote, the rejection of employment and institutionalised forms of work, or the rejection of consumerism, or even, for Fleur, the refusal to have children.

Between 1995 and 2002, Fleur did not vote, but she then re-registered to vote after the results of the presidential elections. Since then, she has voted LCR, but does not feel that she is represented by any politician. Olivier, on the other hand, stopped voting when he joined SCALP-Reflex:
I do enough for society as a full-time activist to allow myself to not vote [...] the next elections, there’s a good chance that it will be Sarkozy who’s in the second round, against either Ségolène or Le Pen, but for me, once we get there it’s too late... Because it means we took the wrong path a long time ago [...] Voting, as we do it, means you delegate all your power to people who, even if they are good people, will end up screwing you over because they are in a system where when you have power, well... you manage it... according to the laws of capitalism...

Fleur and Olivier also share a critical attitude towards the world of work. After obtaining a research Masters in mechanical engineering, after nine years of study, Olivier left to travel in South America for several months, before becoming a casual teacher in a middle school:

I failed to internalise the idea that work is central to life, and so I’m a bit in the shit now. Basically, in 30 years, I’ve worked maybe two! I always managed, giving maths classes... And as I don’t have a frantic need to consume, I’ve managed to get by like that [...] When people ask me what I do, I say I’m an activist.

As for Fleur, she writes in her questionnaire that she has been officially unemployed for the last sixteen years and adds, “let’s talk about activity rather than work (an instrument of torture).” Further on she adds that, for her, work represents one of the most difficult compromises to accept. At the time of the study she was a teaching assistant in a vocational high school, and lived in a small rural village in Brittany, with her partner Anthony, unemployed. She said, “Coming here was a big turning point in our lives, a throw with a single dart; a spur of the moment decision against a background of social instability, guided by a radical social, economic, and environmental analysis.”

Anthony and Fleur describe themselves as “cyber-neo-rurals:” they run a neighbourhood house that organises screenings and debates where several generations of neo-rurals come together. Fleur is the secretary of the association Démo-Terre-Happy, which defends “people caring for society” and participates in various local social forums. However, she refuses to be described as an activist: “I don’t like the concept of activism. I have moved from activism to everyday resistance.”

48 Extract from an email received on 15 November 2006.
49 Response to the question “do you consider yourself an activist today?”
We can see that Oliver has a similar perspective; he is also searching for political alternative and answers to social instability. He has a project to buy some land with friends, and to build some collective housing, so that they can escape their dependency on landowners. He founded a “counterculture collective” to organise concerts at the International Centre for Popular Culture “at the crossroads of activism, alternative rock music, counterculture, and the anti-authoritarian, anarchist, and autonomist spheres...”

Finally, the rejection of activist asceticism and the desire to focus on concrete local struggles constitute two central aspects to the forms of activism taken on by these anti-authoritarian inheritors. Although the critique of parents’ political models has undoubtedly influenced the forms of second-generation activism, the transformations of the activism on offer also played an essential role. The new forms of neo-rurality (Fleur) or the militant experiences in the Alternative, Anti-capitalist and Anti-war Village (VAAG) during the G8 counter-summit (Olivier) thus represent ways of reconciling radical activism, activation of countercultural dispositions internalised during childhood (practical implementation of self-management, feminism, political environmentalism) and immediate returns on current activism.

However, these new forms of activism must be understood as a response to the downward social mobility (individual and structural) of the cohorts born in the 1970s (Chauvel 1998; Baudelot and Establet, 2000; Peugny, 2009). In fact, in these forms of collective living that apply the modes of organisation they hope to see everywhere (along the lines of phalanstères), anti-authoritarian inheritors find political alternatives and answers to their social instability.

Inheriting the need to make sense of one’s life through activism

The processes of transmission and political inheritance in the second profile of activist inheritors will now be explored through the case of Lydia. These inheritors are involved on the far-left rather than at the anti-authoritarian pole,50 and the comparison with the previous profile allows us to show how the divergences in their political futures must be considered in light of family variables (particularly the continuity of parental political engagements during their youth) but also their social and professional trajectories.

50 This profile of activist inheritors brings together three times as many participants as the previous profile (30 versus 10)
A child schooled in revolution

Gérard, Lydia’s father, was born in 1948.\textsuperscript{51} He was enrolled in a scientific preparatory class in Toulouse in 1968. Close to the JCR, he was part of the occupation of the Lycée Fermat during the events and became an activist with the young JCR in the months that followed, as he was accepted into the prestigious engineering school, the Ecole Centrale de Paris. For him, May ’68 represented a “genuine turning point in [his] life and above all the opportunity to give meaning to [my] existence.”\textsuperscript{52} Three years later he became a paid party official of the LCR, and stayed there until the mid-1980s. Through his activism, he met Eliane, Lydia’s mother, in 1972. Born in 1954, Eliane was still a high school student at the time, and she joined the LCR and dropped her studies after passing the baccalaureate. When Lydia was born in 1975, her mother was working as a newspaper copyeditor.

Lydia’s parents separated before she was two years old. For Eliane, this romantic breakdown also meant a break away from activism, but also from her daughter, who remained in the sole custody of Gérard. As a result, Lydia scarcely saw her mother before she was seven years old.\textsuperscript{53}

Lydia describes the education that she received as permissive and progressive. Gérard took her to nearly all the meetings he participated in, to the point where Lydia was a “little revolutionary” from an early age:

> When I was in primary school... I spent a lot of time at the printshop for Rouge;\textsuperscript{54} I drew pictures, I knew the place by heart, I knew everyone, I was like a fish in water! [...] I was proud that my father was an activist! I was very aware of what was happening: I was totally into it! I was really, completely indoctrinated (she laughs)! My father transmitted his revolutionary faith to me. Later on, I questioned all that, but not when I was a kid!\textsuperscript{55}

Although they were given responsibilities early in life by parents who were very busy with their activism, the interviewees in this profile grew up with

\textsuperscript{51} His parents were left-wing Protestants and participated in the Resistance. Gérard’s trajectory was mentioned previously, in Chapters 2 and 3.

\textsuperscript{52} Extract from the interview conducted with Gérard on 3 March 2006, at his home in Paris.

\textsuperscript{53} Eliane refused to participate in the study, considering that she was not concerned by the Vitruve school.

\textsuperscript{54} Rouge is the newspaper of the LCR.

\textsuperscript{55} Extract from an interview conducted at Lydia’s home, on 15 March 2006. All the extracts in this section are from this interview.
a certain material, affective and political stability. They were born a few years later than the children who were on the “frontline” of educational experiments, mostly born before 1968 (see profile 2 in the schema above). Their parents were not unemployed, and they observed stable political behaviour in their parents. At a very early age they therefore internalised the need to commit to radically transforming society.

Reversing the stigma
Unlike the interviewees who shared the negative feeling of having been the objects of political experimentation at Vitruve school, Lydia, like most of the activist inheritors, adored and completely adopted the Vitruvian approach:

I was so proud of my school and always motivated... super enthusiastic about learning citizenship, participating in voting, meetings, sharing responsibilities etc. [...] I remember workshops where we had subjects to debate in a kind of arena, you know, verbal jousting, to teach us how to debate, how to defend ideas.

These students also say that the institutions and the functioning of the Vitruve school played a role in their future militant engagements. How can we explain such different reactions from those who, for example, criticise the school for not “having prepared them for reality” (a posture often accompanied by a rejection of activism)? We can hypothesise that the homogeneity of forms of primary socialisation (in the family and in the school) represents an initial factor favouring the “success”\textsuperscript{56} of Vitruvian socialisation, and being aware of one’s own education in a school outside the norm, is another. In other words, these children internalised the \textit{illusio} necessary to believe in the counter-system incarnated by their school, whilst being conscious that the rest of society did not follow this model. In this, we can see a characteristic of the parents of this profile who challenged the social order, and partly the everyday order, but who rejected more utopian positions. Gérard for example says, “I had both the deep conviction that we had to shake up society, as a whole, and particularly the school system, but I also thought that creating alternative micro-societies was not going to solve the problem.”

\textsuperscript{56} In the sense that these former students consider that Vitruve had a positive impact on the formation of their dispositions for activism (which constitutes, at least implicitly, one of the objectives of socialisation at Vitruve).
Thus, unlike the interviewees who experienced a more radically countercultural primary (family) socialisation (in particular the profile of the ambivalent inheritors of utopia and downwardly mobile inheritors), Lydia and those like her were aware of their difference from a very early age, which made it easier for them to confront the frames of secondary socialisation.

These future activists quickly adapted to secondary school (whereas profiles 2 and 6 were unable to overcome their academic shortcomings). Lydia was an excellent student, and elected class representative several times. Although she felt different from her classmates, she never suffered from this feeling, unlike those who saw their difference as a kind of stigma. This is because success at school has a strong influence on how dissocialisation is managed. It is much easier to reverse the stigma of marginalisation when one is accepted by the school institution. By contrast, those who failed at school sought to repress their countercultural dispositions, aspired to conformity, and did not become activists.

Lydia went to the local Lycée after four years of middle school at Vitruve, where upon her father’s advice she chose to study English and Spanish. This parental rejection of elitist academic strategies emerged again when Lydia told Gérard that she wanted to go to the highly prestigious Lycée Henri IV for her final year, but the latter did not encourage her. She obtained her baccalaureate with third class honours, and enrolled to study history at university.

In search of salvation goods: in the (partially contested) footsteps of her father Lydia left France to travel around Mexico after she finished her undergradu-ate degree. She found herself in the Chiapas region in 1994, in the midst of the Zapatista uprising. Although she was political she had never been directly involved in activism, and she began to question her political heritage through her experience in the field:

I met two people who had a strong impact on me: a woman who was the coordinator of a rural development program, which was reformist and so opposed to what the Zapatist National Liberation Army (EZLN) had done. And I worked in a Catholic mission with street children, with a

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57 This secondary school (which is not an experimental school) has a relatively poor reputation and most of the interviewees pursued their secondary studies elsewhere.
58 At the time Lydia wanted to undertake a preparatory course for the grandes écoles (hy-pokhâgne) so she decided to go to Lycée Henri IV, but also to pursue a girlfriend she had fallen in love with.
priest who was an extraordinary man, a Marxist, and who made a big impact on me (she laughs).

At age nineteen, Lydia was going through what she describes as a “mystical crisis.” She read up on all religions, searching for answers to her existential questions, and challenged the materialism she inherited from her parents. The very fact that she was asking these questions underlines the affinities that can exist between religious and political engagements and why it is interesting to consider activism in terms of the offer of salvation goods (Siméant, 2009).59

When she returned to France, the young student concluded her research for salvation goods with the observation of the inadequacy between her aspirations and what religion had to offer. She specifies that such a conversion would have been too costly in any case, “believing in God called into question too radically the foundations upon which I had built myself.” However, Lydia’s need to achieve self-realisation through her engagement continued to guide her in the years that followed.

Several interviewees in this profile became activists with political organisations close to the ones their parents had been involved with, before ultimately realising that it was impossible to reproduce parental activism identically. Lydia laughs, “it would be incestuous for me to be a member of the LCR!” By using the term incest Lydia expresses the widely held need of those in this profile to appropriate their political heritage through activist engagements that make sense in terms of their own trajectories as well as in the socio-political context of the 1990s. Yet this is a context that is incomparable to that of May ‘68 and the early ‘70s, marked by high unemployment, structural downward mobility for young people and a significant devaluing of far-left activism.

The results of National Front (FN) at the presidential elections of 1995 (15%), as well as the size of the social movements over that winter were catalysts for activism among many of the interviewees born in the 1970s, as were the student movements of 1986 and the emergence of SOS Racisme for the interviewees who were slightly older. Lydia joined Ras l’Front60 in 1996, considering it “the antiracist group closest to [her] opinions,” whilst she was studying history at the Sorbonne. She didn’t stay an activist there for

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59 Lydia went to work in a hospice in Calcutta two years later, surrounded by nuns. In some families, dispositions for political engagement (for parents) shifted towards the religious sphere (for the children). In these instances, it is often Buddhism that captured children’s interest.

60 An organisation created in 1990 to fight against the National Front.
very long: “I couldn’t do it. I had been steeped in this militant far-left milieu for so long that I knew all the bad sides, and I was hyper critical. Factional infighting, all the little conflicts that there are between micro-movements – I found it exasperating!”

It seemed as though the fact that they had witnessed the backstage operations of similar political organisations, as children, was detrimental to the illusio required to invest in them. In other words, these inheritors are faced with the following paradox: they cannot envisage their lives without activism, but they have inherited a critical perspective of political organisations that makes it more costly for them to maintain their engagement.

A job enabling activism

Lydia stopped her university studies after completing her Masters degree and became a primary school teacher. She justifies this professional decision by her desire for economic independence but also by the activist dimension of teaching “children and adolescents who are in difficulty.” Teaching attracts a great number of the activist inheritors, as we can see on the factorial plane in the proximity of the variables “middle-class, teachers” and the other variables related to activism. Rather than turning towards niches in the labour market that are adjusted to their countercultural dispositions (like many of those in profiles 1 and 2 do), they turned towards professions that allow them time to be activists, the first element in the forms of self-realisation that they inherited from their parents: “I’m not saying that I don’t care about my job, of course not, but I have never had the feeling that I would fulfil myself completely in my professional activity.”

It is not surprising that “career” ambitions are absent from the lifestyles inherited here, given that the parents also considered the professional sphere as being of secondary importance. The case of Gérard, who became a paid official with the LCR when he left engineering school is an archetypal example of this.

Whilst artistic professions constituted a space for the resolution of the tensions that were constitutive of the dissocialisation of ambivalent inheritors of utopia, activism allowed this second group of inheritors to resolve a certain number of contradictions also. Lydia thus found her place among the Panthères Roses (Pink Panthers), a far-left lesbian feminist group:

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61 She is a teacher at a school for children and young people with special educational needs.
I thought it was really good that my parents’ activism had given meaning to their lives; but of course... I obviously had a bit of trouble re-appropriating things [...] and at the Pink Panthers, it was the first time I had the impression that I’d found a form of engagement that was really mine, that corresponded exactly to what I want to say in that world.

This extract emphasises just how important parental engagement is in the internalisation of a norm of self-realisation through activism. Yet it also underlines the weight that this can represent for these inheritors. Many interviewees in profiles 3 and 4 declared that they suffered from the context which devalued the political engagements they had grown up with, as well as from lack of collective momentum, and a feeling of powerlessness in the face of a global capitalist system which seemed increasingly difficult to influence. This thus begs the question, not of the costs of activism, but the cost of a lack of militant activities. Olivier thus said:

It’s sure that we are different and that we make it hard for ourselves, more than others, asking all these questions, and wanting to change everything... Sometimes, I’d love to have a crap little job, a house, a car, a dog, a wife, kids, not have to think about anything, watch telly and football... but it’s just impossible, I can’t imagine my life without activism!

Often overqualified for the jobs they do, these activists put their university knowledge and skills at the service of a highly qualified activism, within hybrid activist networks that bring together activists, intellectuals, researchers and people in situations of instability, and thus contribute to (re)defining the position of an activist intellectual. Lydia thus became a member of a collective situated on the border between academia and activism on the question of gender. Similarly, for several years Gaël (see Box 8 below) ran a network dedicated to Bourdieu's sociology, bringing together students, researchers and activists to question the militant uses of critical sociology.

**Box 9  Gaël: from the factory to university via Bourdieu**

Born in 1968, Gaël is Fleur’s older brother. After going to primary school at Ange-Guépin, he immediately encountered academic difficulties at secondary school and was encouraged to do a professional certificate after middle school. He is bitterly critical of his parents (and in particular his father François) for not having helped him at school, and holds him responsible for his downward mobility.
Enrolled in a work-study programme, he quickly realised that factory work was not for him. He began to read philosophy “to escape from my everyday life.”62 Shortly afterwards, his autodidactic intellectual path led him to discover Pierre Bourdieu, whose work would have a radical impact on his social trajectory – indeed he wrote to the sociologist in 1998 to tell him this, after he had enrolled in a PhD in sociology. He was able to pursue his doctorate after sitting a special entry exam at age 24 and studying sociology at the University of Nantes. On the day of our interview, Gaël showed me the letter Pierre Bourdieu had sent him in reply. The physical place this letter occupied in his house (stuck to the glass door of his bookcase, in full view of the main room of his house) reflects the place of Bourdieu’s work in Gaël’s life. Here are some extracts from the letter he sent to the sociologist:

In 1987, after a ‘problematic’ education that had involuntarily led me to a professional school, my first experiences of factory life curiously saw me turn towards cultural pleasures far removed from the kind of professional education I received in the company. A feeling of downward social mobility and disillusionment were the origin of my enthusiasm for reading during my free time and my breaks at the factory […] my experience as a manual worker (on the assembly line and other unskilled tasks) provoked a social suffering in me that put me in an awkward position with this industrial world, in which I felt condemned to stay forever. […]

A little later, my personal research had helped me to understand the meaning of my social trajectory and the multiple forms of domination and resentment that I observed among my schoolmates, and later among my work colleagues. […] I did struggle to understand certain passages of The Critique of Pure Reason […], texts from the Frankfurt school, Foucault… Closer to my own experience, I read Simone Weil (The Worker’s Condition), Robert Linhart (L’Établi). I can still remember all my efforts to familiarise myself – sometimes in vain – with “high” thinking. People discouraged me, ‘you’re not cut out for study’ they told me. I remember an anecdote about my workplace (1989): dressed in my blue uniform and my hands covered in grease I had the gall to write the introduction of a philosophy essay (to give to my sister’s teacher, she was in her final year) in a little notebook, right next to technicians who were busy adjusting an injection moulding machine and who naturally must have thought I was interested in their way of working. I was both there and elsewhere.

62 Extract from the interview conducted at Gaël’s house near Nantes on 6 June 2006.
And then one day there was a little book by Ferry and Renaut, *La Pensée ’68* (The Thought of ’68) that I bought almost by chance. I started to read it, not without some difficulty and discovered your existence. […] For me, in spite of all the difficulty I had in reading you, it was a veritable ‘revelation’. […] All the analyses that you propose in *La Distinction* helped me to reconceptualise the way I saw the social worlds I had moved in since my childhood. […] Through a kind of ‘revelation’ your writings led me to return to study aged 23, and to pursue a university degree without too much trouble to doctoral level.

I had to be one of the dominated (I could not but be very sensitive, or even revolted, by all these miserable situations specific to the ‘precarious’ people who will never be understood by public policy representatives, by traditional unions, by fashionable intellectual circles) to be able to understand that a theory of the actor trapped in a scholastic vision – like for Ferry and Renaut, or for Rawls, to mention only them – stems from a cynical comfort, a profound ignorance of the conditions in which social relations are produced.

[…] To conclude, I wanted to tell you that my social trajectory is the product of reading your work, and, even as I continue to read, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

We have seen that the reading of the early Bourdieu’s work contributed to the politicisation of many first-generation intellectuals (see Chapter 1), due to this “revelation effect,” which Gaël also mentions. Similarly, we can see how this critical sociology resonates with the concerns of actors whose social trajectories are marked by social mobility (upward or downward, as is the case here) or displacement. Indeed, when Gaël says “I was here and elsewhere,” he summarises what most of the interviewees from the second generation felt, and expressed over the course of the interviews: the feeling of being displaced, whether or not they move downward. There are substantial affinities between the reflexivity produced by the position of a displaced person, the sociology of revelation and social critique through various forms of activism; and the boundaries between them are often fluid and permeable. This is how Gaël came to do his Masters sociology theses on student unionism, to vote for the LCR and to become a unionist with Sud during his studies. This reflexive activist posture allows him to conceptualise the tensions due to the dissonance of the dispositions internalised in the habitually closed circles he moved in (very free education, parents considered absent, countercultural socialisation, traditional secondary school and humiliation due to academic failure, orientation into
vocational learning unsuited to his aspirations, factory work and university study, return to study as a mature student, generational gap with the other students etc.).

Gaël did not finish his doctoral thesis, for a number of reasons, particularly financial. After working as a casual teacher at university and in different social work schools (between 2001 and 2005) he retrained to become a special education teacher. Although his trajectory is unique in the corpus studied here, it nevertheless reflects the reflexive posture characteristic of many children of 68ers who became university lecturers and teachers in social and human sciences, working on subjects related to their political heritage.63

Conclusion

As we reach the end of this final chapter, there are several findings that may shed light on the question of the – activist – futures of the children of the ’68ers we interviewed. Firstly, it is important to establish a link between the fact that only one fifth of the children interviewed went on to become activists, and the political context in which they grew up, characterised as it was by an increasing depreciation of activism.64 It is also important to underline that these children of activists did not experience the opening of the field of possibilities that their parents went through in May ’68. This was an important socialising factor for the first generation, reinforcing dispositions for contestation and functioning as a kind of proof of the fragility of a political system hitherto believed to be unshakable. The second generation thus inherited aspirations to activism that only encountered a weak echo among their peers. Moreover, they experienced no events comparable with May ’68, which would have been able to confirm the validity of their aspirations and spark their passage to activism.

63 This profile combining reflexive and militant postures seems to be generalisable (beyond the few interviewees who embody it here) given the discussions I have had about the study with young researchers in social sciences and sociology who proved to be the “children of ’68ers” studying politics. To cite only a few who identify (or identified) with this posture, Hélène Combes, Florence Joshua, Sandrine Garcia, Bleuwen Lechaux, Virginie Linhart, Joël Gombin, Eve Meuret-Campfort, Bibia Pavard, Étienne Pénissat, Johanna Siméant, and of course, myself.

64 Thus, as Johanna Siméant observes, the often-cited conclusion about apolitical young people and more politicised elders is “an overly schematic image [...] that overlooks the fact that political activity, and particularly in its leftist incarnations, appears particularly highly valued during the first period, but particularly devalued during the 1980s-1990s” (Siméant, 2003, p. 187).
In order to answer the question “who are those who became activists?” the comparison of different collective profiles of inheritors (beyond the few presented here) allows us to perceive the roles played by different forms of parental activism during childhood, educational models, the intra-familial affective economy or the arrangements for responding to dissocialisation. Here we present certain conclusions as to the social conditions for the second-generation effects of May ’68.

Firstly, and unsurprisingly, it seems necessary – but not sufficient – that the events of May ’68 had an impact on the trajectories of the parents for them to have an impact on the children. Simple participation in the events is not sufficient in itself. The homogeneity of political preferences and activities between parents, as well as their stability over time, represents another essential factor in the transmission of dispositions for activism. The study thus shows that a childhood marked by the homogeneity of socialising agents (within the parental couple, but also between the school and the family environment) and a certain material – and affective – parental stability, is favourable to the transmission of dispositions for protest. Success at school also positively contributes to assimilation and the activation of countercultural dispositions, whilst failure at school and downward social mobility are often responsible for rejecting these dispositions.

The children interviewed have almost all internalised systems of dissonant dispositions, which make them young adults who are always slightly “out of step” or “on the margins.” Among the activist inheritors, activism appears to be a position that allows resolution of tensions inherent in their dissocialisation. Indeed, through their militant activities they contribute to modifying the environment in which they live, so that it might conform to the dispositions for protest internalised during their childhoods.

The comparison of different activist trajectories among the second generation also shows that, although dispositions for activism are relatively well transmitted from parents to children, the forms and repertoires of action in which these dispositions can be actualised are much more difficult to transmit, as the political context of the time becomes a major constraining factor. We thus observe a relatively strong continuity in dispositions for protest, and a discontinuity in militant frameworks, which allows us to move beyond the sterile and overly simplistic opposition between “old” and “new” activists. Indeed, the case studies presented here show that the “new activists” can be the children of the “old,” a result that partly invalidates the thesis of a clear difference in social origin between these two groups.

Finally, in order to maintain a certain intergenerational continuity of activism, the transmission of “organisational memory,” “group memory”
and “collective identity,” allowing younger activist to learn from their predecessors’ experiences, is essential (Whittier, 1997). However, many interviewees were activists in countercultural spheres that rejected political organisations, or in non-institutionalised feminist movements that began to run out of steam in the late 1970s. They therefore had difficulty successfully transmitting a memory of activism to their children, in the absence of the institutional means (i.e. political training schools, or youth groups) established by these protest organisations to transmit a (political) collective history. The family institution thus appears necessary, but not sufficient, to transmit these dispositions for activism.