May '68

Whittaker, Vicki, Whittaker, Presses de la Fondation Nationale de Sciences Politiques, Pagis, Julie

Published by Amsterdam University Press

Whittaker, Vicki, et al.
May '68: Shaping Political Generations.
Amsterdam University Press, 2018.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/66525.

⇒ For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66525

⇐ For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2659621
Changing one’s life to change the world? The politicisation of the private sphere

The effects of the events of May ’68 can also be found in the private sphere,¹ which was subject to its share of breakdowns and upheavals in the wake of activism. Indeed, the sociology of the biographical consequences of activism cannot ignore the personal spaces in which political dispositions and preferences will be applied. From the beginning of the 1970s, many interviewees thus sought to continue their activism by attacking the logics of social reproduction within the family and within the school system. For them, participation in May ’68 produced a critical redefinition of social relations of sex, generation, and the roles of parents and children (Chamboderon and Prévot, 1973, p. 317-318). This transfer of protest aspirations into the private sphere did not uniformly affect all the interviewees – it primarily concerns the sub-group clustered around non-institutionalised forms of activism in the 1970s (situated on the right of the factorial plane presented in Chapter 3). This chapter therefore focuses on the biographical impact of May ’68 on the youngest members of the corpus, who are mostly women, and who were mostly first-time activists, high school and young university students in 1968, and who generally came from more privileged backgrounds. It focuses on those for whom May ’68 played a role in political socialisation by awareness raising, altering their political and professional trajectories to different extents, but particularly affecting their private trajectories. This is the pole at which individuals attempted to change their own lives in order to maintain the opening of possibilities they experienced during May ’68, including non-linear careers, social marginalisation, or communitarian utopias. This critical renewal of everyday life (Mauger, 1999, p. 234) therefore participates in the politicisation of causes that had previously remained outside the political sphere, such as the family, the place of women in society, the environment, or education.

¹ The forms and boundaries of the private and public spheres have evolved over time. These habitual distinctions between public and private, or between political and domestic, have been widely criticised by feminist movements, notably in the name of the famous slogan “the personal is political” (Bereni and Revillard, 2012). The notion of the private sphere is preserved however, to show just how protest dispositions have been imported into it, leading to a redefinition of its boundaries.
Politicising the private sphere

The core of the many repercussions of activism during May ’68 on the familial and private spheres lie in challenges to the family institution, conjugal relations, established norms relating to gender and sexuality, and also child-rearing practices.

Family: I hate you!

“Do you believe that in 1968 (and the years that followed), the family was an institution that reproduced bourgeois social order?” Half of the interviewees answered yes to this question, and within that half, most were women. This disparity reflects the forms of activism that were adopted in the years following May ’68. Nearly 70% of interviewees of both sexes continued as activists after 1968, but only 31% of women were activists before the events, compared to 58% of men. May ’68 therefore represented a more significant catalyst to entry into activism for the women interviewed. If gender has an impact on the number of people becoming politically involved through May ’68, it also has an impact on the forms of politicisation – 60% of the women interviewed said they participated (actively or as sympathisers) in the feminist movements of the 1970s, compared to less than 25% of men. These women imported their critical dispositions into the feminist movements and protested for the evolution of their conditions, attacked social gender relations, and participated in redefining “women’s” roles. Gender thus weighs heavily on the forms of conversion of activist resources accumulated both before and during May ’68.

Indeed, the men interviewed here seem to have converted their disposition for protest into the professional sphere (see the previous chapter), whilst many more of the women imported them into the private sphere or into care (transferring them to roles as midwives, in crèches, or in family planning). This fundamental difference is a result of the gendered division of labour, which is typical within couples and also reflected in the militant sphere (Dunezat, 2007). Activist work for men leads to the acquisition of skills and abilities (organisation, leadership, public speaking, synthesis etc.) that are more easily convertible into the professional sphere than the

2 Among these groups were the MLAC – the Mouvement pour la liberté de l’avortement et de la contraception (Movement for free access to abortion and contraception), the MLF – Mouvement de Libération des Femmes (Women’s Liberation Movement), and numerous other informal feminist group.
resources acquired by women activists, which are less socially recognised and valued. The young women interviewed, who took background roles or performed subaltern militant tasks during May ’68, and who often had young children in the 1970s, found a way of appropriating activism through the politicisation of the private sphere. This was the case for most of the women who became politically active through the matrix of statutory incoherencies, and for whom May ’68 provoked a political awakening. The case of Mathilde serves as an example here; she moved to Paris with her husband in September 1969 to study humanities at the Sorbonne, where she discovered the profusion of activist groups and joined the protest space through the crèche:

In 1968 everything took off, and the whole generation immediately got caught up in it... [...] What happened outside resonated in every home, in every person, in every couple. That was the beginning of my awareness [...] I went to Paris... And as I had my daughter and I wanted to participate in the movement, I went in via the ‘alternative’ crèches [...] I got my political education among those leftists [...] And so from that, well feminism, at the time it was the MLF, so I went to their meetings, some awareness raising groups as they called them.

Mathilde quickly became one of the cornerstones of the alternative crèche at the university, as an “activist for anti-authoritarian education and everything associated with that,” participating at the MLAC group at the university. In this environment, she discovered the writings of Wilhelm Reich, and Summerhill by Alexander Sutherland Neill (1960):

---

3 The gendered division of forms of participation in May ’68 was presented in Chapter 2: public speaking at meetings, “active” participation in events, or the “charisma” of leaders are presented as predominantly associated with men, whereas women “follow”, “participate”, and play less visible, less “political” and less valued roles. Gender also defines the distribution of tasks between activists and their rank in the hierarchy, according to the two main principles of the gendered division of labour – the principle of separation and the principle of hierarchy (Kergoat, 2000).

4 Mathilde’s case (born in 1946, the daughter of right-wing artisans) was used in Chapter 1 to develop the schema of statutory incoherencies.

5 Many of the women interviewed joined the protest sphere at the beginning of the 1970s through alternative crèches, thus combining activist time, familial time and even professional time for those who became professional childcare workers through these structures (Mozère, 1992).

6 Extract from the interview with Mathilde, on 26 January 2004.
So then, well it was communal living. Our idea was not to stage a revolution somewhere else, but to live it in our own lives...we were living as activists, that’s how it was. So there was a refusal of lots of things, family, school... So we looked, once my daughter was a bit older, we had to find a school that was not a school...

Mathilde’s activism, as a feminist and an anarchist, was thus characteristic of the sub-group of the corpus situated on the right-hand side of the factorial plane (figure 7 in chapter 3), which is predominantly made up of women who were students in 1968, with little or no prior activist experience. These women tended to access the protest space in areas that were not very institutionalised (and that were thus less demanding in terms of militant resources and organisational constraints). Investment in the alternative crèches also gave them time for activism (Mathilde’s daughter was cared for in this way) and a way to appropriate activism by importing the political discourses and behaviour from the sphere of production into the sphere of reproduction (Borzeix and Maruani, 1984). The struggle for the right to abortion, particularly within the MLAC (Zancarini-Fournel, 2003), is emblematic of this period and this sub-group of interviewees, who became active to consolidate the means of their recent sexual independence.

The family as an institution was seen as the fundamental unit in which social inequalities were reproduced, and as such it had to be shattered in favour of domestic collectives that were yet to be invented. It was thus put to the test through various subversive family structures. Against the institution of marriage and the norm of fidelity which was considered hypocritical and associated with male domination, “sexual liberation” was promoted with the slogan “jealousy is forbidden” or “we belong to no one.” Among their intellectual references was Wilhelm Reich, who wrote “today, the family and the school are, from a political perspective, nothing more than workshops of the bourgeois social order destined to produce good and obedient subjects” (Reich, 1972, p. 106). Just over 40% of interviewees say that they experienced “open relationships” in the 1970s. Doris thus recalls:

Our thing was Reich, ah yes, yes, we were real Reichians, we had to break free from the yolk of marriage and possession and be free [...] because you see, all manifestation of suffering, jealousy was considered emotional

---

7 In the militant space represented on the factorial plane, Mathilde is situated between the categories “women”, “community” and “student in 1968”, and “non-institutional activism”.
8 But also Family Planning and the organisation Choice (Pavard, 2012).
blackmail. There was something by Simone de Beauvoir where she explained that very well, you could tell that she’d been through that with her man! Because our model was pretty much Sartre and de Beauvoir!

These “everyday activists” (Bidou, 1984) thus experimented with new conjugal and domestic norms within extended familial configurations; these took very diverse forms but were regrouped under the term “communes.” Of the corpus as a whole, one third of the interviewees experienced life in a commune, however, the rate is lower in the population who were already activists than among those who became activists with May ’68. Age (correlated to the occupational status in 1968)\(^9\) is the most decisive variable in accounting for the probability of living in a commune (see Figure 9 below).

Different ways of regulating gender and generational relations existed in these communes, and they evolved over time within any particular one (Lacroix, 1981). To return to the example of Mathilde, after an initial experience in a commune that made it possible to imagine and then to

---

\(^9\) Extract from an interview conducted with Doris at her home in Paris, January 10 2006. The daughter of a rabbi, Doris was born in 1950. She became politically active with the events of May ’68, whilst she was in her first year of an arts degree at the Sorbonne, and in the years that followed, she participated in the movement for critical revival of everyday life.

\(^10\) 45% of students in 1968 experienced communal life in the years that followed, compared to just 20% of employees.
achieve separation from her husband, her next communal experience took the form of an extended household (Weber, 2002), organised around the collective responsibility for child-rearing. In this commune in the north of Paris, we can see the various attempts to experience a model that could be an alternative to that of the traditional family:

the main idea was that everyone had their own room, even though couples formed pretty quickly, but that was important! [...] We wrote on the walls, we wrote dazibaos\(^\text{11}\) all the time and every time something happened, either on a practical level like the soup wasn’t great or whatever, or there was a conflict between the kids and parents, we wrote it on the walls! And pretty soon we saw that even among ourselves, we still had the same distribution of tasks [...] we tried very hard to get rid of that difference, and didn’t really succeed, well... perhaps a little [...] the idea of sharing the children too...

As far as domestic organisation was concerned, the rejection of traditional social gender relations was reflected in various systems for rotating tasks, more or less organised and egalitarian, sometimes debated in the general assemblies and formalized in calendars stuck up in communal spaces, or even written on the walls.

**Marital breakdowns: a consequence of May ’68?**

A third of interviewees who were in relationships in 1968 separated in the years that followed; but the women are more likely (than their ex-husbands) to impute these separations to their participation in the events of 1968. In the long term, 60% of the couples interviewed eventually separated, at a time (in the early 70s) when the divorce rate for the general population in France was below 15%.\(^\text{12}\) Without suggesting that May ’68 represents the unique cause of these separations, some can be imputed to the effects (different for men and women) of participation in these events.\(^\text{13}\) It is important to distinguish

---

\(^\text{11}\) Dazibaos are handwritten posters stuck on the walls. Imported from the Chinese cultural revolution by Maoist organisations, dazibaos spread quickly through the French commune movement in the 1970s.

\(^\text{12}\) Data from INSEE and the Minister for Justice. These rates have not stopped climbing since, reaching 42.5% in 2003. In this respect we can characterise our population as a precursor to a general tendency.

\(^\text{13}\) Doug McAdam obtained similar results with lower marriage rates in the population of former activists than in the control population (McAdam, 1989, p. 757).
what happened during the events of May ’68 from what was to play out in the years that followed. For some, May ’68 simply played a role in revealing prior dissent. For others, the gap between the discourses of the political organisations they participated in during May ’68, and the inequality they experienced in practice, accelerated their awareness of male domination (Evans, 1979; McAdam, 1992; Borzeix and Maruani, 1984, p. 294-296).

But it was above all the investment of interviewees in the women’s movement and the discovery of feminism that caused upheavals in their conjugal relationships in the following years (Le Quentrec and Rieu, 2003). Doris thus explained how her trajectory progressively diverged from that of her husband the more she frequented the feminist sphere:

Robert was not into it at all, he’d just followed May ’68 from a distance, but he was already working and I was discovering a new student and feminist environment... And he hated my feminist friends...but it was reciprocal, at the beginning I had to defend him all the time... but well, we just became too different... and let’s just say it brought out a lot of things, and on top of that ... I fell in love with someone else. 14

From the early 1970s, feminism made it possible to politically and collectively re-evaluate situations that had previously been regarded as individual and guilt-ridden, both politically and collectively. Martine 15 thus recounts:

Before [1968] I thought that I was “backward” compared with the others, that if it wasn’t great in my relationship, it was because I had problems... there were so many taboos, it was a bit shameful... and then we realised that we shared these problems with so many other girls! [...] and that it was more widespread!

For many women, the “1968 years” (Dreyfus-Armand et al., 2000) provided an opportunity for personal transformation. Indeed, the divergence between the model of femininity interiorised during primary socialisation (most of the interviewees had a Judeo-Christian upbringing in the post-war era) and the redefinition of new ways of becoming women16 became a source of deep divisions, both personally and within their relationships. Although men were

---

14 Extract from an interview conducted with Doris, 10 January 2006.
15 Born in 1948, the daughter of a right-wing Catholic police inspector and a mother at home.
16 For which they did not have hereditary models from prior generations, that they could readily mobilise (Collin, 2000, p. 29).
also shaped and altered by their activism, it had a different impact on them than it did on women who experienced genuine gender resocialisation, testing their activist claims in their own private lives. In other words, although the social movements of the 1970s did indeed represent “spaces of gender work” (Fillieule and Roux, 2009), they had a greater transformative impact on women. The distinct evolution of representations of the self and one’s role within the couple and the family thus provoked situations of increasing dissonance and divergence between the expectations of the two partners.

Once again, the consequences of these separations differ according to gender – men are four times more likely than their ex-partners to be currently in a couple.\textsuperscript{17} Although this is in keeping with the classical studies on the fact that women tend to have more difficulty finding another partner after a divorce (Cassan, Mazuy and Clanché, 2001), the gender gap is even more pronounced in the population interviewed here. Yet these women are much more likely than their male counterparts to attribute the changes in their representations of conjugal relationships to the events of May ’68.\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, finding a partner who accepts to challenge the gender system in conjugal life is clearly not always easy. Marthe puts it like this:

I realised that men found me scary, I never had trouble having affairs, but whenever it came to becoming a couple, they ran away, as though I was asking too much…\textsuperscript{19}

The cost of returning to more traditional forms of conjugal life after having experimented with more diverse countercultural family structures and sexual norms therefore appears to be more substantial for women than for men.

Moreover, although interviewees of both sexes had alternative experiences in the years that followed May ’68, temporarily breaking away from their professional paths, the social reintegration of women seems to have been less straightforward. Women were also more likely to have had non-linear professional trajectories, like Annette for example, for whom a succession

---

\textsuperscript{17} One third of female interviewees were living alone at the time of the interviews, compared to just 8\% of male interviewees.

\textsuperscript{18} To the question “Is it possible to credit May ’68 with an influence (direct or indirect) on your vision of being in a couple?” nearly half the female respondents replied in the affirmative, compared to one third of male respondents.

\textsuperscript{19} Born in 1939 in a Parisian bourgeois family, Marthe graduated as a dental surgeon, but had not practiced since the mid-1970s, having transitioned in the 1980s to work in video.
of professional setbacks led to a reaction of withdrawal and disappointment – particularly in political terms:

My life has been a series of mutations in which I never really found a balance, which I feel particularly acutely at the moment, which is why I have difficulty answering some of your political questions. The questions to do with sharing collide with the need for individualistic self-protection as a result of fatigue, and personal struggle. 20

The influence of gender on the formation of political generations is dealt with in the next chapter. However, we can already begin to formulate certain hypotheses concerning the gender gap in professional costs and retributions of activism. Firstly, the trajectories of the women in the corpus encounter May ’68 at impressionable biographical moments, 21 such that their professional trajectories remain durably altered. 22 Moreover, the gendered division of activist labour (particular in May ’68) leads to a difference in knowledge and competences acquired through activism, which benefits the professional reintegration of men. Finally, the statistical analysis of professional effects (see Chapter 3) shows that women are more likely to be concerned by what can be described as parallel strategies, temporary exits and social marginalisation in the years after May ’68, compared to their male counterparts. This renders professional reintegration after several “blank” years on their CVs (unusual in traditional forms of work and especially salaried work), especially taxing.

Turning to psychoanalysis: a therapy for fractured habitus?

One quarter of the women interviewed said they had experienced depression in the years after 1968 (compared to 10% of men), and 37% had turned to psychoanalysis, compared to one quarter of men. Beyond the context of the late-1970s that was particularly favourable to psychoanalysis, these women’s use of this therapy seems to function partly as a way of conceiving and

---

20 Extract from an interview with Annette, born in 1948, daughter of a taxi-driver and an accountant, both left-wing atheists. For several of the female interviewees, like Annette, who were divorced, living alone, in chaotic professional situations, downward social mobility combined with the professional costs of past engagements led to a disavowal of the political class.

21 In particular, there are more women than men in the corpus who were still high school or university students during May ’68, and who had not yet begun professional careers.

22 In fact 68% of the women in the corpus declared that May ’68 led to effects on their professions compared to just 56% of men.
healing the identity tensions that were provoked by their activism after 1968. Indeed, these female pioneers who participated in the profound challenges to the condition of women through the invention and experimentation of new forms of womanhood, often encountered incomprehension or even rejection by their parents and some of their friends and family. The emotional costs of these conversions were all the more intense given that these young women had themselves interiorised the gendered norms that they were now violently rejecting. As Mathilde explains:

At the time [1974], I began psychoanalysis, whilst this revolution inside me, my life, this enormous revolution, which meant that I completely lost my bearings... that was something that really destabilised me in a way and during this whole period of two or three years where I completely changed my bearings, and well, I cut myself off from my parents [...] and in terms of activism, I also had a few pangs, about abortion especially, that stuck... My catholic education kept coming out and I’d signed the manifesto of the 343 sluts23 but I knew that I could never have an abortion myself [...] the only really concrete thing that I got out of my analysis was that I understood, in my body, well in my head, that I was free, that I could choose, because up until then, each of my actions, each of my movements had been dictated by morality... Everything was formatted by education, so I had such guilt in going against it! [...] So, it was very violent and destabilising, at the same time as it was a genuine renaissance. That’s why for a time I leant on the crutch of psychoanalysis [...] You can’t imagine the moral tsunami that it was, for a whole generation.

The family breakdown (temporary in this case, but long-lasting in others), and the break away from certain social networks from before 1968, were part of the consequences of this conversion process, as well as being part of its conditions. Yet Mathilde’s comments, particularly on abortion, remind us that these breakdowns are rarely sufficient to shake off dispositions that are internalised early on; the “crutch of psychoanalysis” is thus useful in

23 The manifesto of the 343, written by Simone de Beauvoir in 1971 to defend women’s right to abortion, was signed by 343 women admitting to having had an abortion when abortions were illegal in France. The manifesto became known as the “appel des 343 salopes (sluts)” after a satirical cartoon appeared on the subject. It ultimately contributed to a change in attitudes towards abortion in France which, in addition to the essential work by grassroots feminist movements such as MLAC, eventually led to the Veil Law decriminalizing voluntary termination in the first ten weeks of pregnancy.
helping to resolve these contradictory socialisations and understand these fractured *habitus*.

In the long term, a significant proportion of the interviewees continue to see the events of May-June ’68 as having a certain number of effects on their everyday lives, their representations of adult relationships, education and child-rearing practices, even dress codes – once again with significant differences between the sexes (see table 5 below).

**Table 5  The influence of May ’68 on everyday life by gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of interviewees who say May ’68 had a “quite” or “very” significant impact</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>on their way of interpreting the world</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on their current style of dress</td>
<td>58%**</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on their vision of the couple</td>
<td>47%**</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their everyday life</td>
<td>43%**</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**correlations statistically significant with the Chi2 test

The formulation of the questionnaire allowed the interviewees to specify how their everyday lives had been affected (where relevant), forty years later, by the events of 1968. Environmentalism and refusal of consumerism are among the most frequently recurring themes for both sexes. However male respondents do not emphasise their intimate relations with the social world in the way that women do. Among their responses, we find: “awareness of environmentalism in everyday actions: sharing housework with my partner; non-conformity;” “more marginal life choices;” “the search for equity, thirst for justice, conformity with my ideas in my everyday actions and choices;” “I have always sought to remain in this openness;” “I continue to build my relationships according to this engagement and openness;” or finally, “1968: I still live with it.”

These differences in the personal consequences resulting from activism in May-June ’68 are not easy to objectify through numerical indicators. Yet their traces are visible even on the bodies of the participants, “in a shortened, practical form, in other words mnemonic” (Bourdieu 1972, p. 297). We would need a photo gallery to really account for the differences in bodily *hexis*,

---

24  In other words habitus “bearing in the form of tensions and contradictions, the mark of the contradictory conditions of formation of which they are the product” (Bourdieu, 1997, trad. p. 64)

25  I abandoned the initial idea of taking photos in order to respect the anonymity of the participants.
so we will make do with a few indications. The interviewees for whom the effects are the most visible present an anti-conformist bodily *hexis*. This might be seen in the rejection of the traditional reservation of the bourgeoisie and a more relaxed style, in highly colourful dress, a historically or typically “hippie” look, clear favourite colours,\(^{26}\) or in laid-back hairstyles. These more visible forms are incarnated by the interviewees situated at the countercultural pole, who seek to subvert the social order on an individual level, through transgressive trajectories based on the logic of exemplarity: they display their rejection of dominant norms on and through their bodies.

Finally, the rejection of these dominant educative norms is widely shared in the interview population because of the way it was constructed,\(^{27}\) and nearly 90% of these interviewees consider that May ’68 had an impact on their educational strategies – both familial and academic.

### Redefining the role of parents

The politicisation of educative practices was a significant part of the critical renewal of everyday life. Childhood was invested by this particular sub-group of the population as a field of political experimentation. The educational practices implemented by these everyday activists must be put into a context in which the social roles of parents and children were being redefined. Based on these interviews, the archives from the schools in the study, and the results in the questionnaires, we can list the main traits (rarely present within a single family configuration) of the ideal type countercultural educational model.\(^{28}\)

The rejection of the institution of the family, marriage and the couple resulted in a delay in becoming parents, among other things. There is a

---

26 For example, when I arrived at Christiane’s house in Nantes, I was struck by the omnipresence of purple: from the interior decoration, to the Volkswagen painted purple in the yard, to her clothes. Forty years on, these traces of the past are more visible among the women interviewees: they have more attributes (both in terms of body and dress) that are susceptible to manifesting this countercultural past than their male counterparts.

27 We can, however, generalise (in part) this type of effect to a less specific population of ’68ers, to the extent that challenging traditional pedagogic relationships and generational relations resonated widely in the 1970s, as we can see in the numerous publications dedicated to the “end of the family”, or the critique of the school system, in journals such as *Autrement*, or satirical political newspapers such as *Actuel*, *Tout*, *La Gueule ouverte*, *Hara-Kiri* etc. as well as the number of pedagogic groups and journals that emerged around these questions.

28 I have chosen to use the term counterculture in reference both to the type of activism that Gérard Mauger describes as “countercultural leftism” and the questionings of Annick Percheron regarding the rejection of dominant norms (Percheron and Subileau, 1974, p. 33).
significant age gap between first child(ren) and those that came from any second relationships, and this is also characteristic of the population interviewed here. This meant complex sibling groups (for this period) in broader family configurations. In terms of modes of organisation and regulations of family relationships, these actors who accuse the family institution of reproducing the social order, reject dominant norms whilst experimenting with new norms of parenthood and regulations of intergenerational relations. Criticism of relationships based on authority and domination within the family may also lead to the questioning of the terms of address that typically convey them. Nearly half of the parents interviewed here therefore had their children call them by their given names, which they explain in retrospect by their refusal to conceal relations of domination behind a “system of sentiment”29 (affective obligations and constraints linked to family relationships) or by the refusal to be reduced to their role in social reproduction:

Both my sons called me Claire, from when they were very young (except when they needed to be consoled) and continue to do so. All our friends' children did the same [...] there is no consciously political justification. That's just how it was, that was the time. With hindsight, you could explain it by a societal desire for change, to not impose on our children what our parents demanded of us. To give children a status that allowed them a future free from imposition – to blossom, without being hampered by their parents’ desires.30

Gilles emphasises that:

We wanted to be called by our given names, of course, but it didn’t always work [...] it was about constructing a non-hierarchical relationship, non-authoritarian, in which power relations were less vocal... and were less concealed by the emotional blackmail stemming from the terms ‘mummy’ and ‘daddy’. So, it was part of a logic of challenging the status of the child and thus the status of the parent as well, of course.31

29 Florence Weber reminds us that systems of kinship are threefold: “intellectual (systems of thought), practical (systems of action), affective (systems of sentiment)” (Weber, 2002, p. 74)
30 Extract from an email from Claire received 10 November 2008. Claire comes from a bourgeois right-wing Catholic background. In 1968, she was a technical assistant at the SAT (telecom company) and a CFDT unionist.
31 Extract from an exchange of emails with Gilles regarding the educational practices he used with his daughter Nathalie, born in 1964. (Emails exchanged between 18 October 2008
Child-rearing was also subject to a degree of experimentation. In certain communes, the parents took turns parenting not just their own children but the whole group of children, as a way of collectivizing childcare. Although this collective approach can be understood from the perspective of reducing the costs of the domestic economy, the political justifications remain central in the interviewees’ discourses. We can see this in the case of Mathilde:

I wanted to set up a kind of club for single parents, with only activists... I always lived in political communities [...] there, my idea, was that it was unhealthy to raise your children alone, two-people families were considered unhealthy, mother-child couples, and the neurosis, and if we didn't feel able to accommodate demands, at certain times etc. there had to be a group of adults who could step in, so it revolved around the idea that there were groups of adults and children, and being the least interventionist possible [...] there was also the idea of the non-possession of the children [...].

The refusal to consider the child as a “future social being” (Foucambert, 1977, p. 138) led to the rejection of authoritarian educational practices, as well as the refusal to keep children at a distance from a certain number of subjects from which they are habitually excluded. The children ate at the same table as the adults and participated in the discussions. They had the right to speak and subjects such as politics and sexuality were discussed with them. The few taboos were always made explicit and even decided together with the children. Early autonomy and responsibilisation of children were the two central and complementary principles of this countercultural socialisation. This operated through substantial freedom given to the children in their daily activities (in terms of both schooling and friendships), but also in their responsibility for a certain number of domestic chores (shopping, housework, managing pocket money, cooking etc.).

In terms of political socialisation, these educational practices directly aimed to encourage non-conformity to dominant norms. This intentional political socialisation meant being open with children about one's political preferences, and having the children participate in various political activities (first and foremost demonstrations, but also political meetings). The refusal and 25 October 2008). The trajectory of Gilles is analysed in Chapter 4.

---

32 An extreme case of this can be seen in Betty (born 1946) who explained in her interview that the names of her twins were decided in a general assembly by the six adults in the commune.
to “format children” or to have them “conform to dominant norms” also involved educational practices that aimed to not reproduce the gendered division of social roles – buying traditionally male toys for girls, and vice versa, equal participation of both sexes in housework, non-differentiation of education according to sex etc. With forty years hindsight, Mathilde reflects on these educational utopias:

We imagined – we were crazy right! – that by getting at the roots, in the education of very small children, we could abolish the domination of men over women, for us it was clear, and we realised, as we watched the children grow, that it didn’t work like that (she laughs)!

These comments clearly underline the experimental aspect of these collective spaces for the redefinition of gender relations and educational relations, based on the (relative) suspension of conjugal norms, norms of parenting and gender that had all been tacitly accepted up until then.

Finally, the school as an institution was not left unscathed by the anti-institutional mood of the parents, who criticised it for being the site of the reproduction of social inequalities and the socialisation of children to relations of authority. In 1975, one of the teachers at the Vitruve school wrote, “The school as an institution was created for the dominant classes so that the school machine would keep turning and reproducing itself.” Enrolling children in experimental schools corresponds to the parent’s desire to find a school structure based on educational practices in keeping with the ones used in the family sphere. In the same way as they mistrust the idea of “academic success” (when they are not openly defiant about it), certain parents do not (or not much) value school qualifications, considering that it is not qualifications that make a person intelligent or happy. At this countercultural pole, we do not always observe (or do so with a degree of ambiguity) a parental mandate for children to extend the social trajectory of the family line. This sometimes leads to various forms of incomprehension, and even intergenerational conflicts. Johanna thus reproaches her parents for not having encouraged her (nevertheless brilliant) education, because

33 Talking marks are used for the expressions that are frequently mobilised in the interviews.
34 In a book entitled, En sortant de l’école : un projet réalisé par des enfants de la rue Vitruve, Paris Casterman, 1976, p. 121
35 On this point, Gérard Mauger wrote: “In the essentially implicit transmission of cultural capital, it is the perpetuation, the improvement or the deterioration of the social position of the line that is at stake and the upward social mobility of the children contains no fewer potential conflicts than decline, regression or collapse” (Mauger, 1989b, p. 113).
her father refused to believe that academic qualification was a source of social happiness:

**Johanna**

“My parents did not push me at all, because in any case my father always joked that if I wanted to be a plumber I’d be a plumber! Because of course women do the same jobs as men, they have access to everything ... the dream, right! And that’s a thing that I do reproach them for a bit: I had enormous abilities and in fact they never pushed me... never, never, never. They even didn’t really give a shit, and that, I found that very very hard, because as a child, it’s not true: as a child you don’t work for yourself, you work to please your parents.”

**Simon (Johanna’s father)**

“Me, I was part of the hard-core current at Vitruve, I still had my Stalinist side in fact! It was Makarenko, the soviet pedagogue – take the kids away from their families... I didn’t like that a lot but at the same time, I thought that if you want to break away from society [...] I was obsessed with politics, you know, the rest was all secondary. The revolution came first, the rest had to come after [...] So we made her work because it’s true that at Vitruve she did nothing, but it’s also true that we didn’t want to over-value academic success so as to not reproduce elitism and to allow her to do what she really wanted to do.”

Given that individuals usually try to maximise their inheritance, the refusal to accept it represents an extreme breakdown in intergenerational transmission. Although only one couple of interviewees actually refused their material parental inheritance (by transferring it to the far-left political organisation that they belonged to at the time), the discourse associating inheritance and capitalism is frequent among the interviewees, and various forms of “dilapidation” of this capital can be observed. The refusal of ownership (land or home) is probably one of the most obvious and most generalised forms of it in the 1970s and 1980s. But these interviewees are more broadly characterised by an attitude of refusing private property, different forms of possession and accumulation of private goods. Some of

---

36 Extract of an interview filmed on 17 December 2007 as part of the documentary *Children of Utopia* (Kaïm and Pagis, 2008). Paul was born in 1965 in Paris, his mother was from a family of artists and taught at a high school, and his father, whose own father was in the military, was a construction technician.
the children recall: “our parents weren’t into real estate! Money was dirty! For my parents, ownership and money were dirty – real ’68ers. My mother, who is now 68, lives near the freeway in a council flat, and my father lives with his girlfriend, they’ve got nothing...” Martin’s comments are along the same lines: “My mother wants to help. The movements of the moment, Solidarnosc or the Chilean Resistance, decorate the house with their coloured posters. [...] Everything individual is negative. Your things, yourself, your ideas, your culture, your nation, your wife: possession is bad.”

We could describe some of the interviewees as “inheritance liquidators” (Gotman, 1988) who apply their political convictions in the family sphere, here in terms of the refusal of their inheritance which is denounced for its role in the social reproduction of inequalities. Overthrowing the economy of exchanges between generations leads to several misunderstandings. The children-pretenders criticise their parents-possessors (Mauger, 2009a, p. 23) for “not having transmitted,” whilst the parents responded that they did not want to oblige them (in the sense of obligations that result from gifts) or they wanted to remain consistent in their everyday practices and political ideals.

In selecting the most salient educational principles (rather than the most representative) in the population of this study, and by systematically analysing all the practices (conjugal, educational, academic, successional, and economic) that may have influenced parental decisions in terms of education, we can sketch an ideal type of countercultural education. Although these principles must be seen in light of the explicit desire to harmonise one’s practices and one’s political convictions, the unhappy relationship that many interviewees have with their own education or with the school system also seems to be decisive. This is because, at this pole, the challenge to the social order and the family order combine, the one not excluding the other. Relations of cause and effect play out in both directions. At one pole we can see the revolutionary political activists who theorised the role of family and school institutions in the social reproduction of inequalities, before putting their discourses of denunciation into practice. At the opposite pole are interviewees who personally experienced unhappy pedagogic relationships which predisposed them to political discourses condemning both family and school as institutions. Empirical study reveals a multitude of intermediary situations between these two

37 Johanna was born in 1967. Both her parents were then Maoist activists in Grenoble. Simon had just been recruited at the CNRS and Hélène was studying history and geography.
38 Extract from an email received on 22 May 2007.
poles, which also constitute two registers of discourse regarding children’s education.\textsuperscript{39}

So as not to remain stuck in the ideal type, the analysis of an extreme case will allow us to progress further in understanding this collective profile of ’68ers, who in the 1970s and 1980s challenged the social order by establishing micro-structures in opposition to it on the margins of the “system.”

**Anne: remaining faithful to the break**

The different utopias that are of interest to us here are born of the discord between aspirations (liberated through the experience of May ’68) and the actual possibilities of satisfying them. They structure the diverse offer of ethical-political salvation goods which attracted far-left activists made desperate in waiting for an increasingly hypothetical revolution. But these salvation goods also attracted a younger population who had been spectators during May-June ’68 and who became directly invested in the everyday revolution in the 1970s. The forms of counter-societal reconversion (for those who had had previous experiences in left-wing politics) or conversions (for the youngest who had had no prior political experience) were therefore varied.\textsuperscript{40} However, the different utopias practiced share the fact that they suspended dominant norms in the context of alternative societies (such as communes, phalanstères, or hermitages), and functioned on the hope of propagating examples in order to ultimately subvert the social order from its margins.

The analysis of Anne’s trajectory will allow us to return to the birth of her utopian aspirations, and then to their practical implementation in different countercultural contexts. We will then turn to the conditions for the exit from marginalism and reintegration into mainstream society.

**1949-1968: the baby boom blues**

Anne was born in 1949, to an upper-middle-class intellectual family. Her father was a writer and her mother a high school librarian in the outskirts

\textsuperscript{39} The questions linked to pedagogic practices and intergenerational relations are developed at length in the doctoral thesis upon which this book is based. Please see the third part dedicated to the “children of ’68ers” (Pagis, 2009, p. 569-818).

\textsuperscript{40} Bernard Lacroix opposed political and societal utopias (Lacroix, 1981, p. 177) Jean Séguy, however, defined utopia as “any totalizing ideological system aiming, implicitly or explicitly, by appealing to the imaginary alone (written utopia), or in moving to practice (utopia in practice), to radically transform the existing global social systems (Séguy, 1971, p. 331).
of Paris. They were atheists and voted left, but politics was not an object of discussion in the family sphere. Raised by her paternal grandparents until the age of 6, Anne grew up with a family heritage marked by the heroism of her grandfather, who was a Resistance member arrested by the Gestapo in 1944 and who escaped the day before his deportation. She was much less close to her parents, who had her when they were very young and seemed less interested in her education: “I came from a family with a double discourse. You say you love, but you feel nothing, you say you’re left-wing but you do nothing. You’re an atheist but you enrol your daughter in Catholic school...”

Expelled from several establishments for lack of discipline and defiance against the school system generally, Anne had a chaotic education. After having been dismissed from an umpteenth lycée, she enrolled in a theatre course in Paris in 1967, whilst her parents lived in Brittany. But she was anorexic at the time and her parents quickly brought her back to live with them. As a teenager, she was bored and remained perplexed about her role in a society that she judged conformist and insipid: “I had this impression, for years, that everything had happened without us, before us, that we arrived a bit late. The war was over. All that remained was a world without intensity; I was convinced that I had been born into a generation of sheep.”

Here, the impossibility of accepting the educational relationship within the family sphere and a breaking away from academic authority at an early age (characteristics that are typical of the matrix of statutory incoherencies, see Chapter 1) reinforced a discourse that is typical of the first generation to not have known war (Sirinelli, 2008, p. 177).

Anne lived with her parents in Brittany in the spring of 1968. Her father went to the Latin Quarter from the first days of the events, as a spectator. “Glued to the radio and nose in the papers,” Anne also wanted to go to Paris, but her parents prevented her. At 19 years old, she was still a minor. This missed opportunity is still a source of frustration for her, as is the “impression that the generation before, didn’t leave room [for her].”

A few months after the events, Anne returned to Paris with some former school friends and fell in love with an activist from the Gauche Prolétarienne (GP). Her parents planned to send her to America, and even gave her money for the plane ticket, but she bought a “scooter to ride around the suburbs, living and being an activist with Alain.” The events of May-June ’68 thus played a role of socialisation by awareness raising here, in the sense that Anne discovered and appropriated a political language that gave meaning to her.

41 I conducted an interview with Anne at her home on 2 July 2008, and then we continued to exchange emails in the months that followed.
rebellious character. However, we might wonder why she joined a Maoist organisation given the large range of militant causes on offer in 1970. Her romantic attachment was decisive for her shift to action, but it was above all a “sense of placement” that explains this decision: “I had more fun with the anti-authoritarians, but I absolutely wanted to be part of something more hard-core.” More than adopting the ideas (Marxist, Maoist) of the group, Anne’s involvement with the GP was the result of a disposition for the escalation of radicalism, which underlies the rest of her trajectory.

1970–1974: Maoism, becoming an établi, theatre, communal living and motherhood

Anne obtained her baccalaureat degree as an external candidate, and enrolled in Chinese at the University of Paris Dauphine in 1970. Although she preferred the writings of Marx to those of Mao – “I found Maoist literature simplistic, I couldn’t read it” – she still sold the newspaper La Cause du peuple outside the Renault factories and on the marketplace, was an activist with the GP and gave literacy classes to Algerian workers from the Citroën factory. In hindsight she says, “Poor guys! I was teaching them to read with La Cause du peuple!”

In 1971 Anne met Fab, a young anarchist artist, in a theatre at Sèvres, where he was staging a play by Artaud. A few months later they moved to Rouvière in the Cevennes region with a friend, to stage a militant play there. The Amical was an old theatre that they managed to convince the Mayor to give them the keys to, and it was quickly transformed into a commune. Alongside this, Anne decided to become an établi, she was employed as an unskilled worker in a textile factory. But her revolutionary hopes rapidly came up against the chasm that separated Maoist theory from the reality of her factory.

We had this slogan at the GP – down with the little bosses! So I had it in for them! Bad luck, the lovely women who drove me to the factory every morning was the supervisor! (she laughs) But I had bigger goals; because the textiles came in from Roubaix, Lille, Tourcoing, I said to myself, we could organise a revolt among all the factories of the company. And the most receptive to my violent argument was the supervisor – so I was

42 The newspaper put out by the GP
43 Fab was abandoned at birth, and went through several foster families before arriving at the house in Sèvres, an orphanage run by anarchists.
in the shit! She thought I wasn’t far-off on several points *(she laughs).* [...] I couldn’t fight against the unions, there weren’t any, and as for the workers, I began to raise awareness during the lunch break, following the recommendations of the GP, explaining how much they were exploited. But they didn’t care because they all came from farms and they said ‘well yeah but on the farm I work ten times as much, for nothing’, which was a knockout argument! [...] Finally, there were still heated discussions during lunch time, so I was still hopeful, I said to myself: this is a wakeup call. What I did not take into account because I was naïve and not really politically trained, is that there is a big difference between vaguely supporting ideas and action *(she laughs).* Well, and they had to feed me as well because we had so little money I never had anything *(she laughs)* everything was backward!

Anne was also the only Maoist activist in the commune; the others were anarchists, anti-authoritarians and hippies, and she did not have much affinity with them. “When you get up at five o’clock in the morning, go to the factory and you’re the only one working, it’s much less cool!” She did appreciate however, being able to meet all sorts of young people searching for projects to defer the return to everyday life:

I met some Maoists who came from Lille – I adored them! [...] that was after the breakup of the GP so they were, well, everyone was in this kind of lost phase, wanting to continue but with the structure that officially no longer existed [...] Moreover, we wrote in *Actuel*[^44] to say that we were performing a play and we said something like ‘everyone can come’, and well they did all come! The place was overflowing, the Rouvière police went crazy, they pretty much posted a guy permanently at the end of the street, there were so many runaways, they fished guys out of the village pond, completely off their heads... well we gave it a good vibe!

At the turn of 1972, the *Amicale* functioned as a transitional space, where activists from various extreme-left groups looking for alternative prophecies to “prolong the utopian inspiration that was not successfully achieved at the level of society as a whole” (Léger, 1979, p. 48) came together. In a context where far-left engagements were increasingly unpopular, communal living helped to absorb the shock of individual disillusionment. It therefore allowed the members of the communes (the “communards” to use Bernard Lacroix's

[^44]: *One of the main underground, countercultural magazines in the 1970s.*
term, 1981) to mourn for their revolutionary hopes together, whilst still remaining faithful to their break away from society. The hope of “changing the world” was thus gradually converted into a hope to “change one’s own life.” The communal space thus allowed them to defer the closure of the space of possibilities and to perpetuate social indetermination through various forms of exile or escape. These quests could take on spatial dimensions, such as in the back-to-the-land projects, or in long-distance travel; temporal dimensions, such as in “futuristic or backward-looking utopias” (Mauger, 1999, p. 235); or psychological dimensions with the use of drugs etc.

Communes therefore mitigated the absence of institutions providing legitimacy for the communards (after the dissolution of the political organisations in which they had been active), and compensated for the lack of social integration,45 due to breakdowns with family and friends resulting from activism or marginalisation. For Anne, the social and political diversity of the communes represented a way of perpetuating the utopia of a society without class (or a least without social barriers):

Very different people came through the communes; some of them were very political. We all met in the Larzac, the hippies and all the others. Now it seems like these things were separate but it was much less divided in the meetings [...] What I liked was the mixing. The workers really taught me things, and well, I was discovering everything: the first black person I had talked to and become friends with was during that time [...] Before, it was the cloistered world of each to their own, here it was the opposite, openness to other social worlds, within the commune, but also within the village.

In these spaces of intense sociability, certain encounters – both between friends and romantic partners – were responsible for biographical changes that became all the more decisive in that they occurred at an age of biographical indetermination (and thus represented so many possible futures). Anne also recognises that she would not have hesitated to take up arms if she had had the opportunity at the time:

I was lost [after the dissolution of the GP] and I was looking for something, something more extreme. In other words, if I had met people who were in

45 For Michel Voisin, the solution of the commune “achieves a kind of collective mobilisation from disarray” (Voisin, 1977, p. 300). Bernard Lacroix also describes the role of communes in integration, but in my view, he reduces it overly rapidly to the downward mobility of commune members which, he believes, produces their social exclusion (Lacroix, 1981, Chapter 4).
combat at the time I wouldn’t have hesitated for sure. With the mindset I had then, the desire to breakaway from what I had, I would probably have jumped right in (long silence). But, well, 80% of the people I met were hippies, so I had occasional urges for violence, but that’s all (she laughs)!

At twenty-three, with no affiliation to any structured political organisation and without any stable professional future, Anne found herself in a situation of prolonged “temporary irresponsibility” (Bourdieu, 1984a), which made her particularly receptive to the different countercultural utopias on offer.

**Sparking a peasant revolt: from disillusion to disillusion**

Anne, Fab and their theatre company ended up staging several performances of a play by Rabelais which was very popular with the local population, especially when the local pastor and other people from the area joined the company. Fuelled by this success, they decided to take on a more politically ambitious play: “It was after my observations at the factory. We had to open up to the peasants. We said to ourselves, we’re going to put on a play for the peasants, with the idea of causing a revolt. Believing in the virtues of leading by example, we set up a performance based on the successive peasant revolution.”

Anne was six months pregnant when she was forced to take leave for health problems. She left the factory where she had been an établi. Shortly afterward the theatre troupe went on tour around the communes in France, and performed the play with relative success. The only really enthusiastic (and quite singular) public was in Saint-Alban\(^46\) where, “The principle is that the crazy people can go out in the village. It took them three days to calm the inmates down afterwards: And yes, we called for insurrection, and there we had our best audience: they went into immediate insurrection! That’s also when I understood that I wanted to leave the troupe. They made fun of the mad people and I couldn’t deal with that… I thought, in fact *they’re all rednecks*, it’s the same – they’re just as stupid as the rest.”

Once again, Anne reacted according to the principle mentioned above: flee everything that could be seen as conformist, and genuinely seek the most radical or marginal belonging possible. She used anti-psychiatry to further her critique of the troupe members, seen as “bigots” for having taken the side of “normal people” – a position that she denounced and sought to

---

\(^{46}\) St-Alban is a town in the Lozère region of France, whose psychiatric hospital is considered the birthplace of institutional psychotherapy.
eradicate in both others and in herself. This quest for belonging without compromising with the “system” was exhausting. For Anne, it increasingly began to resemble an escape from reality.


At the end of her pregnancy, Anne was physically and emotionally exhausted. She was doubtful about the appropriateness of having a child in her current living conditions – the most extreme social marginalisation, drugs and destitution. Disappointed by life in the commune, she persuaded Fab to move with her to Montpellier, so that she could return to her studies. But communal life caught up with her. Fab and his friends moved back into a commune in Aveyron and Anne, who had just given birth to her son Mikaël had no option but to follow them. She did not dwell on the period that followed, in which she knew hunger, cold and the great material and moral difficulty that came from caring for her new-born son almost alone, along with the inevitable tensions within the commune. During this period, Anne pushed her own psychological and physical boundaries as a form of resistance, and was eventually hospitalised:

It’s hard to explain, when I ended up in hospital from having nothing to eat, the doctor treating me couldn’t believe it, I was coherent within myself. It’s hard to get you to understand, I was sure that I was living in truth because I was paying for it with my body. [...] I grew up, like everyone, in the land of lies, in the land of the Resistance – yeah right! In ‘popular’ republics that weren’t at all, great silences behind the celebrations, not to mention the significant family resources, we experienced all that, so my body suffering, that seemed real, right, just; [...] the main question that I asked myself at the time, I swear I thought about it every day, was – to what point am I able to resist? And against what?

Anne threw herself headlong into a project of denunciation, whose authenticity was founded partly in the bodily risks she took, as in the case “of martyrdom” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p. 88). She sought to (re)live the French Resistance on a personal level, by other means. The spectre

47 Anne explained in the interview that she rapidly regretted having a child; that was, for her “just as utopian as the theatre project, life in the scrub, the fantasy of going back-to-the-land”. For an analysis of the trajectory of this child, Mikaël, his countercultural education and his future, see Pagis (2015).
of the Second World War, which we have already seen as being decisive in the engagements of Paul and Colette (Chapter 4), was also important for Anne, who says in the interview that war never ends but is continued by other means.

In 1973 Fab and Anne returned to Paris, once again stuck on the extreme fringes of society: “We found ourselves on the street, and this friend, a psychiatrist from Saint-Alban lent us an attic room to tide us over: I’d reached a kind of point of no return...” Anne lived doing small jobs, translations – particularly of Playboy articles. On the weekend, she helped her friend Laurent, an engineer she had met a few years before in a commune, to renovate his houseboat, and discussed linguistics whilst high on LSD. With a very low income she managed to rent a small apartment and made Fab promise not to bring friends around... in vain. They were so far advanced into marginalisation it was far from simple to get out. Social capital thus became decisive in the conditions for her exit from this marginalisation and Laurent played an essential role in this: “He sold his houseboat. He arrived one night and he said – listen, it’s vital for you that you get out, and he gave me a wad of money. The next day I bought a ticket for New York.”

Anne left Mikaël (who was then little more than a year old) with Laurent, the only person in her entourage she could trust; Mikaël’s father, she said, was “too wasted.” In New York she discovered that the nanny she knew as a child had become an activist with the Gay Front, and she was introduced into the radical feminist milieu. She is still moved by the memory of having mixed with Kate Millett shortly after reading her book. She was then “caught up in the most extreme feminist movement.” For a few months Anne travelled the United States in search of various forms of belonging “as a rambler more than as an active member... whilst also frantically looking to belong to something completely.” In 1974, when she returned to her son, she knew that she had to break away from this marginalisation. But it would take several years.

1975-1980: journalism, squats and psychoanalysis: slowly climbing out of the margins

When she returned to Paris, Anne was 26 years old and wanted to work freelance for various papers. This is how she came to be a journalist at L’imprevu and worked for a year (1976-1977) as a script girl for television. She became passionate about avant-garde cinema, and lived for a time with an actor who was well-known for his work in protest cinema of the 1970s. For the first time, she managed to earn enough money to rent an apartment in her own name. But although economic independence was a necessary
condition for moving out of marginalisation it was not sufficient in itself, and Anne’s social networks – with which she had not completely broken off – caught up with her: “I was bored in that apartment, I didn’t see many people. Then Jojo arrived, a friend from the commune period, and we became professional burglars for about a year.”

Through Jojo, Anne met Victor, a far-left psychoanalyst – close to the autonomist movement – who she fell in love with. He would be a bridge from marginalisation to a more conventional way of life. Between 1975 and 1980, Anne remained half in and half out. She trained as a journalist with several papers, discovered a taste for writing, whilst also moving in autonomist circles and “not disconnecting.” She also began psychoanalysis:

I was fully aware that I was in a mode of abandonment – I couldn’t live anything long-term... I had a disproportionate desire to belong, and at the same time a deep fear of being abandoned which made me always chuck everything in. [I was] Constantly looking for belongings, but without actually being able to tolerate any of them, which led to this kind of wandering [... ] I felt like I was at the end of something ... I think I wanted to do it and I was tired of all my breakups.

Impossible stability (political, professional, familial) as well as the futile search for “total” belonging, were not too far removed from the family configuration in which Anne grew up, or her early inability to accept the educational relationship in the family sphere. In the face of her parents’ gap between their discourses and their practices, Anne developed the habit of “identifying double discourses and constantly searching for weaknesses in practice,” thus interiorising a critical stance vis à vis the social world. This critical distance would be reflected in all the stages of her career as activist, as a professional and as a parent.

During this period, Mikaël went to various alternative crèches in Paris, as his mother moved around. Anne’s description of her approach to education reflects the characteristic traits of countercultural educational practices described above:

This was an education marked by activism, feminism, rejection of authority in all institutional forms, rejection of family structures (for example, I

48 Just as it is not enough for someone who smokes marijuana to simply stop smoking to “get out”, to the extent that the group of smokers represents the principle support for deviant socialisation (Becker, 1963, Chapter 3).
considered Laurent to be a real father to Mikaël), very often group living […] The political context of the time gave us a revolutionary perspective, what vision of the future could I envisage that wouldn’t be thrown into doubt? So I never made a project for Mikaël, I think I was in a wait-and-see position, which was consolidated by the ideas coming out of life in the commune […] we particularly didn’t want to impose our choices by playing on our authority, our position of power as parents…

It was a newspaper ad in Liberation presenting a project for an alternative crèche in a squat in the 20th district in Paris that made Anne decide to move there in 1977:

On the right, there was the J street squat, they were all druggies, and us, we were activists, and that is where Action Directe was formed, and one of my best friends, who I met there, joined it… So half the autonomists in Paris met up there to yell at each other. I was a very enthusiastic participant, whilst still managing to go to my three session of psychoanalysis a week. So I was not completely out of the woods in terms of coherence…

Following a form of reconversion of militant resources into the educative sphere that was common among women in the 1970s, Anne became the impromptu director of the alternative crèche for a year. Her relationship with the autonomists was ambiguous, as was her desire to break free from the margins: “I thought that the squats were great, but the political discussions, there was something that didn’t work, it seemed too simplistic to me. Five years earlier, I was totally convinced, but here, I vaguely began to understand, with the help of psychoanalysis, that marginalisation, which was a choice at first, became a trap.” In this period, Anne met Antoine, her current partner, and for a time lived between him and Victor.

1982-1986: reintegration through journalism

One of Anne’s best friends, an activist with Action Directe was arrested in the early 1980s. As a result she became involved in the active support for imprisoned activists, created a defence committee, sought support

Action Directe was an armed revolutionary group in France between 1979 and 1987. They described themselves as a communist anarchist “guerrilla group”, which originated in the autonomist movement and committed a number of violent attacks and assassinations before being eventually banned by the French government.
from various high-profile figures, from activists to artists, but also journalists, asking them to sign a number of petitions. It was through this activism that Anne began to work for the newspaper Liberation in 1983, to become the “prison correspondent.” “Almost every day I went to Libé to give them petitions, articles in support... and I ended up staying there, you know!”

Liberation played a similar role for Anne as it had for Paul (nearly ten years earlier), allowing her to make a living whilst engaging in an activity based on social critique, in a professional environment where she found the activists she had frequented in the 1970s. “I spent my time writing, I was among my own, we understood each other straight away, paths that were all so close to mine, well, at least when I got there, after that it changed [...] And especially, the thing that was so important to me, meeting people from everywhere, that’s what journalism was!”

Once again, the newspaper functions here as a path to reintegration whilst still remaining on the outside, of joining the labour market whilst still considering oneself as an activist, getting out of social marginalisation whilst writing articles in support of those who were still marginalised. Anne thus achieved reintegration through professional practice, and was able to progressively renegotiate the schema through which she perceived the world: “the ministry of justice thought that sometimes it wasn’t very clear which side I was on, but it was a left-wing ministry so there were lots of people you could talk to, it wasn’t Rachida Dati. That’s how you learn to think differently... At the beginning I thought all judges were enemies to fight against, but I became more moderate afterwards!”

Several factors contributed to making this change in perspective possible, after more than five years: fatigue (physical and emotional) accumulated over years of being socially marginalised, having a school-aged child to care for, psychoanalysis, meeting Antoine, the social resources necessary to join Libération (see Box 5 below), and resocialisation both professionally and socially due to contact with new networks. This was such a long process for Anne because she had genuinely converted to life on the social margins. She had interiorised the ways of being and acting that are specific to a milieu in which the functioning principles are approximately the inverse of those in the dominant social order. This made it impossible to reintegrate the latter overnight: fractured habitus had to be genuinely re-educated, which

Rachida Dati is a right-wing politician who was Minister for Justice and spokesperson for Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007.
required breaking away from the marginal spheres and accepting relations with individuals who had previously been considered enemies.\textsuperscript{51}

Her psychoanalysis was involved in the resolution of identity contradictions, and the accompaniment of social reintegration, with all the ambiguity associated with this practice in the 1970s. Indeed the events of May-June 1968 had resonated strongly in the psychiatric sphere. In the years that followed, anti-psychiatry proposed (individual) salvation goods well-suited to demands for alternative prophecies by ex-activists in search of somewhere to belong, after the dissolution of their political organisations. Although many of the interviewees were looking of a way of legitimising their non-conformist way of life (psychoanalysis thus served to expunge feelings of guilt) in this sphere, it often marked the end of activism and the beginning of social reintegration.\textsuperscript{52} An in-depth study would be necessary to explore a hypothesis that is only sketched here: the use of psychoanalysis to rationalise and justify (collective) revolutionary disengagement. Faced with the contradictions inherent in his professional practice, Victor ended up stopping all his activity as an analyst: “The day he thought that the job he was doing was leading people to live according to the norm, he stopped being a psychoanalyst and became a translator.”\textsuperscript{53} Although Victor played an essential role in Anne’s reconversion, it was ultimately with Antoine, a university lecturer, that she settled down to live as a couple.

**Box 6  Socially differentiated exits from marginalisation**

The conditions for leaving marginalisation primarily depend on resources (particularly qualifications), and the social origins of the interviewees. Reintegration was much more difficult for Marinette, born to working-class parents in 1948, who became a school teacher after passing her *baccalauréat* in 1968. After her experience at a commune on a farm in the Loire-Atlantique, where she lived with her husband Yves for nearly a decade in quasi self-sufficiency, reintegration turned out to be impossible. Marinette had resigned from the national education system, they tried to become artisans but failed several times. After the

\textsuperscript{51} Anne explains this with respect to judges; but, more generally, anybody who was socially well established was considered suspicious.

\textsuperscript{52} I asked another interviewee at what point he stopped considering himself a revolutionary, he replied: “I think quite quickly, there was the example of the URSS, of Mao... And then I quickly became interested in psychoanalysis and when you’re interested in that, you understand that the revolution can only be personal, and you can’t change people, or decide to change people like that, impose it [on them] ...”

\textsuperscript{53} In particular Victor translated the novels of Virginia Woolf, and expressed his dispositions for protest through his choice of the work he translated.
final bankruptcy, Yves and Martinette, who had meanwhile become close to a spiritual sect, the Universal White Brotherhood (FBU), went through a period of depression and alcoholism.

Forced to live in a caravan, they became more and more involved with the FBU and ended up living at the headquarters as paid staff members. Their lack of social, educational, political and economic resources meant that their various attempts to redefine their space in keeping with their expectations failed after years of marginalisation. Their spiritual exile proved to be a way of avoiding extreme social vulnerability and downward mobility.

1986-2008: perpetuating the openness of possibilities – in spite of everything

Anne's second son, Eli, was born in 1986, whilst she was in a stable professional situation at *Libération*, where she had been for three years, and in a stable relationship with a partner who was neither a burglar, nor a psychoanalyst, nor a leftist, nor an artist (and who was in fact just a leftie)\(^54\)

Life on the margins was behind her, although she was still friends with certain “exes,” particularly with an activist from *Action Directe*: “I was very complacent; I knew full well that he was carrying out robberies, I knew all that... But I was complacent because I adored that guy, I still do in fact, and because, from my own experience, I knew that [...] the only way to get out of there, is to have friends elsewhere, close to him and ready to help him change track.”

Anne therefore projected herself onto this friend’s story, which reflects her own, and tried to be the bridge for him that others had been for her. This affective connection may also have been a way for her to continue to keep one foot in the margins, as a condition of maintaining her self-esteem.

Anne resigned from *Libération* in 1996, for several reasons; she no longer agreed with the editorial line of the newspaper, but especially she wanted to devote herself to her own writing. She published her first essay in the same year, on a subject that had been close to her heart since the first arrests of GP activists, and then those of *Action Directe* – justice in France.\(^55\) Her thirst for social justice, which had been the driving force in her political activism, before being transferred into the professional sphere and journalistic critique of the judicial system, became a literary project.

---

\(^{54}\) He was a member of the Socialist Party, the major moderate left-wing party in France, and as such was significantly less radical than Anne’s previous partners.

\(^{55}\) The exact reference is not given here in order to preserve Anne’s anonymity.
What were the effects of these successive reconversions on a political level? Anne voted regularly for far-left parties in the first round of elections, but has great difficulty identifying with the current political offer.

My husband is an elected representative in the Socialist Party. We often don’t agree, we often agree too, luckily... But I absolutely don’t identify with the PS, even the left of the PS; but I also absolutely don’t identify with the far left, so I don’t know where I am anymore [...] I don’t have any political activity worthy of that name any more, perhaps a political attitude in my way of living in a neighbourhood, and living with people. That yes, that stays. But I’m in a sort of political no-man’s-land.

When I met Anne, she was a writer (in a financially unstable situation) and involved against the extradition of Marina Petrella, an Italian former activist in the Red Brigades. For this cause, she reactivated her activist network and her contacts made through Libération, particularly among political refugees. Anne is thus part of a hotbed of ex-’68ers who are not involved in lasting militant activities but who have latent dispositions for re-engagement. Although supportive of the alternative globalization movement, they are not directly involved, as though they were waiting for a significant social movement which would resonate more with “their history” and in which their involvement would make sense. The analysis of trajectories like that of Anne or Paul thus provides elements of response to questions regarding the conditions that maintain hope in situations of significant social change. Indeed, both of these interviewees achieved more or less successful reconversion of their critical dispositions into journalism, without having to break with their previous leftist identity. Journalism became a way of perpetuating the breakdown of social barriers (through investigation, and the overarching perspective on the social world), and using one’s pen to give voice to the dominated, excluded and marginal in society.56 It is as though their whole trajectory allowed them to remain in a state of social weightlessness, socially unclassifiable, and thus potentially (re)mobilisable. Their living conditions were thus more favourable to maintaining a hope for social change than those of other interviewees whose professional paths irrevocably distanced them from the concerns they had had forty years earlier. This is not to suggest that Anne and Paul did not change their concerns, but they seem to have preserved their reflexes, their affinities with their former milieu,

56 In this respect, this is equivalent to the profession of research in social sciences discussed above.
transforming their former objects of contestation into objects of study, or even into objects of resistance art, and resorting to forms of protest suited to their situation.

However, most of the interviewees at the countercultural pole of the protest space in the 1970s turned towards an environmentalist vote from the 1980s onward. This was notably the case for Mathilde, who was a unionist with Sud, beginning in the 1980s, before joining the Green party when she retired. More generally, this political orientation brings together the sub-group in the corpus who did not have activist experience prior to May ’68, and for whom these events played a role of political socialisation by awareness raising or conversion, responsible for less institutionalised forms of activism in the 1970s (feminist movements, critical renovation of everyday life, utopian communities etc.).

Conclusion

To what extent can we consider the events of May-June 1968 as responsible for the birth of utopian habitus? The temporary opening up of the realm of possibilities which is characteristic of critical moments, produced new aspirations without – in most cases – providing the means to satisfy them. This dissonance between aspirations and possibilities to fulfil them is at the root of utopian representations of the social world. These representations are heterogeneous, and lead to multiple forms of counter-societal conversion (Lacroix, 1981). Protesting against the dominant order can also take the form of withdrawal (voluntary or not) into marginalisation and the development of parallel strategies of latent (or open) confrontation that takes the form of individual escape (depression, drugs, long-distance travel etc.), an anti-institutional mood (refusal to work, rejection of the family or school as institutions) or communautarian utopias.

The communes took very different forms and had clearly heterogeneous objectives because they accommodated individuals who were significantly socially and politically diverse. For those who, like Anne, had previously been activists in far-left organisations, the communal space functioned

---

57 Sud (Solidarity, unity, democracy, "solidaires, unitaires, démocratiques") is a left-wing federation of unions primarily stemming from the divisions within the CFDT in 1989.
58 This hypothesis is quite close to that developed on this subject by Bernard Lacroix, but his approach systematically reduces the production of utopian aspirations to the experience of frustration or downward mobility, from a perspective that is sometimes too mechanistic (or even legitimistic).
as a space for transition, which facilitated transition and allowed them to imperceptibly convert their hope to “change the world” (with political leftism) into a hope to “change their lives” (countercultural leftism) (Mauger, 1999, p. 234). For others, who were younger and who did not have any prior political experience, the counter-societal phase represents an initial stage in the activist career. Their critical dispositions and their anti-institutional mood were directly activated in spheres that are generally outside politics. These activists also participated in the politicisation of a certain number of causes that emerged in the early 1970s – first and foremost women’s rights, but also the situation of young people, homosexuality, environmentalism, or the recognition of regional languages.

For both the first group and the second, the communal phase represented a way of perpetuating the opening of the realm of possibilities and “of making the present a sort of constantly renewed reprieve” (Bourdieu, 1978, p. 18) in the hope of a better future, which they were trying to achieve. These counter-societal experiences were more or less long-lasting, but they began to run dry from the mid-1970s (when it was no longer materially possible to delay professional reintegration, or after familial stabilisation). They were then followed by more or less fortunate epilogues. The exit conditions and forms of reintegration that followed these communes are as diverse as the people who lived, long-term or short-term, in them. Although those who had the most social and academic resources managed to convert their dispositions for protest into a certain number of professions that they helped to redefine (writers, teachers, journalists), others, with fewer resources, more or less successfully “invented” other professions (neo-rurals, neo-artisans, artists, storytellers etc.). Finally, for those who did not have the necessary resources to have a basic hold on reality, or to renegotiate their spheres of belonging, exit from marginalism was sometimes very difficult or even impossible, leading to situations of extreme social and emotional vulnerability (depression, alcoholism, hard drugs, and even suicide). In other words, although communes were spaces in which society was (relatively) put on hold, where alternative class, gender and generational relations were tested, and which functioned as instruments for enabling the symbolic manipulation of the future (perpetuating the opening of possibilities), social inequalities generally ended up catching up with the protagonists in their post-communal lives.