

# May '68 and its Subject (some Philosophical Archives of a Revolution)

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**Abstract:** This article concerns the philosophico-political archive of May '68 in France, dating from the beginning of the 1970s until the 40th anniversary of 2008. Through a comparative analysis of the texts of Badiou, Rancière, Daney and Deleuze, I question the difficulty of thinking the singularity of a militant subjectivity, caught between a Marxist hegemonic language and the wavering of its political grammar. I examine certain games of writing and legibility of this difficulty, by considering testimonial registers and philosophical analyses along with problems encountered by militant cinema of the 1968 years. Finally, I turn towards another “archive” of events, one characterized by anomie, traced by Maud Mannoni alongside a psychotic patient in May '68, to interrogate from the standpoint of such an “other scene” the hyperbolization of historico-political indentifications that, in May '68, had shaken strands of the universal instituted in the State and its sovereignty, the nation and its community, society and its exchanges, as well as the instituted figures of the individuality, or the normative constructions of the “person” and the attributes that our juridico-moral metaphysics bestow on it. We are thus confronted with a mode of effectiveness of historical signifiers that have given to a type of revolutionary subjectivity both its militant intensity and an extension of its universe of reference. These have also given rise to its “impolitical” side, that is to say the least prone to reappropriation, or the least to be grasped by the work of historical knowledge, and memory.

**Keywords:** Badiou, Deleuze, militant, subjectivity, Rancière, Daney,

We are invited to avoid the commemorative ritual without giving up on the question that still makes us contemporaries of May '68, and such a question is the very object of the commemorations. Thus, in France, every decennial commemoration is accompanied by its own exercises of conjuration, while the historiographical works correct and complicate the understanding of events. One modality of it takes on a reflexive and critical form, intruding into the complexity of heterogeneous or contradictory memories of May '68, their querulous production and various transformations. Kristin Ross' *contretemps* study<sup>1</sup> is a perfect example of the battlefield-like archive of May '68, which follows isolated attempts to go against the grain and counter depoliticization dating back to the summer of 1968. Another equally interesting modality could be labeled meta-commemorative: we ask not simply whether we are contemporaries of May '68 but question its impact on the sense of the “contemporary” that has radically transformed what “us” means in politics, or what are the conditions and coincidences, the precautions and the audacity necessary to declare such an “us”. We do not claim

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<sup>1</sup> Ross 2002

directly any fixed image of May '68, whether scholarly or trivial, complex or allegorical, intended for estrangement or identification. We do it indirectly, by analyzing how May '68 transformed the very meaning of the "political," the identities mobilized by political movements, and the historicity invented and transformed by them. This nexus of history, politics, and collective subjects who "make history" by doing politics, has been dramatized under the idea of Revolution: thus these studies often appear as a thread stretched between a settled past and an active survival, between a confirmation of obsolescence and a remembrance for the future, necessary disidentifications and possible re-identifications with a revolutionary tradition, of which May '68 names both the last scene and the unsolved insistence of its promises. We are uncertain how to frame May '68, but we do believe that its repression would lead to a terrible loss. Between exercise of "dis-idealization" and reserve of ideal, the commemoration is de-ritualized, while the drama intensity of its stakes is multiplied tenfold.

This game of language is inseparable from a polemical space; and it is certainly not in vain, if only to interrupt the inexhaustible and rhetorically multiform work of the denial, falsification and "liquidation of '68" (between its minimal credo—nothing significant happened in '68, it's enough to check that nothing changed in the institutions, the law, the economical organization—and its sophisticated demonstrations—what happened differs from what the actors of '68 believed had happened, they believed they made a revolution and they accomplished a "cultural rupture" that was ultimately perfectly functional and synchronic with the mutations of advanced capitalism). The following reflections intend to suggest that this language game is not saturated either. I begin with the example of the conference given by Alain Badiou,<sup>2</sup> as it is interesting to scrutinize the construction of the philosophical archive of May '68. I will not deal with its accuracy against the present state of historical knowledge, but rather study the way the '68 years forced philosophico-political writing to question its own regime of legibility between historical knowledge and redispotion of a political memory. Next, I will focus on what becomes illegible here; that concerns some aspects of the identifications of political subjects, and particularly their discursive and imaginary implications for which Marx, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, suggested hallucinatory and delirious vectors. I will then conclude on another "philosophical archive" of May (which was often considered significantly synchronous to May '68, with its political vitality—or its illusions) by referring to some suggestions made by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in the early 1970s. However I will not consider their propositions to be a draft of a general theory of political identifications, but rather a symptom of the hyperbolic game of historico-political

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2 Badiou 2008 (2010)

identifications that '68 popularized worldwide. It could be useful, in our necessary polemical intervention into the cobwebs of historical knowledge, and political memories of '68, to keep sight of the mode of efficiency of historical signifiers, or these "names of history" that have given a certain kind of revolutionary subjectivity to its militant intensity and the extension of its universe of reference. That is, precisely because they have simultaneously formed its "impolitical" underside, which could be less liable to re-appropriation and less controllable by the work of memory and historical knowledge.

**1, 2, 3 May '68, more or less**

Let us consider Badiou's conference of 2008. He does not pretend to be an administrator of patrimony of '68; his revision of events is not indifferent to his own political agenda of the time, nor to his later reformulations of the relations between politics and philosophical thought. What interests me is the form of exposition he adopts in seeking to place May '68 at this intersection. It is deliberately passed through the sketch of a surface of legibility in the hardly legible cobwebs of the facts and causalities, and on such a surface at least three Mays can be distinguished. There is the May of student and college youth, for whom novelty composes the worldwide character of the revolt and "the extraordinary strength of the ideology and the symbols, the Marxist vocabulary and the idea of revolution."<sup>3</sup> There is also the working-class May, that of the general strike never before seen in France. This is mobilized around big factories and trade-union organizations in a more classical form of "leftist" struggles ("given its scale and its general features, the strike took place, in historical terms, in a very different context from the youth rebellion",<sup>4</sup> but also in some previously unknown radical elements, such as the role played by young workers outside of trade-union organizations in the outbreak, the modes of action and the development of the strike. Thirdly, there is a May that Badiou, in passing, labels libertarian, one that sought to transform morals, manners, shapes of individual freedom, new relationships between the sexes and generations, emancipation of women and sexual minorities, and new frontiers of sensibility in the culture "with the idea of a new theatre, new forms of political expression, a new style of collective action, the promotion of happenings and improvisation, and the *États généraux du cinéma*...."<sup>5</sup> Although between these three Mays exist "important intersections," meetings and even violent conflicts—between classical leftism and the classical left, between the political leftism of Trotskyists and Maoists and "rather anarchist cultural leftism", the three

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3 Ibid., p.47

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., p.50

Mays remain perfectly distinct. Badiou emblemizes this fact with the symbolic topography that distributes the occupations (one of the most striking forms of collective action of May '68): the universities of the Paris region (Nanterre, Sorbonne, Censier), the big automobile factories (Cléon, Billancourt, Flins), and the Odéon Theater (then called *Théâtre de France*) or even the Avignon Festival a few weeks later. Each May has its own sociology and complex memory, its regimes of utterances and dominant ideological forms, its organizations of reference and dissidents, its triggering events and chronology, its particular conflicts, and its own ways of referring to the other Mays. "Three components, three sites, three types of symbolism and discourse", which heterogeneity gives to this mass uprising its contradictory intensity as well as polyvocal and non-unifiable effervescence. "In May '68, political life was intense, and it was lived in the midst of a multiplicity of contradictions";<sup>6</sup> and for this very reason no univocal statement about it could be made, either today or yesterday.

To call this account simplified would be a superficial reproach. It reestablishes an assignable analytical (and duly assigned at the time) schema: the schema of a "*topique*". It came from Freud, but had different philosophical precedents, and was elaborated in two ways during the sixties by Lacan and Althusser, who developed its terms and meanings for a theory of the subject of unconsciousness and a theory of historical causality, respectively. It would be fitting to add to these three "discursive locations" of Mays (knowledge, production, and ideology) Lacanian registers of the symbolic, real and imaginary. The Althusserian palimpsest is more obvious: in Marx's *topique* Althusser conceptualized the kind of determination active in a non-unifiable multiplicity, in which relations will be regularized and deregularized by the differentials of "efficacy", of rhythms, and of historical temporalities deprived of any common measure. This complexity excluded purely aleatory distributions of contradictions and their transformations in the emancipatory struggles; but it equally excluded the possibility of a "total point of view" that would grant the analysis of conjuncture full visibility and grant revolutionary organization the control of its intervention, or that would "ideally" grant the availability of one for the other. It would instead subordinate their adjustment to the contingency of the conjunctural synchronization of these contradictions (to their "encounter" or "fusion," following the metaphors of *For Marx*) in a "unity of rupture" which is incompressibly equivocal, "overdetermined," and de-predictive.

This kind of editing doesn't need to be homologized in order to be put into the field: Badiou revises this narrative by dissociating its premises and effects. If May '68 is given as a non-unified multiplicity of contradictions and conflicts, their "encounter" can be detached as

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6 Ibid., p.51

another May, one politically and temporally distinct. This fourth May, Badiou says, is more "essential," but also "less legible"; it is "still prescribing the future," however it is difficult to comprehend this May within the events of May-June 1968. It inscribes an unity of rupture, but this occurs by means of a double inversion: in a series of differentiated effects afterward (rather than a rupture), and in the chrono-topical dissemination (and not unity) of a decade of struggles and of political experimentations, throughout the seventies. Between these three Mays and the fourth, dateless, May, a strange chiasmus appears. As the legibility of the revolt of May '68 is based on its over determined complexity, the minimal legibility of the "'68 years" promises its greatest univocity. This univocity then appeals to a superior legibility capable of extracting from it something that "still predicts the future," on the condition that the revolt of May-June '68 becomes more illegible in its turn. The field of this transaction is nothing other than the common language that could hold together, in a combative yet combined manner, these three disjunctive Mays in an over determined unity. These three discourses, heterogeneous as they are, were shaped by the same regime of historico-political utterances that articulated, for the sake of Marxism, a knowledge of social structures, a schema of historical evolution, and a restrictive scenario of political organization and intervention. This regime of utterance allowed conflicts on these three dimensions, on the relations of primacy and subordination, or of continuity or discontinuity between them; it held so long as the exigency to situate them in relation to each other held too. "There were certainly wide-ranging discussions about what that party was. Did it already exist, or did it have to be created or re-created? What form would it take? And so on. But there was a basic agreement that there was a historical agent, and that that agent had to be organized. (...) No matter whether they were actors in dominant institutions or protesters [*contestataires*], orthodox communists or *gauchistes*, Maoists or Trotskyists, everyone used the vocabulary of classes, class struggles, the proletarian leadership of struggles, mass organizations and the party. There were, of course, violent disagreements about the legitimacy and significance of these movements. But everyone spoke the same language, and the red flag was everyone's emblem."<sup>7</sup> In fact, this language was not first common and then became quarrelsome; it was common *because* it was highly conflicting. It was in this sense hegemonic: common and disrupting, devised and devising, making controversies communicable and incommunicability translatable.

Thus, the relation between May '68 and the decade that followed appears to be essentially negative, and the shift neither paradoxical nor problematic. Badiou gives it the rhetorical form of a secret and its fragile revelation, of the trouble between knowledge and non-knowledge looking

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7 Ibid., pp.53-54

for “a new vision of politics that was trying to wrench itself away from the old vision. The fourth May '68 is seeking to find that which might exist beyond the confines of classic revolutionism. It seeks it blindly because it uses the same language as the language that dominated the conception it was trying to get away from”<sup>8</sup> The difference between the first three Mays, and the fourth, becomes rather an opaque interference, providing the metapolitical meaning of the event: May '68 has desaturated what is implied by politics, and primarily by its Marxist theoretical and practical codifications. To the extent that this encoding was the very language of the actors themselves, measuring its reflux is inevitably ambivalent. One that presumes to show how this desaturation was lived by them. But that presumes also to accentuate a dividing line between what was said and saying, that is, between the utterances these actors made, full of sense and historical urgency, and the speech acts and practical inventions blindly calling for a new language still missing. Let us turn to the analysis of these two aspects.

### Theatres of May without image

The first allows us a last incursion into Badiou's narrative strategy precisely when the story is interrupted in the narration (in the present and in the first person “I” then “we”) of a young teacher of philosophy at the University of Reims. What a still missing language makes hardly legible has to be shown (“Here I must speak with images”, says Badiou) by means of a personal recollection vouching for this May '68 wrenching itself away from the language of May.

“So one day we organized a march to the Chausson factory, which was the biggest factory in town to have gone on strike. That sunny day, we marched in a long, compact procession towards the factory. What were we going to do when we got there? We didn't know, but had a vague idea that the student revolt and the workers' strike should unite, without the intermediary of the classic organizations. We approached the barricaded factory, which was decked with red flags, with a line of trade unionists standing outside the gates, which had been welded shut. They looked at us with mingled hostility and suspicion. A few young workers came up to us, and then more and more of them. Informal discussions got under way. A sort of local fusion was taking place. We agreed to get together to organize joint meetings in town. (...) What happened at the gates of the Chausson factory would have been completely improbable, even unimaginable, a week earlier. The solid union and party *dispositif* usually kept workers, young people and intellectuals strictly apart in their respective organizations. The local or national leadership was

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8 Ibid., pp.56-57

the only mediator. We found ourselves in a situation in which that *dispositif* was falling apart before our very eyes. This was something completely new, and we were both immediate actors and bewildered spectators. This was an event in the philosophical sense of the term: something was happening but its consequences were incalculable. (...) At that point, we realized, without really understanding it, that if a new emancipatory politics was possible, it would turn social classifications upside down. It would not consist in organizing everyone in the places where they were, but in organizing lightning displacements, both material and mental.”<sup>9</sup>

Striking “image”. There was obviously—singularly for the French Maoists—a political and militant syntax far more pressing than a “vague idea” stipulating such a Long March of students and young intellectuals towards the Chausson factory: to learn from the masses, to break down the manual/intellectual division which structures, not only the capitalist sociotechnical division of labor, but the very bourgeois practice of power, etc. “Speaking with images” (the text of Badiou comes from a lecture), Badiou shows a written image erasing the editing of his own writing; and thus he shows a scene that no script governs. In filmmaking terms : to show it in direct cinema. Actually, Badiou speaks in images, not about images. And yet such a gesture of erasure belongs to the time of this very scene. The film critics of the *Cahiers du cinéma* had at length (even before their late maoist turn) thrashed the odious authority of the script in the filmic process. Among them, Serge Daney was more informed than anyone about the vitality of the militant films of the '68 years. He heavily contributed to analyze the esthetical, technical, ethical and political issues confronting the demands to film *en direct*, from the inside, such a “local fusion” Badiou remembers. Yet Daney will note afterwards that the events of May-June 1968 left very few images. “Everyone pretended to need images but no one had the means nor the want to produce them”. Michel De Certeau had said in an eloquent formula: “*En 1968 on a pris la parole comme on avait pris la Bastille*”; Daney translated: “The '68 imagination lived on theater, not on films. On discourse, on dogmatic recitings, on points of order, on prises de parole, on souvenirs from 1789, and not on images. We “took” the Odéon Theater, not the O.R.T.F. [Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française].”<sup>10</sup> Only one image seemed to make an exception for the film critics of the *Cahiers* (Daney, Jacques Rivette, Serge Le Peron). The twelve minutes film roll of *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder* have often been seen—and still nothing on its strength today—as the visual archive par excellence of May '68. In

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9 Ibid., pp.58-60

10 Daney 1983, p.51

counter-position with Badiou's narrative of the '68 years, this image makes a link between May '68 and the red decade. It shows what does not end with the end of May, and what is not resolved with the negotiating settlement of the strike, with its count of gains and renunciations, with its economy of time conjugating the bygone era of the struggle and the hypothetical future of one another, with its injunction for the workers to go back to work, for the students to go back to studies, for the subjects to go back to the reason of their identity, and for the bodies to go back to the order of things. Yet there is no image without a screen: this linking-image also puts an obstacle. It archives better than anything else the absolute of the '68 revolt—the “becoming-revolutionary” and “opening of the possibles” (Deleuze), the “ultimate illegitimacy of all kinds of domination” and the “reconfiguration of the visible, thinkable, and possible” (Rancière). Though it not only archives a political memory in a film image; it archives also a political image in a memory of cinema. *La Reprise aux usines Wonder* catches the subjective rupture of the '68 revolution in an intense singularity. Meanwhile, *La Reprise* sets itself in the revolution of cinema in the history of images, going back to its inaugural shock, and rediscovering its origin while reversing it. The young worker woman who declares that she “will not return in this clink” reverses the image of mute workers staged, one Sunday of 1895, in *La Sortie des usines Lumières*.<sup>11</sup>

Jean-Louis Comolli, who, along with Narboni, during the Marxist-Leninist turn of the *Cahiers du cinéma* led the review a few months after the events of May, had already analyzed such a paradox of the “detour by the direct.”<sup>12</sup> Interrogating the development of direct cinema since the early Sixties, he noted that the radical reduction of all operations—fictional, technical and esthetical filters— on the film’s material does not guarantee the *effet-de-réel* of the “direct”. On the contrary it exposes the material to produce some uncontrollable effects of over-reality, that the most crafted scripted fiction would envy. Let us return to *La Reprise* one more time. A young woman is silhouetted against gathered people. She stands up and her voice rises. Around her, the distribution of the roles of May organizes the agora: the people become the chorus, the gauchist will serve as her ally, the elected communist and the union representative will serve as her protagonists. These ones order her to accept the law of the city, and she opposes it with nothing but the infinite refusal of her body and inflexible voice. They remind her of the written rules, the reached agreement and the time taken to return to a state of reason; she invokes another reason, and suspends her destiny: on the threshold of the factory from which she stands. The interior will remain out of sight, like the grave of this young worker who would be called Antigone.

11 Le Peron & Daney 1981

12 Comolli 1969, p.49

We shall now return to Badiou's image, since it is no less trapped in the “detour by the direct”; that is, it exposes a political memory which is immediately contaminated by memories of writing and theater. To demonstrate the vacillation of Marxist historico-political grammar in which the contradictory effervescence of May '68 utters, Badiou approaches the utopian breach that Marx allowed in *The German Ideology*, one of a “communist society” liberated from “fixation of the social activity” by the division of labor, “and thus mak[ing] it possible to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner.”<sup>13</sup> But by speaking with images, Badiou also depicts an image of theater. Its model should not be found in the Living Theater, but rather in the *Letter on Spectacles*. Here Rousseau remembered, with a tender melancholy suitable for that which is without an image outside of that which is kept safe by memory, the popular festival, improvised in the ward of Saint-Gervais, where children, women, and soldiers are drawn in a circle, irreversibly becoming actors and spectators. Another recollection and another ideal is addressing the future of a “an egalitarian society which, acting under its own impetus, brings down walls and barriers; a polyvalent society, with variable trajectories, both at work and in our lives.”<sup>14</sup> It is thus clear that this Badiousean image-recollection does not simply abrogate the difference of times it covers; it redistributes the blinding and illumination of afterwardness. The Maoist scenario which prescribed the long march toward the Chausson factory now becomes the unscripted “history of blind movement” (“we don't know,” “we understand at the moment without really understanding”). Conversely, the “incalculable consequences” of May '68 will found a measure and a count during the red decade, when “thousands of students, high school students, workers, women from the estates and proletarians from Africa” go in search of “what would be a political practice that is not willing to keep everyone in their place look like”, “that accepts new trajectories, impossible encounters, and meetings between people who do not usually talk to each other?”<sup>15</sup>

### 1968 – 1848: others repetitions, other bifurcation

Also in 2008, Jacques Rancière borrowed a similar rhetoric of the secret, and its revelation, to situate in May '68 two overlapping conceptions of politics, or, the crossing between a knowledge that does not “know” that it is no longer a knowledge and a non-knowledge that goes in search of a new language.

13 Marx 2010, p.47

14 Badiou 2008, p.

15 Ibid.

“May '68 was a revelation of a disturbing secret: (...) in France, more or less in all sectors, we were seeing the putting into question of hierarchical structures organizing intellectual, social and economical activity, as if it was suddenly revealed that the politics don't have another basement than final illegitimacy of all kinds of domination. This kind of shaking as such doesn't give any definite result. Rather it questions all the schemas of historical evolution that are assigning to this evolution a necessary goal. The militants of May '68 believed they were doing the Marxist revolution. But their action undid it on the contrary, by showing that a revolution is an autonomous process of reconfiguration of the visible, thinkable, and possible and not the accomplishment of a historical movement, led by a political party to its goal.”<sup>16</sup>

Rancière thus discerns an improvement that Deleuze had already observed in May '68, between the “history of revolutions” and the “becoming-revolutionary” of the people.<sup>17</sup> But what would later appear distinct crosses indistinctly in May '68 *within the same subjects*. As such, Rancière has to re-mark a type of division that he taught us to question, between what people say and what they do, between what they do and what they think they are doing, between the knowledge they mobilize in their struggle and its disqualification for the sake of a superior knowledge of their necessary blinding. The refusal of such a stage of illusion was Rancière's anti-lesson of May '68 he turned against “Althusser's lesson”, by updating the implicit policy (“reactionary,” “paranoid”) of the rupture between science and ideology or the power statements this “epistemological break” served.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Rancière identified the historico-political location in Marx where this stage of illusion came to the foreground: in the failure of the revolution of 1848, the break of which is halted by *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* for being essentially political before being epistemological.<sup>19</sup> In *The German Ideology*, Rancière said in substance, the real was one of the division of labor and the class struggles; this position of reality united under one roof the pursuit of science and the perception of the classes who are materially engaged in the struggle; it ensured between the movement of knowledge and the historical movement this coincidence to which the *Communist Manifesto* will still give the form of a “revelation”, while the function of illusion was relegated to a petty-bourgeois marginality whose abstractions internalize its separation from the reality of the

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16 Rancière 2008, p.195

17 Deleuze & Guattari 1984

18 Rancière 1974

19 Rancière 1973

class struggle. But it is this topic that dismembers “the extraordinary pantomime of 1848, where, through the mirages of representation, each class found itself doing the task of its neighbor, where the men in power donned the costumes of another political scene to represent the opposite interests of those they were supposed to represent.”<sup>20</sup> The challenge of the illusion in the representation stopped to be localizable in the separation between ideology and reality; it became coextensive with a “scene of the reality which is that of the representation”. It is the class struggle and the defeat of the proletariat that dissociated the time of knowledge from the time of politics. This conferred to the science an autonomy that Althusser will hypostasize (which was, for Marx, impossible to think until then), giving for his object, not the illusion or objectivical reality, but the very invisible *dispositif* which, off-stage, oversees the objectivical illusion which stands as a reality for the social agents.

Meanwhile, Rancière was suggesting a very different surface of inscription of 1848, of the crisis of (theoretical, political) representations, and of the bankruptcy of the revolutionary scenario provided by the “simplification of the antagonism” in the *Manifesto*: a reorganization of the revolutionary problematic around a “rehab of the multiplicity”, attested to by the “politico-military dream of France spiked with armed workers” (Blanqui: “*Avis au peuple*”), by the “federalist dream of the ‘direct legislation made by the people’” (Rittinghausen) and a world of “communes” and autonomous groups of producers (Proudhon before Varlin), and also by a fantasmatic repetition of older forgotten polytheisms—“poetical (for example Louis Menard, insurgent and principal prosecution witness of June), philosophical (Feuerbach's Theogony, before Nietzsche), historical (Michelet: *La Sorcière*), [repetition] which ends in the prophetic expectation of the regenerating barbarism of the hordes from the Eastern hordes (Coeurderoy : *La Révolution par les Cosaques*).”<sup>21</sup> It would be tempting to see in these two antinomic inscriptions of the political *coupure* of 1848, an analogical disjunction to that which will be illustrated on both sides of May 1968—Althusserian on the one hand, Deleuzian on the other—in French contemporary philosophy. Does this mean that at the time of questioning with Badiou and Rancière (and with their own debates with these two philosophical legacies) over what makes us contemporary from May 68, May 68 makes us contemporaries of the journey leading from the workers' aspirations of February 1848 to the “mischievousness” of universal suffrage bringing his uncle's nephew to power?

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20 Ibid., p.8

21 Ibid.

May '68 between internationalist consciousness and worldwide unconscious

Shortly after May '68, Deleuze published *Difference and repetition*. He reexplores the analysis from the opening of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, which is about the constitution of modern-universalist revolutionary identities, the mechanisms of identification and idealization they lean back on, the phantasmatic repetition of the roles and costumes of past revolutions, the simulation which constitutes political subjects and both deludes them and makes them be up to their historical task.<sup>22</sup> However, in “the poetry of the future” (the very language that was missing, according to Marx, for the proletariat in 1848) Deleuze did not understand the transparent language that put an end to the tragi-comical reversals of bourgeois revolutions by reconciling actors and their characters, political identities and the roles they endorse, the revolutionary class and its proper name. Instead, with a striking marxo-nietzschean twist, Deleuze projected a “liberation” of the multiple that would confront revolutionary time (its dramaturgy of conflicts between the Old and the New, the pathos of the *césure* which makes them incommensurable while relating them to each other<sup>23</sup> with a regime of simulation without patterns, which makes all identities a simulation, and which makes every simulation the repetition of another, with one difference of intensity designated by a proper name. This results in the polytheistic theater of *simulacres* that Pierre Klossowski wanted to highlight in the schizophrenic hystrionism of the late Nietzsche (“What I find distasteful and hinders my modesty is that, at bottom, each name of history is me”).<sup>24</sup> And from that Deleuze and Guattari will still infer, in *Anti-Oedipus* in 1972, the essential parody of symbolic and imaginary identifications, always taken contradictorily from intensive co-ordinates and unconscious modes of location in a “historico-global” cartography, whose names are constantly collected by the clinic of deliriums—just as certain political conjunctures do, albeit more rarely.

From 1968, countless testimonies attest such an intense feeling of being synchronous with global history (Ross evokes some of them<sup>25</sup>), whose names are numerous. The student movement and the revolutionary militancy of 1968 were global, not only in their extension, but intensively: more or less undermined in each state, and within each political and subjective site, when collective enunciations and slogans, debates and claims included the intensities of a global conjuncture, without which these movements would have had neither their duration nor their magnitude. Whether it concerned the national liberation

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22 Deleuze 1968, pp.91-93

23 Cf. Balibar 2016

24 Klossowski 1963

25 Ross 2002, pp.80-99

struggles or the Black American movements in the United States, the Vietnam War or the Chinese Cultural Revolution, each time we had to deal with *internal world events*; and the forms of their internalization and degrees of effectiveness in mass political consciousness were the result of a combination of multiple factors. Among these factors there is the “atopic” localization of these events within the major geopolitical balances, whose axes and borders they sufficiently destabilized to reopen, beyond the great significant break of the two “blocs” and the internal solidarities that each of them was trying to impose, outsider spaces for theoretical and political radicalism, proposing new forms of action, or reactivating older models of workers' struggle that its titled organizations had relegated to the margins or actively repressed (councils, “communes”, self-management...). But we also have to consider the differential internalization of these world events in regional contexts, which differed in their historical and political meanings and according to the series of national factors in which these events resonated. The opposition to the war in Vietnam, which was embodied in the great discursive equivalence of “imperialist aggression against the Vietnamese people”, was not supposed to produce the same effects as the political subjectification of global antagonisms in Japan (where it entered into series with the Second World War, the American military establishment on the territory, the prospect of the renewal of the 1960 Strategic Security Pact, etc.), in West Berlin (in a series involving the economic and military cooperation of the FRG with the United States, the ideological hegemony built since 1946 on anti-communism and opposition to the GDR, the campaigns opposing Adenauer's rearmament policy since the late 1950s, the mobilizations against the federal government's support for the South African and Iranian regimes), or as in France (mobilizing other strata of the collective memory, in resonance with the wars of Indochina and Algeria, and through them, with the place of the colonial history of the institution of a Republic that had to be urgently re-legitimized after five years of collaboration with the Nazi regime). Finally, the unequal appropriation of these different internal world events depends on the conflicts between movements and organizations. This is often recalled in France, no May 1968 without the *Comités Vietnam de Base*; and diverse oppositions to the Communist Party decisively crystallized into them, as in the commitment to Algerian independence ten years earlier. Therefore Marxist language—the field of discursive clashes in which the different May '68s will be differentially, concurrently and conflictually articulated—also forms a surface for the inscription and location of political subjects, a surface that will be both highly territorialized over existing organizations (criticized and contested in the very language in which these organizations partly defined themselves), and powerfully deterritorialized by the global context that makes its syntagmas iridescent. Hence, the difficulty, as we saw with Badiou and

Rancière, in taking afterwards the measure of the reflux of this language. Between Maoists, Trotskyists, Libertarians etc., Marxist coding did not only give a historical-political grammar, a more or less restrictive scenario of revolutionary militancy, and a set of rigid designators of the problems on the agenda (primarily that of the organization and the party). It also gave a world, a transnational space for transferential circulations and repetitions, between “the glorious struggle of the Vietnamese people against the imperialist aggressor”, the Black Panthers, the Latin American guerrillas, the Parisian “enraged”. A same history became commonly readable in the multiple dialects of Marxism. Inversely, internal world events drew, with their intense names, lines of demarcation in ideological positions, militant ethics and political objectives, all the while giving each of them the weight of immediate world history.

The massive effect of all this was the amplified rupture of state regulations of collective identities that continues to amaze us: a disidentification from the state and national frame of reference, whose institutional representatives (including those of the classical organizations of the workers movement) were abruptly disqualified as legitimate interlocutors, while a universal reference was favored. A dense universe, whose complex topology disrupted the relationships between the near and the far, hence redistributing the relative interiors and exteriors, making that “Vietnam is in our factories” (according to the slogan taken from the Fiat workers of Turin), and put in continuity the imperialist wars in the “Peripheries” and the mechanisms of social subjection to the “Centre” themselves understood in terms of “internal colonization”. Surely these continuities have been exaggerated by leftist students and militants. There is no doubt that “the extent to which the working masses of France, preoccupied by their own concerns, came to identify with the Vietnamese peasant and view American imperialism—and not the factory *patron*—as the “principal enemy” was probably very slight indeed.”<sup>26</sup> And the fantasmatic density of these continuities is pretty certain. But what shall we conclude from this? That the “number of analogies [...] between the foreign peasant and the French worker as occupying structurally similar positions in relation to capitalist imperialism, the ‘principle enemy’”,<sup>27</sup> remained too approximate or general analogies? There is no doubt about it, any analogy aimed at correcting the approximation of one relation with the generality of an other. That their “own concerns” inexorably riveted French workers to their immediate working conditions? It is as indisputable as the petition of principle that Kristin Ross’ Rancierian argumentation aims yet to contest, by linking emancipatory subjectification to a “disidentification”,

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26 Ibid., p.92

27 Ibid., p.91

a dehierarchization of places and capacities, which redistributes “concerns” and “interests” and invents other measures of “immediacy”. But perhaps the problem arose, politically and subjectively, neither in terms of objective analogies nor in terms of imaginary fusions,—to pastiche Levi-Strauss: neither *totemic* adjustment between different anti-imperialist “classes” and different names of emancipation, nor *sacrificial* identification with the cause of the other—, but in terms of intensive simulation. Or in terms of historical repetition, as far as Marx outlined it in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, it is neither a category of determination (which would aim at causal constants between different historical situations), nor an idea of reflection (which would allow us to infer relations of analogy or finality), but rather a scheme of dramatization, opening the phenomenology of the revolutionary subject to its excessive forms, those of hallucination and delusion.

### May '68 and “us”—and some others

*Anti-Oedipus* has often been read as one of the most evidently immediate philosophical effects (for better and for worse) of the May 1968 revolt. However, May '68 remains singularly discreet in this book. Deleuze & Guattari’s reproblematicization of sexuality in its coextension to social, economic and political relations, claims less to be the “sexual liberation” of the joli mois de Mai than the dead ends of the left-wing Freudians of the 1920s, contemporaries of the age of revolutions opened by 1917, and soon confronted with the rise of European fascism (the Freud-Marxism they discuss is not Marcuse’s but that of the Wilhelm Reich of 1933). Their reflection on the theoretical and practical articulation of the symptom, the relations of oppression and the dynamics of liberation, is less about anti-psychiatry than about the militant psychiatrist Fanon. *Anti-Oedipus* is contemporary with the inter-war period and the Algerian war, at least as much as it is with May 1968. The few references made to it are all the more significant: they relate to it in a play of displaced connotation, transposed onto an “other scene”. The main one is found in a statement of delirium (“no paranoid delirium that does not stir such historical, geographical and racial masses”). Georges, a Martinican interned for 10 years when Maud Mannoni began to follow him—in May 1968—, organizes his persecution in a trajectory leading from the Algerian war to the current events, and he situates himself in his delirium with regard to Arabs, Whites, Mongols and Gauls: “Everything started in 1957. I was born in Martinique. There was the Algerian issue—it desoriented me. The Arabs sawing my brain established a headline of politics. They used me as their brain, it hurt me. (...) I fell sick from the Algerian problem. I had partaken in the same foolishness as they (sexual pleasure). They adopted me as a brother-in-race. Mongol blood flows through my veins. Algerians controverted me in all my realisations. I had racist ideas. There were rumours about me in Paris when I felt persecuted. (...) I feel persecuted,

I have done nothing wrong and now an expert (the psychoanalyst) is sent to me. I want my freedom. With the present revolution (May events), patients must embrace it..."<sup>28</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, reappraising both the incidence of politics in the process of psychotic symptoms and the impact of delirious elaborations on the radical political subjectivation (as Fanon already did), objected to the reproach that will be addressed to them anyway: to "identify the revolutionary with the schizo", to "think that the revolutionary is schizophrenic or vice versa"—"all-too-familiar traps."<sup>29</sup> Rather, the question would be to know whether or not we agree to take into account the fact that May 68 was inscribed in these *prises de parole* too; and if so, what results from it? What could this tell us, for the delirium clinic, about the implications of politics in the fragile montage of the symptom to which each subject's singularity is attached? But what could this tell us also about the sui generis registers of identifications at work in revolutionary subjectivation, in conjunctures where the names of history connect *both* a broader universality and a more elusive singularity than those regulated in social and individual representation? That is, in conjunctures where historico-political identifications undermine both the genres of the universal instituted in the State and its sovereignty, the nation and its community, society and its exchanges, *and* the instituted figures of individuality, the normative constructions of the "person" and the attributes endowed to it by our juridico-moral metaphysics (the representation of the self, will, and mutual recognition)? The question would then be, not that of an obscure "mystical identity of the revolutionary and lunatic", but to know if, or to what extent, "revolutionary militants cannot but be closely concerned by delinquency, deviance, and madness, not as educators or reformers, but as those who can read the face of their proper difference only in such mirrors."<sup>30</sup> But maybe this question also concerns the mirror where May '68 reflects its strangeness back to us, or, as I previously suggested, its *impolitical side*. Its "names of history" gave the political subjectivity of 68 both its militant intensity and the extension of its reference universe; but no discursive rationalisation knows how to measure their erasure, none to relegate the question of those which will replace them.

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28 Mannoni 1970, pp.96-98

29 Deleuze & Guattari 1972, p.379

30 Deleuze 1972, p.201 (trans.modif.)

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