

An International New Left?

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Author's Introduction to the English Translation

This essay was written for a special issue of the French journal *Esprit*, where it appeared in May 2008. The editors wanted to avoid the typical default of French exceptionalism, which is certain that the true origin and significance of that remarkable year 1968 (and of any other events or years, for that matter) is to be found in France, and more precisely still, in Paris, no doubt within the confines of the Latin Quarter, and among the intellectuals and the revolutionary sects that variously find their favor. [1] *Esprit* has only rarely been guilty of that type of self-centred naval gazing in the decades during which I have been associated with it. On the contrary, what is striking is the ability of the journal to attract younger critical participants (and readers) who constantly open new paths because they are open to new experiences; they didn't come to the journal as converts to an established church.

In a way, it was my experience that was the exception, at least in the stereotypical French context; that is why I was asked by the editors to write about it. I've not tried to write a theoretical essay but have relied on anecdote and some biographical events to try to make a broader point about the emergence of a new type of Left, a radically different way of understanding the political, and a spirit of rebellion that could have been – and perhaps could still be – an essential element in a renewal of democratic politics. In that sense, this essay does advance a thesis. It is one that was suggested in a book that appeared already in June of 1968, written by Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis (under the pseudonym of Jean-Marc Coudray). The authors argued, in their separate contributions, that the 'events' of May were *a brèche*, a rupture with the continuity of history – including the continuity on which the various types of Marxism founded their political hopes. [2] But that vision of historical progress leading to happy tomorrows was too tempting to abandon so easily; the rupture did not lead to a new understanding of the political. In a sense, most of what I have written in the years since 1968 has been an attempt to understand what could have been – and why it was not.

I've reread Cara O'Connor's translation, and at her suggestion I've tried to clarify for the English and American reader some of the allusions that an author can permit

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himself when writing for a French public – whose conviction of its own importance is not entirely unmerited. (DH, May 20, 2008.)

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I left the University of Texas to study in Paris during the summer of 1966 because I wanted to learn how to make a revolution – or at least to understand the Marxist theory that had been identified with this skill. This decision is not so strange if one recalls the kind of political education and culture of a young American, like myself, who had participated in the civil rights movement and demonstrated against the war in Vietnam in the mid-1960s. Our protests against segregation had some successes, but our criticism of the Vietnam adventure seemed to fall on deaf ears. It seemed that we were caught in a trap by trying to use the language of liberalism against the liberal system and its anti-communist rhetoric – a practice that only seemed to reinforce the problems we were trying to solve. We had wanted to win ‘bourgeois rights’ when it now seemed that it was the socio-economic reality of capitalist-imperial America that was truly evil. What we needed instead was, it seemed, a vocabulary that would permit a radical transformation of the liberal system; not just racial integration but a new and superior form of equality that did not stop at the border.

Why France? France, in the shared imagination of critical Americans, incarnated the true revolution. It was the place where 1789 had become 1793, when a ‘bourgeois’ demand for political rights became a radical demand for economic equality that was finally consecrated in the first step toward a global revolution in 1917. The French revolutionary tradition was the more striking when contrasted to the liberal one that had given birth to the United States. In spite of its grand rhetoric, the latter had not even put an end to slavery in 1776 and was only now recognizing the injustice and social divisions that had condemned a part of the population to a segregated existence that was separate and unequal. For us, the myth of revolutionary France was further reinforced by the support found there for 20th century anti-colonial movements, including that of Vietnam, where the U.S. had stupidly picked up a lost cause because of its reflexive anti-communist foreign policy. A reflection of the power of this symbolic myth that linked France and revolution: one of my first ‘touristic’ visits in Paris brought me to the Stalingrad metro station! Why? Because one of our basic criticisms of American liberalism was that it minimized the role of the Soviet Union in the defeat of Nazism. That a Parisian metro station would be

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so-named signified that political culture in France was not blindly enrolled in an anti-communist crusade.

France also represented for us the land of critical philosophy, principally that of Sartre (Althusser had only recently published *For Marx and Reading Capital*, and structuralism had not yet crossed the Atlantic [3]). Sartre was the anti-bourgeois par excellence. Although he was not really a political philosopher (despite his grand existential-Hegelian-Marxist *Critique of Dialectical Reason* [4]), his was a moral stance built on the denunciation of what he called ‘les salauds,’ who manipulated the freedom that is essential to the humanity of the individual (including their own). Sartre was the Voltaire of his time; and we young intellectuals in the U.S. demanded nothing better than, with Voltaire, to ‘écrasez l’infâme’ (although we wanted to find the material means to realize the task). In stark contrast, Anglo-American analytic philosophy, which confined itself to analyzing ordinary language and abstract logic, led only to the confirmation of existing social relations. [5]

Finally, Marx’s work was available and hotly discussed in the French language, while it was scarcely translated in the U.S. (where, for example, I had no choice but to buy my three volumes of *Capital* in the English edition published in Moscow, as only volume 1 was easily available in U.S. bookstores). Indeed, this was the time (after de-Stalinization) when ‘revisionists’ in Eastern Europe were discovering the writings of young Marx, and Western critics were using them as weapons against the dominant ideology of the communist parties. [6]

The March 22 Movement

Some time after my arrival in Paris, I had found myself a room in the dormitory at the recently opened Nanterre campus, where I set out to read *Capital*. My window overlooked the shantytown close to campus, from which arose a yellow smoke attesting to the misery of the inhabitants of its shacks, and which remained for me a *terra incognita*. Somewhat later, I married a French woman and began to search for contacts with the French left. An earlier attempt had met a stinging rebuff when I went to the annual autumn ‘Fête’ organized by the communist party journal, *L’Humanité*. I had no money for admission, and despite my insistence that as a ‘foreign comrade’ I should be allowed to take part in the festivities, I was not even let through the door. This confirmed my suspicion that the communists belonged to the establishment and gave me cause to turn instead to the ‘public’ meetings of the Trotskyites – which were not precisely public, considering everyone had to

sign in under a pseudonym. This practice, as was explained to me, was based on the Trotskyist theory that on the day the (always latent) revolution could no longer be prevented by the false claims of pseudo-orthodox communists, the working class would have to be directed by true *leaders* who fully grasped the theory necessary for the realization of its historic mission. In the meantime, it was necessary to maintain anonymity (since the official communist party would not hesitate to physically eliminate its competitors) and forge a cadre of pure, tough, and true militants.

Since I had no desire to wait for the revolution, I continued my activities against the war in Vietnam. This drew me to the attention of an underground organization that had been created by former militants against the war in Algeria, who had maintained their radical goals, deciding now to work with American deserters. Although they taught me some of the techniques of underground work, my contribution to this organization was minimal. I was not convinced that radical change could come from clandestine action. I mention this experience here only because this was what led me to publish a short essay in *Esprit* in March 1968, entitled 'Les intellectuels français et nous.' The essay was my reaction to a press conference by a group of independent leftist intellectuals led by Sartre, which appeared to me only to bring empty verbal support to an anti-war movement that needed material and active help. But, someone might ask, was one article by an unknown author in *Esprit* really worth any more than a petition or a press conference by renowned intellectuals? Maybe in this case it was, since it brought me the friendship of Pierre Vidal-Naquet, who agreed to join in (clandestine) discussions with a group of American deserters. [7]

During the months that followed, the militant activities of the student 'enragés' at Nanterre spread. I took part, although I found them sometimes confused and often dogmatic. I remember a rowdy meeting in Nanterre where invectives were hurled back and forth for a long time over a resolution to support either 'the peasants and workers' or 'the workers and peasants' struggling in I-don't-know-which country. Whatever the fundamental political distinction might have been, its significance escaped me at the time. It had to do, I think, with the historical-materialist view that a peasant revolution could only form the antechamber of the real workers' revolution – an issue that in turn affected one's understanding of what had 'really' taken place in 1917. Despite this, I tuned out; I was not in France to learn how to manipulate dead categories for partisan ends! Then, one fine day, the second of April 1968, during a General Assembly of the students who were occupying the campus at Nanterre, I heard a language that was free from the dogmatism of the *a*

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priori revolutionaries and the fraudulent radicals who intended to become human vehicles for history's dictates (guided, of course, by the unimpeachable theoretical insight of their leaders). They were still speaking French; but they were talking to one another, not looking for signs of the future course of World History. Finally I could understand the stakes of the claims and participate in the debates. I sensed in the anti-establishment ethos of the new French student movement the same spirit that had animated the civil rights movement, which was in the process of transforming America. We had occupied the campus at Nanterre, and after the morning's General Assembly we broke up into working groups. I proposed a tactic I had experimented with in the U.S.: the creation of free universities, where we who wanted to learn for ourselves could escape the dominance of the 'system.' This declaration of autonomy would make possible an education for autonomy. Was this reformism? Maybe, but still I considered myself a 'revolutionary,' as did the students at Nanterre, and as it seems did history itself, which was accelerating. But was I? Was it? Where were we going?

How the young intellectual who had come to France to find revolutionary thought got involved in the journal *Esprit* is another story [8]. The first time I met Jean-Marie Domenach, who was then the editor in chief, he explained to me the progressive political project of the Gaullist left, which he supported at the time. It was not my cup of tea, but I accepted his invitation to attend the weekly meetings of the 'Journal à plusieurs voix,' at which the events of the day were discussed, debated, and finally published as short commentaries in the monthly issues of *Esprit*. As the student movement became increasingly radical, the critique of the 'enragés' – both in the media and at *Esprit* – became livelier. I was on the side of those who felt that something important was happening. The 'enragés' were not simply anarchists; their militant actions revealed flaws within the 'system' itself. To support my arguments, I brought a tract that had been distributed at Nanterre by the March 22 movement, [9] entitled 'Pourquoi les sociologues?' challenging the function of the social scientists in modern capitalist societies who were being trained only to discipline the working class. The editors agreed to publish it in the May 1968 issue of the journal. The same issue also contained a short essay I had written under the shock of Martin Luther King's assassination on the fourth of April, simply called, 'Résister.' I appropriated the words of the martyred civil rights leader, whose own thought had grown more radical: 'From protest to resistance.' It is true that I wrote Resistance with a capital R, and that my unclear dream of revolution continued to be more a wish than a concrete project. I was still searching for a method that could unmask liberalism – that could reveal the iron fist under the velvet glove by

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confronting its unjust practices with the principles that it professed.

Then came the closing of the University of Nanterre, and the tear gas used against the protesters at the Sorbonne. The tear gas attacks put a premature end to the course on *Capital* that I had been giving as part of a 'free university' that I had organized in a small room on the second floor of the bookstore, *Shakespeare & Company*. We had just come to the crucial account of the 'theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall,' the analysis in Volume three that was supposed to prove convincingly the internal self-contradiction of capitalism. There were still 350 pages remaining in Marx's account, but we never met again to study them. I don't know whether I recalled then the concluding chapter of Lenin's *State and Revolution*, written during the period between the February outbreak of revolution and the Bolshevik seizure of power; Lenin's text breaks off abruptly, leaving the chapter on the Russian revolutionary experience unwritten because, as he explains in the Postscript, 'It is more pleasant and useful to go through the 'experience of revolution' than to write about it.'

What practical contributions could we Americans make to the accelerating events of May? Summer vacation from the universities (which in the U.S. begins in May) was bringing to Paris quite a number of young people who had no comprehension of the stakes of the student revolt that had become a worker's rebellion. This development was all the more regrettable since the massive protests at Columbia University in April, as well as the tactics of the anti-war movement, had a great influence on the spirit of the French student rebels at Nanterre. With some friends I joined in the creation of an 'American Action Committee,' which stood alongside other such action committees that had seized rooms in Censier [10] and at the Sorbonne itself, where general meetings were regularly held. We were convinced that our movement would be international; its aims went beyond France, however necessary France's reform might be.

Faithful to the 'revolutionary' spirit that we were immersed in, the American Action Committee tried to make contact with other participants in the great upheaval. One of the members of our committee, of Serbian origin, went to the factories to try to organize the immigrant workers, but the majority felt more useful working in the student movement. Nevertheless, we wanted to make a connection with the world of the workers, and this led to a meeting with young workers at Renault, organized with Daniel Mothé, [11] whom I knew from meetings of the 'Journal à plusieurs voix' at *Esprit*. But we knew we had no chance of becoming trade unionists;

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our influence would come with the debate about university reform that was the establishment's attempt to co-opt the 'enragés.' Reformists were recommending that France adopt the American system and we thought we could offer insight into the drawbacks of this idea. We sent members of the committee to different debates and meetings, but time ran out. Finally, near the end of May, the government paralysis ended symbolically; the blocking of petrol supplies by the strikers that had paralyzed the country (and made it possible to walk peacefully down the middle of the Boulevard Saint Michel, debating with one's neighbours rather than bustling headlong toward a private goal) ended: that weekend the traffic leaving Paris was unprecedented, the militant élan began to dissipate, the leisure society triumphed over the incipient democratic 'brèche.'

A hope remained, however; at least with us would-be Marxist intellectuals for whom history seems always to offer lessons of hope: could Pierre Mendès-France, the great hope of moral socialism, become our 'Kerensky?' Alexander Kerensky's temporary rise to power in February 1917 had given the Bolsheviks time to teach the working class the true stakes of the revolution; was it not possible that Mendès-France could play a similar role as a temporary Prime Minister? I don't know how many people believed this idea of a repetition of history, but there were a good number who shared the illusion – among them were some circles of the PSU, notably Serge Mallet, the theorist of a 'new working class.' [12] The partial failure of the meeting at the Charléty stadium on May 27 – a crucial last-ditch effort that brought together a wide spectrum of students, workers and activists – essentially signified the end of the French movement. My revolution now became international, *faute de mieux*.

Facing up to Socialism

The sad end to the hopes of that lovely month of May did not put an end to my own. On the contrary, the spirit of resistance that characterized my time in France had expanded beyond the *hexagone*. I found it anew in London in June, where I went to pick up my younger brother, who was rewarded for finishing high school with a trip to Europe. Two completely contradictory experiences awaited me there. At a diner with some members of the editorial committee of the *New Left Review* I met Perry Anderson. He had just returned from Albania, where he was one of the first Western intellectuals invited to the country of the die-hard Maoist, Enver Hoxha. My stories of middle-class French students who took themselves for revolutionaries must have seemed insignificant when compared with the elevated activities of a true

‘cultural *revolution*.’ [13] The next day I visited the Hornsey College of Art and Technology, which had been occupied that week by its students. Their demands had a strong corporatist ring, but their determined resistance to any compromises transformed its implications. What had begun as a demand for specific benefits became a movement of resistance to the system; they didn’t read French, but could just as well have written their own Nanterre students’ pamphlet asking ‘Pourquoi les sociologues?’ Had I taken my wishes for reality? Was Hornsey truly the spread to England of the spirit of resistance that had shaken France? However that may be, on my return from London I wrote a short essay for *Esprit* (which appeared in the August/September issue), optimistically entitled ‘Un début en Angleterre.’

Replete with hope, I left with my wife and brother to follow the path of the revolution, from Switzerland to Italy, then from Prague to Berlin and Frankfurt, before returning to the U.S. where the month of August delivered a double blow. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia put an end to the ‘Prague Spring,’ and the Democratic Party convention nominated vice-president Hubert Humphrey, while young protesters became violent when they realized that the delegates to the convention did not take them seriously. The streets of Chicago were the scene of police riots that were pretending to contain anti-war protesters. The Democratic Party was in tatters and the war in Vietnam would continue for six long years marked by still more pointless losses of life. [14]

Some aspects of this journey through Europe, prior to my return to the politically wracked U.S., are worth relating in order to understand the scope of the attitude of resistance, and its vexed relationship to Marxist – or even to revolutionary – thought. Throughout, we were in touch with militants who opened their homes to us and explained to us the subtleties of local politics and their own ways of resisting the hold of the ‘system.’ In no way were we delegates of any organization; it was simply a matter of sharing experiences and broadening horizons. The dogmatism of the sects was no longer alive that summer; language had been freed, and thought as well. We had no way of knowing that this candour, which would later be criticized as naïveté would disappear in the coming militant years.

In the end, minds were not completely open. Marxism remained, as Sartre had stated in *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, ‘the unsurpassable horizon of our times.’ I was intent upon visiting Zurich, where Lenin had spent the war before the armoured boxcar brought him back to St. Petersburg’s Finland Station. We were put up in the *Pinkus Buchhandlung*, a dignified second-hand bookshop, in which comrades

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from many countries, who had found refuge in Switzerland, donated or sold the books and pamphlets they had collected during their time as militants. Imagine what a find this was for a young American who wanted to come into contact with revolutionary thought! Also interesting were the protests around *Kaufhaus*, the big department store in the center of town, which activists wanted to turn into a youth center. I don't know what came of these protests, but in any case the brief linkage between the old Marxist culture of the bookshop and the youth was not long lasting.

I confess, I don't remember much about our time in Italy, other than the summer heat and the abundance of small radical newspapers where friends worked. It seems to me that the hold of the communist party remained quite strong, which makes sense in a way, because in Italy the works of Gramsci were still respected. In any case, the hegemony of Italian communism on the left was mixed with a strong dose of anti-fascism, whose implications were all the more obvious when we all sang *Bandiera Rosa* rather than *Internationale*. Was this the opening that led to the *ouvrierisme* of the Red Brigades in the years that followed?

It is the memories of my friends from Prague that are really the most important to me. What was crucial was not the so-called 'Prague Spring' itself, which for many was a sign that communism *could* be reformed. Rather, the constant radicalization of this process that had begun with the seizure of power by the reformists within the party was a sign that democratic freedoms, which were identified with the rights of resistance, could not be replaced by the outward signs of material equality. The lesson that I took from this was that communism simply could not be reformed – and not only because Moscow would soon invoke the 'Brezhnev doctrine' to prevent liberalization.

My wife and I had already been to Prague during the summer of 1967, after I had taken part in an international gathering on Lake Balaton, in Hungary, of young leaders of the Eastern and Western bloc countries organized by the Quakers. With some others, I had proposed a resolution condemning the American war in Vietnam. The only person who refused to sign it was one of the Czechs. She refused, not because she was in favor of the war, but because she was fed up with signing petitions. Though the other Czech managed to persuade her, her resistance to the ritual demands of political correctness foreshadowed a future when the emergence of an autonomous civil society would destabilize the Soviet Empire. [15] After the Balaton meeting, we stayed briefly in a Budapest that still bore traces of the

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Soviet invasion of 1956, and then moved on to Prague, where we reconnected with Jan Kavan, one of the leaders of the student movement. It happens that Kavan's mother was English, so we were able to communicate easily, but this bit of good luck was hardly necessary. What struck me above all was the fact that despite a miscellany of languages in which we tried to communicate, we resistors shared a mindset that resulted in long discussions – either around pitchers of beer or during long evening walks in the castle-garden that overlooks the city. What was there to discuss? In 1967, I was still reading *Capital*; they preferred Dostoevsky; but as with the changed tone of the Nanterre radicals, there was a shared spirit that made communication possible and rewarding. I was not willing to abandon my search for the revolution; but when we met a year later, in 1968, I had become what one might call a premature member of the 'anti-totalitarian' left. [16] I was ready for the encounter with Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis, arranged by Pierre Vidal-Naquet, which would permit me, a little while later, to reconcile my experience in '68 with my theoretical research. But that is another story. [17]

The trip was not over; it was necessary to pass through Germany before returning to France. I again experienced the contradiction I had struggled with since my departure for France: Marxism or militancy, revolution or resistance? In the U.S., the new left was identified with an organization called *Students for a Democratic Society* (SDS). In Germany, our friends also participated in an 'SDS,' but the acronym stood for *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*. With us, democracy was primary; with them, socialism had priority. The distinction had significant implications.

What was opaque to me was the West German dissidents' relationship to their 'socialist' cousins in the GDR. Of all the militants of the new left that we met that summer, the West Germans were the most erudite and the most deeply immersed in the writings of Marx – possibly because his language was their own, permitting them to glory in the intricacies of his thought closed to those who knew it only through the simplification of translations. Did their theoretical erudition blind them to the political realities? I don't know, but for some reason they asked us to hide in our car tracts against the Vietnam War, that we would transmit to their friends in Frankfurt. Why hide them? Didn't the GDR also oppose the war? Whatever the political reality may have been, it wasn't the pamphlets that ended up alarming the East German border-guards; it was a copy of *History and Class Consciousness* by the critical Marxist Georg Lukàcs, which I had naively left in view. Suddenly the border guards had opened the trunk, pulled up the backseat, and

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rifled through all the suitcases. We who had just left Prague were not surprised; like communism, orthodox Marxism takes criticism badly. Nor did this surprise the Frankfurt friends, who were adept practitioners of the critical theory identified with their university. But the lesson was ultimately forgotten, here as elsewhere; the new left abandoned its novelty in search of a revolution that was always on the horizon.

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I will end this story with a Franco-American anecdote. In the fall of 1968 I was back in Texas, writing my dissertation (on the movement of the young Marx from philosophy to political economy!). I was introduced to a French writer, Pierre Gasca, who was a visiting professor for the semester. He proposed that I organize a discussion to be broadcast on the public radio station France Culture. I called on Greg Calvert, an old former president of SDS, who spoke good French. As I recall it, the debate centered on a phrase often heard in France during May '68: 'You make the revolution for yourself.' [18] Hearing the slogan now, one would be hard-pressed not to detect the egoistic and hedonistic roots of neoliberal society; however, the story that I've recounted here suggests another interpretation, which I had not wholly grasped at the time, but which Calvert understood quite well. The time for a 'revolution' founded on a philosophy of history was over. No longer would individual freedom be a mere means to the realization of a pre-ordained future; the idea of the proletariat as a 'universal' class and of the colonized as its third-world stand-in was finished. This was the start of a new phase of resisting all heteronomy, of searching for autonomy, and of creating democracy. The emergence of 'second-wave' feminism, born at least in part from reflections on the implications of May '68 – was but one example marking the shift. One could no longer say to women, or to homosexuals, or to ethnic, religious, and 'racial' minorities, that their immediate interests must be sacrificed for the sake of 'the' revolution – and that the revolution would ultimately put an end to all these merely personal and otherwise egoistic miseries.

In the years that followed, one could have the impression that revolutionary enthusiasm had itself thrown the revolutionary spirit of May into the famous dustbin of history. It seemed to many to be what Lenin had denounced in 1920: 'an infantile disorder.' [19] But as Marx liked to say, the old mole just keeps digging. Maybe I remain too much of an optimist, but I can't help but think that

the candidacy of Barack Obama signifies the return of another Left, different from our own, and different also from the social-democratic dream represented by the New Deal. [20] *This* new Left (if that's what it becomes) intends to be a *post-racial* movement that refuses orthodox identity politics. It is awakening in young people (and others) a taste for the political, and it is reviving the demands for real democracy that animated the integrationist civil rights movement and the old American SDS. Would I have recognized this if I had not gone to study in France? – before events and experiences showed me that the revolutionary spirit I looked for in France can appear anywhere – and disappear so quickly that it does not even have time to recognize itself for what it truly is: the spirit of democracy.

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Notes

- [1] The best illustration of this approach remains the fascinating two volume study, *Génération*, by Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1988).
- [2] C.f., Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort and Jean-Marc Coudray, *Mai 1968: la Brèche (premières réflexions sur les événements)* (Paris : Fayard, 1968).
- [3] Louis Althusser's *Pour Marx* (1962) was published in English in 1967; *Lire le Capital* (1968) made it into English in 1970.
- [4] *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* was not published in English until 1976 (by New Left Books).
- [5] C.f., John McCumber's demystification of this stance in: *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Northwestern UP, 2001). McCumber points out that circa 1948 there was a great interest in political thought in American philosophy departments; within a few years, coincident with the rise of McCarthyism, it had given way to the 'analysts.'
- [6] The communists at first gave as good as they got. It is in this context that Althusser's stress on the distinction between the truly scientific 'mature Marx' and the 'young Marx,' who formulated a critique of alienated labor and a denunciation of the reification of everyday life, gets its political weight. It is worth noting that *Marx's 1844 Manuscripts* were only translated into English in the 1960s.
- [7] Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1930-2006), was one of the leading French authorities on Greek history, and had been one of the intellectual leaders of the protests against the Algerian War. He went on to take principled critical stances against threats to freedom whether they came from the left or the right. In addition to his historical work, particularly his path-breaking study of the origins of Greek democracy in *Clisthenes the Athenian*, c.f., his two-volume *Mémoires* (1998). In English, see the engaged essays collected in *The Jews: History, Memory, and the Present* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995).
- [8] C.f., my discussion of the earlier years of *Esprit* in Dick Howard, *Defining the Political* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, pp. 135-49).
- [9] The 'March 22 movement' was the name of the movement at Nanterre, taken from the first

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occupation of the administration on that date; this was the movement led by Cohn-Bendit.

- [10] An annex of the Sorbonne.
- [11] Mothé was a former Trotskyist who joined the group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* led by Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort. He had published at the time two important books: *Journal d'un ouvrier* (1958) and *Militant chez Renault* (1965). He left the factory after an injury and became a research sociologist, publishing numerous works on self-management under his own name (Jacques Gautrat) and as Daniel Mothé. His reflections on May 1968 are published in the same issue of *Esprit* in which my essay appeared under the title: 'L'usine, l'amphi et l'association de quartier: fermeture de trios espaces militants en mai 1968.'
- [12] C.f., Serge Mallet's *Essays on the New Working Class*. Ed. Dick Howard & Dean Savage (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975). I didn't know at the time that this possibility was also discussed among the Gaullists, although for them Mendes-France was to be a center-right alternative. C.f. *Le Monde's* republication and comment on its front pages during the May events, in this case May 21, 2001. Recounting the debates among the different options for the government, 'it is at this moment that the name of Pierre Mendès-France began to be considered as a possible alternative that would be acceptable to the moderates. The former Prime Minister, who then met with trade unionists including [teacher's union president] Alain Geismar, interpreted the events as a regime crisis, declaring 'There is only one service that the government can offer to the country: to resign.' The fact that both the right and left *wings of the established system* would imagine the same solution is another reason to try to interpret 1968 as an historical *brèche*.
- [13] However, one of the editors wanted to take a look at the manuscript where I described in detail the birth of the March 22 movement, which he promised to return to me the following day. But he didn't show up that day, and the carbon-copy of my text, which I had transmitted by an anonymous source (because the postal service was on strike) to the American magazine, *Viet-Report*, was also lost.
- [14] This was to be the origin of the current system of primary elections. Protests had already forced LBJ out of the running. The nomination of Hubert Humphrey signified that the party delegates only represented themselves, as a self-perpetuating bureaucracy. Beaten in November by the Republican party of Richard Nixon, the democrats created a commission to reform the nominating process, headed by Senator George McGovern. The complicated structure invented for the occasion was put into play in 1972; and not incidentally, it was McGovern who carried off the prize bet before being roundly defeated in November by Richard Nixon.
- [15] We could not yet have known the first political writings of Václav Havel, who would bring out the implications of these protests for the creation of a democratic civil society. I should also mention that our two Czech friends were going to play an important role in the Czech struggle for democracy. Helena Klimova, due to her deep involvement in the Charter 77 movement, and Jan Kavan, acting from his forced exile in England.
- [16] The influence of this experience of 1967 on my point of view on the March 22 movement, and my appreciation of the contribution of Cohn-Bendit, manifested itself in a little essay that I published on May 17, 1968, in the American journal *Commonweal*, titled 'Czech-Mating Stalinism.' As I wrote about certain things that were not public knowledge, I published under a pseudonym to protect my friends.
- [17] C.f., *The Marxian Legacy*, whose first edition was published in 1977; an enlarged second edition appeared in 1988.
- [18] I never found out if our debate was actually broadcast on France Culture, being then as now more concerned with actual political questions than with the past.
- [19] C.f., Lenin's 1920 pamphlet, '*Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*.'

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[20] I am speaking more specifically of the *candidacy*, rather than the candidate, whose charisma opposes itself to the voice of experience represented by Hillary Clinton. In this light, I should stress that the other lesson one could draw from the fleeting experience of 1968 is that it does not help to be contemptuous of reforms, and that it can be dangerous to gamble on a resistance that can descend into nihilism.

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