Les événements de Mai as Theory and Practice

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The revolutionary character of Paris, May '68 is variously determined. In the wake of the Algerian War and subsequent *tiersmondisme*, and with the protracted American engagement in Vietnam (seen through the lens of the French presence in Indo-China in the 1950s), the nature of May '68 is taken to be anti-imperialist: it is seen as foreign policy critique carried out through social action. Positively, the anti-imperialism of the protests encouraged a re-configuring of socialism along non-Western lines; the indigenous socialist regimes of Algeria, Cuba and China were taken to exemplify a new left political model. Determining May '68 in this way, namely, as a socialist revolution re-configured along Third World, anti-colonial lines, informed a further, re-configured determination of the events: May '68 became seen as a Marxist revolution, but a Marxist revolution in an ambivalent sense. The advanced industrialist conditions that were commonly supposed to trigger a proletarian revolution, at least from an orthodox Marxist perspective, were largely absent from the economies of the Third World. If Cuba and China are communist states, they arose through a process markedly different from the one Marx details for post-mercantile, capitalist Europe. Accordingly, if such indigenous socialist regimes modelled a new left politics in France, they did so in a way that altered traditional Marxist doctrine. May '68 as a Marxist revolution is thus ambivalently located between a re-evaluation of Marxism from the vantage point of Third World Socialism, and a re-configuration of the hegemonic agency of political revolution; I discuss the latter here in the context of the Paris student protests.

As George Ross has shown, the student protesters coordinated their own protest claims with the grievances voiced by manual labourers and factory workers (Ross 84ff). For example, to show their solidarity with the working class, student protesters organized a protest rally on May 1st 1968 to coincide with the first May Day demonstration permitted in France since 1954 (Seidman 163). In turn, workers responded to the student demonstrations of May and June by undertaking the largest-ever strike wave in French history: Feenberg and Freedman estimate the number of strikers early in May at over one hundred thousand at thirteen major factories (Feenberg and Freedman 33). In total, more than nine million workers across France participated in work stoppages, walkouts, or factory occupations. In Paris, walkouts and factory occupations occurred in the metallurgical industry; in the provinces, strikes occurred at automobile factories like Renault in Cléon, and aviation factories like Sud-Aviation in Nantes (Seidman 166). By late May and early June, the union of civil servants—*Postes, télégraphes, téléphones* (PTT)—declared a work stoppage, and railroad employees walked off the job at all the main rail stations in Paris (Seidman 168-169). Life effectively came to a halt for millions of Parisians, who were in large part sympathetic with the students and workers. Though not uniquely associated with proletarian concerns and the worker reform movement, the May '68 student protests and concurrent strikes nevertheless attest to Marxist tendencies within the protest movement.

However, those same Marxist tendencies signal a change within French Marxism itself. A unified Marxist-socialist front splintered over the course of the 1960s into a constellation of leftist *groupuscules*. The *Parti communiste français* (PCF) held the party line that the events of May and June attested to the ongoing historical struggle of the working class against capitalist oppression. From within the student branch of the PCF—the *Union des étudiants communistes* (UEC)—factions formed that divided the party structure from below. Some *gauchistes*,

particularly students, rejected what they perceived to be an archaic, state-oriented Stalinism in the PCF.¹ By contrast, the ability of the Trotskyites to organize street-level protests, and the efficacy of such groups in putting protest into immediate action, attracted many leftist students eager for change; such students gravitated toward the idea of permanent revolution in Trotskyism and eventually formed the *Comité de liaison des étudiants révolutionnaires* (CLER). A Maoist faction, which located the impetus of revolution in a society's overdetermined superstructure à la the cultural revolution in China, grew up within the UEC, and eventually broke off altogether to form the *Union des jeunesses communistes marxistes-léninistes* (UJCml). Finally, anarchists, militant leftists and Situationists siphoned off the more radical elements from mainline, left-of-centre party organizations (Seidman 24-26).²

Towards the centre lay the population of students who were politically engaged—and sympathetic to leftist ideas—but who advocated reform policies that worked along existing social and political channels. Needless to say, the radicalism of the UEC and anarchists was alienating to such moderate, centre-left students. Such students were instead drawn to the *Union nationale des étudiants de France* (UNEF), which had a long history of student activism in France. Along with left Catholics, the UNEF had backed the *Front de libération nationale* (FLN) throughout the late 1950s in its fight for Algerian independence.³ The increased popularity of centre-left political movements in the 1960s attests, indirectly, to a vital right-centre and right student politics; the influence exerted on the left by such conservatism is evident in the number of students who gravitated toward a centrist position. Membership numbers for the anti-*gauchiste* *Fédération nationale des étudiants de France* (FNEF), for example, rose throughout the 1960s; the left hegemony of the UNEF and PCF on issues of Algerian independence and university reform was challenged by this growing conservatism (Seidman 34). Further right still

was a virulent strand of political organizations marked by racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. Fascists and neo-Nazis organized against open immigration policies and resisted Algerian independence in the name of an imperial *Algérie Française*.

Given the breakdown of a unified socialist party into a constellation of left and centre-left student organizations, it is difficult to characterize the mass of workers' strikes that coincided with the student protests of May '68 in traditional Marxist or proletarian terms. Certainly, many of the main objectives of the strikes were rooted in Marxist doctrine: democratizing the factory hierarchy in particular and the production process more generally, in short, worker *autogestion*, was at issue in union-organized strikes as well as in the spontaneous, non-union, *grèves sauvages* that occurred across the country. Equally, however, many strikes aimed at the more limited goal of *cogestion*, or greater worker input in management and production; strikes were undertaken in the name of advancing pay-scale equity, establishing regular promotion procedures, job security and reduced hours in the average work week.⁴ The more conservative or limited approach of *cogestion* favours the established workforce in a way that the radical goal of *autogestion* does not. Within the strikes themselves, divisions thus opened up between senior staff, who would benefit from revisions to the existing factory structure in place, and younger workers who would benefit from the complete overhaul of the workplace. To the extent that May '68 is a Marxist workers' revolt, then, it is Marxist in a plural or multivalent sense: while the students and workers cooperated across the strike lines, the traditional assumption of a unified working class that would act as a revolutionary hegemony becomes impossible given the plural reality of the modern French workforce.

The over-determination of the political landscape of *les événements de Mai* when viewed from a Marxist vantage point might motivate a shift in perspective, or at least in emphasis. Such

a move would incorporate the complexity of the revolution into its theorization; theory, in this way, would inherit the radical politics of May '68. As Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli have argued in *Les intellectuels en France, de l'affaire Dreyfus à nos jours*, Daniel Cohn-Bendit and the other members of the March 22nd movement forged “a fragile synthesis of two, ordinarily irreconcilable dogmatic logics—one of Marxist inspiration, the other libertarian” (Ory and Sirinelli 26). From a libertarian vantage point, the revolution appears primarily as a response to the repressive bureaucracies of state, police and university. In fact, these three elements inform, reinforce and complement one another: police brutality is linked with State-sponsored violence, which in turn is reflected in repressive university policies and curriculum. Reflecting on May '68 in *L'échange symbolique et la mort* (1976), Jean Baudrillard writes, “[i]t is quite different when there are real libidinal stakes such as knowledge and power, or even a real work of mourning over knowledge and power (as was able to take place in the universities after '68)” (Baudrillard 85). Emphasis in the passage should be placed on the repetition of “real” used in conjunction with the “libidinal stakes” of the student protestors as well as the “reality” of power and knowledge. With this invocation of the political *reality* of the events of May, Baudrillard correlates the libertarian politics of sexual revolution with the politico-economic issue of a state control of knowledge through the universities and state-power wielded through the military and police.⁵

For the protestors, the police represented the growing government bureaucracy of the post-War years (Intercontinental Press 125). Street-level suppression and the arrest of protestors during May and June was an immediate instance of the statist pressure many young people felt under the hierarchical structure of society (wherein the highest positions in government and industry were occupied by the graduates of the *grandes écoles*, in particular by students from the

École nationale d'administration). The police brutality of May and June also reproduced the experience that many young people had in their everyday lives in the poorer parts of Paris and in the outlying *banlieues*. Police presence during the revolutionary days of the spring, and the violent form of that presence, seemed to confirm and consolidate the anti-*flic* attitudes of the students. Rather than diminishing the number and fervour of the protestors, the severity of police repression had the opposite effect: popular opinion was consolidated against the police and state, and there was a swell in the numbers in the protest movement. In this regard, Kristin Ross cites the following reflections of a student protester in Paris: “For me, May ’68 started when I was hit with a police club [*matraqué*] walking out of an apartment ... I was in high school, in a preparatory class for the *grandes écoles*, I was peacefully pursuing my studies. All of a sudden I started going to meetings, to assemblies” (Ross 28).

The word used for police baton in the quotation, which also means, more generally, “beat” or “strike,” derives from Algerian Arabic: “*matraq*” or “club” (Ross 31). In the language the student used to describe police brutality, the events of Paris ’68 are linked to the political fate of Algeria in the 1950s. Further, through use of the term “*matraq*,” the student refers to and associates himself with the Algerian insurgency; in this way, the French police violence in the streets of Paris is compared to the torturous methods employed by the French army in Algeria.⁶ The affinity between the Paris protest movement of 1968 and the Algerian insurgency here expressed in the terminology of “*matraq*” further recalls the events of 17 October 1961 when the French army attacked a peaceful demonstration of pro-FLN Algerians killing as many as 200 protestors (Cf. House and MacMaster 242ff.).

Pursuing the terminological resonance in the language of protest from the streets of Paris to the Algerian war provides a different image of how police brutality reinforced the protests: the

movement expanded laterally to encompass not only other French students but Algerian insurgents as well. Through the language of the protestor, we move out from an articulation of dissatisfaction with market economics and the poor conditions of university life, to the broader issues of racism, imperialism and the military, repressive form of state power. It is this lateral development of the protest movement—and the horizontal structure of the events of May '68 in general—that is of particular interest. Specifically, a laterally or horizontally oriented historico-political event necessitates a comparably structured *theory* of history and politics. In multiplying out the various determinations of May '68, the aim, then, is not to lose sight of the events but to orient the present study differently toward its theorization (Ross 23).⁷ That this point first arises in consideration of the language used by a protestor suggests that it is around language or discourse that a lateral theorization of *les événements* might be organized.

To avoid the mistake of treating discursivity as merely theoretical by insulating it within the socio-political space and practices of the academy, it will serve as a corrective to consider a practical or concrete instance of the kind of lateral discourse we have in mind. The idea is to present, first, a laterally organized political practice, which is no less discursive for its reality. Secondly, we will consider a lateral form of theorization that is no less practical for its origins in university discourse. Thus, it is to the barricades that we turn, briefly, before detailing further the specifics of a horizontalized political theory.

As Daniel Singer writes in *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968*, “the feverish building of the barricades ... was entirely spontaneous, a sheer invention of the crowd” (Singer 137). The “spontaneous” construction of the barricades differentiates them from calculated or strategic political action; at a particular moment, and at various locations across the Latin Quarter, the protest movement coalesced in the form of these mass structures. The 1968

barricades were cobbled together out of materials available near the various sites at which they were erected. At any one place there might be a *mélange* of burning, overturned cars and trucks, or a structure pieced together of paving stones, brick and mortar. A barricade built near a housing site might include boards, nails and other construction materials; still others comprised uprooted trees and shrubbery (Caute 176). Spontaneously designed and erected, the barricades acted concretely as physical obstructions put in the path of paramilitary forces and the police. In their instantaneous, on-site construction, the barricades also stand for the urgency and insistence of the revolution. Finally, as heterogeneously ready-made, the barricades reflect the plural, diverse character of the protesters, the varied articulations of their revolutionary cause and the different communities into which they were built. In pooling the resources of each different *arrondissement*, the students were able to look on the barricades as a sign of their rootedness in the everyday life and workings of Parisian people.

The first night of the barricades, May 10th 1968, generated solidarity between the neighbourhood residents and shopkeepers of the 5^e *arrondissement* and the student protesters: food, drinks and shelter, when needed, were supplied to the demonstrators. The same spirit of cooperation carried over to the subsequent nights: local merchants proposed a coordinated strike on May 13th to coincide with the demonstrations (Seidman 116). Local merchants and residents remained in concert, generally, with the protestors during the second and third nights of the barricades, May 24th and June 11th, respectively. However, as police violence was answered by a comparable level of violence from the protestors, local sympathy for the protest movement decreased. Random destruction of automobiles, market places and thoroughfares disrupted the livelihoods of the working, middle class members of the community; disaffection with police presence no longer offset the real threat posed by the demonstrators (Seidman 185ff.). Like the

barricades themselves, which were often constructed and razed within the same night, so too the identities and alliances that formed along the barricades dissipated almost as quickly as they formed. To the extent that there was a revolutionary front during May and June, it was effectively de-centred along the barricades. Different groups of people were attached to the protests at their outer edge; when the barricade changed shape or direction, when it was abandoned for another, the marginal groups either moved with, and re-shaped the structure of, the barricades, or abandoned the protests altogether. In short, the barricades of 1968 formed, and de-formed, the identities of temporary political agencies and associations: the direction that such formative processes took was non-hierarchical or what we are here calling “lateral.”

The barricades coincided, further, with a marginal form of discourse: three or four nights of the barricades were broadcast over Europe One and Radio Luxembourg. These two media news outlets were unique in French and Parisian broadcasting insofar as they were semi-independent from the state radio and television conglomerate *Office de radiodiffusion-télévision française* (ORTF). Correspondents from both Europe One and Radio Luxembourg were out on the barricades in May and June; they reported on the violence of the police, provided a forum for the student-protestors to voice their demands, and offered the general listening audience a glimpse into what was going on in the streets. There could be no official account of the barricade nights simply because a top-down assessment of the protests was answered by the unofficial word on the street broadcasted through independent channels: a vertical flow of information met an equally strong current of laterally moving information, i.e., from person-to-person and from person-to-reporter, along the edges of the barricades.

Yet, it is not this discursive aspect of the barricades that Corbin and Mayeur, for example, have in mind in describing them as primarily symbolic (Cf. Corbin and Mayeur “Introduction”).

Instead, it is their repetition of the revolutionary acts of the past: as in the Great Revolution of 1789, the student revolutions of 1848, and the Paris Commune of 1871, so in 1968 barricades were erected throughout the Latin Quarter. With each historical remove from their origins, barricades functioned as more than barriers or protective walls against police or military incursion. Each successive construction of barricades referred to and incorporated other revolutionary constructions; past barricades were re-erected within each new construction.

Such reference to and appropriation of past revolutionary practices effectively reconfigures the historical situation and meaning of the May '68 events. As in 1968, so in 1848, the revolution was first a student protest. However, in June 1848 the student protestors had distanced themselves from the proletariat's call for a *république sociale*. As privileged bourgeois *fils à papa*, students, however radical, were hesitant to undermine the basic order of society (Robertson 12ff.). By contrast, the student body that advanced the revolutionary cause in May '68 was markedly more diverse than the one that had participated in the revolution of 1848 and the Commune of 1871. Unlike the bourgeois students of 1848, the student protesters of 1968 had no deep commitment to their contemporary social and economic situation. Accordingly, students and workers integrated themselves into a complex, revolutionary front wherein ethnic, racial, economic and class differences overlapped, reinforced one another and re-figured each other. In a sense, then, the 1848 revolution of students *and* workers had to wait for May '68 to become a reality.

Yet, in becoming the reality of May '68, the 1848 revolution was significantly altered. For instance, traditional assumptions of a universal working class and of a progressive historical time were discarded under the weight of plural, temporary and diverse political agencies and temporalities. It is this relationship with the history of revolutionary politics in France and in

Paris that Corbin and Mayeur have in mind in describing the May '68 barricades as symbols: the barricades were open symbols that collected, re-ordered and gave new expression to the historical record of the French revolutions. The history of note in this regard is not only that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A further symbolic significance to the barricades stems from a more contemporaneous situation: *la semaine des barricades* in Algeria in 1960. What is interesting in this last symbolic resonance of the May '68 barricades is that it was *French* Algerian settlers who erected the barricades in order to block a French military retreat from Algiers (Stora 78-79). In both instances, the object of revolt was the same, namely, state-power in the form of the police; but the goal of each set of barricades differed: one was built to keep police out of the city; the other was built to hold them in.

To frame the barricades of 1968 in discursive terms, and thereby track their significance beyond the political moment of their construction and collapse, is not to question the strategic and tactical merit of the structures. Nor does the discursive determination of May '68 in general deny historical and political reality to the student movement: protestors were tear-gassed on the barricades; growing unrest in the over-crowded *banlieues* was met, more often than not, with a seemingly arbitrary violence from a disintegrated military and police force; in turn, police were pelted with rocks, bricks and makeshift incendiaries; property was damaged and lives affected. Further, there were real social, cultural and political conditions of the revolutionary events of the spring and summer: the student protestors were faced with a faltering state-university system that was taxed by a growing student population; the protestors were also dissatisfied with what they perceived to be an imperialistic French foreign policy, and they felt constrained by traditional social norms and practices. In emphasizing the discursivity of the revolution, and by marking its plural, historical character as an imaginative appropriation and re-working of past and current

political events and practices, the aim is not to deny the reality of historical causes and occurrences but, rather, to frame the political and historical theorization of that reality in a different register. To put the point succinctly, the traditional polarity between “real” and “symbolic” or “practical” and “theoretical” is inapt for engaging the revolutionary events of Paris ’68.⁸

The aim in emphasizing the symbolic, discursive significance of the barricades is to show how political realities and their contemporary and subsequent theorization converge in significant ways within the late-modern political landscape. The lateral associations formed along the May ’68 barricades between racially, ethnically and economically diverse revolutionary groups, between such groups and the various communities within which the barricades were constructed and into which news of the barricades was broadcast, force a horizontal approach to theorization of the barricades (and a laterally organized theory of modern revolutionary politics). With this, we turn from the reality of the horizontally structured barricades in the streets of the Latin Quarter, to the theoretical matter of a lateral or horizontal account of *les événements de Mai*. In order to re-orient the theorization of the politico-historical events of May ’68 horizontally and discursively, it is useful to consider how the anti-repressive sentiments that were articulated in the street protests against police brutality and military foreign policy appeared within the space of the academy. If it is possible to treat the acts of political protest as discursive, the key to such a theoretical approach might be discerned in a socio-cultural space, such as the university, that is itself determined as discursive/linguistic.

With the re-emergence of Charles de Gaulle on the political scene in the late 1950s, the writing of a new constitution to inaugurate the Fifth Republic in the wake of the collapse of the Fourth Republic, the withdrawal of French forces from Indochina, Tunisia and Morocco, and de

Gaulle's stabilization of the *franc* on the world markets, France entered a period of relative economic prosperity and military calm (Berstein 105). The economic stability achieved behind a secure domestic and foreign policy allowed the French citizenry to focus inward on social and cultural matters. Young men and women, who a generation earlier could have faced immediate military conscription or who would have directly entered the work force, matriculated *en masse* into the state university system (Cf. Narbonne). By the mid-1960s, an economically, racially and ethnically diverse student body populated the universities in and around Paris. Seidman notes that the university student population in Paris grew a hundred-fold between 1906 and 1968. Against the backdrop of this long-term trend, the years between 1950 and 1964 stand out: in a fifteen year period, there was an explosive growth in student enrolment figures (Seidman 18-19). But the promise of a high quality, state-subsidized university education and ready career-placement upon graduation rang hollow against the realities of an antiquated university system and glutted job market: class sizes grew, student housing was overcrowded, graduating students found fewer of the prestige careers reserved for university graduates.

On the faculty side of the university system, the professional demographics of staff and faculty trended young: Seidman shows that the number of junior faculty—*maîtres assistants* and *assistants*—hired in the 1960s outpaced the number of senior faculty appointments (Seidman 19). A generation of university students from diverse racial, economic and ethnic backgrounds thus found themselves at mass lectures conducted by faculty who were ideologically and economically closer in identity to the new student population than to the older university administration. As dissatisfaction with conditions in the university system grew, and as this dissatisfaction was paired with the economic realities of a saturated bourgeois career-track, many students were attracted to the political economic theory of Marx and post-War French Marxism.

It is here that the younger demographics within the faculty population proved decisive: students gained a new idea of political identity and new discursive tools for articulating that identity from their young *assistants*. Since much of the prestige of a university appointment dissolved in the de Gaulle years—faculty salaries were cut, temporary appointments grew more common, course-loads and class sizes increased—the young faculty of the new, French university system was not drawn from the bourgeoisie and so did not advance its social and political ideology.⁹ As recent appointments made in response to a burgeoning student population, the young faculty also did not identify with the older faculty at university and so did not necessarily advance the entrenched, left politics of the post-War intelligentsia: Sartrean existential Marxism.¹⁰

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Marxism was subjected to a formalist, structuralist critique and development by figures like Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser. Amongst the changes effected in Marxism by such formalism, one central feature is the displacement of a privileged subject position and its attendant assumption of a fixed, identifiable political agency.¹¹ The continuing association of Marxism with a hegemonic, revolutionary proletariat motivated by alienation is, according to Althusser, a “humanist” misreading of Marx that results from attending to his early philosophical and economic manuscripts (Althusser 221ff.). Rather, and along the lines of Mao’s cultural revolution, Althusser treats as separate the cultural and economic life of a society and identifies points of “over-determination” within the (relatively independent) socio-cultural superstructure. It is from such superstructural *points de capiton*, in the Lacanian sense, that revolutionary instabilities arise (and revolutionary acts/events unfold) (Cf. Althusser, “Contradiction and Overdetermination”).¹² Beyond correcting the idea of a “humanist” Marxism, Althusser’s structuralist approach encloses political practice and theory within a common(over-)determined space; practice and theory are able, in this way, to resonate

with and influence one another while also resonating in and re-shaping the shared structures of capitalist society.

These changes to Marxist theory—which Althusser realizes by insisting on the *Grundrisse* and *Das Capital* as Marx’s key philosophical works—encourage a structuralist appropriation and development of Marxism. The structuralist reworking of Marxist theory is in the service of insulating such a theory against the encroaching influences and, according to Althusser, distortions, of an empirico-scientific Marxism. Capitalism is treated as a formal socio-economic system that gives rise to phenomena that from a non-structuralist perspective might appear empirically simple or given. Instead, the points around which *production-relations* coalesce can be treated from a structuralist viewpoint as signifiers within the larger symbolic order of advanced capitalism. When treated as the coalescence points of *superstructural* relations, these signifiers are points of practical and theoretical interest; they are like the Freudian “thing [Ding]” in the sense that Lacan develops the notion as “la chose freudienne” in Séminaire VII, i.e., objects, events, ideas, etc. that stand as basic or foundational points of significance within the symbolic order. Given the intense significance of such superstructural coincidences, such as those that arise between competing ideologies, e.g., between equality and freedom for liberal democracy, these points of coincidence can be invested with new and different significance. One such different significance that Althusser discerns within the context of advanced capitalism is a non-subjective form of political agency. Further, a pervasively structural account of Marxism and capitalism insulates political theory from the (false) promise of an extra-structural political practice or theory: a critical theory of modern society is only possible *from within* capitalism itself. More generally, in the wake of the formalist/structuralist development of Marx, the prevailing assumption is that a critical social theory must be immanent

to, and arise from within, the structures provided by the society itself. A point of theoretical divergence is whether those structures are superstructural, as Althusser maintains, and thus economically determined in the last instance or whether they are non- or post-structural as Foucault and Deleuze will treat them.

Though Michel Foucault arrives at what Philip Goldstein calls a “post-Marxist” political theory by way of the phenomenological tradition—and specifically, by way of the history of science—rather than by developing out of and beyond Althusserian/Lacanian structuralism, still Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical approach shares common characteristics with structuralism. Foucault is critical, for instance, of the privileged position afforded subjectivity in modern theory. Foucault also abandons the notion of a given political agency, and practices a form of social critique that inhabits, and thus borrows its critical force from, the socio-political system it occupies (Goldstein 37ff.).

Foucault clarifies these matters in reflecting on structuralism, Marxism and the events of May ’68 in a 1977 interview with Gérard Raulet. Reading some of the details of this interview will serve the broader goal of detailing a discursive/linguistic determination of the student protests; the aim, ultimately, is to articulate a post-structural political theory that is practical in the sense of participating in and continuing the revolutionary events of May. With these general goals in mind, Foucault can be treated as a first instance of post-structuralist political theory. What this means in the present context is that Foucault abandons the remaining economical commitments of structural Marxism, e.g., Althusser’s economic determination in the last instance. Such commitments, after all, are obstacles to the formation of a practical theory (and a theoretical practice). Once all non-discursive elements are voided from the socio-political space of discourse, that space becomes something other than or more than a superstructure. It is within

such a post-structural socio-political space of discourse that the free passage of practice into theory and vice-versa can be realized.

At the end of the interview, Foucault is asked whether structuralism is a “necessary preamble” to the events of May ’68; the question is occasioned by Raulet’s point that events in Germany in 1964-65 claim Critical Theory as a kind of intellectual progenitor (Foucault 110). Foucault answers: “No. There is nothing necessary in this order of ideas.” What Foucault objects to in the question and dismisses outright is the idea of a *necessary* sequence of practical and theoretical politics. Foucault does not, however, object to the idea of formalism or structuralism, and its influence on Marxian orthodoxy, as being instrumental in the events of May ’68. As Foucault continues:

[T]o put it very, very crudely, formalist culture, thought and art in the first third of the twentieth century were generally associated with Left political movements—or critiques—and even with certain revolutionary instances; and Marxism concealed all that. It was fiercely critical of formalism in art and theory, most clearly from the 30s onwards. Thirty years later, you saw people in certain Eastern bloc countries and even in France beginning to unsettle Marxist dogmatism with types of analysis obviously inspired by formalism (110).

The political student movements in France during the spring and summer of 1968 are “ambiguous,” Foucault notes, and “interesting” in their ambiguity, in that they wed traditional Marxist thought to counter-Marxist, formalist ideas: “It is a case of movements which, very often, have endowed themselves with a strong reference to Marxism and which, at the same time, have insisted on a violent critique vis-à-vis the dogmatic Marxism of parties and institutions” (110).

Concluding the question, Foucault locates the student politics of May ’68 within the “interplay between a certain kind of non-Marxist thinking and these Marxist references” to workers’ rights and economic reform (110-111). The “non-necessity” of the relation between a

formalist/structuralist Marxism and *les événements de Mai* is a matter of the former not being treated as the *cause* of the latter: Eastern Bloc formalist/structuralist developments (and counter-developments) of Marxism are not “realized” by the Paris protests. If this were the case, if May ’68 was a continuation and completion of the historical situation of Marxism by other means, then the relation between the two *would* be a necessitated order of ideas; and this is just what Foucault denies in responding as he does to Raulet’s question. Foucault is not thereby denying that the events of May in Paris stand in relation to the European history of Marxism: this is as true as it is insignificant. What he is denying is the reducibility of this relation to that history; there is, in short, something extra- or supra-historical to *les événements de Mai* and it is on the basis of this excess that Foucault resists the identification of the May events with the history of European Marxism.

May ’68 for Foucault articulates the formalist/structuralist development and critique of Marxism but it does so to excess: May ’68 is an *expression* of that historical development and as such *exceeds* it. However far a structuralist reading of Marxism can go toward complicating the circumstances of modern, political events, and thus, however proximate theory and practice become in structuralist social theory, its limit is drawn at the point where expression exceeds the structural components of discourse. Though Foucault arrives at this insight through the history of science and phenomenology rather than through a close study of structuralism, its repercussions for structuralism are no less profound: what is needed now is a theory that can treat socio-political actions and events as discursive, in line with structuralism, but discursively excessive. In short, what is needed is an extra- or post-structural political theory.

These last considerations draw out a further determination of May ’68: it is a revolution in theory, political intellectualism, and cultural critique. Raymond Aron, for example, voices the

conservative opinion of May 1968 by calling it a “nihilistic psychodrama,” and an “unpatriotic” happening led by “fascist” students, without deep significance for France’s future. Further, Aron likens the university conditions that touched off the student revolts to animal overcrowding in a cage; the protests, then, are nothing more than animal-like responses to high-stress living conditions (Aron 41). Francis Fukuyama is equally dismissive of the student protesters on conservative grounds. By Fukuyama’s account, the student protestors of 1968 are, like their 1848 counterparts, *fils à papa*: the rich, over-privileged children of bourgeois parents with no real reason to rail against the existing state and university system (Fukuyama 330). Luc Ferry and Alain Renault read the revolutionary events of 1968 in terms of the “revolutionary individualism” of the French Revolution, which they take to be anti-hierarchical in the name of liberty and equality. On Ferry and Renault’s reading, the failure of May ’68 is attested in the rampant consumerism and narcissistic individualism of the 1980s: the politics of autonomy, self-determination and liberal freedom become Reaganomics, Thatcherism, free-market globalism and the breakdown of civil society (Ferry and Renault 71ff.).

Andrew Feenberg and Jim Freedman, by contrast, distinguish the apparent failure of the demonstrators to “overthrow the state” from the success of May ’68 in revolutionizing radical, left political action. May ’68 is thus a kind of intra-political revolution: “[The protestors] transformed resistance to technocratic authority and consumer society into a new kind of mass politics ... [they] shifted the focus of opposition from economic exploitation to social and cultural alienation” (Feenberg and Freedman 68). In contrast to Ferry and Renault—and a similar “narcissistic individualist” interpretation of May ’68 by Gilles Lipovetsky—Feenberg and Freedman draw on a different account of the 1980s (Lipovetsky “Introduction”). Rather than counting the decade a political failure, Feenberg and Freedman find in the proliferation of micro-

political organizations that grew up in the late 1970s and early 1980s an inheritance of the pluralist, revolutionary politics of May '68.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe trace a comparable trajectory from the late 1960s to the politics of the 1980s. Though not singularly focused on the events in Paris '68, Laclau and Mouffe locate the inaugural moment of a pluralist left democracy—or what they term “radical democracy”—in the political climate of Europe in the late 1960s. As Marxism recedes or splinters in the late 1960s in left political action, the “conception of the working class as a ‘universal class’ is rejected;” such “reject[ion]” allows for the recognition of “the plurality of the antagonisms which take place in the field of what is arbitrarily grouped under the label of workers’ struggle” (Laclau and Mouffe 167). To exemplify their point, Laclau and Mouffe single out the “new workers’ struggles” in France and Italy in the late 1960s: these political movements show “how the forms of struggles within the factory depend upon a discursive context much vaster than that of simple relations of production.”¹³ The “vaster” discursive context of workers’ revolts in France and Italy at the time grows out of the “evident influence of the struggles and slogans of the student movement.” The student movements, after all, drew from a young working class; such a working class was culturally, “radically different” than the older class of labourers.

The wave of immigrations into France and southern Italy throughout the 1960s diversified the racial and ethnic identity of the working class. In France in particular, Algerian independence prompted French settlers—the so-called *pied-noirs*—to return to the Continent; many of the returning French settlers were Jews who had fled during the Vichy government and Pétain presidency (Shepard 150-163). Laclau and Mouffe conclude from these various factors that: “[T]he plurality of these [social] relations [in which workers are enrolled] cannot be magically erased to constitute a single working class” (Laclau and Mouffe 167). Thus, in contrast

to Ferry and Renault and the “narcissistic individualism” interpretation of the events of 1968, Laclau and Mouffe treat the pluralisation of discursive contexts in the radical, left politics of the late 1960s as the seedbed for the “new social movements” of the 1980s: under this heading, Laclau and Mouffe place such grassroots political initiatives as multiculturalism, environmentalism and post-colonialism, as well as anti-war and anti-globalization activism, and protest movements against nuclear proliferation (Laclau and Mouffe “Preface”).

What all of these different theoretical inheritances and developments signal is the exceedingly discursive character of *les événements de Mai*. The above survey canvasses a fraction of the works published on the May events; Kristin Ross, for one, has described as “enormous” the body of literature produced on this short span of French history. The seemingly inexhaustible subject of May ’68 is a reflection of the event itself. Again, in the language of extra- or post-structuralist thought, there is a discursive excess to the events; or, better, the event of May ’68 just *is* this expressive excess to discourse. The diversity and number of theoretical responses to and appropriations of May ’68 announces its peculiar status: May ’68 is an extra-discursive event (that is subsequently expressed in discourse about that event). The following excerpt from a television documentary—*Histoire d’un jour 30 mai 1968*—which aired in France in May 1985 to commemorate May ’68, exemplifies this idea of the revolution. One interviewee, who had participated in the events of May ’68 as a Maoist, dismisses the student protests as not “political” but rather as a “movement purely of words.” A second interviewee, who was also involved in the events of May ’68, concurs: “It’s true ... the terrible evil of replacing reality with words” (Ross 21).

Even amongstst its participants, May ’68 is readily treated as a revolution in and of discourse. Depending on one’s vantage, this point either evacuates the revolution of real political

significance or expands political action through the network of communications, publications, and performances by the student protesters. *L'après-Mai* theorists find themselves in the same situation: discursive appropriations and critiques of the events are put forward and then variously dismissed as signifying nothing, or are privileged as occasions for further theoretical productions. Yet, the meta-theoretical assessment of the worth—or lack of worth—of a particular study of May '68 succumbs to the same error as those theoretical attempts that try to assess the events themselves as a success or failure. The false assumption on which both claims are founded is that there is a position (discursive) from which an event (extra-discursive), and from which subsequent expressions of that event, can be estimated. All together, the thousands of pages spent on May '68—and the countless conferences organized in its name—are simply further expressions of the extra-discursive excesses of *les événements de Mai*.

To conclude, it will be helpful to trace such “extra-discursive excess” through the events of May and June and then pursue this same excess into the work of Baudrillard and Deleuze, who are here considered together as theorists of *l'après-Mai*. Pro-Situationist students in Strasbourg, for instance, gained popular control of the UNEF—radical Situationist representatives were elected, uncontested, to officiate the local Bureau of the Students Association (AFGES)—and used office materials to produce and distribute the pamphlet “On the Poverty of Student Life.” The pamphlet was successful in presenting the extremist dissatisfactions with society, politics, the communist party structure and the student movement: by 1969 nearly half a million copies had been published (Debord 28-29). Similarly, students at the Beaux-Arts used their occupation of the school in 1968 to produce the mass of posters and fliers that blanketed the streets with student protest slogans: “La Police S’Affiche Aux Beaux Arts. Les Beaux Arts Affichent Dans La Rue,” “Sois Jeune Et Tais Toi,” “Nous Sommes Tous

Des Juifs Et Des Allemands. Nous Sommes Tous Indésirables,” and “Une Jeunesse Que L’Avenir Inquiète Trop Souvent” (Cf. Lacout).

Student protestors also overran the *Théâtre de l’Odéon* on 15 May 1968 and established a revolutionary theatre company. Daniel Cohn-Bendit and the actor Jean-Louis Barrault appeared together on opening night to declaim the theatre as a former bastion of bourgeois culture and ideology. With their first performance, the protestors reclaimed the theatre as an instrument of progressive, revolutionary politics. Similar efforts were launched against the state-control of television and radio. Though students never gained control of major media, they were able to expand television coverage of the demonstrations through on-site interviews with radio and television (Feenberg and Freedman 40-42). Media exposure peaked in early June when Cohn-Bendit was invited to participate in a live, televised debate with journalists from *Le Figaro* and *Paris-Presse* (Seidman 166-167).

In light of such sloganeering, postering, and theatrical and media performance of revolutionary activity during May and June 1968, it seems a decision is needed as to whether such a “discursive” or “expressive” approach to political action empties it of real political significance. Both interviewees cited above decided against May ’68 on just these grounds, namely, that it was an empty, merely rhetorical, revolution; they dismissed it as a kind of mimicry of real political revolution. The opposite conclusion seems no less viable: the focus of the protestors on appropriating media for the revolutionary cause and advancing their ideas through various media outlets signalled a change in, rather than an abandonment of, the practices of political reform. But the choice between these two options is illusory. Further, the idea that a decision must be made on this matter shows a misunderstanding of the events of May ’68. Some remarks by Jean Baudrillard will here again be helpful. In *L’échange symbolique et la mort*,

Baudrillard complicates the conditions for deciding this matter by *identifying* real action with the production and display of graffiti, pamphlets and posters.¹⁴ Prior to May '68, Baudrillard recounts, such informal signs were debased insofar as they are “sexual[ly] and pornographic[ally]” based and inscribed on the walls of “*pissoirs* and waste grounds.” Even when politicized, the traditional sign or slogan depended upon and so did not undermine the social supports of urban communication: non-radical, non-revolutionary political signage projected itself onto city walls and worked within language as a “traditional medium” of communication. Only with the revolution of May '68 did the sign realize its political potential.

[I]t was only in May '68 in France that the graffiti and posters swept through the city in a different manner, attacking the support itself, producing a savage mobility on the walls, an inscription so sudden that it amounted to annihilating them (Baudrillard 79).

Baudrillard cites as evidence for the basic political efficacy of the student and worker communiqués of the summer the government's unwillingness to remove the posters and graffiti; Baudrillard intimates that the walls, which stood for the very architecture of a bourgeois social system, remained standing only because of the slogans that undercut and re-deployed their base supports (80). There is, in other words, no basis from which political action could be leveraged, other than the traditional socio-cultural resources that have now been taken up into and re-formulated as slogans, posters and protest signs. As Baudrillard summarizes the point: “This is not at all a flight into signs, but on the contrary an extraordinary development in theory and practice” (80). Theory and practice now run together in the revolutionary production, performance and transmission of language; theory and practice, in short, converge at the point where the revolutionary event of May '68 is determined discursively. Thus, to “decide” between the expression/performance of revolution and its reality is to treat an event as if its occurrence were something other, or more, than the being of that event.¹⁵

Taking these last determinations of May '68 together, namely, the proliferation of political theories it occasioned, and the modalities of political discourses through which it was exercised, the revolution re-figured the role of the intellectual in politics, the forms of theoretical, political discourse, as well as traditional concepts and approaches in political theory (in particular those that posit a coherent revolutionary class or agency). The revolutionary events of May '68 thus become an empty point around which diverse social, cultural and historical determinations circulate: a political theory that responds to this complex discursive-practical situation must be one that is open and yet also able to organize these various different determinations. While there is no one way to respond properly to this theoretical situation, the suggestion here is that a contemporary theory of revolutionary events and politics must be laterally or horizontally oriented. Let us consider one instance of such lateral theorization, namely, a short piece by Gilles Deleuze in which he reflects on the events of May '68.

The essay in question is "May '68 Didn't Happen," which is a short op-ed piece written with Félix Guattari and published in the May 1984 edition of *Les nouvelles littéraires*. In the essay, Deleuze insists that the "event" of revolution, whether eighteenth or nineteenth century, is "irreducible to any social determinism, or to causal chains" (Deleuze 233). A revolutionary event is historically anomalous in standing out from regular temporal succession such that the event-character of a revolution occasions extra-temporal and extra-historical consequences: "[T]he event is itself a splitting off from, or a breaking with causality; it is a bifurcation, a deviation with respect to laws, an unstable condition which opens up a new field of the possible" (233). Under the auspices of the revolutionary event, which occurs in time and at a particular historical moment, there arise such non-temporal occurrences as a change in causal efficacy, the disruption

of lawful order and regularity, and still more radically, the revolutionary event's creation of possibility as a social and political reality (234).

Though he begins with revolution in general as historical examples of the disruptive force of the event—citing the French Revolution, the Commune and the Bolshevik Revolution—Deleuze singles out May 1968 as what he terms a “pure event”: the revolution of May '68 is “free of all normal, or normative causality ... [i]ts history is a ‘series of amplified instabilities and fluctuations’” (233). Such “instabilities” and “fluctuations” in May '68, its “agitations, gesticulations, slogans, idiocies, [and] illusions,” extend or “amplif[y]” the mode of possibility in which revolutionary events occur. The possibility of the revolutionary event is amplified, Deleuze explains, in creating a “new existence, it produces a new subjectivity,” and in demanding of society the creation of new “subjective redeployment[s]”; specifically, a newly created form of subjectivity demands of society subjective redeployments on a “collective level” (234). Deleuze cites the American New Deal policies of the Roosevelt Administration and the economic “boom” during Japanese reconstruction to exemplify the collective, social redeployment of a new subjectivity; France falters in the wake of May '68, Deleuze continues, in not giving rise to comparable, social redeployments (234-5).

To generalize the point from Deleuze's historical reflections, and in so doing note the peculiarity of the “pure event” of Paris 1968: the events of May '68, determined by manifold political, social and even temporal directions, creates possibility but does so in a distinctly plural, diverse fashion. There is no one, particular possibility opened up by the revolution. Rather, the plurality of the events “amplifie[s]” the “instabilities and fluctuations” of social and political possibility. Such instabilities are either allowed to resonate through the existing social order, and in so doing create new forms through which collective subjectivity can be exercised. Or, as in

France under the influence of a resurgent, right-Gaullism in the 1970s, the resonances are muted, and the inaugural possibility of the revolution diminished. France might, however, reverse its failure in responding to the late-modern, revolutionary event of May '68 by admitting collective redeployments at the level of society of the kind Deleuze lists at the close of the essay.

Mapping new, collective subjectivities along East-West and North-South axes, Deleuze cites the Eastern pacifism of the nuclear disarmament movement in America and Europe, and the “third-worldification” [*Tiersmondisation*] of major Anglo-European cities, respectively. What should be noted from Deleuze’s examples of collective redeployment is how they open a range of possible identifications and agencies within a generally organized collectivity. Advocates of nuclear disarmament, for instance, are collected in their commitment to peaceful protest and reform, but the manner in which such pacifism is practiced is left open. Similarly, life in modern metropolitan America or Europe is organized, but organized *uniquely*, within a city geography bordered and intersected by different races and ethnicities. For a particular society, then, to respond in kind to its own revolutionary events—or for any society to act *après* May '68—is to allow open, plural identifications and agencies to develop, and to allow the very process of development to shape, and re-shape, such identifications. It is to signal the reciprocal relationship between an existing social order and the formation, and re-formation, of collectivities for which Deleuze uses the phrase collective, social *re*-deployment rather than simply collective, social deployment.

Yet, if the revolutionary event that occasions a post-Marxist, post-structuralist political theory is itself pluralized to the point of maximal possible determination, a final concern arises as to whether a theory of such an event might not fail to be significant. As Kristin Ross notes, citing the opinion of the German sociologist Wolf Lepenies, there is a prevailing sense in the academic

social sciences that “nothing happened” in Paris in May ’68: “But nothing happened in France in ’68. Institutions didn’t change, the university didn’t change, conditions for workers didn’t change—nothing happened” (Ross 19).¹⁶ Deleuze’s insight that “May ’68 didn’t happen” is here turned around and used to arrive at an opposite conclusion: the diffusion of the political events of revolution into a plurality of social reforms, political causes and group mobilizations amounts to a *disappearance*, rather than a continuation, of May ’68. From a theoretical standpoint, the concern that arises from the conclusion that “nothing happened” in May ’68 is that a political theory of the revolutionary event might, equally, *mean* nothing. Interestingly, the complaint answers itself: it is precisely because nothing happened in Paris 1968 that all subsequent discourse about that nothing—and, perhaps, all subsequent discourse (if Derrida is to be believed)—confirms its continuation. The excessively discursive events of May ’68 are inexhaustible; every utterance and act enacted in its wake are the same revolutionary events re-expressed and given new direction.

Notes

¹ The PCF and CGT (*Confédération générale du travail*) were regularly charged after May with failing to play the revolutionary role that their Marxist orientations would have seemed to demand. As Peter Starr reports on the situation in *Logics of Failed Revolt: French Theory after May ’68*, “one typically hears of the union’s attempts, prior to the wildcat strike at Renault (Cléon) on May 15, to block the spread of the students’ revolt to the factories, and most especially of the leadership’s timidity in the negotiation of the Grenelle accords. Likewise, critics of the Communist establishment rarely fail to mention the remarkably defensive position staked out in May by a Communist Party reluctant to put at risk its hold on the ‘red suburbs,’ still struggling to consolidate the federation of the left, and hesitant to call for revolutionary insurrection against a regime whose foreign policy had long been looked on favourably by the party bosses in Moscow” (Starr 27). See also Joffrin and Morin, the latter of whom argues that what ultimately confirmed the ‘official’ left’s role as double and pseudo-rival to the Gaullist

régime was its will to recuperate the revolutionary ferment of the student movement for specifically reformist purposes.

² Radical leftists broke with the PCF over what they took to be centrist, conciliatory leanings in the Party: the PCF had backed the “Atlanticist,” pro-American presidential candidacy of François Mitterand in 1965. Influenced by the *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT), which was a left-moderate trade union, the PCF abandoned a strong Marxist-socialist anti-capitalism and instead advocated for wage equity and salary reform (Seidman 162-163).

³ “Having previously distanced itself from the pro-FLN UGEMA, the UNEF had changed position during the course of 1960. The UNEF had been undergoing a quiet radicalization under the influence of social Catholicism and due to the government’s decision in 1959 to end students’ right to delay military service call-up while continuing studies ... [Within the UNEF there was] anti-war opposition with a view to toppling the [French] government [in Algeria] via unitary protests and wide cooperation wherever possible at local level” (House and MacMaster 207-208).

⁴ For example, there was a special supplement issue of the magazine *Noir et Rouge* published in May 1968, dedicated to a comparison of *autogestion* and *cogestion*: “*L’autogestion, l’état et la révolution.*”

⁵ Cf. Perrot. During winter term 1968 at the state university in Nanterre, hundreds of students occupied the women’s dormitory to protest university restrictions on overnight male visitations. On-campus protests like the one in Nanterre coincided with similar protests at other schools in Paris and surrounding areas.

⁶ Alistair Horne offers the following insight into the interrogation techniques employed by the *Section administrative spécialisée* (SAS), which was the covert, intelligence arm of the French military in Algeria, and specifically the *Détachement Opérationnel de Protection* (DOP), which oversaw intelligence gathering.

The first of the tortures consisted of suspending the two [suspected] men completely naked by their feet, their hands bound behind their backs, and plunging their heads for a long time into a bucket of water to make them talk. The second torture consisted of suspending them, their hands and feet tied behind their backs, this time with their head upwards. Underneath them was placed a trestle, and they were made to swing, by fist blows, in such a fashion that their sexual parts rubbed against the very sharp pointed bar of the trestle.

Horne presents the two primary forms of torture interrogation under the heading of “water” and “electric” techniques: in addition to the water method quoted above, French intelligence officers water-boarded suspects, and forced cold water into the lungs and stomachs of suspects through a hose placed in the mouth; “electric” interrogation techniques consisted of

placing electrodes on the genitals of suspects and running high voltages through their bodies (Horne 197-200.)

⁷ In her discussion of the police, and policing aspects of May '68, Ross anticipates the interweaving of empirical reality and theory returned to below. "The police," Ross explains, "appear regularly in the 1970s, as characters, as forces, within theoretical speculation." Ross exemplifies the point by citing Michel Foucault's "vast meditations on state repression"; Jacques Donzelot's Foucauldian analysis of the insertion of the family into "an intricate web of bureaucratic institutions and systems of management"; and Maurice Blanchot's writings for the *Comité d'action étudiants-écrivains* (Ross 24). Ross privileges the work of Jacques Rancière and Foucault as theoretical means of "keep[ing] each of these [empirical and theoretical] registers visible;" in what follows, the specifics will be explored of a political theory that keeps both the empirical and theoretical "registers" visible.

⁸ What must be complicated, in short, is the history/seriality and culture/spectacle distinction that, for example, Jean-Paul Aron draws in *Les Modernes*.

⁹ Pierre Bourdieu challenges an expressly political reading of the young faculty's influence on precipitating the student protests of 1968. Bourdieu argues, instead, for what might be called an "academic" reading of faculty involvement: the faculty who were most prominently involved in the politics of the era—and who are best known to Anglo-American scholars of the period—all held appointments at the periphery of the French university system. For careerist reasons, the young faculty who became involved in the student protests hoped, according to Bourdieu, to promote themselves out of such peripheral, non-prestigious faculty appointments (Cf. Bourdieu 25ff.). In short, the political consequences of the young faculty's involvement with the student body are secondary to their wont to advance their academic careers. What Bourdieu overlooks in his dismissive reading of the intellectual situation of May '68 is that it is not the actual placement of the intellectual *in* the academy that determines his/her contribution to the politics of a revolutionary event, but rather the very *marginality* or *peripheral* character of that placement that makes his/her position political—whether consciously determined as such or not. Bourdieu, in short, is right to recall the academically peripheral position of those faculty who were involved in the student protests but is wrong in treating such marginality as careerist and thus non-political.

¹⁰ Mark Poster argues in *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* that the events of May 1968 are the culmination of a paired Marxist-existentialist theoretical trajectory that traces its roots back to the Occupation and Resistance. What such a historical, theoretical re-construction of the revolution overlooks is the breakdown of both existentialism and Marxism in French left political thought in the decade prior to 1968.

¹¹ Etienne Balibar develops the "anti-subjectivism" of Althusser's thought in the article "Althusser's Object" (157-188; see 167ff).

¹² Cf. Lacan (1981).

¹³ Cf. Lumley.

¹⁴ Thanks are due to Naomi Beeman in the Comparative Literature Department at Emory University for bringing this Baudrillard passage to my attention.

¹⁵ The ontological mistake made with respect to *les événements de Mai* is discussed, obliquely, under the heading of “excess” in Badiou’s *L’être et l’événement* (84ff.).

¹⁶ Ross connects the past-tense “nothing happened” of academic, sociological consensus on May ‘68 with the present-tense, police directive “nothing is happening”; Ross draws this connection through the work of Jacques Rancière: “Is the sociologist’s relation to the past that of the police to the present? For Rancière, the police and the sociologist speak with the same voice...[they both] confirm, in the final accounting, that things could not have happened in any other way, that things could not have been any different” (22-23).

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