

# Introduction

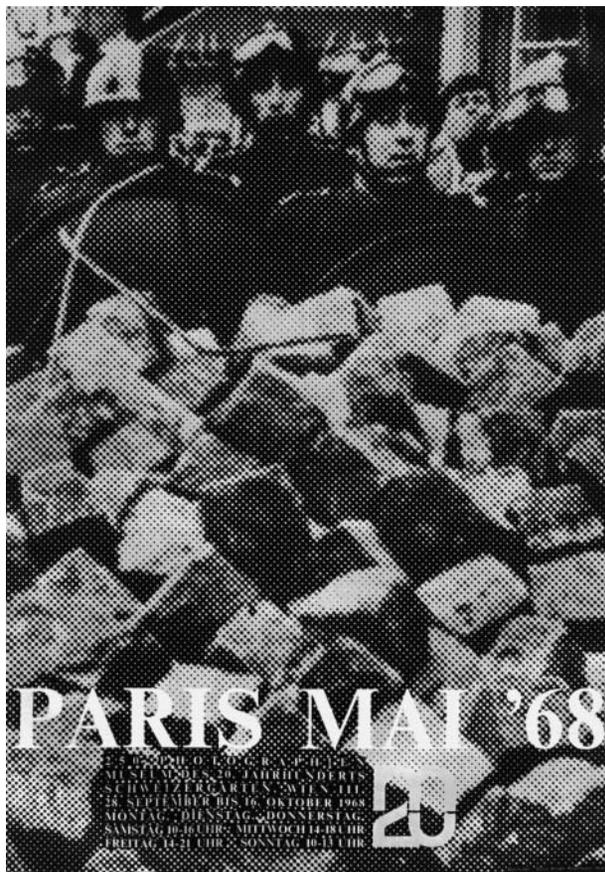
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The cover of this issue of *French Historical Studies* features two posters from 1968. One comprises a photograph of armored policemen behind a makeshift barricade of what look like paving stones, with the words “PARIS MAI ’68” in bright red letters toward the bottom (fig. 1). Closer inspection reveals that the poster advertises an exhibition of photographs held in Vienna in the fall of 1968, barely five months after the events depicted. From the beginning, then, the student and worker demonstrations that took place in France in May 1968, and the response to them by the forces of order, had global resonance that could be captured in a relatively few iconic images. This issue proposes to explore that resonance both by probing the images that already populate our memories and by expanding them to cast May ’68 in France not simply as an instigator or a response but as a node in a much larger, international concatenation of ideas and activism, dreams and disappointments.

The second poster, equally iconic of 1968 in its bold graphics and careful integration of text and image, is more complex (fig. 2). The pun equates *charogne*, a rotting carcass or, more familiarly, a disreputable type, with the Charonne metro station, metonym for the deadly police repression on February 8, 1962, of demonstrations against the terrorism of the Organisation de l’Armée Secrète and for an end to the war in Algeria. The poster also depicts massed forces of order, but the face in the middle, from which sprout two vulture’s wings, is identified by the word just below it, “Frey.” Roger Frey was minister of the interior at the time of the Charonne massacre. In their essay in this issue, Ludivine Bantigny and Boris Gobille tell of a student calling out in the face of police violence on May 3, 1968, “They come from Charonne and they are beginning again.” Many activists in 1968 saw their struggles as part of a global radical movement extending from the Algerian War through the war in Vietnam. The poster thus presents an imaged historical memory as a live force in 1968, and it

FIGURE 1 “Paris May ’68.”  
 Poster for an exhibition at  
 the Museum des 20.  
 Jahrhunderts, Vienna,  
 Austria, September–  
 October 1968. Public  
 domain. Image courtesy  
 of the Bibliothèque  
 Nationale de France, Paris



aims to provoke an active emotional response. Emotions, images, memory, and activism all constitute important threads in this issue.

As these posters reveal, 1968 in France was immediately recognized outside France and placed within historical genealogies in France. They also capture the fundamental unifying element of movements grouped under the umbrella of 1968. Activists all sought in one way or another to transform the existing order, but this involved combating the forces that blocked that future and prefiguring that future in their own lives and actions. However, in the ensuing decades both those involved and those too young to have been have examined the events of 1968 in terms increasingly remote from those expressed at the time. Reflecting on 1968 in light of the France in which they wrote, for example, Régis Debray and more recently Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have placed 1968 in narratives of the history of capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Other scholars have put 1968 in the history of humanitarian thought and action.<sup>2</sup>

1. Debray, *Modeste contribution*; Boltanski and Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*.

2. Bourq, *From Revolution to Ethics*; Wolin, *Wind from the East*.



FIGURE 2 “Charonne/  
Charogne, Frey XIIIe.”  
Poster produced by the  
Ecole Boulle, Paris,  
1968. Public domain.  
Image courtesy of the  
Bibliothèque Nationale  
de France, Paris

The historical context in which the events of 1968 are discussed can also dictate the presence or absence of subjects of historical research. At the time, as the largest general strike in French history, May 1968 was considered a world-historical event. However, relatively little of the research on the period now—an absence reflected in this issue—has focused on factory labor and unions, a development in line with deindustrialization and the decline in union size and strength in France and elsewhere in Europe and North America.<sup>3</sup> The 1968 years saw the last widespread expression in France of a belief in the creativity and morality of the project of workers engaged in labor conflicts as the driving force of social transformation. Over the last two decades, the primary concepts developed to allow the exploration of new facets of the period are the long 1968 or its variant, the 1968 years, and the global 1968.<sup>4</sup> Focusing on the breadth of the personal, social, political, ideological, and media networks, these concepts reveal important dimensions previous histories have occluded.

3. For important exceptions, see Georgi, *Autogestion*; Vigna, *L'insubordination ouvrière dans les années 68*; and Porhel, *Ouvriers bretons*.

4. The two concepts are sometimes conflated, as in Sherman et al., *Long 1968*, a study of the global 1968 years in which essays on France are a distinct minority.

The long 1968 in France refers to a period delimited by the questions being asked. Sometimes the long 1968 runs from the end of the Algerian War in 1962 to the beginning of the recession of the mid-1970s. For others, it follows more clearly the history of the New Left, from Khrushchev's Secret Speech in 1956 and opposition to the Algerian War until the election of François Mitterrand as president in 1981. Common to all long-1968 interpretations is a recognition of the importance of *les trente glorieuses* (thirty glorious years) of economic expansion after 1945.<sup>5</sup> France went from a rural to an urban nation, drawing to an unprecedented extent not only on its own countryside for workers but also on foreign labor from its former overseas possessions.

New sectors of the economy expanded the burgeoning middle class and increased the numbers of French men and women who went to college, thus affording them more time outside the authority of the family or the workplace.<sup>6</sup> These students, a small minority of their demographic cohort, acted with the confidence that there would be a place for them in a society they could create. This differentiates them from successor generations of college students, whose wealthier societies are driven and disciplined by the insecurity that is a central element of neoliberal capitalism and that has made the decades after the 1968 years less glorious. In the 1968 years one sees among politicized youth not the statist economic concerns of the Old Left, which would find a home in the Common Program, the reform manifesto signed by the Communists, Socialists, and Left Radicals in 1972, but a sense that with a new degree of prosperity and security came the responsibility to take risks, to challenge authority in all its forms, in order to create the new society that now appeared possible.

As the massive general strike in 1968 and the succeeding years of labor conflicts reveal, the industrial workers, who literally made the world whose future students debated, demanded a greater share of the wealth created and new forms of democratization and liberty at the workplace. Working-class and middle-class youth met in ways and to an extent that were "improbable" to earlier generations and came to share common aspirations—or at least the belief that they shared them.<sup>7</sup> What Boltanski and Chiapello refer to as the social and aesthetic critiques of capitalism and bureaucracy found points of conjuncture in the late 1960s and early 1970s before the first gave ground to the latter among middle-class youth in the context of economic downturns from the mid-1970s on.

5. The term is generally attributed to the economist Jean Fourastié, author of *Les trente glorieuses ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975*.

6. Jobs, *Riding the New Wave*.

7. Vigna and Zancarini-Fournel, "Les rencontres improbables dans les 'années 68.'" For an insightful examination of these "meetings," see Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, chap. 2.

What of the global 1968, of the interpretation of world-historical events in terms of the history of the world? World War II opened a new period of globalization, understood in political, economic, and cultural terms. Fractures in the initial bipolar structure of the Cold War, initiated by the People's Republic of China and France, provided impetus for the events and aspirations of 68ers, broadly understood. The same held true for the struggle against colonialism and its legacies for both the colonized and their supporters in the former or soon-to-be-former colonial powers. Many of the workers who drove the economy of *les trente glorieuses* came from former colonies and brought new aspirations with them. Once in France, they strove to achieve these goals, often in cooperation with leftists for whom rights and struggles did not stop at national borders.<sup>8</sup> The Cold War and economic integration conceived in terms of nation-states, capitalism, and state socialism were accompanied by other types of internationalism, whether class-based or anti-imperialist, that challenged the dominant political and economic forms of globalization. Politics, consumerism, and culture, from popular music to the visual arts, were increasingly globalized. "The whole world is watching," chanted antiwar demonstrators at the Democratic Party Convention in 1968. Many French may have been more eager to see American commercial films than French filmmakers would have liked, but important elements in France also became engaged in the imagined community the media created in which civil rights, black power, student movements, and opposition to the war in Vietnam in the United States became events that informed, inspired, and challenged youth in France. The 1968 years constituted a breach, but they also brought people together in new and important ways.<sup>9</sup>

The articles in this issue work within the conceptual frameworks of the long 1968 and the global 1968 to reveal new dimensions of 1968 within the context of the global 1960s and 1970s. The postcolonial legacy of Charles de Gaulle's dreams of a continued connection between France and its newly independent colonies included total freedom of movement between the former colonies and France. When the government of his successor, Georges Pompidou, ended this policy in 1973, it marked the beginning of the end of the long 1968 in postcolonial Africa. Françoise Blum examines movements of students cooperating with workers and other elements of the urban population in the new nations of Guinea, Congo, Senegal, and Madagascar from the perspectives of both the long and the global 1968. Blum points to Gaullists who looked at student movements and responses to them in Africa and to their opponents in France who worked with unions in the new nations. She suggests that their reflections on events in

8. Gordon, *Immigrants and Intellectuals*.

9. Morin, Lefort, and Coudray, *Mai 1968*.

postcolonial Africa figured in their actions in France in the 1968 years. But this transnational exchange moved in both directions. Important ties dating from the colonial period persisted between student groups and unions in France and newly independent African nations. Yet the postcolonial legacy was not simply a neocolonial one in which France left a legacy of authoritarian polities dependent on France and supportive of French interests. Whether learned in France—Blum discusses the participation of African students in France in 1968—or from French teachers in Africa, an oppositional political culture in France provided access to the ideological tools for opposing neocolonialism. African students contested the educational system in the name of the revolutionary imaginary learned in schools established by the French colonizers. They fought in the same terms of 1789 and Marxism as French students did. Blum thus challenges the conception of 1968 as solely a domestic French event with international repercussions; for her, rather, both issues and actors of 1968 had their origins in the colonial era. In postcolonial Africa the 1968 years took the form of a challenge to modes of domination inherited from the French Empire and led, among other things, to renegotiation of accords governing relations with France. Blum shows that one cannot understand the long 1968 in France or in Africa without recognizing its postcolonial character.

Two articles address the American war in Vietnam. New Left radicals in France had hoped that the success of the Algerian independence movement would serve as the spark for the working class and its leadership in France to turn its efforts to revolution. Salar Mohandesi explores how the war in Vietnam evoked similar aspirations among leftists in Western Europe and the United States. In France they were dissatisfied with de Gaulle's critique of the American war in Indochina and French Communists' calls for peace. Activists in France saw support for the National Liberation Front in Vietnam as the key to advancing revolution at home. Vietnam could provide models to radicals in the West, whether in the realm of women's equality or in political organization. An effort by Europeans to emulate non-Europeans was in itself an important expression of the world turned upside down of 1968. Mohandesi examines the expression of a new internationalism among groups in the United States and Western Europe that helped spawn the events of 1968 and in turn affected leftist projects in France. In France, aiding the Vietnamese was not a matter of participating directly in the struggle, as it had been for many in the Algerian War of Independence, most famously by transporting suitcases of money collected from Algerian workers in France to Switzerland. Seeking to weaken Western imperialism rather than directly bolster Vietnamese military resistance, French radicals offered different kinds of support to the Vietnamese. In so doing, French radicals

engaged directly with the society in which they lived and provided both organizational and ideological foundations to 1968-era movements.

For those who saw opposition to the war as the vanguard of their own opposition to imperialism in its various forms in France, engagement could mean bringing the struggle back home. Revolution in France would be the most effective way to aid revolution in Vietnam. For many in Europe and the United States, May 1968 returned the possibility for revolution to France and the rest of the industrialized capitalist world. But leftists in France retained the inspiration of Vietnam—both the way that the Vietnamese resistance showed that the apparently impossible was possible and the revolutionary approaches to all facets of social life it could inspire. In 1973 Jean Raguénès, a leader of workers at Lip engaged in the emblematic labor conflict of the 1968 years, voiced this idea: “Creating Vietnams, Vietnam-factory, Vietnam-Church, Vietnam-justice, Vietnam-police . . . Vietnam-Lip. . . . The day when there will be enough Vietnams, when the relations of power will be destroyed between the powerful and the governed, the teacher and his students, the priest and his flocks, that day there will inevitably be a change in society.”<sup>10</sup>

During the war the French who supported the National Liberation Front in Vietnam had done so primarily through activism in France. After May 1968, however, new forms of internationalism emerged that were at once consonant with the goals of 1968 and often at odds with the political positions taken by radicals at the time. Médecins sans Frontières, with its mission to help all in need, rather than solely anti-imperialists, was one expression of this.<sup>11</sup> And, as Mohandesi concludes, important elements of the French radical Left that had supported the Vietnamese Communist-led war against the Americans in turn aided Vietnamese boat people seeking to escape repression by Vietnamese Communists after their victory against American imperialism.

Bethany S. Keenan examines the position of France during the Vietnam War from a different perspective. Rather than analyze the aspirations and actions of the antiwar movement, Keenan examines the context in which opposition to the war could be manifested in France. Many scholars have written on the negotiations to end the war, which began in France in 1968, and on the opposition to the war in France during the 1968 years, but Keenan innovates in bringing the two bodies of work together. If the Quai d’Orsay had gone no farther than to observe antiwar protests before negotiations began in Paris, it took a more active role after this, seeing the provision of a neutral site for the negotiations as in the interest of France. The effort of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

10. July, “A quoi sert Lip?,” 3.

11. Davey, *Idealism beyond Borders*.

to keep demonstrations in the provinces reminds us that free speech is a matter not just of what can be said but of where. If, as Mohandesi contends, the Vietnam War became a rallying point for new forms of cooperation among radicals in Europe and the United States, Keenan shows how the French need for support after the Fifth Republic's near-death experience in May 1968 and the American need to end the war in Vietnam brought about a new level of cooperation between the two states.<sup>12</sup> To return to the history of French mobilization against the war in Vietnam, Keenan provides reasons beyond (or explanatory of) the argument that radicals now saw a possibility of revolution in France after May 1968. The actions of the French state after May—banning the left organizations most involved in the radical antiwar movement in France, as well as restricting who could demonstrate and where demonstrations could be held—reduced the focus on Vietnam among French radicals.

Too often references to the 1968 years take for granted a particular emotional world with a number of elements. Actors in this world believed not only that they could see what was true and just but also that the impossible could be possible in a society without constraining discipline or norms. Though this is apparent in writings of prominent thinkers of the time, from Félix Guattari to Michel Foucault, radical leftists whose accounts long dominated narratives of 1968 refused to examine the emotional content of events—joy, anger, hatred, fear—and its importance in making possible experiences on which their own narratives depended. Such interpretations had long been the monopoly of conservative commentators, notably Raymond Aron, who within months of the events dismissed May '68 as a psychodrama led by emotion-ridden youth.<sup>13</sup>

Bantigny and Gobille take up the challenge of considering emotions as a vital part of 1968. The affective experience of 1968 has been largely overlooked, though participants recognized it as central to their reception and formulation of ideas and to their constitution as individuals and collectivities acting as they had never done before. Bantigny and Gobille analyze both the affective experiences that brought social actors together and those framing the actions taken in opposition to other groups. They draw on diverse contemporary sources, ranging from anonymous poems to militant films. Recognizing that many in 1968 were suspicious of organizations as potentially impeding or quelling their emotional involvement, Bantigny and Gobille pay particular attention to the archives of neighborhood and workplace committees in which the previously silent and obedient spoke. They break with much of the work on 1968 by using the same theoretical model to analyze both the students and workers and the

12. Suri, *Power and Protest*.

13. Aron, *Elusive Revolution*.

police and bourgeois who opposed them. Bantigny and Gobille are close students of police archives, not just for what they tell about students and workers but for what they reveal about the emotions experienced by the police. They in turn examine Aron's depiction of a psychodrama as evidence of his own deep emotional engagement in the events.

Bantigny and Gobille focus on both radicals and conservatives, whose selves, not just their ideas, were changed when they broke with daily conventions and relations of authority in 1968. Those who experienced 1968 in emotional and affective terms would seek to maintain the experience of liberation and collectivity in communes, feminism, and mobilizations like those of the struggles of Lip and Larzac. These people, not just the intellectuals or leftist leaders marked by changing ideas or an allegiance to an ideology, are the social legacy of 1968.

The last two articles draw on the theme of the global 1968 in a European context and, going beyond the 1968 years, offer insight into long-term consequences and cultural memory of those years. Tony Côme examines a little-known cultural transfer that occurred between Germany and France during the long 1968. An innovative German design school in Ulm, the Hochschule für Gestaltung (HfG), which as early as 1965 had attracted French students dissatisfied with the traditionalist architectural training offered in Paris, itself became the object of a conservative backlash in Germany after that country's precocious student demonstrations in 1967. Led by the HfG's Francophone Swiss rector, Claude Schnaidt, a number of the school's leading faculty members chose self-exile in France in early 1968 rather than accept an end to their pedagogical autonomy, a threat that came both from the government and from radical German students. The HfG tapped into leftist cultural-historical memory in a number of ways: not only by claiming to embody the spirit of the Bauhaus, the most influential reformist architectural school of the century, but also as a memorial to Hans and Sophie Scholl, the founders of the White Rose anti-Nazi resistance movement; the HfG was founded by their sister in 1950.

Notwithstanding student protests of its ties to German industry, the HfG thus held great appeal for architecture and design students in Paris seeking more up-to-date instruction. At the same time, the prestige of the school's faculty gave it credibility with the French higher education bureaucracy and offered a way to jump-start reform under the rubric of "the environment," at once an emerging academic field and a policy issue to which May '68 had given a new resonance. Thus, in near record time, was born the Institut de l'Environnement, in a purpose-built building on the Rue Erasme with facades by the pioneering modernist engineer Jean Prouvé. Côme unpacks the multiple layers of this structure, institutional as well as architectural, sensitively tracing the—in retrospect

predictably—turbulent beginnings of the institute, in which a shared reformist ideology could not overcome factional divisions within the student body and between students and professors. The experimental model of the institute lasted for only a few years, but, as Côme argues, it contributed to a durable change in art and design education in France.

Sandrine Sanos brings this issue to a close with an essay that expands the canon of 1968 films while offering new insights into the complex insertion of May '68 into a longer-term historical memory. She focuses on two loosely connected films by Diane Kurys, *Diabolo Menthe* (1977), set in 1963, and *Cocktail Molotov* (1980), set in the spring of 1968. At the time of its release, critics dismissed *Cocktail Molotov*, which followed the conventions of the road movie and took place largely outside Paris, as a small film offering no new insights into historical events. As they did when 1968 was interpreted with reference to emotions, radicals rejected *Cocktail Molotov* for telling the history of 1968 outside the confines of their own narratives. The film was better received by critics in the United States who, unburdened by the particular political legacy of 1968 in France, interpreted it as a revealing examination of the ethos and unpredictability of the 1968 years. Sanos persuasively argues that Kurys intended the choice of a mediated narrative style (the characters hear more than they see or participate in) and her emphasis on the personal to counter what was already becoming a monolithic construction of “May '68.” The connections between the two films notably establish a genealogy of the long 1968 that extends from the repression of demonstrations in support of the Algerian Left and Algerian independence in 1962 to police violence in 1968.

At a structural level, Kurys is preoccupied with the ways individuals come to grips with history at once intimately and indirectly, by hearing the testimony of those who both participated in and witnessed it. In a passage in the film central to Sanos's analysis, a policeman evokes the emotions he felt in confronting demonstrators, a scene that resonates with Bantigny and Gobille's analysis but is rare among dramatic works set in May '68 in presenting how the police experienced events. That sexual initiation figures in *Cocktail Molotov* and many of the films set in 1968 suggests its central role in the affective and emotional expression of revolt studied in other terms by Bantigny and Gobille. Gendered bodily experience—notably, in *Cocktail Molotov*, a pregnancy that the central character decides to end, a problematic proposition before France's legalization of abortion under the Loi Veil—also offers a (side)way into politics. So too does the positioning of individuals at the cusp of multiple identities: without pressing the point, Kurys floats emigration to Israel, and the memory of the 1967 Six-Day War, as a horizon of possibility that a certain kind of young French Jew might well have found appealing in 1968, and that at any rate would undoubtedly have

conditioned her understanding of the events of that year. Sanos's article reminds us that the construction of memory is a discursive process involving not only authoritative or consensual pronouncements but "the margins, silences, and oblique (or anecdotal) references of cultural texts that seem to have little to do with politics." Fifty years on, at a moment when the kind of subjective displacement Sanos describes has become, in many places, the principal mode of apprehending history and politics, it is good to be reminded that the complex imbrication of culture, politics, and memory is within the grasp of sophisticated historical analysis.

The essays in this issue mark a new stage in the transformation of 1968 and its memory into subjects of history. None of the authors of the articles in this issue are of an age to have been veterans or witnesses of the events they analyze. They pose new questions and answer them within new chronological and geographic conceptualizations of 1968. They use historical research and analysis to bring life to acts and ideas that analyses born of the events themselves cannot fully illuminate, when they recognize them at all. Special issues on the ten-year anniversaries of 1968 originally allowed the generation defined by their experience of 1968 to analyze and critique itself. Fifty years later scholars can enter into new and revealing dialogues. This issue took shape in a colloquium at the National Humanities Center in February 2017 at which authors discussed and critiqued early versions of one another's work and thus participated in the creation of this issue. This experience, rather than the usual format of two editors of the issue, a slew of individual readers, and seven isolated authors, is a legacy of the mantra "Work differently, live differently" of 1968. Yes, the history of struggles is itself a struggle, and we attain nothing without joining that struggle. *La lutte continue.*

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