

Being in Parentheses

Memory, Sex, and Jewishness in Diane Kurys's Visions of May '68

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ABSTRACT Diane Kurys is known in French cinema for her popular, seemingly apolitical and “sentimental” films. Kurys’s early films, however, chart a mode of historical consciousness, memory, and temporality that alerts us to both the origins and afterlives of May ’68. In the widely celebrated 1977 *Diabolo menthe*, set in 1963 just after the end of the Franco-Algerian War, and the 1980 commercial and critical flop *Cocktail Molotov*, which took May ’68 as its subject, Kurys fictionalizes a meditation on the ways gender, sex, and Jewishness have been at the heart of these events’ politics for her. Through the figure of the *jeune fille* at the heart of her films, Kurys traces an ambivalent memory linking the specters of the Franco-Algerian war to those of World War II to map an ambivalent and gendered post-Holocaust French Jewish identity. For Kurys, finding meaning in May ’68 means revealing how only sex constitutes a politics that can rearrange the ordering of bodies in a community.

KEYWORDS cinema, gender, sexuality, Jewishness, Franco-Algerian War

There is meaning in what seems not to hold any, an enigma in what seems commonsense, a weight of thought in what appears to be an anodyne detail.
—Jacques Rancière, *L'inconscient esthétique*

When Diane Kurys’s second film, *Cocktail Molotov*, came out in 1980, few found its vision of the May ’68 revolution meaningful. *Cocktail Molotov* was the second in an autobiographical trilogy of sorts that begins with Kurys’s first film, *Diabolo menthe* (1977), set in 1963, and ends with World War II and its aftermath in *Entre nous/Coup de foudre* (1983).¹ Contemporaries and critics have

1. In contrast, the final film of the trilogy, *Entre nous (Coup de foudre)*, featuring two well-known actresses, Isabelle Huppert and Miou-Miou, was “an international commercial success and well received by the critics, winning a nomination as Best Foreign Film at the Academy Awards,” and was celebrated as a moving historical fiction. Tarr and Rollet, *Cinema and the Second Sex*, 86. See also Tarr, *Diane Kurys*, 26. All translations from the film and from the radio are my own.

often described Kurys's *Diabolo menthe* and *Cocktail Molotov*, her popular and realist melodramas of a young Jewish girl's coming of age, as "sentimental." But while Diane Kurys's first film, *Diabolo menthe*, received the coveted Prix Louis Delluc, *Cocktail Molotov* was a commercial flop. The story of that same teenager now rebelling against her bourgeois family was widely judged a cinematic failure. *Le monde's* cinema critic mused that the story of "an interrupted world, a failed revolution, a flailing love" made for "nothing more" than a "small, impressionistic sketch [*pochade*]." ² Most critics agreed that the film "was truly dreadful," "historically inaccurate," or "bland."³ The *Cahiers du cinéma* judged *Cocktail Molotov* a long assemblage of clichéd vignettes without plot or purpose.⁴ As Kurys herself noted, the film created "a general outcry."⁵ Indeed, the tale of Anne and her two friends who hitchhiked through France and missed most of May '68 appears to be narrowly French, though it began abroad, with little of the global in it that made '68 such a momentous event.⁶ The film has since lingered in obscurity and is never mentioned in scholarship on films and representations of May '68.⁷

At the time, however, Kurys insisted in interviews that she put her characters "on the margins" and preferred "small history" to "History" because it seemed impossible to "recreate the street battles between students and the police, the barricades, and all the effervescence" that characterized May '68.⁸ She added that she had wanted not to do a "historical film" but to have May '68 as "background."⁹ Kurys explained that she made the film because she felt that the events of May had been "buried" during the 1978 commemorations of its tenth anniversary.¹⁰ Kurys's insistence on the rather macabre burial of the utopian hopes and possibilities of May '68 is symptomatic of the political context of the late 1970s, when President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing had undertaken the

2. De Baroncelli, "Cocktail Molotov de Diane Kurys."

3. Marmin, "Cocktail Molotov"; Ro, "Cocktail Molotov"; Perez, "Cocktail Molotov."

4. *Cahiers du cinéma*, "Table ronde"; *Cahiers du cinéma*, "Notes sur d'autres films"; Ro, "Cocktail Molotov"; Perez, "Cocktail Molotov."

5. Chancel, "Diane Kurys parle de ses films."

6. Recent scholarship has insisted on the global (and transnational) character of May '68. See Zancarini-Fournel, *Le moment 68*, 182–223; Jackson et al., *May '68*; Frazier and Cohen, *Gender and Sexuality in 1968*; and Sherman et al., *Long 1968*.

7. Still, *Cocktail Molotov* enjoyed the highest number of entries for films by women filmmakers (such as Agnès Varda and Chantal Ackermann) that year when female film directors were still rare. See Tarr and Rollet, *Cinema and the Second Sex*, 285. Margaret Attack, for instance, mentions only the trailer in *May '68 in French Fiction and Film*, 47; Michelle Zancarini-Fournel does not refer to it in her list of popular films, *Le moment 68*, 144–50.

8. Wachthausen, "May '68 en stop pour adolescents." Kurys also had a small budget. In another interview she calls the 1978 commemorations a "funeral" (Rochu, "Interview").

9. CM, "Avant-première"; Pantel, "Diane Kurys"; Wachthausen, "May '68 en stop pour adolescents."

10. Wachthausen, "May '68 en stop pour adolescents."

“modernization” of France and inaugurated a liberal reform agenda to domesticate many of the hopes unleashed by May ’68. The end of the Vietnam War, which had propelled the politicization of so many in the 1960s, had not brought an end to American imperialism. Neither had the socialist revolutions of the 1960s brought the radical overturning of the global political order that so many had hoped for. And those who had become the “figureheads” of May ’68 were already busy “liquidating” May ’68 as a “failed moment.”¹¹ By the late 1970s there seemed to be little left of the May revolution.

Like *Diabolo menthe*, *Cocktail Molotov* was widely seen as a “nostalgic” vision though, this time, most thought that it lacked the “seductive,” “tender,” and “moving” tone that had provided the texture to *Diabolo menthe*’s heroines’ lives.¹² Instead, the tribulations of Anne and her friends seemed “gently insignificant.”¹³ The association of nostalgia with excessive emotion and marginal anecdote suggests the absence of politics and, in its place, a rather naive “yearning for a different time” untouched by the messiness of the present.¹⁴ It certainly allowed most to dismiss *Cocktail Molotov* as inconsequential and meaningless. Nostalgia, however, as Svetlana Boym has explained, is a “historical emotion” that can say something about the relationship between past and present.¹⁵ Taking nostalgia seriously as a “sentiment of loss and displacement” that may not always be about recovering a whole and mythical past allows us to see how, in fact, Kurys offers a meditation on history, memory, and testimony.¹⁶ Such a frame may also reveal why Kurys’s films, which contrasted with French cinema’s *mode rétro*, seemed at odds with the commemorative and emotional regime of late 1970s France.¹⁷

Kurys’s films do not dismiss the political but step sideways to speak to some of the politics that made May ’68 and that have at once endured and disappeared after it—a politics of subjectivity anchored through gender, sex, and Jewishness.¹⁸ Kurys alluded to this political project when *Cocktail Molotov* came

11. This is Kristin Ross’s expression in *May ’68 and Its Afterlives*, 8. On the “liquidation” of May ’68 by “ex-gauchistes” and the “Nouveaux Philosophes,” see Ross, *May ’68 and Its Afterlives*, 138–81.

12. Chazal, “Cocktail Molotov”; *Enfants*, “‘Diabolo menthe’ de Diane Kurys.” “Nostalgic” was a commonplace description of *Diabolo menthe*. See, e.g., Mauriac, “Diabolo menthe”; and D.M., “Diabolo menthe.”

13. Michel Perez, who derided the film, wrote that viewers “would have wished [Kurys] had not been such a whore [faire la pute]” (“Cocktail Molotov”).

14. Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, xv.

15. Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, xvi.

16. Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, xiii.

17. On the *mode rétro*, see Golsan, *Vichy’s Afterlife*, 57–72; and Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics*. On the importance of taking seriously the “emotional experience of politics,” see the article by Ludvine Bantigny and Boris Gobille in this issue.

18. *Entre nous* mines similar motifs, and the imbrication of gender and Jewishness is, again, central.

out. Indeed, she felt that with this film she “tried to speak of something that is not talked about.” She had “tried to undermine a taboo.”¹⁹ With her trilogy Kurys offers an autobiographical genealogy of May ’68, which begins with the Franco-Algerian and Vietnam Wars and remains haunted by the ghosts of World War II and the Holocaust. It speaks to the politics of the late 1970s and what has remained and emerged from May ’68. Her trilogy signals how, for the post-1945 generation, May ’68 was less a rupture than an interlude in a longer historical trajectory. These three films function as palimpsests, uncovering the ways the past shapes late twentieth-century France for Kurys.

Her chronological mapping from 1963 to 1968 and beyond offers history in a gendered mode.²⁰ *Cocktail Molotov* and *Diabolo menthe* are especially striking because they tell the story of the same young protagonist, Anne. In these films the figure of the *jeune fille*—a trope with a longer genealogy—embodies a mode of historical consciousness at odds with the ways May ’68 was memorialized in the late 1970s.²¹ The characters of the teenage girls Kurys fictionalizes in these two films do cultural work in signifying a political present and past. Their stories remind viewers that desire lies at the center of politics.²² The insistent and ambivalent figuration of sexuality and Jewishness, as modes of identity, is the politics that structures both films and that, the films tell us, was at the heart of 1968’s utopian desires. The absence of May ’68 as “event” in *Cocktail Molotov* and the fragmentary narrative that stands in as plot suggest a mode of subjectivity and a different temporality that refuse the stories of rupture and failure that have shaped memories of May ’68.

Specters of War and Testimony

OAS=SS

—Graffiti, *Diabolo menthe*

When *Diabolo menthe* came out in 1977 to acclaim and box office success (over two million people saw the film), most critics regarded it as a “tale of origins” that prefigured May ’68 and was clearly *before* it, that is, “before the watershed”—something that Kurys referred to in interviews and that many

19. Chancel, “Diane Kurys parle de ses films.”

20. The subject of gender has remained absent from most scholarly work. See Frazier and Cohen, *Gender and Sexuality in 1968*; and Porhel and Zancarini-Fournel, “68: Révolutions dans le genre?”

21. On the figure of the *jeune fille* doing political and cultural work, see Weiner, *Enfants Terribles*; Jobs, *Riding the New Wave*; and Kennedy, “Charming Monsters.” The far-left collective Tiqqun mobilizes that figure to unfold their critique of contemporary neoliberal capitalism in *Premiers matériaux pour une théorie de la jeune fille*.

22. Frazier and Cohen, *Gender and Sexuality in 1968*, x, 1, 4.

commentators insisted on.²³ Set in 1963, the film charts an academic year in the lives of the two Weber sisters, fifteen-year-old Frédérique and thirteen-year-old Anne, who live with their soon-to-be-divorced mother, who manages a clothing store. Most then and now have celebrated the intimate and, at times, melancholic tone with which the director traces the coming of age of these two sisters in early 1960s France. Kurys insisted that she had wanted to show how, in contrast to the post-68 years, life was shackled, oppressive, and shrouded in silence. The film, as Kurys (and film critics) understood it, was the story of “a young girl’s gaze on her year 1963: high school, teachers and their quirks, the awakening of sexuality, relationships with parents, with her sister, girlfriends, boys. The awakening of political consciousness. An ordinary school year.”²⁴ That year was the “prehistory” to May ’68.

Politics are very much present in *Diabolo menthe*: war is the background to the characters’ world. The tyrannical silence and the seemingly intractable norms that govern the sisters’ lives at school and at home echo the ways politics indirectly shape their daily lives. The film takes place just after the Franco-Algerian War, yet that conflict is a specter on the margins of the girls’ daily lives (but only as a “French” event). The film’s narrative is punctuated by Anne’s walks from home to school and back. It is on her way to school, at the very beginning of the film, that viewers glimpse traces of the war. As she walks, one can see graffiti reminding us of the infamous Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS) bombing campaign and of the ways OAS members were equated with Nazis by the war’s opponents—another reminder of the past haunting the present. The graffiti are at the center of the frame and yet background to the long shot of Anne running to school. The war endures in the physical space the girls inhabit, a material sign of something that is now invisible to them yet still indirectly maps their world.

These traces shape the contours of what most critics saw as the moving chronicle of a “young girl’s life.” One early scene reminds the audience of this: at the “rentrée des classes” in the girls-only high school, after every student has found her way to her designated classroom, one girl remains in the schoolyard, crying, lost and disoriented. A cantankerous and authoritarian schoolmistress, whose sole purpose seems to be to police the students, hails her. Asked where she is from, the young girl, Monique Martinez, responds, “Oran,” to which the schoolmistress responds, confused, “Oran—what’s that?,” and muses that it must be a private school unknown to her. The display of her utter ignorance in

23. It came second to *Star Wars*, that year’s French box-office success. See Tarr, *Diane Kurys*, 17; Rabine, “Diabolo menthe”; Mauriac, “Diabolo menthe”; and Chaumetton, “Diane Kurys.” It is still beloved, as evidenced by its re-release in late August 2017, which the magazine *Elle* announced (the article replicates some of the comments made when it was first released). See Diatkine, “Diabolo menthe.”

24. Interview with Diane Kurys, *Des femmes en mouvement hebdo*.

the face of this new student's distraught disorientation is meant to prompt ridicule. For viewers, the lost little girl would have evoked those many "repatriates" who, in the wake of the exodus from Algeria to the metropole, had dominated the news in late 1961 and 1962.²⁵ The presence of that young girl in the Parisian school pointed to that historic moment. Only the English teacher welcomes her: "Oran? Oran! My poor dear. Come in then. . . . Don't worry. It'll get better." She, too, is marked as presumably North African from her accent, which one reviewer patronizingly referred to as her "delightful Bab-El-Oued accent."²⁶

Moments like these in the film are fleeting, just as they are on the margins of these young girls' lives. They are a reminder of the ways French society remained haunted by the war that had no name.²⁷ A conversation among Anne, Frédérique, and their friends is symptomatic of this ongoing presence of the war. The conversation occurs when much has already changed in the ways Anne and Frédérique understand their life. Politics have seeped into their lives (mostly Frédérique's) and erupt in their daily routine in the most incongruous manner. Pascale (whose importance grows as the film unfolds) comes asking for help for her crossword puzzle: what is "a film by Resnais with the name of a woman, six letters?" The spontaneous collective response is "*Muriel!*" Released in 1963, *Muriel* is structured around the memory and absence of the Franco-Algerian War, like *Diabolo menthe*. In the scene that absence is reinforced by the girls' insistence that everyone should know *Muriel* ("*Muriel!* Haven't you seen it?"), though it is doubtful that they had actually seen it. They are baffled because another classmate seems not to know the film—she, too, is named Muriel. She is a sexually emancipated teenager (unlike the other girls) who seems not to care about politics and later will run away with her boyfriend and challenge the school's authority.²⁸ This banal schoolyard scene points to the oblique link between the politics of war and the politics of sex.

Politics also remap the Weber sisters' lives. By the time of the *Muriel* reference, Frédérique has become attentive to politics. She is now involved in the peace movement and is caught selling peace badges in school—for which she receives a suspension. Like the Algerian War, the nuclear threat had dominated French news (and continued to do so).²⁹ Frédérique's politicization affects the

25. Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 220–21.

26. D.M., "Diabolo menthe."

27. On the memory of the Algerian war, see Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli*; and Lorcin, *Algeria and France*.

28. There is no further discussion of Resnais's film in *Diabolo menthe*; the only film the "real" Muriel knows is *The Great Escape*, the 1963 American picture with Steve McQueen, in keeping with the film's portrayal of popular culture's role in the teenage girls' lives.

29. I thank Roxanne Panchasi for sharing her unpublished work on the colonial history of France's nuclear testing.

coordinates of her intimate life. As she moves to leftist activism, she sees it painfully divide her from her best friend, Perrine, who does not challenge her own apolitical stand and right-wing bourgeois upbringing.³⁰ Their friendship is tested when Frédérique and her friends confront the “fascists [*fachos*]” of the elitist and bourgeois Janson de Sailly high school in a physical fight on the front steps of the school. As Frédérique engages further in politics, most adults (including the school principal and her own mother) insist that “politics is not a girl’s business.” Politics is coded masculine—something the girls will be repeatedly told by adults around them. But what the film demonstrates is precisely the necessity of politics and how it shapes their daily lives. The politicization Frédérique undergoes highlights the many ways the world is changing.

The specter of the Franco-Algerian War and the urgency of antinuclear peace activism are intimately connected, for Frédérique, to her Jewishness. When her mother chastises her for her politicization and for her membership in an “antifascist committee” because “she is too young for this,” Frédérique exclaims that not to be involved is to abdicate her identity. “So you think it’s not important if someone calls me a dirty Jew [*sale juive*]?” she defiantly asks. When her mother asks her if that has happened, Frédérique says, “No, it hasn’t. But it could.” Frédérique’s use of the conditional illustrates how identity, history, and politics are imbricated. When her mother attempts to rein her in by saying that if Frédérique is subject to anti-Semitic taunts, she will alert the school director, Frédérique replies that “the school director is anti-Semitic. Oh, you didn’t know that?! Well, that’s the case.” The film remains ambiguous: it is unclear whether that is indeed the case (Frédérique’s mother is incredulous) or whether it is another way Frédérique defies her mother by alerting her to the enduring connections among anti-Semitism, racism, and left activism. The fight between leftists and “fascists”—which involves the “shocking” sight of girls fighting—takes place immediately after this exchange. It is Frédérique who is proved right: one of her “fascist” classmates tells her that she “hates communists. And Jews too, *in fact*” (my emphasis).

Kurys herself was very explicit that politicization took root in the wars of decolonization, anticipating what was to erupt in May ’68. She explained in the feminist newspaper *Des femmes en mouvement*’s 1982 special issue on women filmmakers that, for her, 1963 meant “the end of the Algerian War and the beginning of the Vietnam War. There were teachers’ strikes, students’ strikes. We were becoming activists: we were communists or ‘Movement for Peace.’ . . . And the

30. In a prior scene set in Perrine’s bourgeois family home, Perrine’s father complains that her history teacher discusses politics in class, while her brother informs the family that, in his high school, “all the teachers are communist.”

fascists attacked us outside school.”³¹ For Kurys, the tale of a young girl’s awakening was a tale of the origins of May ’68 for her generation. As she added, “Those who were 15 in 1963 were 20 in 1968,” as she had been, and at an age when, for her generation, “explosion” and “revolt” had begun, “the first time one says no.”³²

Frédérique’s awakening to left and antifascist politics and the connection she makes between her politicization and her Jewish identity are also symptomatic of what many May ’68 leaders and far-left participants argued led them to anticolonial, anti-imperialist, and anticapitalist politics. *Gauche Prolétarienne* founder Alain Geismar explained that “we were fighting in 1968 against the police that had made Charonne. The slogan ‘CRS-SS,’ which may have appeared excessive then, in fact evoked for us the massacre of Algerians.”³³ As Ethan Katz has pointed out, “Many Jews of the anti-Zionist Left of this generation had developed their political consciousness through an experience of decolonization and a collective memory of World War II.”³⁴ Like Frédérique, they had come of age in the midst of the revelations (despite the censorship) of the worst atrocities of the war on Algerians. Some have argued that the coming of age in the midst of decolonization wars (in Algeria and Vietnam) mingled with silences inherited from parents who were Holocaust survivors to create the “necessity” of a global antiracist and peace politics.³⁵ These retrospective biographical narratives tied together the personal and political and helped make sense of the “explosion and revolt” of May ’68 in the same way that the film suggests they do for Frédérique.

This politicization—and the connection between past and present—is fictionalized in *Diabolo menthe*’s most moving scene, which focuses on another student, Pascale, rather than on Frédérique. The scene signals a radical shift in our understanding of the girls’ interior lives and the ways their personal and political lives mesh. Frédérique and her girlfriends are in a history class. The history teacher notices the class’s indifference to the French Revolution and

31. Interview with Diane Kurys, *Des femmes en mouvement hebdo*, 17.

32. Interview with Diane Kurys, *Des femmes en mouvement hebdo*, 17; *Cocktail Molotov—un film de Diane Kurys*, 15.

33. Quoted in Stora, *La gangrène et l’oubli*, 224. Many May ’68 leaders, such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Alain Geismar, and Alain Krivine, had drawn a connection between their Jewish family histories and their horror in the face of knowledge of the Algerian War’s atrocities and the Vietnam War. In her memoir, *Le jour où mon père s’est tué*, about her father, Robert, who founded the Union des Jeunes Communistes Marxistes-Léninistes, Virginie Linhart argues for a causal effect between the legacy of the Holocaust and involvement in May ’68’s radical politics. For a more nuanced exploration that relies on interviews made long after May ’68, see Auron, *Les juifs d’extrême-gauche en Mai 68*, 22–24, 41–80; and Attack, *May ’68 in French Fiction and Film*, 45.

34. Katz, *Burdens of Brotherhood*, 266.

35. Some scholars have explored this; see, e.g., Auron, *Les juifs d’extrême-gauche en Mai 68*, and Gordon, *Immigrants and Intellectuals*.

remarks that, surely, they realize politics and history are related. She asks whether politics interests them, especially since, she adds, they will soon be able to vote. Laughter erupts. Frédérique says she feels the “nuclear threat concerns them all.” A student says every time she wants to talk politics, her father “rightfully” makes fun of her. Some say they don’t care about voting. One will vote only if the candidate is the popular rock ’n’ roll star Johnny Hallyday. Another says she will, “of course,” vote like her husband. Outraged by this indifference, Pascale exclaims, “But there was Charonne!” The history teacher responds, “That is true, who can talk about Charonne? Nobody? It happened last year, in February, February 8.” Faced with more laughter, she calls on Pascale to tell the story of Charonne.

The eruption of “Charonne”—the 1962 mass demonstration “against fascism” and in support of “peace in Algeria” in which nine people were killed by the French police—did not escape notice when the film was released.³⁶ In fact, it was systematically mentioned as a “pivotal moment” in the film.³⁷ Strikingly, *Diabolo menthe* is the only film that dramatizes a “telling” of the massacre that has, since then, become a shorthand for one of the most public instances of state violence against its citizens, simultaneously evoking and displacing the memory of another massacre, that of October 17, 1961.³⁸ Its presence in *Diabolo menthe* and the form its narration takes have remained unexamined. The focus on Charonne is therefore especially meaningful because, despite its significance, the demonstration and funeral processions have remained shrouded in myth, “censorships, souvenirs, as well as forgetfulness.”³⁹

Pascale is a witness and not a participant. Her narration is fragmentary and evokes only fleeting images while the camera stays on her face and silence

36. On February 8, 1962, five demonstrations were organized by the communists and a number of trade unions and student organizations in protest of the OAS terrorist attacks in the preceding weeks. The demonstrations were declared “illegal” at the last minute and came to a halt later that afternoon when the police charged in just as most demonstrators were leaving. At the metro stop Charonne, some demonstrators who tried to escape into the metro were crushed to death. Nine people died, including a sixteen-year-old boy. Five days later, on February 13, a huge procession (150,000, according to contemporary accounts) gathered for the funeral of the nine dead. Alain Dewerpe, whose own mother was one of the nine killed, challenges that official story, emphasizing instead police brutality tactics, and calls Charonne a “state massacre.” On this event and police brutality, see Dewerpe, *Charonne*, 585, 17, 80–81, 88, 108–12, 120, 128–68.

37. M.A., “Le temps de l’apprentissage”; Lachize, “Un ‘Zéro de conduite’ au féminin.” See also Muller, “Les désarrois de l’élève Kurys”; *Le nouvel observateur*, “*Diabolo menthe*”; Grégeois, “*Diabolo menthe*”; G.V., “Dans son premier film”; *Le Figaro*, “Scènes de la vie de lycée”; Chazal, “*Diabolo menthe*”; Coppermann, “*Diabolo menthe*”; Burnat, “*Diabolo menthe*”; Bory, “Zéros de conduite”; B.A., “*Diabolo menthe*.”

38. Dewerpe calls the film a “hapax” and points to the ways the memory of Charonne has displaced, obscured, and erased that of October 17, 1961 (*Charonne*, 588). On the forgettings surrounding the October 17 massacre of Algerians demonstrating in Paris by the Paris police, see Cole, “Remembering the Battle of Paris,” 25.

39. Dewerpe, *Charonne*, 18.

envelops the classroom. She talks about how she “saw” it all from her window with her father from their Boulevard Voltaire balcony, close to the Charonne metro stop. She adds that, when the police charged, they “were completely enraged. They were hitting everyone everywhere. My father closed the window. Even with the window closed, we could hear people screaming.” What struck her, in the aftermath, was “there was no one,” but “shoes, shoes everywhere . . . on the pavement, in the gutters.” Finally, she speaks of joining the thousands who marched to the cemetery to commemorate the dead, behind the teenager’s white coffin, with white “flowers everywhere.” They marched “in the rain,” everyone silent. She ends her “testimony” with the evocation of collective mobilization: “All these people who did not know one another and who were walking toward *something*, and it was a cemetery” (my emphasis). The school bell rings, and all the students leave. The camera remains on close-ups of Pascale and the history teacher, who stay behind, gazing at one another, silent.

With this scene, Kurys inaugurates a mode of history telling that she will continue in *Cocktail Molotov* (in “free indirect style,” as one critic called it), implicitly tracing a genealogy between 1963 and 1968. In both films, the protagonists (Frédérique in *Diabolo menthe*, Anne in *Cocktail Molotov*) do not experience events but rather are told what has happened. That narrative choice may be symptomatic of the ways in which testimony emphasized individual experience while inscribing it within a larger historical and collective framework.⁴⁰ As a cultural form, testimony fit well with the post-68 privileging of *prise de parole* and autobiography that was inaugurated in May to serve those left voiceless and nameless in history and that became the hallmark of many radical political activists in the 1970s.⁴¹ Pascale’s monologue signaled how testimony could be a powerful mode of history telling.⁴² In the film Pascale’s narrative is not as much a “factual” rendering of events as an affective, embodied, and gendered memorialization that marks history.

What may be just as important in the film’s elaboration of the role of politics and history is what follows Pascale’s description of Charonne. Pascale’s narration signals a decisive shift for Frédérique. The two become close friends. On a school outing to a museum, organized by their Latin teacher, they escape to its peaceful and bucolic gardens. The moment is melancholic since it is the end of the school year. Pascale muses that “isn’t it strange, we don’t even have the same friends as at the beginning of the school year.” Politics has reshaped the

40. Annette Wieworka argues that the 1961 Eichmann trial inaugurated the “era of the witness” (*L’ère du témoin*, 13, 82, 98, 114).

41. On the emergence of autobiography and *prise de parole* as a post-68 narrative form, see Zancarini-Fournel, *Le moment 68*, 68–69, 165–72.

42. The first photos of Charonne were published in 1972 by *Paris-Match* (Dewerpe, *Charonne*, 585).

girls' intimate lives: Frédérique has become estranged from her right-wing bourgeois best friend. Frédérique says little, but as they lie on the grass, side by side, they turn to one another. Desire surfaces in this brief moment. Frédérique turns her head away, shutting down the possibility of same-sex desire and foreclosing what seems to have emerged between them.⁴³ The possibility of other desires is imbricated in the possibility of other politics. Pascale, in the film, is a political subject and, as this scene suggests, is also a sexual subject in ways Frédérique and Anne are not and struggle to be. *Diabolo menthe* suggests that sexuality and politics are not two separate fields of meaning and experience but are intimately tied. Sex determines politics and politics is a realm of affect and desire. By the time Kurys set out to make *Diabolo menthe* in the late 1970s, sex had become a politics and the “sexual revolution” provided the “grammar” for working out France’s historical past.⁴⁴ Sex, Jewishness, and testimony will also be central motifs in *Cocktail Molotov*.

Temporality and the Making of History

May '68 as if you had not been there.
—*Les nouvelles littéraires*, February 7, 1980

At first glance, *Cocktail Molotov* seems to offer a conventional retelling of May '68, another instance of the “dehistorici[zation] and depoliticsi[zation]” of narratives and representation of May '68.⁴⁵ It tells the story of seventeen-year-old Anne, presumably from *Diabolo menthe*, who is in love with Frédéric, a painter from a working-class immigrant background, in one of these “unlikely encounters” that characterized the May events.⁴⁶ Suffocating under the strictures of her bourgeois mother, who seems concerned only with respectability and rules, Anne flees her mother and stepfather’s comfortable home. She has decided to go to a kibbutz with Frédéric. Before leaving, however, she visits her best friend, who gives her birth control pills stolen from her father, a gynecologist. After spending her first night with Frédéric, she decides to leave alone when he proves reluctant to follow her. Panicked by her departure, Frédéric and his best friend, Bruno, start driving south, hoping to find her on the road. They reunite, and all three make their way to Venice, where Anne is to take a boat for Israel. Once in

43. Kurys mines that motif (the ambiguous line between homosociability and homoeroticism) more explicitly in her third film, *Entre nous*, with the tale of her mother Lena’s passionate friendship with another woman that will end her marriage.

44. On the ways post-1962 “sex talk” became a means for French people to discuss the Franco-Algerian War, see Shepard, *Sex, France, and “Arab Men.”* On postwar relation between sex and politics, see Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*.

45. Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, 6.

46. Vigna and Zancarini-Fournel, “Les rencontres improbables dans ‘les années 68,’” 163–77.

Venice, they begin hearing news of barricades, demonstrations, and mayhem in Paris. After their car is stolen by Bruno's lover, an Italian anarchist named Ana Maria, they are left penniless and make their way back to Paris.

The film then follows the convention of the "road movie," offering a string of vignettes where the three protagonists meet different French people directly and indirectly involved in the events of May '68: a middle-class couple, a group of farmers in a rural café, a student at a vocational high school whose father is a depressed officer of the Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité (CRS), a compassionate trucker, and various other characters. The dominant theme of the film is this road trip, as the protagonists end up missing May '68.⁴⁷ On the way back to Paris, Anne discovers she is pregnant and visits her father in Lyon in the hope he can provide her money for an abortion. While Anne and her father drive to Switzerland, where she stays for a week in an abortion clinic, Bruno and Frédéric return to Paris, eager to join the demonstrations. As they exit the metro, they are immediately arrested by the police and end up in a police car as Bruno complains that they have, yet again, missed it all. The film ends in repetition with a difference. Neither narrative closure nor particular meaning is given to May '68. The trio reunites, Anne leaves the parental home for the second time, and they drive off again as overtitles explain that "they wanted us to believe it was all finished. For us, the journey had just begun."

Cocktail Molotov certainly does not offer critiques of "capitalism, American imperialism and Gaullism" the way Jean-Luc Godard's and Chris Marker's films had done.⁴⁸ It does not fictionalize the most violent or transgressive aspects of these events.⁴⁹ Nor does it dramatize the protagonists as willful agents of political change. Many critics, in fact, bemoaned the narrative conceit of the film: Jean-Paul Grouchet wrote in *Le canard enchaîné*, "To evoke [the May '68 events that the film's title predicts] indirectly and only through hearsay is pushing indirect style too far." There is "nothing concrete about the student mobilization or the workers' movement. Nothing noticeable on the hopes and urges born from the insurrection. The fleeting images of police repression render them rather insignificant."⁵⁰ Still, some granted that the film's decision to portray "May '68 as if you weren't there" offered "a testimony between the lines" even if, ultimately, it felt more like "history as flowery tapestry."⁵¹ Former far-

47. On the subgenre of autobiographies and hitchhiking memoirs, see Jobs, *Backpack Ambassadors*, 151–54.

48. For an overview of radical cinema, see Grant, *Cinéma Militant*.

49. Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, 8, 10. For an overview of actors, events, and imaginaries, see Dreyfus-Armand et al., *Les années 68*.

50. Grouchet, "Cocktail Molotov."

51. Boujut, "Mai 68 comme si vous n'y étiez pas."

left activists were far harsher. In a special issue of *Les nouvelles littéraires* that involved “four ways of looking at the film,” May ’68 leader Alain Geismar deemed it an “indulgent film,” while Trotskyist and Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire founder Alain Krivine (who would have been older than the film’s heroine, Anne, at the time) scathingly characterized it as a “rose-tinted vision of life” that was nothing more than the “Comtesse de Ségur” “after 68.”⁵² The same issue included interviews with two young people for their reactions to a time they could not have known. Eighteen-year-old Christine thought the film taught her little about the period: “It was rather pleasant, quite sentimental, but rather lighthearted.” Nineteen-year-old Mouhoud explained he did not consider it a “political film” but felt it was nonetheless a sincere “testimony of a [particular] sensibility.”⁵³

Mouhoud’s insistence that *Cocktail Molotov* had some meaning is worth considering. He felt that the film showed “May ’68 as metaphor for travel.” He “did not believe they had missed May ’68. They had undertaken it in their own way.”⁵⁴ What kind of politics does *Cocktail Molotov* trace, then, if any? After all, Kurys centered her film on Anne, who was thirteen in *Diabolo menthe* and would have been younger than most of those who became politically engaged in May ’68 and were of her sister Frédérique’s cohort. Any direct reference to the most radical aspects of May ’68 politics was conspicuously absent from the film—“erasing the social revolt of 10 million workers,” which is what Krivine criticized.⁵⁵ In some of the interviews on the film’s release, Kurys explained that she had cut out two more overtly political scenes. The film was supposed to dramatize a meeting of Italian anarchists and, more important, end with the emblematic strike at Renault-Flins.⁵⁶ That absence seems symptomatic of the film’s muted comments on class and collective action, as well as the editorial choice Kurys made in privileging an “indirect style” of narrative. As the *Libération* film critic commented, “After so many testimonies, by those who were there but did not want to talk about it, and by those who talked about it

52. *Les nouvelles littéraires*, “Mai 68 comme si vous n’y étiez pas.” Both Geismar and Jacques Sauvegot are mentioned by Frédéric reading an Italian newspaper article regarding the “troubles” in Paris.

53. *Les nouvelles littéraires*, “Mai 68 comme si vous n’y étiez pas.”

54. Of note is Mouhoud’s explanation that he was not in France at the time but that his “father who is Algerian, was.” He also indicates that he is now a “trotskyist activist,” in *Les nouvelles littéraires*, “Mai 68 comme si vous n’y étiez pas.”

55. Boujut, “Mai 68 comme si vous n’y étiez pas.” For another example of cinematic “memories” of May ’68 that point to the ways generational experience shaped politics, see Reid, “We Have a Situation Here.”

56. While thousands of Renault factory workers had gone on strike, it was at Flins, where students and workers had mobilized, that the riot police charged, murdering one student, Gilles Tautin. Rochu, “Interview.” On the importance of the Renault-Flins strike, see Vigna, “La figure ouvrière à Flins.”

precisely because they had not been there . . . the take of those who missed May '68 needed to be put on screen."⁵⁷ Understanding the film's politics therefore requires reading below the surface, attentive to the narrative form of the film, its decentering of Paris, and its insistent focus on gender and class and on the stories of protagonists who do not experience May '68 directly but, like 1980 cinema audiences, learn about it through others' testimonies.

The film does not so much erase May '68's politics as propose another political interpretation of May '68's memory. Its indirect style ultimately narrates the event as one whose meaning is impossible to capture. It can only be refracted through social groups.⁵⁸ *Cocktail Molotov's* seamless entanglement of mediated narration, lived experience, and generational narrative says something about the ways historical consciousness was interpreted by Kurys.⁵⁹ Its deliberate use, first inaugurated in *Diabolo menthe*, speaks to the distance and mediation Kurys put at the heart of her tale of May '68. In this, Kurys's film echoes Gustave Flaubert's 1869 coming-of-age novel, *L'éducation sentimentale*: Anne's boyfriend even has the same name as the novel's hero. Like Flaubert, who had used indirect style as subjective mode of narration, Kurys stages history as background in a retrospective tale of youth and complicated love.⁶⁰ Kurys's film suggests that only a fragmented, mediated, and "episodic" narration fits the event and that, perhaps, the political is to be found in the familiar and the banal and their subjective experience.⁶¹

As the *Libération* reviewer explained, *Cocktail Molotov's* protagonists never experience May '68 directly. The protagonists hear about the first demonstrations on their car radio as they drive to Venice, twenty-five minutes into the film.⁶² They look at a map of Paris to see where the barricades are. Once in Venice, Frédéric reads in the Italian newspaper that "turmoil continues in Paris." After Anne misses her ship for Israel, she decides that they should hitchhike back to Paris since, as she says, "at least I won't have missed everything." Their hitchhiking journey becomes the opportunity for encounters with various individuals who recount *their* own experience of May. These didactic exchanges punctuate the hitchhikers' return to Paris as they travel through the south of France. The news from the radio and newspapers and the comments of people they encounter act as "scattered references" that anchor the rhythm of the

57. Rochu, "Cocktail Molotov."

58. On the narrative function of "social groups," see Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, 23.

59. Rochu, "Cocktail Molotov."

60. Free indirect style is a literary device that blends direct and indirect discourse without distinguishing them. I am grateful to Anne-Gaëlle Saliot for reminding me of the Flaubert reference.

61. On the film's episodic narrative style, see Tarr, *Diane Kurys*, 43. See also Rancière, *L'inconscient esthétique*, 11.

62. Because of censorship, most French people followed the events on the radio.

protagonists' journey.⁶³ These snippets of news and random encounters create a disjointed sense of time at odds with the energy and urgency of the Parisian events the media convey. The aftershocks of May resonating through France punctuate Anne, Frédéric, and Bruno's return to Paris.

As the film unfolds, it appears that everyone in France is thinking about, is involved in, is affected by, or has an opinion on "the events." The group of rural workers Anne, Frédéric, and Bruno encounter in a small-town café are busy discussing the effects of the strikes, some dismissing it ("A strike is not freedom; it's pissing everybody off") and others approving it. Later, a similar exchange occurs between truckers, one of whom supports the strikes. When Anne phones her stepfather for money, he is distracted by the "occupation" of his factory. It is important that these commentaries are always staged in the provinces, thus decentering Paris. Physical surroundings and also, more strikingly, the accents of various characters mark this decentering.

Some encounters stand out, such as when they meet a young man in an Aix-en-Provence café who explains he is, like them, a student but at the local vocational high school and says he would rather "the school be burned." Anne asks why, and he responds that is because "it stinks there. It's a school and [yet] it stinks." Their education is a joke, and everything is a "complete mess [*bor-del*]." This is one of several moments in which the film offers a muted commentary on the ways class rigidly divides French society and fails its youth. This student has rebelled while the trio is, again, mere witness. Anne's remark to her boyfriend, Frédéric, that "it is a shame he has not finished high school [*lycée*]" appears blind to the socioeconomic disparities between her own bourgeois upbringing and that of Frédéric, the son of an immigrant working-class father. Frédéric's class background is, in fact, the only one that is consistently remarked on. Bruno (who seems more politicized yet divorced from any context) criticizes Frédéric's frustration with having to hitchhike and tells him that he "acts like a petit-bourgeois when, really, he is the son of poor people [*fil de pauvre*]" and "that is the worst." Frédéric's ambivalence toward their road trip is a function of his sense of responsibility toward his working-class parents, who live in public housing (*grands ensembles*), and to his father, who is gravely ill because, the film suggests, of his years as a factory worker.

If class explains the impatience, politicization, and revolt of some in the film, another origin explains conservative and reactionary forces. That origin is to be found not in the immediate discomfort created by strikes or the disruption of everyday life but in the ways the Franco-Algerian War has marked an older generation that is now incapable of comprehending students' and workers'

63. Tarr, *Diane Kurys*, 45.

demands. The first hitchhiking encounter the young people experience sets the scene. They listen to a technocratic-looking middle-class couple. While the wife seems more understanding, the husband is cynical and conservative, portraying events as narrowly individualist youthful revolts. After commenting that the May student demonstrations are akin to the rebellion of a teenager who “slam[s] the door and say[s] no to daddy,” he adds his own patronizing explanation for current events: “In ’40, there was the Resistance, *we* had the Algerian War, so they need their *own little war*” (my emphasis).⁶⁴ Kurys contrasts his refusal to name those who protest and revolt to the “we” who, he claims, at least undertook a “real” war and faced “real” dangers.

It is the dinner the three hitchhikers are unwittingly subjected to with a CRS officer that offers the most striking testimony of the relationship between May ’68 and the Franco-Algerian War. In this scene Anne, Frédéric, and Bruno are sitting around the dinner table in an unassuming small kitchen. The student at the vocational school has invited them back to his house, and they discover that his father is a “cop” who has just returned from Paris. As he serves drinks, the man launches into a long monologue in which he ties police violence against students and workers to the Franco-Algerian and the Vietnam Wars. He first explains that he cannot drink because he is depressed (“C’est les nerfs qu’ont lâché”). His depression and exhaustion, they learn, are the result of his policing work: his monologue suggests that he, and other police officers, experience an irrepressible desire to exercise violence when they—the police—cannot properly “police” the public: “We don’t have the right to move, we don’t even have the right to hide. So, after two, three hours, that gets you all worked up, so then, knee on the ground, rifle inclined at 45 degrees and . . . BLAST AHEAD [*feu à volonté!*]”⁶⁵ His monologue of his experience of the Paris barricades becomes a confession of the affective dimension (and maybe even pleasure) of police violence that blends May with the Algerian and Vietnam Wars:

We throw “potatoes,” that’s tear gas. Yeah, tear gas is not dangerous. What’s annoying is when the wind blows against you or there’s an idiot who sends it back to you before it explodes. Tear gas is nothing. Worse is *la criquée*. That’s a chlorine grenade. They say Americans used them in Vietnam. They make a strange sound at night . . . when they explode. Ah, you don’t know what I’ve seen. You have no idea what that was like. Young ones like you, fuck, that violence, you know, I’m telling you.

64. The credits say that “they” are “diplomats.”

65. For a discussion of the police’s role in dispersal and interruption of the collective, see Ross on Rancière, *May ’68 and Its Afterlives*, 22–27.

Kurys deliberately staged this eruption of the historical past since the May events saw neither chlorine gas used nor shots fired. As the CRS officer invokes something of a past violence that he cannot talk about and that no one can grasp, he begins weeping, before confessing, “You know, I was in the Algerian War.” He immediately bypasses that revelation as he returns to the present: “I’ve been in the police for twenty years, but I can tell you one thing: we’ve become bonkers.” Here the Franco-Algerian War, which mobilized millions of young men to round up, brutalize, and torture Algerian men and women, remains the absence that structures state and police intervention against students and workers.⁶⁶ It matters that he is a police officer and not just a former military conscript, since it was the police that oversaw some of the worst massacres on French metropolitan soil, such as Charonne and especially the October 17, 1961, murder of hundreds of Algerian men.⁶⁷ The unclear origin of the police officer’s “we” troubles the previous “we” that the middle-class driver had so confidently asserted.

The police officer’s conclusion is simple. He will now embrace his madness—the impotence that generates excitement and the excitement associated with the exercise of violence against the public in the streets—so that “now, I’m just going to play at being a turtle. The turtle, you know, it’s when you move forward with your shield over your head.” He is suddenly interrupted by his son’s hysterical laughter while the other three remain silent, as they have been throughout his monologue. They cannot empathize with the traumatized alienation of the perpetrator of violence during France’s Algerian years.⁶⁸ Like other encounters, this one stands alone, without context or further explanation. It merely punctuates the protagonists’ journey. It suggests the ways Kurys identifies an “origin” to May ’68, a time that remains, for the most part, suspended and without a conclusion. The depressed CRS officer in *Cocktail Molotov* echoes the “enraged” police Pascale mentioned in *Diabolo menthe*. In both films, Kurys suggests, arbitrary police brutality injures and murders innocent civilians, especially young people.

Still, Kurys never evokes solidarity with the Algerians who were victims of the French state violence and war.⁶⁹ Her films are not concerned with suggesting any empathy with the “Algerian experience.” In *Diabolo menthe* the repatriation

66. I borrow this expression—the “structuring absence” of the Algerian War—from Croombs, “*Loin du Vietnam*,” 501. See also Croombs, “Algeria Deferred.”

67. Cole, “Remembering the Battle of Paris,” 25.

68. This portrayal fits with the widely shared cultural sentiment that dominated in the late 1960s and 1970s, according to Stora, *La gangrène et l’oubli*, 270.

69. This is in contrast with her partner and collaborator, Alexandre Arcady, who in his first film, the 1979 *Coup de Sirocco*, fictionalized a conservative and “nostalgic” telling of the *pied-noir* Jewish exodus, inspired by his own experience. The protagonist’s mother was played by Marthe Villalonga, the English teacher in *Diabolo menthe*. See Watt, “Alexandre Arcady,” 78–79.

crisis of *pieds-noirs* makes only a brief appearance, and it is “Charonne” rather than October 17, 1961, that is evoked. While May ’68 politics may have emerged in the aftermath of the Franco-Algerian War, as many far-left leaders later claimed, Kurys’s film does not stage its translation into a radical far-left politics. Instead, the only political commitment that she (obliquely) invokes is Zionism, embodied by Anne’s decision to leave for Israel. In fact, Kurys films the conditions and shape of postwar French Jewish identity for younger generations—a fact that seems to have escaped most viewers and critics.

In both films Kurys dramatizes a post-Holocaust French Ashkenazi identity.⁷⁰ Her female heroines are ambivalently situated in the world they move through, because they are Jewish and because of the ways lived experience shapes their relation to politics. The Jewishness of their familial world stands in contrast to the (public) world they inhabit. The heroines’ private lives are saturated with cultural habits and forms of French Jewish life. In her films, they are ordinary and banal moments of her heroines’ lives, even if it is clear from interviews that she self-consciously made such narrative choices. In *Diabolo menthe*, when Frédérique and Anne surprise their mother for her birthday, they play the famous “My Yiddishe Momme” (in Yiddish) as she enters the flat. In *Cocktail Molotov* it is Anne’s father who becomes the repository of Jewish identity: he speaks Yiddish and his life, in Lyon, is deeply embedded in the Jewish community (unlike Anne’s mother’s bourgeois and seemingly secular life). Kurys points out that, when Anne arrives, her father “is alone in front of his dining table filled with food he’s bought at the Jewish deli.”⁷¹ Indeed, Kurys explains in an interview that, “for her, Lyon is a Jewish city” and that she wanted to film these textures, accents, and spaces.⁷²

Anne’s father’s life embodies Kurys’s nostalgic rendering of Lyon. Her father finds her and her friends a place to stay at the local Jewish community center. (He asks if Frédéric is Jewish.) In the center, a scene focuses our eye: a group of men and women listening to an address by General de Gaulle calling for the end of violence. An older man suddenly turns to Frédéric and Bruno to tell them in a heavily accented voice that “violence is not good. . . . What is happening to us is not good for us.” Here, again, another “we” is evoked that is distinct from the collective youth they address under the guise of the three travelers. (According to the film promotional brochure’s stills, Kurys had planned on a longer scene at the community center.)⁷³ Both films emphasize generational

70. At that time, the French Jewish community had been radically reconfigured with the arrival of about 220,000 North African Jews in the wake of decolonization. See Bensimon, *Les Juifs de France et leurs relations avec Israël*, 31.

71. This is how Kurys described the scene. See Rochu, “Interview.”

72. Rochu, “Interview.”

73. *Cocktail Molotov—un film de Diane Kurys*, 14.

differences: in *Diabolo menthe*, between Frédérique and her mother on the question of anti-Semitism; in *Cocktail Molotov*, between Anne and her father regarding their Jewish identity and their interpretation of May. Frédéric and Bruno even try to raise money for Anne's abortion by asking for donations for the Fonds Social Juif Unifié: her father is uncomprehending, but Anne laughs.⁷⁴ If Kurys suggests a politics, it is in Anne's decision to run away to Israel and live in a kibbutz.⁷⁵ That fact drives *Cocktail Molotov's* plot and would have resonated with a French Jewish audience.

Anne's decision to leave for Israel in 1968 referred to the 1967 Six-Day War, an event that had reshaped the lines of political affiliations within the French Jewish community. Anne's character is symptomatic of the ways that war had radically "transformed Jewish identity" in France and the world, signaling a "Jewish commitment to Israel" that "burst onto the public stage."⁷⁶ In this sense Anne's desire to go to a kibbutz echoes the migration of almost seven thousand French Jews who moved to Israel between 1965 and 1971—a rather small number that nevertheless shows how Zionism regained some support among parts of the French Jewish community.⁷⁷ It was one of Kurys's autobiographical fictionalizations since she had herself left for a kibbutz, stayed there a year, and as she recounted, "witnessed the Six-Day War," though "she refused to participate."⁷⁸ Hers was, however, a contested position since, unlike Kurys and her character, many May '68 far-left activists explained that they rejected Zionism as a "nationalist" politics at odds with their anticolonial commitment.⁷⁹

This staging, however oblique, of Zionism makes Kurys's narrative more of an anomaly in leftist circles and may have also shaped Geismar's and Krivine's dislike of Anne's story. *Cocktail Molotov* never evokes the Six-Day War directly. But neither is it clearly in the past, since the reason Anne never leaves is because,

74. On the Fonds Social Juif Unifié as the largest Jewish philanthropic and community organization, see Bensimon, *Les Juifs de France et leurs relations avec Israël*, 69–74.

75. Kurys explained that she left home at sixteen, was a "Zionist Marxist" back then, and lived in an Israeli kibbutz for a year before returning to Paris, a fact that she related in quite a few interviews; see, e.g., Rochu, "Interview." On French Zionism, see Coulon, *L'opinion française*, 115–34.

76. Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France*, 80–81.

77. Mandel, *Muslim and Jews in France*, 85.

78. Interview with Diane Kurys, *Des femmes en mouvement hebdo*, 17. At fifteen, in 1960, Daniel Cohn-Bendit had gone to live in a kibbutz because of his affinity to left and socialist Zionism, but he was horrified by the "nationalism and chauvinism" of French Jews in the face of the Six-Day War. See Auron, *Les juifs d'extrême-gauche en Mai 68*, 172–74.

79. This was the case for activists such Geismar, Cohn-Bendit, and others, as opposed to Kurys. See Rochu, "Interview." See also Mandel, *Muslims and Jews in France*, 85, 86, 107–9; and Katz, *Burdens of Brotherhood*, 248, 255–60, 266. On the "divisions" unleashed by the Six-Day War, see Katz and Mandel, "French Jewish Community," 214–15. However, Isaacson points out how the "transformative" aspect of the 1967 war on the French Jewish community and on the French nation should be nuanced in "From 'Brave Little Israel,'" 18–22.

we are told, the Israeli government has halted all transportation because of “troubles at the borders.” As in the CRS officer’s tale, this is a fiction, this time invented by Frédéric and Bruno to stall Anne (she seems ignorant of the realities of Israeli political context despite her avowed decision to join a kibbutz). Invoking such “troubles” may have pointed to the memory of the war itself or its aftereffects, which lingered well into the 1970s.⁸⁰ Like the connection she makes between the Algerian War and the present, Kurys ties the aftermath of the Six-Day War to May ’68—on the margins of the characters’ story yet central to their sense of self. De Gaulle, heard on the radio in the Jewish community center, had in the aftermath of the war called Jews “an elite people, sure of themselves and domineering.”⁸¹ The recent past reverberates into the present.

Kurys stages Anne’s desire to leave for Israel as a utopian and apolitical desire, motivated more by books than by deeply held or carefully articulated political consciousness or experience.⁸² Still, viewers seem not to have noticed Kurys’s evocation of these politics and many film critics bemoaned the lack of a clearly legible and identifiable political consciousness of the film’s heroine. Yet Anne’s desires and actions drive the plot and also speak to the kinds of feminist politics that were marginalized within memorialization of May ’68 but that had become central in late 1970s France. To grasp *Cocktail Molotov*’s politics demands taking seriously its figuration of sex and gender.

Ambivalent Sex and the *Jeune Fille*

We always assume nothing has happened in a young girl’s life because we have forgotten.

—Interview with Diane Kurys, *Des femmes en mouvement hebdo*

Most critics found *Cocktail Molotov* and its protagonists uninteresting.⁸³ They found the trio a pale echo of François Truffaut’s *Jules et Jim* (*Diabolo menthe* had already been compared to Truffaut’s first film, *Les quatre cents coups*) but did not take seriously Kurys’s claim that she had imagined her film as a counterpoint to the profoundly misogynist yet successful 1974 *Les valseuses* (*Going Places*) where “two men possess a woman.”⁸⁴ Just as few noticed how she

80. There was, for instance, the Jordanian battle of Karameh between Israeli and Palestine Liberation Organization forces on March 21, 1968. See Danan, *Les Juifs de France et l’État d’Israël*, 73–104. See also Coulon, *L’opinion française*, 197–210; and Isaacson, “From ‘Brave Little Israel,’” 275–428.

81. Quoted in Isaacson, “From ‘Brave Little Israel,’” 167–68.

82. Kurys claimed that *Cocktail Molotov* was less autobiographical than *Diabolo menthe*, but she explained in an interview that she, too, left for a kibbutz because “it was a way of escaping the milieu that oppressed her and of living her life as an adult.” See Chancel, “Diane Kurys parle de ses films.”

83. Rochu, “Interview.”

84. Interview with Diane Kurys, *Des femmes en mouvement hebdo*.

gestured to the heroine in Godard's *A bout de souffle* (*Breathless*) in an almost identical shot that opened *Cocktail Molotov*, signaling Kurys's feminist reimagining of the New Wave. Though Kurys said that she was not a "feminist activist," sex and gender lie at the heart of both films and their heroines' stories, at a time when second-wave feminism had gained visibility in French society.⁸⁵ As one journalist commented, *Diabolo menthe* charted the "awakening of sexuality, of political consciousness," at a time before the utopian cataclysm of May '68.⁸⁶ That juxtaposition was meaningful, showing how sex and politics were intertwined and that sex was a politics. While *Diabolo menthe* staged how teenage female sexuality was still subjected to repressive social norms, *Cocktail Molotov* "articulated May '68 with female experience."⁸⁷ It perfectly illustrated the very issues that had preoccupied many French women in the middle to late 1970s and had become the subject of politics. After all, from Michel Foucault's 1977 *History of Sexuality* to the work of Monique Wittig, Christine Delphy, and Guy Hocquenghem and the very public campaigns waged by radical feminists and the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire, sex was the urgent politics for many on the left. Both films were more contemporary than historical.

Female sexuality lies at the heart of each film. *Cocktail Molotov* fictionalizes most of the issues, debates, and campaigns that French feminists had been fighting for in the 1970s, namely, abortion, rape, and sexual pleasure. A central feature of the plot is Anne's concern with avoiding pregnancy. Leaving the parental home for a kibbutz means beginning her sexual life. Her first initiative—after she has run away from her home—is to go and visit her close friend (who has lent her books on life in kibbutzim) whose father, Dr. Goldmann, is a gynecologist. Her friend gives her contraceptive pills she has stolen from her father's drawer. Kurys sets this scene only months after the Neuwirth Act legalizing birth control in late 1967, but long before the 1975 legalization of abortion. Throughout the film Anne's recurring anxiety regarding the possible failure of her contraception (she forgets to take the pills) and possible pregnancy will affect the hitchhikers' trip. It reminds viewers that freedom on the road was a gendered affair: a scene shows Anne on her road trip taking her contraceptive pill, implicitly tying together space and freedom to reproductive rights for female subjects.⁸⁸ Anne is also the one who must cut short her road trip to secure an

85. Carrie Tarr explains that "Kurys' early films, particularly *Diabolo Menthe* [1977] and *Coup de Foudre* [1983], were welcomed as women's films by feminist critics because of their overtly women-centered content" (*Diane Kurys*, 7). On Kurys as feminist filmmaker, see Scollen-Jimack, "Diane Kurys."

86. Petit-Castelli, "Diabolo menthe."

87. Tarr, *Diane Kurys*, 40.

88. She is drinking a "diabolo menthe" at a highway cafeteria, clearly linking the first and second films.

abortion with the help of her father—something that some reviewers mocked, though in the film Anne jokes that she will first need to find an abortionist. She misses the barricades of May '68 because she is recovering in a Swiss clinic. Her freedom is a more ambivalent affair than that of her male companions, who remain passive in the face of her predicament.⁸⁹

Similarly, Anne's male companions are ignorant when it comes to female sexuality. A brief conversation between Anne and Bruno echoes some of the heated public debates that had shaken feminist and left circles over the recognition of rape as a crime against women in the preceding two years.⁹⁰ Bruno, the most politically engaged of the three, explains that "there is no *real* rape," while Anne laughs him off, saying only that "of course *real* rape exists" (my emphasis). The conversation is cut off abruptly. Sex emerges again, this time around the questions of female sexual pleasure. Bruno confesses to Frédéric that his Italian lover has not enjoyed their night together, only to conclude with a peremptory but still tentative "it must be in her head." Another telling exchange occurs after Anne goes to the gynecologist to confirm that she is pregnant. At the end, almost as an afterthought, she explains that, when she has sex with Frédéric, she experiences no pleasure. The issue is not her ability to experience sexual pleasure. She tells the (female) doctor that she knows "pleasure on my own." The doctor's response is another illustration of the strictures imposed on female sexuality: she advises Anne to "think very hard of" Frédéric and that only then "will pleasure come about, by itself," since "it's for him [*ç'est pour lui, vous verrez, ça ira*]." Anne does not react, and the scene stands as a vignette illustrating how female desire and pleasure are still not self-evident facts for women.

Neither film escapes tropes clearly centered on (white) normative heterosexuality. In *Diabolo menthe* Anne is still ignorant of most sexual matters, as the schoolyard conversations with her two best friends, Sylvie and Marie, reveal, since they talk of the various rumors, myths, and stories that surround sex, something they have not yet experienced. These sexual myths do not escape the particular context of post-Algerian War France. As Todd Shepard has noted, Kurys's film was yet another cultural text where sex and "fears of Arab men" are tied together: Sylvie recounts the story of "white slavery" with "white women kidnapped" in clothing stores and "sent to Arab countries"—a rumor

89. Critics and scholars have read the scene when Anne takes off her bra to be Kurys's attempt to gesture at feminist awakening. Most deem it clumsy, but her gesture needs to be framed within the context of the film's argument: sexual freedom for Anne only means, in 1968, discovering sexual pleasure and no longer having to resort to abortion secretly and illegally.

90. While rape has been considered a crime since 1810, these campaigns mobilized to have it redefined and tried in criminal courts. On this, see Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics*, esp. 193–203. See also Shepard, *Sex, France, and "Arab Men."*

that began circulating widely in these years. That scene—like another in which Sylvie informs her friends that, during sex, men can have a “two-meter-long penis”—was designed to cause hilarity among viewers, but no one noted its inscription of race, difference, and sex.⁹¹ In *Cocktail Molotov* it is male homosexuality (as opposed to the desirable possibility of female same-sex desire in *Diabolo menthe*) that is portrayed as outside the bonds of normality: Bruno jokes to a driver who has picked them up and is flirting with Anne that he is a “faggot,” and in another scene Frédéric reacts violently to the advances of a male driver, portrayed as somewhat menacing, in the darkness of the car at night. In both cases male homosexuality is marked as deviant and a source of fear and ridicule.

Heterosexuality remains a desirable norm, though in ambivalent and complicated ways. *Diabolo menthe* especially dramatizes conjugal heterosexuality’s impossibility. Anne and Frédérique’s parents are divorced, and it is her friend Muriel’s single father who attracts Frédérique, who has realized that her relationship with her long-distance boyfriend, Marc, is a mere romantic fantasy, devoid of sex and excitement. That incestuous motif (Frédérique and her friend’s father kiss) and the impossibility of their relation (he later introduces Frédérique to his girlfriend, a woman his equal in age and status) cause Frédérique’s first heartbreak. In 1963, before the “sexual revolution,” Kurys’s film stages lesbian desire as the only form of sexual agency (embodied in the character of Pascale). Similarly, in *Cocktail Molotov*, while Anne is in love with Frédéric, she appears to be detached from their experience as a couple: Frédéric asks her why she has never told him that she loves him, and she brings not Frédéric but Bruno to her appointment with the gynecologist. Here the couple functions only if embedded in a triangular logic of desire—something that Kurys said made the couple “less boring.”⁹² Nonetheless, in both films the only escape from oppressive and authoritarian social norms is running away, not alone but as a heterosexual couple: in *Diabolo menthe* Muriel runs away from home and school to live with her boyfriend “as if they were married,” and in *Cocktail Molotov* Anne initially plans to run away to a kibbutz as part of a couple rather than as a trio of fellow travelers.

Ultimately, Kurys’s films show that female autonomy is achieved through the simultaneous and related “awakening to sexuality, to political consciousness.” In *Diabolo menthe* it is Muriel who, to the shock of the other students, loudly screams (and repeats), “I say: *Piss off! [je vous dis MERDE!]*,” in the schoolyard for everyone to hear—a defiant gesture to the school’s authority. In *Cocktail Molotov* agency lies in the character of Anne: she is the one who decides

91. Shepard, *Sex, France, and “Arab Men,”* 168–69.

92. Chancel, “Diane Kurys parle de ses films.”

to run away and go to Israel, just as she decides that it is time for her and Frédéric to have sex for the first time. She declares that they must return to Paris after their car and money are stolen. She is also the one who has to cut short her road trip to seek an abortion. The politics of desire and sexual freedom situate bodies in public space. The choice of the “road movie” and of hitchhiking illustrates those longings. *Cocktail Molotov* is therefore especially striking because, unlike the photos and images of May ’68 and its barricades, which always featured men, here a woman decides to go on the road, alone.⁹³ Despite this autonomy, freedom is not fully accessible to Anne and remains an ambivalent state. It stands in stark contrast to her male companions’ agency as they merely follow and react after the fact—in many ways the last scene, when their attempt at political action is foiled (they are arrested as soon as they reach the demonstrations, thereby failing yet again), is symptomatic of the impotent and anecdotal masculinity that Kurys stages. Throughout the film, male, paternal authority figures are ineffectual, irrational, or antiquated.⁹⁴ Few critics and scholars have observed that sex and politics offer the language through which both films tell the story of a *jeune fille*’s coming of age. Kurys’s insistence on filming female experience, sexuality, and agency without any overt political message or radical aesthetics may have been another reason for some far-left figures to think of her film as overly concerned with “tenderness” and a “rose-tinted” version of history.

Conclusion

I am bored. I feel like I am in parentheses.

—Anne, *Cocktail Molotov*

At first glance, *Cocktail Molotov* might appear as yet another depoliticized tale of generational revolt and cultural emancipation. However, thinking of the (political) legacies of May ’68 means paying attention to the ways memories are manufactured in the margins, silences, and oblique (or anecdotal) references of cultural texts that seem to have little to do with politics.⁹⁵ If we think of the political as the “dissensual refiguration” of the realm of the “sensible,” we can trace how May ’68’s reconfiguration of the social and political imagination finds echoes, if unrealized, that traverse many cultural texts in the 1970s and 1980s.⁹⁶

93. Atack points this out in *May ’68 in French Fiction and Film*, 88–89. The publication of the May riot photographs by the Gamma Agency features only men; see Labro, *Les barricades de Mai*. On the gendering of youth travel, see Jobs, *Backpack Ambassadors*, 181–84.

94. Tarr also makes this point in *Diane Kurys*, 28–29.

95. On the difference between “the political” (*le politique*), namely, “the principles of law, power, and community,” and “politics” (*la politique*), namely, that which speaks to the regulation and activity of government, see Rancière, *Aux bords du politique*, 15–17.

96. Rancière, *Aux bords du politique*, 17.

Kurys's films are ambiguous texts that suggest a mode of understanding the specters of the past through the language of sex.

What might be most interesting about her early films is the ways they mediate and defer historical events. Things happen around their protagonists' lives. Individual testimony is shown to be the only way for one to "experience" and understand history. The very narrative forms Kurys has chosen (the still photographs of holidays in *Diabolo menthe*, the marks of temporality, the disconnected vignettes of *Cocktail Molotov*) evoke the incompleteness of the present and the impossibility of ever escaping memory's work on subjects, bodies, and stories.⁹⁷ Kurys's nostalgic inflection speaks to the kind of "reflective nostalgia" that, according to Boym, "dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity." Its tone can only be "ironic, inconclusive, and fragmentary," like Kurys's films.⁹⁸

Diabolo menthe is a film on the margins of May '68, unevenly tying together the specter of the Franco-Algerian War to French metropolitan life and the mapping of a post-Holocaust Jewish identity.⁹⁹ While some scholars have noted how Jewishness features in her films, few have analyzed how her mapping out the sex of politics and impossible access of history is the prism through which Kurys films her vision of postwar and post-Holocaust French (Ashkenazi) Jewish identity.¹⁰⁰ The "crisscrossing" of global and French politics continued haunting French culture well into the 1970s, inscribing May '68 within a longer genealogy, as both rupture and anecdote. As background to Anne's story, May '68 saturates the film. Kurys explained that she wanted "May '68 to be behind, in front, aside, elsewhere" to show that her protagonists did in fact "live May '68."¹⁰¹ Her filmic choice of the genre of the road movie in *Cocktail Molotov* filmed in midshots (as opposed to the claustrophobia of the singular authoritarian space of the high school and the close-ups in *Diabolo menthe*) disrupts conventional assumptions regarding the relation of the public, the political, space, and gender in narratives of May '68.¹⁰²

Most strikingly, the elaboration of a politics of history is embodied in a Jewish *jeune fille*'s coming of age and in the figuration of sex as politics.¹⁰³ They

97. On memory, see Chamarette, "Memory, Representation of Time, and Cinema."

98. Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, xviii, 50.

99. On postwar memory, see Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*. On French Holocaust memory, complicating Henry Rousso's "Vichy syndrome," see Azouvi, *Le mythe du grand silence*.

100. Higgins is an exception; see "Two Women Filmmakers Remember the Dark Years."

101. *Cocktail Molotov—un film de Diane Kurys*, 16.

102. On the lived experience of mobility for young Europeans (of which *Cocktail Molotov* is a post-68 cultural representation), see Jobs, *Backpack Ambassadors*.

103. Kurys, who refused to call herself a feminist, asserted that "nonetheless, *Diabolo Menthe* is for me a political act." Dugan, "Diane Kurys (Diabolo Menthe)."

offer a meditation on the ways gender, sex, and Jewishness were, for Kurys, at the heart of what made May '68.¹⁰⁴ Kurys mused that she had made *Cocktail Molotov* because she wanted to “remember and understand how she was, how she was made, and how she is today.”¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, we may read these films as articulations of displacement as a (gendered) mode of subjectivity. There is none of the *jouissance* associated with the May events.¹⁰⁶ Even while the events of May '68 are unfolding in Paris, Anne feels only boredom. Kurys's female characters long for an elsewhere that will allow them to escape the ordering of bodies in a community. They are displaced subjects, never quite at home in the world they inhabit. Kurys's nostalgia may be, in fact, symptomatic of the ambivalent realization that to be a female subject in the late 1970s is still to live “in parentheses.”

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104. I take my cue from Ross's argument regarding the “dissolving” of May '68's politics while calling our attention to what remains as politics (sex, gender, Jewishness) but could not be seen as politics by late 1970s and early 1980s French viewers (*May '68 and Its Afterlives*, 1).

105. Wachthausen, “May '68 en stop pour adolescents.” On the necessity of gender as a category of analysis in generational stories of May '68, see Pagis, “Repenser la formation des générations politiques.”

106. On *jouissance* in the iconography of May '68, see Banai, “Sensorial Techniques of the Self.”

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