

***LES LIEUX DE MÉMOIRE: FRENCH COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF
WORLD WAR II IN THE EVENTS OF MAY 1968***

A Thesis

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The Historical Analysis of How Nations Remember

As a way to justify power and explain injustices, historical production often reflects the myth-making processes in society, unveiling the fragile connections between memory and history. The French historian Pierre Nora coined the term *lieux de mémoire* to describe this connection in terms of the relationship between memory and the French construction of the nation's history.¹ Memory as a form of historical analysis was reevaluated in the mid-1980s in France. This followed a societal questioning of French involvement in the German occupation of World War II and a reexamination of how myths of French resistance had been created in collective memory and were affecting contemporary politics. As French historians began questioning their interpretations of World War II, they simultaneously began to reexamine their previous methods of writing about the War. In the following study, I plan to use the methodological results of these reevaluations of Nora's theory to examine the events in Paris in 1968 and the relationship between collective memory and history in twentieth century French politics. I believe that such an analysis will offer a unique insight to the events of May 1968 and the structure of French collective memory.

Memories of fascism and resistance became elements in the political crisis of 1968 and were used by the two main parties involved, the government and the

¹ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," in *Histoires: French Constructions of the Past: Postwar French Thought*, vol. I, (New

students. By investigating the interaction between French collective memory and the student's usage of World War II themes to criticize the Gaullist regime during 1968, it is possible to arrive at a new analysis of postwar French political and social history. Historian Henry Rousso stated that *lieux de mémoire* tend to emerge in times of crisis in French history. He wrote, "each new crisis has fed upon its predecessors: the Dreyfus Affair on the French Revolution, Vichy on the Dreyfus Affair, the Algerian war on Vichy."² With my project, I plan to continue his argument by proving that the memory of Vichy "fed" upon the events of 1968. In other words, the uprising instigated a renewed interest and significant societal questioning of the occupation years. The memory of France's wartime resurfaced and was manipulated by the protesting students to create political change.

Nora writes that "The study of the *lieux de mémoire*...lies at the intersection of two developments that in France today give it meaning: one a purely historiographical movement, the reflexive turning of history upon itself, the other a movement that is, properly speaking, historical: the end of a tradition of memory."³ The *lieu de mémoire* is a bridge leading from memory to history. It facilitates the "turning of history upon itself" and also diminishes the reliance on individual memory in place of selected collective memories. The *lieu de mémoire* is an interaction of both memory and history. The difference between the two entities lies in the specific intention of the thinker to create memory.

York: The New Press, 1995),631.

² Ibid., 646.

³ Ibid., 635.

These sites of memory can be “material, symbolic, and functional.”⁴ Nora’s theory thus widened the definition of what constitutes a collective memory; the *lieux de mémoire* can be anything from a building or a river, to a concept, such as glory or the power of a specific phrase or word. Based on the works of his predecessors, Maurice Halbwach and Frances Yates, Nora argued in his theory that *lieux de mémoire* are symbolic in context because of the way they explain the nature and fundamental basis from which the collective identity of a nation arises.

Halbwach, a sociologist, argued that memories of the individual derive from their specific *cadres sociaux* or position in society. According to his views, the collective experience of a diverse group of individuals is what determines the *lieux de mémoire*. Nora’s work re-evaluated Halbwach’s theory and took it a step further to show how the memory of the French nation has changed over the years and which symbols of nationalism continue, and thus pass from one generation to the next. Because the member of a society can not retain all memories on a daily basis, *lieux de mémoire* replace the disappearance of diverse memories and provide comfort to a society that needs to have its past represented in fixed symbols of significance and defined in terms of a common national vocabulary.

From the 1960s until the mid-1980s, historians writing about memory examined it in terms of *mentalités*. Historian Eugene Genovese defined *mentalités* as “systems of meaning embedded in the structures of everyday life...”⁵ The

⁴ Ibid., 639.

⁵ John B. Boles and Evelyn Thomas Nolen, eds., *Interpreting the South*,

study of *mentalités* led toward the examination of “beliefs that order and influence common experience.”⁶ In the 1980s, historians began acknowledging the physical and symbolic objects that trigger those beliefs. The significance that these sites of memory have played in modern French politics hints at the important and often determining role that collective memory can play in national politics.

Three examples of *lieux de mémoire* that historians have identified as continuing to emerge in French politics are the Bastille, the Arc de Triomphe, and the *Marseillaise*. Nora edited a well-known series of books entitled *Realms of Memory* that contains articles related to different *lieux de mémoire* found in French history including those mentioned above.⁷ The volumes in this series fall under seven specific categories of analysis, including French civilization and philosophy, memory, symbolism, national characteristics and nationalism, and include articles by well-known French intellectuals, such as Michel Vovelle, Phillippe Burrin and François Furet. The acknowledgment of *lieux de mémoire* in French political history has provided a unique perspective for the study of French collective history.

Several other histories concerning *lieux de mémoire* emerged from France in the mid-1980s. Historian Henry Rousso used *lieux de mémoire* in his examination of how French society has dealt and is dealing with collective

(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), p. 102.

⁶ Ibid., 98-99.

⁷ Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory*, vols. I-III, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

memories of Vichy, and took a psychoanalytical approach to his study of memory and World War II French history.⁸ He wrote that the students' usage of World War II images in the events of 1968 began a larger societal questioning of the wartime era and the "syndrome de Vichy."⁹ Rousso's work recognizes the connections between memory and history found during the student uprising. He writes, "La légitimité de la Résistance...ne fait pas de doute pour une majorité de Français de tous âges, à droite comme à gauche, ...depuis plusieurs années, des assauts révisionnistes et si son statut au sein de la mémoire nationale semble moins affirmé qu'auparavant."¹⁰ Another French Historian of the 1968 events, Alain Brossat, explained in 1994, "Surge dans l'après-68, l'objet mémoire collective se rattache pour une part à cet éclatement de l'histoire."¹¹ In 1989, the U.S. Historian, Simon Schama, in *Citizens* also referred to Nora's theory to discuss symbolism derived from the French Revolution in terms of *lieux de mémoire*.¹² The artwork around the walls of the Sorbonne and throughout the Latin Quarter represented the beginning of a re-examination of French history by the nation's younger generation as well as their historians.

⁸ Henry Rousso, "The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory Since 1944," in *Histories: French Constructions of the Past: Postwar French Thought*, vol. I, (New York: The New Press, 1995).

⁹ Henry Rousso, *Le Syndrome de Vichy (1944-198...)*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987), 111-113.

¹⁰ Eric Conan and Henry Rousso, *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas*, (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1994), 10.

Translation: "The legitimacy of the resistance...no doubt has been created for a majority of the French of all ages, right and left,...for many years, from the revisionist assaults and at the same time its status at the heart of the national memory seems less maintained than before."

¹¹ Alain Brossat, "Loitain goulag...", pp. 188-205, Dimitri Nicolaidis, ed., *Oublier nos crimes: L'amnésie nationale, une spécificité française*, (Paris: Editions Autrement, 1994), 255.

Translation: "Arising in post-'68, the idea of collective memory reattached itself for a while to this explosion of history."

¹² Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, (New

1968 and *Lieux de Mémoire*

I am using a combination of these historians' methods in my analysis of the events of 1968. These theories apply to my research because the students' criticism of their government in their artwork and literature is steeped in examples of their generation's interpretations of a collective memory about France in World War II. The resurfacing of World War II resistance and occupation memories converged in the form of French historical myth-making which reappeared during the social and political turmoil of 1968 went far beyond the riots in the Latin quarter of Paris. These resistance and occupation themes from World War II came from the dialogue of the government, the striking workers, the rioting students, and the intellectual community. A renewal of national myth-making spread into the different regions of France and encompassed the entire nation. The unique convergence of the resistance and occupation memories with the potentially revolutionary events of 1968 provides a useful case study of the relationship between French collective memory and French political history.

Nora's theory of *lieux de mémoire* leaves several issues unclear. One of the most difficult is the question of qualifying evidence. How does one demonstrate that a collective memory exists? Whose collective memory is it once it has been identified? It will be necessary in this work to discuss the difference

York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989).

between popular memory and collective memory and to define collective memory as it will be interpreted in this research. To answer these questions, this study will utilize a combination of the ideas found in the theories of Halbwachs and Nora.

Halbwachs makes distinctions between individual, historical, and collective memory.¹³ Throughout his work *On Collective Memory*, he argues that different groups within society experience events differently and therefore obtain different memories from those experiences. From my own analysis I understand that the past is not experienced from the same perspective by different individuals, groups, or societies. The most influential aspect of creating a collective memory lies in the shared present experience of different parties and groups in that society. The present influences on a community mixed with their memories of the past are what creates the *lieux de mémoire*. The present political and social situations could have the power to merge differing memories into a present collective memory that transcends the differing experiences of social classes, races, and genders.

The events of 1968 support Halbwachs' hypothesis that "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories."¹⁴ When writing about how memories are recalled, Halbwachs stated that memory is recollected "with the help of

¹³ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

landmarks that we always carry within ourselves.”¹⁵ In addition, he argues that while recalling a memory it is often reconstructed in the process by the specific social group that is recollecting it.¹⁶ In simpler terms, the present imposes itself on the past whenever a memory is recalled. It is by these means that collective memory is often manipulated for political purposes, often appearing in the form of propaganda. For example, De Gaulle’s regime played up the myth that the majority of the French citizens actively fought the Vichy regime during the occupation. De Gaulle relied on images of French resistance fighters to legitimize his authority as a victorious leader. Paul Connerton described this phenomenon in *How Societies Remember*. He argued that a ruling political party would use carefully selected memories from its nation’s history to dictate its political actions.¹⁷

The study of the manipulation of collective memory can be used as a way to interpret how the intellectual community, made up of mostly World War II veterans, influenced the student population in the late 1960s, with *lieux de mémoire* that referred to a collective memory of resistance and occupation. The students had this collective memory, or national myth, simply because their generation existed within and served as a function of the nation, not because they actually experienced the war or occupation. Applying Halwach’s theory of collective memory, the students of 1968 acquired their memories from members

¹⁵ Ibid., 175.

¹⁶ Ibid., 182.

¹⁷ Ibid., 17-18.

of the society that had the influence to manipulate those memories and turned them against the current French government.

Halbwachs argued that no recalled memory is exclusively our own; it can not be separated from the memories of the society we live in.¹⁸ Halbwach, however, does not explain how memory is transferred from generation to generation. Can one make the generalization that a collective memory encompasses an entire nation or an entire social group, such as the student population, and that their memories stem from the mnemonic interpretations of the generations before them? In this way I disagree with Halbwach's theory that it is only within the specific social group within a society that the individual acquires memory. This is where I turn to Nora's theory. Nora argues that *Lieux de mémoire* can transcend social differences, such as age, class, and sex, to create a collective memory. In the case of 1968 France, I would agree with Nora that it is possible. To explain this transfer between generations, my choice of evidence of collective memory from the events in 1968, the student artwork and theatrical literature, will prove my argument.

Another aspect of memory that will be addressed in this paper is the act of forgetting, for example, the student's selected forgetting of De Gaulle's military involvement with the Free French Movement. Instead Charles de Gaulle appeared in the students' artwork as the specter of Hitler, and the French National Police as the Nazi SS. This representation is ironic because the students also continued to recognize De Gaulle as the former head of the Free French

Movement in France. Understanding the portions of the past that are selectively left out often requires an examination of the type of myths that are replacing an actual historical reality; for example, the myth that the great majority of the French population during the occupation were active members in the resistance movement. In my case study, the students, and especially those who influenced them, such as older intellectuals and professors associated with the Sorbonne, tended to adhere to this myth and glorify the resistance movement's fight against fascism. They selectively forgot the large majority of ordinary French citizens that collaborated with the German occupation. In *How Societies Remember*, Connerton described this phenomenon as "organized forgetting."

Priorities and values seemed to change during the late 1960s in France. A new bourgeois class gained economic and social importance and appeared to place more emphasis on materialism than nationalism. Historians have described tensions occurred due to the imbalance between so called traditional French values and behavior with the growth and consumption patterns of the new modernized, technological society in the 1960s. For example, throughout subsequent accounts of the 1968 events, historians see the loss of "traditional French values," an ambiguous term which implied that a cultural change had occurred, a change from past traits found in French culture to new traits.¹⁹

The students' portrayal of themselves as a continuation of the French resistance movement and of the Gaullist government as a fascist regime appear to

¹⁸ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 36.

¹⁹ Serge Bernstein, *The Republic of de Gaulle, 1958-1969*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Press,

have been created out of this change and will be the focus of this study. This will be demonstrated by the images of World War II themes found in the artwork and literature from the Sorbonne produced during the years surrounding the May 1968 events. This study begins with the posters that most immediately influenced the events and then moves to the plays that grew out of the events and continued the protest into the early 1970s. The larger question suggested by this study is the mnemonic images from May 1968 and their role in occasioning and even causing the subsequent deconstruction of French myth-making by the French historians of the 1980s.

The sources to describe the working of a collective memory in France in 1968 come largely from the collection of student artwork and theatrical literature which exemplified the *lieux de mémoire* of the student protesters. The Atelier Populaire, a student-run organization that formed during the May events, created a newspaper wall around the Sorbonne. This exhibit displayed artwork depicting criticism of the tensions within France's political and economic systems. The majority of the posters contained themes of fascism. The students presented themselves as members of a resistance movement and the Gaullist regime as fascist occupiers. Theater played a similar role in tapping into the collective memory of the community during the uprising. The Odeon, occupied by students and artists from the Sorbonne, became a hotbed of political rhetoric through the many radical plays shown throughout the summer of 1968. As in the Atelier

1993):217.

Populaire's posters, the plays, part of the Théâtre Ouvert, exhibit themes from France's history and contain strong anti-fascist sentiment.

France Modernizes, 1958-68

Before the worker and student protests, the Fifth Republic, created and dominated by Charles de Gaulle since 1958, enjoyed a state of stability in which the government stayed free from the pressures of war or economic crisis. De Gaulle had organized the Free French Troops in 1940-44 to fight Hitler's invasion and to liberate France. In recognition of his successful leadership, the French National Assembly asked de Gaulle to form a new French government in 1958. After several crises in this Fourth Republic, such as the beginning of the Algerian war in 1954, de Gaulle was able to create the Fifth Republic in 1958. He changed the constitution of France by adding the president's office, which he then immediately filled himself in 1958. The creation of the office of president of the republic began de Gaulle's reign over the French government.²⁰ Under his leadership, the Fifth Republic, politically restructured from the instability of World War II, secured the country for almost ten years from 1958 to 1968.

Some historians have labeled de Gaulle, "monarch," for the way in which he used his new position. De Gaulle ended the crisis in Algeria by granting the country independence in 1962. With the aid of conservative Prime Minister

²⁰ The specific office of President of the Republic had not been created until De Gaulle came to power. This was due to the political instability in the French government as they attempted to restructure the country following World War II.

Georges Pompidou and Secretaries of State Yvon Bourges and Jacques Chirac, the Gaullist regime increased the industrialization of France at an overwhelming rate, bringing the nation to high economic standing by 1968.²¹ For the first time since the end of the Algerian War in 1962, France was in a comfortable and secure position politically and economically.

The 1960s marked years of solid economic growth in France that had reached a peak in 1968. France's unemployment rate for 1968 was 3%.²² The value of the franc remained stable. De Gaulle described France as "à la pointe" of modern development.²³ The lack of the colonial wars after 1961 increased the stability and wealth of the nation. Between 1959 and 1970 industrial production doubled and the gross national product increased on average 5.8% annually.²⁴ This economic growth in France created a new consumer society. After the economic depression of the 1930s and the shortages of World War II, French society had the ability to spend more money on the increased number of products that the economy produced.

However, along with the postwar economic prosperity throughout the country, France also faced the resultant societal problems that often accompany the grand-scale modernization of the economy. The mass migration of workers from the *campagne* to the city, a result of industrialization, increased social tensions among workers and the government. Workers traveling to the cities held

²¹Adrien Dansette, *Mai 1968* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1971), 386-387.

²²Lewis, "The Demise of the French Left," 19.

²³Ibid., 19.

²⁴Encarta 1994, s.v. "France" [CD-ROM] Microsoft Corporation, 1993.

expectations of stable employment conditions and salaries that the government could not guarantee to such a large number of people, especially with the already increased numbers of managerial, middle-class workers. This migration also affected the availability of higher paying, salaried jobs for the growing middle class causing more tensions. As prospects in the job market for the children of the middle classes shrank, concerns with the lack of government involvement in the creation of employment increased. Between 1958 and 1968, the French government failed to recognize the extent of these social changes or the tensions they had created, and took no steps to expand the job market to meet the needs of the new society whose economy was growing steadily due to modernization. Because the Fifth Republic had increased French industry to the point that it created social tensions, members of society perceived that the government had a responsibility to address these social issues.

Mai 1968

Frustrations heightened by growing modernization arose out of the economic situation. By 1968, the *mélange* of a newly industrialized economy and a traditional consumer society caused political turmoil. Students at the Sorbonne demanded education reforms that would provide them with the necessary technical training that would enable them to find jobs after graduation. Workers, such as those at the Renault factory, wanted the government to impose regulations on their employers that would provide the workers with more job stability,

benefits and over-all control over their economic situations. At the time, the only citizens that appeared to be satisfied with the changes brought about by the economic growth were members of the managerial, middle class. Violent student riots and protests and worker strikes resulted from these tensions, and the government was called upon to ratify the social system to change at a rate equivalent to that of the economy. In other words, the government was expected to create new jobs to meet the needs of the larger numbers of people moving to the cities to work in industry and to have a hand in regulating the authority of the plant and factory managers in terms of the worker's salaries and benefits. De Gaulle's plan to solve the imbalance caused by modernization, however vaguely proposed to the public, focused on reforming the economy. He announced his plan in an extremely patriotic address to the French public on May 24. There he focused on the economy: "Adapter notre économie non pas à telles ou telles catégories d'intérêt particulier, mais aux nécessités nationales et internationales du présent, en améliorant les conditions de vie et de travail...."²⁵ The rest of the speech is a means by which the state could achieve the goal of adapting the economy to the society.

The General had tried once before to reform France's economic system. In 1967 de Gaulle created a program titled *intéressement*. The General designed the program as a profit-sharing scheme to provide workers with a material interest

²⁵Charles De Gaulle, "Allocution Du Général De Gaulle", 24 May 1968, comp. Adrien Dansette, *Mai 1968* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1971): 418-419.

Translation: "To adapt our economy not only to those categories of particular interest, but to the present national and international necessities, in improving the conditions of life and of work..."

in the welfare of their industries. De Gaulle aimed at combatting the increasing signs of worker alienation from society and the apparent lack of individuality in the industrial process. The workers disliked the program because it defined only vaguely the terms of wage raises, the issue more relevant to the workers. During the May 1968 events, Pompidou remembered the program. He realized that it may have worsened rather than helped the workers' frustration by avoiding problems pertaining to their daily lives, and so proposed new worker contracts. These contracts offered a solid economic gain instead of vague promises of future raises by increasing the SMIG (minimum wage) by 35%.²⁶ Pompidou's program, called the Accord de Grenelle, was issued on May 25-26 but came too late in the workers' opinions and only increased their determination to continue the strikes.

The debates between the different groups during the May protests over the alterations of society caused by modernization continually returned to examples from France's military and political history. References to past French military victories over oppressive governments and ruling classes echoed in the discourse from all sides of the May uprising. While the government used the wartime themes of victory and resistance to justify their authority, the student population relied on the themes of occupation and collaboration to strengthen their protests. The government referred to its past victories after World War II, and included such accomplishments as the increase in industrialization and modernization of the economy and the relative stability of the Gaullist regime in comparison with

²⁶Luther P. Carpenter, "France in 1968: A Breakdown of the Welfare State" *Tocqueville Review* 5 (1983):89.

the political instability in other nations. De Gaulle himself made reference to his personal successes with the Free French troops from 1940-44. De Gaulle reminded the public of his ten years of governing France after the trials of World War II occupation. He recreated himself in the image of the savior of French independence from German control.

In a massive show of French nostalgia, the general held a Gaullist Manifestation, or large political parade, on the Champs-Élysée on May 30, 1968, including a ceremony under the Arc de Triomphe. Henri Duvillard, Ministre des Anciens Combattants, and Jacques Chaban-Delmas, President de l'Assemblée Nationale, stood at the Arc de Triomphe which was decorated with French flags.²⁷ Soldiers in dress uniform surrounded the symbol of French military pride. The *Marseillaise*, the French national anthem first played in 1792, blared out of loud speakers over a crowd of thousands, demonstrating a symbolic patriotism traditional of France's past. The great French military leaders, including de Gaulle, rode down the Champs Élysée and through the Arc de Triomphe in celebration of victory for the nation and the French people. The government expected this event to be reminiscent of France's past patriotic demonstrations. The “manifestation” was meant to emphasize that the first goal of the government was to represent the people and to reassure the citizens of Paris at a time when they had serious questions about its stability. Over the massive crowds a loud speaker announced, "Chacun son tour. Après les émeutiers, le Peuple."²⁸

²⁷Lewis, “The Demise of the French Left,” 16-20.

²⁸Frank Georgi, “Le Pouvoir est dans la rue” *Vingtième siècle*, vol. 48 (1995): 54-55.

In France's past, the great leaders of the nation, including Napoleon, performed a similar ceremony to emphasize the stability of their reign. De Gaulle tapped into this political memory believing that he knew the memory that it would evoke in French citizens and the meaning that they would apply to it. Having elected to forget the fact that the Wehrmacht had also paraded down the Champs Elysées to the Arc de Triomphe, De Gaulle's attempt to recall a collective memory was lost on the students and other protesters who had already selected another memory from French history to apply to their current government. In this case, the *lieux de mémoire*, the march to the Arc de Triomphe, served as a bridge between two opposing memories within French and especially Parisian society.

The Fifth Republic used the demonstration at the Arc de Triomphe to legitimize its power by returning to French traditions dating back to the days of Napoleon. At the Gaullist Manifestation on May 30, veteran soldiers from World War II sang and marched carrying several French national flags mixed with the English and United States' national flags to symbolize the importance of international cooperation and perhaps to evoke memories the Allied Forces' collaborative victory in World War II.²⁹ On the same day as the Gaullist Manifestation, the President of the Republic also dissolved the National Assembly giving the French public the opportunity to reelect a new government. Dissolving the National Assembly and planning the manifestation on the same day were meant to show the public that the Gaullist regime was prepared to respond to the

Translation: "Everyone will have his turn. After the rioters, the people."

²⁹ Georgi, "Le pouvoir est dans la rue," 58-59.

society's desire for change in governmental authority. The President of the Republic was giving the students their opportunity for change, only in a more legal and traditional manner by providing them an opportunity to vote. In his speech at the "manifestation," De Gaulle attempted to play down the significance of the student uprising. He referred to other international situations of student revolts, such as those at Berkeley in the United States and at the universities in Czechoslovakia, and discussed how those foreign governments had handled their respective situations. He did this to emphasize that the French student revolt should be seen not as a world phenomenon but as a national crisis to which the Fifth Republic would calmly respond.

The student population, however, was not swayed by the nostalgic display of power by the Gaullistes and continued after May 24th to demand immediate changes from their government. Their initial request was for the reform of their traditional education system, but as the protests continued, student goals broadened to the overthrow of the entire Gaullist government. Students in 1968 instigated the rioting and occupation of the Sorbonne for several reasons all stemming from their discontent with the current education system in France. The students followed a conservative university curriculum that had existed since its creation by Napoleon. This ancient university curriculum had not been designed to accommodate the large number of students that filled the universities in 1968. With severe overcrowding, the professors photocopied and sold class notes to the students as an alternative to attending classes. The education system needed to be upgraded to accommodate the massive influx of young students.

The majority of students entering the university in 1968 had grown up in the peaceful "golden age of de Gaulle" in which France maintained a strong economy. The French unemployment rate of 3% in the late 1960s increased the students' concerns about finding employment after graduation. Unemployment in 1968 was at its lowest in years, but the majority of available jobs tended to be found in factories or industries under the supervision of a manager. The students feared that they would not find managerial or professional jobs in a market that catered to technically trained workers. The ancient university education system did not include courses pertaining to technology and industry, and the students felt unprepared for this new job market. French students in 1968 observed other student revolts against governments, such as in Japan, Germany and the United States, and began to question the peaceful state of France's republic in view of the students' own concerns. Student demands addressed to the government, specifically to the French Minister of Education, included a reform of the education system that would alter the criteria for receiving diplomas. These desired reforms would replace the more classical education courses with a more technical and vocational oriented curriculum that would better prepare the students for the new industrial job market. Public letters from the students to the ministers of education and interior, Alain Peyrefitte and Christian Fouchet respectively, expressed the students' frustrations.

It was particularly the lack of adequate employment for newly graduated students that concerned the majority of student organizations. UNEF (Union Nationale des Etudiants de France), led by Jacques Sauvageot, published a letter

of complaint from the Université de Strasbourg in 1966 titled, "De la misère en milieu étudiant." The letter, one of the first written documents by students protesting the education system, expressed the students' sense of alienation from society and of neglect by their government. The document called for reform of the educational criteria to include more practical courses that would help the students rise in society, as well as an increase in student economic aid.

As the May riots unfolded, the student goals changed from these institutional and economic demands to a philosophical demand for the restructuring of the entire French government. To justify their demands, the students used three themes. They focused on economic insecurities, international concerns, such as the Vietnam War, and reassessment of French military and social involvement in World War II. Many French worker organizations joined the students with similar calls for governmental restructuring or an end to the conservative Gaullist regime. Their demands remained economically rather than ideologically based when compared to the students', but the two groups often joined together throughout the months of May and June to support each other's respective causes.

Student Protest and World War II Themes

The students used themes from the second world war to protest the Gaullist regime. The theme of France's wartime experience was best displayed in the student artwork and posters of the Atelier Populaire which decorated the Latin

Quarter for several months after May 3. During the student occupation of the Sorbonne, a group of student artists occupied the studios at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and created the Atelier Populaire, or Ex-Ecole des Beaux Arts, on May 16, 1968.³⁰ The organization opened the doors of the school to the protesting public and provided them with materials and fliers with step-by-step instructions for creating posters.

Aside from encouraging public involvement in this artistic form of protest, the primary goal of the Atelier Populaire was to produce pictorial critiques of the Gaullist regime. The organization contained a student formed General Assembly that discussed which political issues to address in the posters based on their discussions with other student and worker organizations. For each, they asked two questions: Was the political idea it posed fair? and Did the poster appropriately address this idea?³¹ The Atelier Populaire refused to sell its creative political statements for fear that their artistic expressions would be exhibited as bourgeois cultural decorations. Using the surrounding walls of the occupied Sorbonne, the Atelier Populaire created a wall journal that exhibited themes from France's past to express the students' desire for change in the current education system and their frustrations with the Gaullist regime's neglect of their situation. The posters drew on several historical eras to justify statements, and used references to more violent times in France's history to express opposition to

³⁰Robin Mitchell, "The May 1968 Student Revolution" (Art History 540 paper, University of Kentucky, Broadside Collection, unnumbered box, 1977), 10-11.

³¹ Mesa, *Mai '68: Les Affiches de l'Atelier Populaire de l'ex-ecole des Beaux-Arts*, Paris: Editions S.P.M., 4-5.

the authority of the Fifth Republic. The themes of the artwork can be divided into two categories: De Gaulle and his government presented as fascists or occupiers, and the students' questioning of the French resistance movement.

“Un gouvernement d’assassins” was the general sentiment expressed by the student protests.³² Although the Gaullist government did nothing more than imprison and fine the rioting students, the protesters portrayed the government as a regime of murderers, similar to Hitler’s Nazi regime. Fliers distributed throughout the events greatly exaggerated the physical abuse inflicted on the students. Several of these publications even made reference to the atrocities of the holocaust. A large number of posters from the walls of the Sorbonne are written in German script and have the appearance of World War II German propaganda posters. “Der Reichstag in Flammen!,” “Brave Burger als Geiseln an die Wand gestellt!” exclaims one poster.³³ “Wahle zum Reichstag Adolf Hitler und seine Getreuen!” reads another.³⁴

These World War II German propaganda posters re-introduced during the political turmoil of 1968 provide an example of how the students related the social and political tensions of their era to a collective memory of fascist control in France during World War II. Another poster read: “Unsere letzte Hoffnung: Hilter” and showed a mass of working class people with thin, hollowed out,

³² Les Tracts de Mai 1968, Microfiche #7893, unknown author.

³³ Les Tracts de Mai 1968, #7886.

³⁴ Les Tracts de Mai 1968, #7886.

Translation: “The Reichstag is in Flames!”, “Good citizen, you are held hostage against the wall!”, “Choose at the Reichstag Adolf Hitler and his faithful!”

furrowed faces crowding around the name Hitler.³⁵ Posters like these specifically tapped at the collective memory of the German occupation of France. Another flier read “Des centaines et des centaines de BLESSES peuplent les hopitaux, l’ORDRE est retabli...mais le regime Gaulliste a montre son vrai visage.”³⁶ The “vrai visage” of De Gaulle from the perspective of the student protesters was that of Adolf Hitler. Much of the artwork, either posters or newspaper cartoons, conveyed the mistrust of the public with their government, the feeling that De Gaulle was not only becoming a dictator, but that he had been hiding his true political intentions from the public. “Ca me rajeunit!” states a caricature of De Gaulle in a cartoon as he affixes a Hitler-style mustache to his face.³⁷

These images of de Gaulle first appeared with the illegal expulsion of the student leader, Cohn-Bendit, after the May 3 street fighting. Although Cohn-Bendit was German, the student organizations referred to his Jewish heritage to make the racist connection to Hitler’s cruel treatment of the French Jews in World War II. Pierre Peuchemaurd, a leftist student sarcastically wrote, “Cohn-Bendit à Dachau!”³⁸ Other posters played with the same theme: “Nous sommes tous des juifs Allemands,” “Nous sommes tous indésirables,” “Halte à l’expulsion de nos camarades étrangers!”³⁹ Of the more violent posters, one

³⁵ Les Tracts de Mai 1968, #7886.

³⁶ Ibid.

Translation: “Hundreds and hundreds of injured people at the hospital, the Order was restored...but the Gaullist regime showed its true face.”

³⁷ Les Tracts de Mai 1968, Microfiche #7856.

Translation: “That rejuvenates me!”

³⁸ Pierre Peuchemaurd, “Le 30 Mai Vu Par Un Étudiant Gauchiste,” *Plus vivants que jamais*, comp. Adrien Dansette, *Mai 1968* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1971): 432.

³⁹ Mesa, *Mai ’68: Les Affiches de l’Atelier Populaire de l’ex-ecole des Beaux-Arts*, Paris:

consisted of a large figure of Hitler. The dictator held a mask painted with the face of de Gaulle down from his face, in place of the swastika on his armband was the symbol of the Free French Movement.⁴⁰ In another poster created by Atelier Populaire, the figure of de Gaulle struck the characteristic pose of the Nazi salute. A large black question mark sat over the president's head contrasted with a bright orange background.

By comparing de Gaulle's regime with the Nazis under Hitler, the students questioned the entire basis of the Fifth Republic by representing the French government as a fascist regime. With this artwork, the student protesters reminded the public that the Sorbonne had been closed down only one other time: under the Vichy government at the direction of Petain and the Gestapo.⁴¹ The protesters attempted to warn the public about what could happen to their society if they allowed the Gaullist regime to maintain its power. Because De Gaulle had been in power for ten years in 1968, he had achieved an indestructible image in the eyes of the French students and working classes as a French dictator with no significant political opposition. Another poster simply contains a list of fascist dictators and adds de Gaulle: "Patakos, Salazar, Franco, De Gaulle."⁴² Historian Philippe Forest explained that the dialogue of the students in these posters, "dit

Editions S.P.M., 24.

Translation: "We are all German Jews," "We are all undesirables," "Stop the expulsion of our foreign comrades!"

⁴⁰ Atelier Populaire, untitled, poster, 1968, University of Kentucky Special Collections.

⁴¹ Federation des Étudiants Révolutionnaires, "For the Creation of the Revolutionary Youth Organisation," 6 May 1968, comp. Vladimir Fisera, *Writing on the Wall* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978.), 92.

⁴² Mesa, *Mai '68: Les Affiches de l'Atelier Populaire de l'ex-ecole des Beaux-Arts*, 30.

bien la confusion...antifasciste.”⁴³ The fear of fascism, based on memories from wartime occupation, placed De Gaulle as the next Hitler and the student protesters as the new resistance movement.

In addition to the Gaullist caricatures, the Atelier Populaire devoted the majority of its artwork to attacking other organization within the Gaullist regime, particularly the D.C.R., the Committees for the Defense of the Republic. De Gaulle had attempted to form an organization that would include informers who would support government efforts to control national radio, television, and press.⁴⁴ Often, the posters would include the meeting times and dates for the D.C.R. so that protesters could prevent its attempt to organize. For example, one poster specifically protested the government's censoring of the ORTF (Office de Radiodiffusion et Télévision Française), the French national broadcasting authority for radio and television. The ORTF went on strike opposing the censorship. When the police stationed themselves around the headquarters to urge the ORTF workers to continue their jobs one poster noted: “La police vous parle tous les soirs à 20h.” This and another poster meant to remind citizens that if the police intimidated the national radio and television company, then, as in the 1940s occupation by German Nazis, citizens would be intimidated in their own houses by way of a censored, government controlled media. Under a drawing of

⁴³ Philippe Forest, “Mai ’68,” Pierre Brunel, ed., *Dictionnaire des Mythes D’aujourd’hui*, (Paris: Editions du Rocher, 1999), 463.

Translation: “Says well about the confusion...antifasciste.” The posters show the confusion that the students have in trying to define their own government as fascist by comparing it to the Vichy government.

⁴⁴ Klein, Peter. Art History 540 paper, p. 11.

a menacing, armed policeman this other poster reads, "La police, à l'ORTF, c'est la police chez vous."⁴⁵

The students' representations of the French police also exhibited violent images. Painted in bright red or orange or striking black and white, the artists pictured the police as brutal aggressors, dressed in Nazi uniforms with swastikas, holding large police clubs raised menacingly. One poster presents an officer as a huge gorilla brandishing a banana/club in the shape of the Croix de Lorraine, the symbol used by the Free French Movement.⁴⁶ Another poster shows a policeman, who is wearing a swastika, running over the body of a naked woman. The woman symbolizes Marianne, the maternal symbol of the French nation being raped by the French/Nazi policeman, just as the police are imagined by the students to be brutalizing innocent citizens during the protests. The threat expressed in the poster's text depicted the police, like Nazi officers during the occupation, invading the privacy of citizens in their homes. In fact at the end of the student protests, on June 27 1968, the French police forced their way into the occupied Ex-ecole des Beaux-Arts, disbanded the students and artists and ended poster production at the Atelier Populaire.⁴⁷

Aside from direct attacks on the Gaullist regime, the students also made references in their artwork to the French resistance movement. It is beneficial to refer to Nora's theory of memory that emphasizes the inherent myth-making

⁴⁵ Atelier Populaire, "La Police, à l'ORTF, c'est la police chez vous," poster, 1968, University of Kentucky Special Collections, Broadside Collection, unnumbered box.

Translation: "The Police, at the ORTF, is the police at your house."

⁴⁶ Mesa, Mai '68: *Les Affiches de l'Atelier Populaire de l'ex-ecole des Beaux-Arts*, (Paris: Editions S.P.M.), 34.

involved in collective memory. Post-war myths had been created in French society about the resistance movement during the German occupation as well as myths about collaborators. Not until the mid to late 1980s did historians distance themselves enough from these collective memories to re-evaluate all the different facets of French history during the World War II years. It is, however, the myths found in the collective national memory that these posters are playing upon and attempting to renew. Daniel Cohn-Bendit admitted, “Nous avons été, sur le coup, prisonniers de la mythologie. Aujourd’hui, nous vivons sur la nostalgie.”⁴⁸ At the same time as the students are questioning resistance myths, they are also trying to associate their struggles with those of the former resistance movement.

In making reference to the resistance movement in the artwork, the students turned to the symbol of the French Free Movement, the Croix de Lorraine. The Croix de Lorraine, a double cross, holds two symbolic meanings in contemporary France; it is both the religious symbol of Saint Jeanne D’Arc and the secular symbol for the resistance movement. To question memories of the often glorified resistance movement, the students drew the Croix de Lorraine on the armbands of the French police in Heil Hitler salutes or on De Gaulle’s uniform while he sported a Hitler-style mustache. The students often mocked the Free French Resistance Movement by making fun of the myth of De Gaulle as the successful founder and most important leader of the movement.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁸ *Mai ’68*, Collection “Les Médias et l’Événements,” (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1988), 60.

Translation: “We were all at the time, prisoners of the mythology. Today, we live on the nostalgia.”

De Gaulle had referred to his involvement in the resistance movement to legitimize his authority. When the resistance movement itself underwent a re-examination, however, the credibility of De Gaulle's legitimacy was also re-opened. Had he been acting as President of the Republic or as a monarchical dictator? For example, one poster shows De Gaulle wearing an angel costume, brandishing a sword, and standing triumphantly over a dead French woman. The cartoon of the general reads, "C'est moi, l'ange exterminateur!"⁴⁹ To emphasize that myths of the resistance had been drilled into the minds of the French citizens, the students created a poster with the profile of a man's head with a drill boring into his skull. The Croix de Lorraine formed the top of the drill.⁵⁰ Another poster shows the arms of a drowning person reaching out of a body of water. The resistance symbol rests above the image and keeps the figure underwater.⁵¹

Having grown up with glorified myths of the French Resistance movement, the students related their struggles for change to that of the resistance fighters battling the Vichy government and German occupation. The irony of the students' use of the nation's past is the comparison between De Gaulle, a leader of the Free French Resistance Movement, with a fascist dictator, such as Maréchal Pétain and Hitler. At the same time, the artwork questions the role of France in World War II and by doing so, also questions the authority of the former resistance leader to govern as President of the Republic.

⁴⁹ Mesa, *Mai '68: Les Affiches de l'Atelier Populaire de l'ex-ecole des Beaux-Arts*, 16.

Translation: "It's me, the angel exterminator."

⁵⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁵¹ Ibid., 12.

Politically-charged plays written and performed immediately before, during and just after the social uprising demanded the justification for De Gaulle's ten-year control over the country in even more radical terms than the students' artwork. While these plays produced in 1968 do not place the same emphasis on the symbols of the resistance movement, such as the Croix de Lorraine, they do make many references to the country's years under a fascist dictatorship and foreign occupation. Though not as well-known, the radical plays created in 1968 also represent a *lieu de mémoire* that addresses France's role in wartime occupation.

On May 16, 1968, students and artists from the Sorbonne occupied the Odeon and converted the national theater into a stage for their political protests. André Malraux, Minister of Culture, had recently given the proprietorship of the theater over to the playwright and director, Jean-Louis Barrault.⁵² Even so at the start of the rioting, Barrault turned against Gaullist-supporter Malraux and hung a sign on the door of the theater that read: "L'application de l'imagination au service de la révolution."⁵³ With the encouragement of Barrault, over 2,500 students and artists occupied the Odeon and produced many radical works of theater that appeared both during and after the events of May 1968.⁵⁴ Barrault himself wrote a play criticizing the state and supporting the student and worker protests.

⁵² Frederick Brown, *Theater and Revolution*, (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 443.

⁵³ Ibid., 448.

Translation: "The application of the imagination at the service of the revolution."

⁵⁴ Ibid, 446-447.

Two play-writes in particular contributed prolifically to the body of radical theater that grew out of the 1968 uprising. Of the many play-writes who contributed at the Odeon, Jean-Louis Barrault and Benedetto remained active participants in the French literary scene for many years after 1968. As of November 1999, Benedetto manages a performing arts group called the André Benedetto Company at the Théâtre des Carmes. Because of their continued success, this study will focus on only some of the plays written and performed by these authors in 1968 and analyze them as examples of the ways in which they, like the students, used *lieu de mémoire* to criticize the gaulliste regime.

Barrault's pièce de théâtre, *Jarry Sur la Butte*, attacks the growth and dominance of French industry over what he identifies as traditional French society. He creates one Jarry, who multiplies into numerous characters each representing a different facet of French society. For example, the play introduces "Jarry le ventre," "Jarry le double," "Jarry la tête," and "Jarry le coeur." The other two main roles in the play belong to a Dr. Faustroll, a philosopher, and Père Ubu, a king, both of whom Barrault states are a part of "Jarry." Borrowing several characters from the famous play *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry and using Jarry himself, Barrault's Père Ubu bears striking resemblance to De Gaulle. Barrault questions the glorified military career of General De Gaulle by placing Père Ubu in a military hospital where he regally criticizes the wounded soldiers of the "armée des hommes libres" who were badly beaten by the "armée réelle." At the same time, however, the soldiers and other leaders continue to cheer Père Ubu

and call him “le plus grand homme libre.”⁵⁵ Barrault implies that De Gaulle’s involvement in the Free French Movement was not as valiant a fighting experience as the President of the Republic advertised. Just as De Gaulle in 1968 appeared to the students and protesters to claim almost monarchical authority, Barrault’s Père Ubu loudly proclaims his own absolute power.

Another reference to resistance myths appears in a scene where several of the actors are riding bicycles and philosophizing about religion. Another cyclist named Jewey Jacobs enters on the course and dies in a violent accident. Immediately after the accident, another actor, “a spectator,” addresses the audience and informs them that the event was only an hallucination. Here Barrault makes reference to the tendency of French society to selectively forget its involvement in the fate of the Jewish race during the holocaust and the plans for the Final Solution and instead to dwell on the supposed involvement in the resistance movement.

The final act of *Jarry Sur la Butte* presents Barrault’s political opinions about the Gaullist regime the most poignantly. All of the characters, including the four Jarrys, lie ill in a hospital where the doctor explains that they are dying of nostalgia. In the introduction to the play, Barrault states that “le mal de Jarry, c’est déjà le mal de notre siècle.”⁵⁶ Père Ubu, the De Gaulle figure, confronts his consciousness who shows him how he is responsible for all the chaos in the society. When the sick Père Ubu dies, the “Jarry le ventre” disappears. When

⁵⁵ Jean-Louis Barrault, *Jarry Sur la Butte*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 65.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 10.

one of the soldiers from the “armée des hommes libres” dies, the “Jarry le coeur” disappears. At the end of the play, only Dr. Faustroll, who represents the majority of the French public, survives. He addresses the audience and explains that the society of “Jarry,” or Barrault’s concept of French society, depends on continual progress.

Dr. Faustroll states, “En ces temps où le métal et la mécanique sont devenus tout-puissants, il faut bien que l’homme, pour survivre, devienne plus fort que les machines!”⁵⁷ The French society in the late 1960s had built new industries and begun to rely on machines to run production rather than human labor. The fact remained, however, that a major portion of that economic progress would have to rely on the continual and simultaneous transformation of society, or accommodate rural citizens to urban communities and job markets. By emphasizing the need to address the affects of economic growth on France’s demographics, Barrault’s play fulfilled a dual purpose. He joins the students of the Sorbonne in demanding reforms from the government by emphasizing un-addressed problems brought about by economic progress, and in questioning the authority of De Gaulle by mocking the importance of the French resistance movement and the general’s wartime role. Performed for the public at the L’Elysée Montmartre in 1970, Barrault’s play serves as another example of

Translation: “The sickness of Jarry, it is already the sickness of our century.”

⁵⁷ Ibid., 158.

Translation: “In these times where the metal and the mechanical have become all powerful, it is necessary for man, to survive, to become stronger than machines!”

World War II themes used to demand changes in the current French government as well as to force the society to re-evaluate its wartime history.

André Benedetto's plays tend to focus on what he considered to be the imperialistic nature of the Gaullist government. Reflecting his political position as a Marxist, Benedetto's works include more international political issues, such as the Vietnam War and France's involvement in foreign politics. His general argument focuses on the idea that De Gaulle has been more concerned with building a strong consumer society than with addressing human rights issues, both domestically, in the case of the growing bourgeoisie class versus the working class, and internationally, in the case of supporting the United States' fight in Vietnam. The French Marxists in 1968 seized on the political instability caused by events like the student riots and campaigned for a larger following. The Marxists hoped to provide a communist leader to replace de Gaulle in the elections that followed the May events. The characters in Benedetto's plays compare their struggles against De Gaulle's government to the resistance movement against the Vichy government.

In an interview following the publication of one of his plays in 1969, Benedetto made the distinction between "men of action," the play-writes and artists involved in the protests, and "men of politics." He wrote that the "men of action" are the men who are able to transcend collective thought and make

immediate changes in the society.⁵⁸ He must have viewed the uprising in 1968 as an ideal opportunity for change led by men of action.

In his other 1968 production *Le Petit Train de Monsieur Kamodé*, Benedetto presented his vision of the effects of capitalism on politics. All the scenes take place on a train, a metaphor for France. Monsieur Kamodé works as the conductor (De Gaulle) and the passengers and employees represent the citizens of France. In the play, Benedetto complains that the influence that French capitalism has had on French politics under De Gaulle has created an “anonymous society” where the actions of its citizens do not matter because humans have become replaceable with machines in industries. He compares the Gaullist regime’s partnership with French industry to a collaboration of a fascist regime against the state by using the term “kamodéllaborateurs.” The names of the actors in the play also hint at this collaboration theme. The head of Monsieur Kamodé’s public opinion bureau is called Signal D’Alarme. The alarm signal rings whenever Monsieur Kamodé says or does anything that might lower him in public opinion. The leader of his propaganda and public dialogue is called Ecran de Fumée. This smoke screen goes up to shield the public from the reality of Monsieur Kamodé’s political actions.

The play begins with Monsieur Kamodé seated on a throne with women surrounding him shouting that he should be crowned.⁵⁹ Reminiscent of Louis XIV, his continual refrain of “l’Etat, c’est moi ouah ouah” exhibits his

⁵⁸ André Benedetto, *Zone Rouge, Feux Interdit*, Paris: P.J. Oswald, 1969.

⁵⁹ Andre Benedetto, *Le Petit Train de Monsieur Kamode*, Paris: P.J. Oswald, 1969, 19.

monarchical ego.⁶⁰ Ecran de Fumée, who speaks for Monsieur Kamodé many times in the play, tries, as De Gaulle did during the Gaullist Manifestation, to lead the citizens in a rendition of La Marseillaise. Halfway through the national anthem his view of the public as a tool that he needs to manipulate comes out in the lyrics. Quickly Signal D'Alarme announces, "GAAAAARE DAA vou!" In Monsieur Kamodé's first grand speech to his public he speaks about his loyal collaborators who he claims are found night and day in "mes usines, et mes chantiers, dans mes écoles, et dans mes universités, et dans mes champs de blé, ..."⁶¹

The main characters exhibit a strong paranoia about collaboration and conspiracy that preempts the creation of different means of control over the potentially revolutionary society. One of these means of control is through the mistress of Kamodé, Arachné, who Benedetto invents to represent the national society of railroads and the mass industrialization of the country. Asserting his control over Arachné, Kamodé, speaks, "Tu m'appartiens belle Arachné. Je fais de toi ce qui'il me plaît. Je tourne autour de toi, comme autour de mon os!"⁶² After manipulating several other national institutions in the name of progress and modernization, Signal D'Alarme, representing public opinion, realizes the extent of Kamodé's manipulation and honestly reports to society, "...il utilise le service

⁶⁰ Ibid., 95.

Translation: The state is me, yes, yes.

⁶¹ Ibid., 26.

Translation: my factories, and my buildings, in my schools, and in my universities, and in my corn fields,...

⁶² Ibid., 39.

Translation: You belong to me, Archné. I do with you what I please. I turn away from you, like I

public à son usage exclusif et préférentiel.”⁶³ In the same way, De Gaulle was accused of focusing his political glory on the international economic status and modernization of the state at the cost of social institutions, such as the education system, overdue for government attention.

At the conclusion of the play, the train (the French public) responds to Kamodé in the revolutionary style of the workers and students in 1968. They argue, “Je demande la parole et je la prends. Je n’ai pas besoin d’encensoir ni de drapeau ni monter sur un escabeau ni faire de la fumée comme un indien. Je tiens à la vérité de dévoiler sans fard. Je veux descendre dans la rue.”⁶⁴ In response to their anger, Kamodé, in a long, self-glorifying speech, reminds them that he has served them unceasingly in every way possible and made them what they are. Kamodé then disappears from the scene and Ecran de Fumée reminds them that the misguided ruler remains out there and could easily return should they again let their guard down.⁶⁵ In the last few lines of the play, Dupont, who throughout the play had represented an objective spectator, turns to the train, representing the French public, hands out a new set of rules and regulations, and announces his plans to “faire de la politique.”⁶⁶

turn away from my back.

⁶³ Ibid., 41.

Translation: ...he uses the public service for his own exclusive and preferential usage.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 81, 99.

Translation: I demand debate and I take it. I do not need to censor nor cover nor hold up on an stepladder nor make smoke like an Indian. I hold the truth of the unveiling openly. I want to walk in the street.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 109.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 112.

Translation: practice politics

During the political instability of 1968, several political leaders appeared in the public spotlight to “faire de la politique” and present themselves as capable replacements for de Gaulle. Mitterrand stepped into the political foreground almost as soon as De Gaulle’s regime was in question. Mitterrand had participated in the government of Vichy at the end of 1942, beginning of 1943 but then quickly switched to the resistance. Benedetto’s play recognizes the inevitable political games that have existed and will continue to occur in France. At the introduction to one of his other plays produced after the events of 1968, Benedetto writes about their significance to the workers and the connection to France during the second world war, “Si 36 a commencé à Breguet, 68 a laissé des marques dans les âmes et des traces réelles dans la vie ouvrière.”⁶⁷ The message of *Le Petit Train de Monsieur Kamodé* examines both the frustration that the students in 1968 went through and the struggles that France has endured since the collaboration with the Germans in World War II.

In 1968, Benedetto wrote *Zone Rouge, Feux Interdit*, two months before the uprising and the play was *mise en scène* a few months later. The work presents the history of several revolutionaries fight against a fascist, imperialist government. De Gaulle, who while in the Free French Resistance Movement protested the inhumane treatment of French Jews and others persecuted during the holocaust, is represented as a money-hungry capitalist, concerned only with the opinions of the bourgeoisie. Performed on July 15, 1968, but written a few

⁶⁷ Andre Benedetto, *Emballage*, (Paris: P. J. Oswald, 1970), 9.

Translation: If 1936 started at Breguet, 1968 left marks in the souls and real traces in the life of

months before the uprising, *Zone Rouge, Feux Interdits* most directly predicts and exhibits the tensions of the events. The characters are labeled simply: A, Alpha, chef de bande, B, B/Elle, la Hurleuse, C, un garçon dit Castro, D, Drainette-Grenouille, and E, Eluah le noir. The focus of their dialogue revolves not around France, but the tensions in the world around her, most notably China and the war in Vietnam. In this play, Benedetto emphasizes the role that the French public needs to play in influencing international political events. In the fashion of many United States' youth during the late 1960s, *Zone Rouge, Feux Interdits*, expresses a growing political globalism. The message of Benedetto's work is for the French public to pull the nation out of her historically acquiescent role in world politics, as exhibited by World War II collaboration, and take an active role in stopping the international atrocities of the late 1960s.

Zone Rouge, Feux Interdits begins in a morbid fashion with the discussion of a burning deceased body and the fate of another one. "Pourquoi l'ont-ils brûlé? Parce qu'ils en avaient peur."⁶⁸ Strong images of the holocaust, and strong racial and ethnic slurs mix together with the confusion of the alphabetical characters. Benedetto omits few ethnic or racial minorities in his attempt to shock the audience with the hatred he sees apparent in the world. The five characters want to start a world revolution. A, or Alpha, the leader of the group, wants to address the world's problems in a violent manner, "Cette société est pourrie. On

the worker.

⁶⁸ Andre Benedetto, *Zone Rouge, Feux Interdit*, (Paris: P. J. Oswald, 1969), 12.
Translation: Why are they burning it? Because they are afraid.

va frapper fort, là où ça fait mal. On va se dresser et on va se battre.”⁶⁹ At the same time, B, or Le Hippié Bleu, argues that the revolution should be based on love rather than hate. Benedetto’s plan entails unification of all the different groups in the world and “NE faites PAS de politique!”⁷⁰

The exaggerated style with which Benedetto writes the dialogue for these characters seems to be mocking both violence and love as methods of problem solving. In an interview following the publication of the play, Benedetto explains, “il n’y a de culture que révolutionnaire: tout le reste est bavardage et divertissement de salon.”⁷¹ At the end of the play, the group has not resolved the fate of the deceased body and a single question is posed, “Dis, la vie: est-ce optimiste ou pessimiste?”⁷²

Many interpretations could be drawn from this work of Benedetto. In one interpretation, the deceased body represents the human casualties of war. As French society began questioning its role in international affairs of the present, its role in the past also came into question with the Holocaust. French citizens had to face issues of guilt and collaboration that had remained silenced since the end of the war. In this play, Benedetto presents five different styles of revolutionaries and how they would approach ending such tragedies in the world. Benedetto’s

⁶⁹ Ibid., 42.

Translation: This society is rotten. One is going to strike it hard, there, where it is bad. One is going to stand up and one is going to fight.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 45.

Translation: Do not do politics!

⁷¹ Ibid., 120.

Translation: There is no culture other than revolutionary: all the rest is chattering and lounge distraction.

⁷² Ibid., 114.

conclusion seems to present the message that the past should be recognized, and understood, but that there is no one solution to the atrocities of the world because they will always exist regardless of how many revolutionary approaches evolve.

Benedetto ends his play with the post script, “Mai nous a montré nos rêves un instant en chair et en os et nous a tout repris. Mai nous a enseigné un peu d’humilité dans le théâtre. Mais nous n’avons découvert que nos désirs multipliés.”⁷³ He recognizes the events of May only began the years of re-examining the events of World War II and that, while many revolutionaries were born out of the events, the division among the methods of solving their demands, and the methods of dealing with the recollection of the collective memory of French involvement in the Holocaust, as also seen in the artwork of the Atelier Populaire, only multiplied the political confusion.

There are many other examples of pièces de théâtre in the genre of Théâtre Ouvert of the late 1960s exhibiting World War II themes, some subtle and others blatantly comparing the Gaulliste regime to the Nazis.⁷⁴ The affects of the plays on the French public at the time differ from that of the artwork from the Atelier Populaire. The radical posters appeared all over Paris and later in other larger cities that contained a sizable, protesting student body, such as in Strasbourg. The

Translation: Say, life: is it optimistic or pessimistic?

⁷³ Ibid., 124.

Translation: May, we showed our dreams for an instant in the flesh and in the bone and we reopening it all. May, we taught a little humility in the theater. But, we did not discover that our desires multiplied.

⁷⁴ Some other titles from the Théâtre Ouvert include:

Benedetto, André. *Emballage*. Paris: P. J. Oswald, 1970.

_____. *Napalm*. Paris: P. J. Oswald, 1968.

Michel, Georges. *Les Jouets*. Paris: Gallimard, 1963.

plays, however, were mainly viewed by the students and playwrights and did not reach the general public until after the events when they were published by either P. J. Oswald or the Théâtre Ouvert Stock. However, the radical literature created from or performed during the student occupation of the Odeon did serve as a significant *lieu de mémoire* for the students. It allowed them to publicly and viciously question their government and this, directly or indirectly, influenced French society to begin questioning France's involvement in the Second World War.

The students' connection to their nation's past is the comparison between De Gaulle, a leader of the Free French Resistance Movement, with a fascist dictator, such as Maréchal Pétain and Hitler. At the same time, the artwork questions the role of France in World War II and by doing so, also questions the authority of the former resistance leader to govern as President of the Republic. The final irony lies in the student's mocking of the resistance myths while they simultaneously attempted to define themselves as the "real" heroes of resistance. They wanted to connect their cause with the myth of a true resistance movement in World War II, an imaginary movement that existed separate from the one led by General de Gaulle. Having grown up with glorified myths of the French Resistance movement, the students related their struggles for change to that of the resistance fighters battling the Vichy government and German occupation.

Rezvani. *Le Remora*. Paris: Stock, 1970.

_____. *Captaine Schelle, Capitaine Eçço*. Paris: Stock, 1971.

Conclusion

Until the late 1960s, France discussed its wartime years, however, the dialogue ignored certain aspects of French involvement in the German occupation. For example, historians would write about concentration and work camps for Jews, but not discuss the existence of extermination camps or the collaboration of Vichy, the French army and the general populace with the German troops. The student's usage of *lieux de mémoire* during the events of May 1968 served as a catalyst to a national reexamination of World War II France. "Après l'événement rupture de mai 1968, la libéralisation de la société française, l'obsolescence du modèle politique Gaulliste, la valorisation des particularismes et de la diversité du tissu social, régional, culturel de la France, favorisèrent un changement significatif du regard des Français sur leur histoire," wrote historian Dimitri Nicolaidis who in the 1990s examines the French tendency to selectively forget wartime involvement.⁷⁵

In this study's interpretation of Nora's theory, *lieux de mémoire* can only be recognized by historians or by the society that those memories originated in, when the personal emotions and memories of the individuals involved in that memory have lessened over time. This would explain why it took 30 years or more for France to begin reevaluating the history of the war years without the

⁷⁵ Dimitri Nicolaidis, ed., *Oublier nos crimes: L'amnésie nationale, une spécificité française*, (Paris: Editions Autrement, 1994), 31.

Translation: After the rupturing event of May 1968, the liberalization of the French society, the obsolescence of the Gaullist political model, the development of particularisms and of the diversity of the social, regional, and cultural fabric of France, favored a significant change in the

rose colored glasses. Nora stated that history examined in terms of *lieux de mémoire* occurs only at “that moment when the obsessive grasp of passion finally loosens but whose true sadness is no longer to suffer from what one has so long suffered, henceforth to understand only with the mind’s reason, no longer with the unreason of the heart.”⁷⁶ To simplify, a certain amount of time needs to pass before a society or an historian can emotionally distance his or her self from an historical event so that the relationship between the memory or myth and the actual history can be more objectively observed. This speaks to the need for French historians of the 1980s and 90s to reevaluate the political and social events of 1968 in terms of *lieux de mémoire* originating from World War II memories.

The re-examination of France’s involvement in World War II continues to affect French society, particularly as the number of citizens who actually lived during World War II decreases. But how has it affected modern politics? Has a fear of “selected forgetting” in society’s collective memory led to an overly critical public scrutiny of national and regional political atmospheres? In the summer of 1999, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, once influential student enraged of 1968, won the election for the Green Party in the European Parliament. His name, face and Jewish heritage were used in 1968 to compare the treatment of the students to that of the Jews during the holocaust and to compare the Gaullist regime to the Nazis. Today this Jewish German born in France, who once criticized his nation’s political structures, works for the European government. Based on the

regard of the French toward their history.”

⁷⁶ Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” 642.

evidence of the 1968 student's usage of *lieux de mémoire* of World War II, how will that generation, now in their fifties, use those re-evaluated memories to dictate current politics? With the absence of French political leaders who were involved in either the resistance movement or Vichy, how will the memories of French involvement be transformed and passed down to future French citizens by the new generation of politicians?

Today in French society there are already myths about the events of May 1968 that attempt to over-dramatize the historical significance of the student protests and worker strikes.⁷⁷ These new myths glorify 1968 as a major turning point in twentieth century French History and take their place alongside the older collective myths of France's resistance and collaboration roles in World War II. In post-war years, as resistance fighter Jean Moulin's ashes were placed in the Pantheon, other large gaps in the French collective memory formed, such as the role France was to play in Hitler's Final Solution, the French internment camps, the role of foreigners in the resistance movement, and French anti-semitism.⁷⁸ While it did not achieve the goal of overthrowing the Gaulliste government, the

⁷⁷The following are examples of books or articles that tend to over-dramatize the 1968 events:

Bousquet, Gilles. "Ou en est-on de Mai 68?" *Contemporary French Civilization* 16 (1992): 68-89.

Brown, Bernard E. *Protest in Paris: Anatomy of a Revolt*. New Jersey: General Learning Corporation, 1974.

Capdevielle, Jacques and Rene Mouriaux. *Mai 68: L'Entre-Deux de la Modernité, Histoire de Trente Ans*. Paris: Press de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1988.

Cohn-Bendit, Dany. *Nous L'Avons Tant Aimée, La Révolution*. Paris: Bernard Barrault, 1986.

Dansette, Adrien. *Mai 1968*. Plon: Librairie Plon, 1971.

Katsiaficas, George. "The Meaning of May 1968." *Monthly Review* 30 (1978): 13-30.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

crisis of 1968 provided French society with the opportunity to openly discuss these critical gaps in the collective memory and to attempt to develop a more balanced picture of their wartime experiences.

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