



1968 Then and Now
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27 April 2013







Oral history – interviews with former activists

Life-history interview produces *stories* of becoming, being and thinking about activism

Interplay of the political and personal among those who were seeking to change the world
and change themselves

Relationship of *individual* memory with
collective memory/dominant narratives about 1968

Romain Goupil (b. 1951)



We were the heirs of eternal revolt and we did not understand why our parents had stopped.

We wanted to have a revolution as it happened in Russia. We were the direct heirs of 1917

We built barricades as if we had always built barricades. As if we were in 1830, 1848, 1871, 1968..

We all saw ourselves as insurgents

(Interview with Romain Goupil, conducted by Robert Gildea, Paris, 24 May 2007)

Ole Vind (b. 1944)



The core of my passion was definitely not about the Marxist revolution, but about something else. It was closer to a consciousness revolution,

a cultural revolution

‘Be a realist, demand the impossible’, was the slogan in Paris in ‘68.

A lack of imagination is not having the imagination to see what’s missing.

(Interview with Ole Vind, conducted by Anette Warring, Hillerød, 7 Jan. 2010)

Lia Migale (b. 1951)



For me personally, '68 was...freedom [*libertà*], which is to say the concrete manifestation of the concept of freedom.

I'm not just talking about sexual freedom, although that was also an issue. Just think of the miniskirt, right? I had a miniskirt that was this short!

(Interview with Lia Migale, conducted by Rebecca Clifford, Rome, 4 Dec. 2008)

K. D. Wolff (b. 1943)



In many ways I was very confused. I had just started arguing with my father properly and then he died two months later.

I felt unbelievably guilty. As if I had killed him.

It took me forty years to be able to deal with it at all.

(Interview with KD Wolff, conducted by Anna von der Goltz, Berlin, 28 May 2008.

Maren Sell (b. 1945)



My parents were not Nazis, they did not belong to the party. My father tried – not with a huge amount of courage – to remain on the outside of all that.

As for my mother, I had a fantasy. I imagined or rather hoped that my mother had sheltered a German deserter, a soldier. I wrote that in my book but it wasn't true.

I imagined that I was the daughter of a resister. We had ideas like that. Or else to trace our Jewish origins, to discover that we were on the right side.

(Interview with Maren Sell, conducted by RG, Paris, 21 April 2008).

Yves Cohen (b. 1951)



I hated the Communist Party, whereas I was immediately enthusiastic, when I started to find out about it, about the Chinese [Cultural] Revolution

On the one hand there was an adolescent revolt against my parents, but there was also a constant homage rendered to my parents who had been resisters , the fact that my mother had been deported.

(Interview, with Yves Cohen, recorded by Robert Gildea, Paris, 9 May 2008)

Stefan Bekier (b. 1946)



My mother survived my father, and by many years, as she passed away at 93.

But, sadly, she told me that she'd wasted her life in the defence of a mistaken cause. She once said 'my generation was the manure of history.'

So by getting involved in '68, together with my friends I was trying to give her some hope, to show her that it wasn't all for nothing, and that the next generations would learn what not to do.

(Interview with Stefan Bekier, conducted by PO, Warsaw, 23 June 2009).

John Hoyland (b. 1941)



I went to Cuba in the summer of '66 while England was watching the World Cup .

There was an art school event in Trafalgar Square where we did a performance based on a big rally in the stadium I'd seen in Cuba in the July '66 celebrations, there was about 10,000 people in the stadium, and all along one side were children, and each one... had six, half a dozen or so, placards, right.

And one of the slogans I remember was 'Vietnam, Cementerio del Imperialismo' Right. 'Vietnam, Cemetery of Imperialism'.

(Interview with John Hoyland, conducted by John Davis, London, 25 May 2010)

Jean-Pierre Le Dantec (b. 1943)



We got an anti-Soviet and anti-Stalinist version of the story of the conquest of power in China by Maoists and a version of the Cultural Revolution based on the principles of the *parole au peuple* and the Paris Commune.

That delighted us ... there was a spiritual time bomb in Mao Tse-Tung's saying that "a revolution is not a dinner party"... we liked Mao's idea that there had to be trouble.

(Interview with Jean-Pierre Le Dantec, recorded by RG, Paris, 24 April 2007).

Gábor Révai (b. 1947)



It was '67, Vietnam, they [i.e. the socialist bloc] were critical of America, but in our opinion, it was the socialist countries that also needed to be sharply criticized. Their [official] solidarity was just a formal thing, it wasn't enough.

We organized Vietnamese Sundays tons of university students came out to collect money.

We had such a young, romantic spirit that we applied voluntarily to go out and fight in Vietnam.

(interview with Gábor Révai, conducted by Peter Apor, Budapest, 8 Oct. 2008)

Ivan Cooper (b. 1944)



We saw the impact of Gandhi and we saw the impact of Martin Luther King and this non-violent approach and that's precisely the reason why we adopted that stance.

I remember we particularly studied what had happened in Prague and what had happened in France and Germany as well, but the major influence was Martin Luther King and Gandhi.

Not European, it felt linked to the whole thing in the American Civil Rights movement.

(Interview with Ivan Cooper, conducted by Chris Reynolds, Derry, 15 May 2009)

Daniel Defert (b. 1937)



I remember Antoinette Fouque arriving from England. She was a friend, we had studied together. I was going to fetch Foucault at Orly .

And Antoinette Fouque arrived at the same time, on the same plane. She said, “I am bringing the revolution from England”. It was feminism.

(Interview with Daniel Defert, conducted by Robert Gildea, Paris, 7 April 2008).

Anna Filini (b. 1945)

When the coup happened it was a shock to many people.

I realized that none of all the things I did before really mattered... Studies, academic work, nothing. We had to go back [to Greece].

Gradually after a couple of months this idea took shape... We were ready to take to the mountains. With guns and the rest, say, to make the new EAM (National Liberation Front)! Or rather, the new ELAS (Greek People's Liberation Army)

(Interview with Anna Filini, conducted by Polymeris Voglis, Athens, 29 February 2008.



Olivier Rolin (b. 1947)



Something that is difficult to understand now is that at the time it was almost automatic for a young intellectual to be a Marxist.

You might at the limit be in the Communist Party, although that was less and less the case.

You could be Trotskyist, Maoist, Castroist, etc, but not to be a Marxist would have been very bizarre

(Interview of Olivier Rolin, conducted by Robert Gildea, Paris, 4 May 2007)

Nadja Ringart (b. 1948)



Society was completely stifling. I was in revolt against morality, I think..I had the idea that liberty was a fundamental value in my itinerary, even more than equality. Sexual, personal, political, everything, the self-determination of peoples.

I went to meetings but they were awful. They were fighting over whether the revolution should be in stages or permanent. I didn't understand anything. I wanted to talk about Vietnam, not Trotsky.

When I was with Guy Hocquenghem's group, it seemed as though they were fifty years ahead of everyone else. It's not complicated, it was an anti-totalitarian vision.

(Interview with Nadja Ringart, conducted by Robert Gildea, Sceaux, 5 June 2007).

André Senik (b. 1938)



As a young man the important thing was not to be like our parents. Above all not to be a timid and fearful little Jewish boy.

Being revolutionary for Jews was thus a paradoxical and rather aggressive way of becoming part of society instead of having to hide.

Finally there was a demonstration in which everyone was shouting, 'We are all German Jews!'. For us it was a way of settling our accounts with parents who told us not to raise our voices, not to say that we were Jewish, to take care that people didn't think ill of us because we were Jewish.

(Interview with André Senik, conducted by Robert Gildea, 4 April 2007).

Vera Jirousová (1944-2011)



We had the Holy Cross School of Pure Humour without Wit, sitting in little pubs in Old Town. We did things in a spontaneous, creative manner, immediately, not to order: “Walk down the street and crow”. “Take off your jacket and throw it off the Charles Bridge”. “I don’t need to free myself because I am free”. That was the difference.

All the participants had an equal position during the activities – girls and boys, the painter Honza Steklík had the same status as the two nurses, known as ‘Little Giraffes’.

(Interview with Vera Jirousová, conducted by Marie Cerna, Prague, 1 Jan. 2009).

Dominique Grange, b. 1940



I remember that every day, every evening, we went up and down the Boulevard Saint-Michel, meeting people who had been involved in the movement, talking about what had happened and observing the return to normal life.

It was intolerable, awful. We had the feeling of having been betrayed, screwed by everyone, that there had been a historic betrayal.

Some people went back to their old lives easily, but I couldn't. It was as if I had been paralysed by the force of the change that had taken place inside me, so that I had gone over to the other side.

Socially I was on the same side as the people who were involved in the class struggle and I wanted to be involved in it, even against my own class

(Interview with Dominique Grange, conducted by Robert Gildea, Paris, 10 May 2013)

Yves Cohen (b. 1951)



In photos I found of Gilles' funeral I am wearing a black jacket, and I remember wearing that black jacket for two years after that.

After that I went to Sochaux – Sochaux was where there had been the two other deaths in May '68.

Without my being conscious of it in any way, without thinking about it at all, my trajectory completely linked up these deaths

(Interview, with Yves Cohen, recorded by Robert Gildea, Paris, 9 May 2008)

Michel-Antoine Burnier (b. 1942)



We said to ourselves that we had to undertake a revolution in spirit, which was present in 1968 but which had been stifled by Trotskyism, Maoism, the October Revolution, the Paris Commune, which was all terribly archaic.

The real message was that everyone can speak to each other, it's a free democracy, at last people can have sex. Down with bourgeois morality! We secretly said to ourselves, 'this paper will be a machine to kill off the *groupuscules*, the little political factions, we will get them through the revolution in spirit, sexual liberation, music and happenings, and we got them.

We killed the revolution..I was very happy with the way things turned out

(Interview with Michel-Antoine Burnier, conducted by Robert Gildea, xxx 2007)

Marjorie Mayo (b. 1943)



Revolution doesn't have to be a moment with the barricades, I don't think I thought that the barricades are going up in Britain.

But in the sense that power relations will have to change before serious progress is going to be made towards a genuinely democratic and more egalitarian kind of society.

Without that kind of organisation and development of solidarity, and development of collective understanding that changes need to be made, you're never going to make them.

(Interview with Marjorie Mayo, conducted by John Davis, London, 30 June 2010)

Carla Prosdocimo (b. 1955)



[The Trieste experience] was a practical way to carry out a revolution. Up until [the moment when I first read Basaglia, my idea of revolution had been shaped by the Italian resistance during the Second World War.

But there was something in this model that didn't work, because I had no intention of shooting or of doing anything of the sort, but that was the only model I had, right? When I discovered [Basaglia's] approach, which was based on practical action, without violence but very radical, this brought things together for me.

I had a bit of a crisis after this. I understood that the destruction wrought by the institution was much more significant than that of the [mental] illness.

(Interview with Carla Prosdocimo, conducted by Rebecca Clifford, Trieste, 23 March 2009).

Birgitte Due (b. 1944)



I was constantly drawn into it, into a place where we examined ourselves and talked about personal development, private things and relationships, and how to make relationships work and such.

I had been strongly aware of socialist consciousness or ... you could say consciousness about the class struggle or class awareness. This was a schism for me, and then another schism happened. Hmm, what year was it? Maybe '72-'73? Because for the first time I fell in love with a woman.

(Interview with Birgitte Due, conducted by Anette Warring, Copenhagen, 8 December 2010.

Jean Le Bitoux (1948-2010)



I discovered an incredible thing, a convergence of my revolutionary convictions and my secret.

That is, the emergence or revolt of something as intimate as your sexual preferences which are not those of others...

I discovered militant friendship. Until then I had not had sex, I did not even know how to masturbate. I think that I only just avoided psychiatric hospital or suicide

(Interview with Jean Le Bitoux, conducted by Robert Gildea, Paris, 10 April 2008)

Paul Atkinson (b. 1949)



It felt like that kind of feminism was an invitation to do something with my own sort of emotional sensibilities and so on.

For men, the women's movement actually legitimises that project in a way that it's quite difficult for men, among themselves, to legitimise .

The heart of it for me was the invitation from the women's movement to men to engage in an emotional politics as well as an external politics.

(Interview with Paul Atkinson, conducted by JD, London, 9 July 2010).

Jean-Pierre Duteuil (b. 1942)

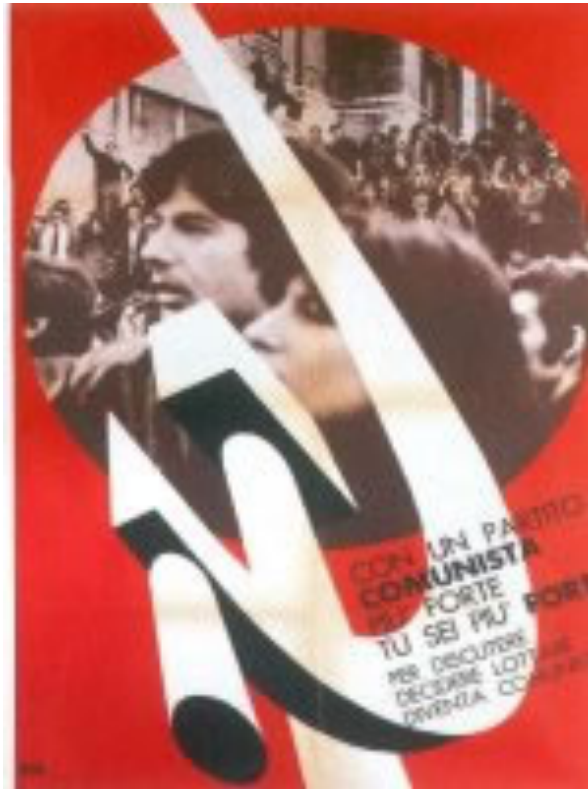


I also went on trips to Switzerland, where you met lots of Spanish exiles, Spanish refugees and deserters from the Algerian War who had fled to Switzerland.

There was an anarchist camp in 1965, the summer of '65, in the Alps, organised by the Spanish republicans in exile, which was attended by young French people. It was there that two mates from Nanterre and I met Gaby [Cohn Bendit], the brother. We linked up politically and then Gaby said, "My brother is going to France next academic year. Could you look after him a bit, guide him?"

(Interview with Jean-Pierre Duteuil, conducted by Robert Gildea, interview, 27 May 2008).

Mikhalis Tiktopoulos (b. 1946)



I went to the Feltrinelli bookshop. Three out of four magazines had the hammer and sickle or the red star on their covers.

I said to myself: 'Where am I? Am I in heaven?'

(Interview with Michalis Tiktopoulos, conducted by Polymeris Voglis, Athens, 3 November 2009).

Maren Sell (b. 1945)



I enrolled at Vincennes. It was the ideal place to combine study and politics. They were all there.

I was a foreigner, that was clear. In Germany women were freer, I think. Here [in France] the women activists in Maoist or Trotskyist groups were activists in a masculine way, completely.

That wasn't really my thing, and I was criticised. I had to undergo self-criticism because I wore lipstick and low-cut dresses. In Germany, if you were a feminist at the time, you didn't wear a bra.

(Interview with Maren Sell, conducted by RG, Paris, 21 April 2008).

John Hoyland (b. 1941)



To say that you thought revolution could and should happen can now seem like, well, we must've been mad and probably we were a bit.

But during the May events in Paris for ten days a revolution was very possible. I mean, the students were fighting the police. There were pitched battles every single night. They'd occupied the centre of Paris. And then there was a general strike. The workers went on general strike.

I mean, you thought, "crikey it really is happening".

(Interview with John Hoyland, conducted by John Davis, London, 25 May 2010).

Sybille Plogstedt (b. 1945)



Our political adventure was interwoven with our sexuality so that I missed him like an addict. “Socialism in one bed” was how he christened our erotic life.’

Sybille Plogstedt, *Im Netz der Gedichte: Gefangen in Prag nach 1968* (Berlin, 2001), 26.

K D Wolff



You couldn't talk to them. [...] They were stupid. No, really, everywhere you went – in Sweden, in Norway, in England and in America – everywhere they discussed how our societies ought to change. What's the next step? And here they said 'Freedom of the press! Dubček is our guy!' Boring, you know. With hindsight I think they were terribly scared, but they didn't say to us: 'We are scared.' They just didn't speak.

(Interview with K.D. Wolff, conducted by Anna von der Goltz, Berlin, 28 May 2008)

Seweryn Blumsztajn (b. 1946)



I had sympathy for those events. And I had a feeling of connection, generational connection, and of their absolute misunderstanding. You know, their attraction to Marxism.

That is, we were fighting for what they were rejecting – that was all quite obvious.

For us democracy was a dream – but for them it was a prison.

So I simply couldn't comprehend their Marxism, their communism, all that leftist ideology of theirs. Those Maoists – wow, that was just pure blather for us. All of it.

Nonetheless, I did feel a generational sympathy – that's how I'd label it. I felt there was a bond between us.

(Interview with Seweryn Blumsztajn conducted by Piotr Oseka, Warsaw, 5 January 2010).

Jean-Yves Potel (b. 1948)



I met people who wanted to change things. People who had an approach that was much more ethical and cultural, much less dogmatic. I found myself talking to Christians, to people who had no particular ideology.

Generally they hated the terms that I worshipped, such as 'proletariat' or 'internationalism'. That cleared my mind. It was like a thunderbolt.

(Interview with Jean-Yves Potel, conducted by Robert Gildea, Paris, 16 May 2008).

Jeffrey Weeks (b. 1945)



I think the critical achievement of those movements was to develop this sense of agency, of being able to remake your own lives.

The moment of '68 and the immediate aftermath is for me that moment of agency rather than the more exciting political arguments of the time.

I don't look back nostalgically to that 1968 moment. I actually see it as having opened up possibilities, which are still continuing.

(Interview with Jeffrey Weeks, conducted by John Davis, London, 17 June 2010).

Gábor Demsky (b. 1952)



1968 historically was the beginning of an antiauthoritarian period, and in my own personal history it had a very powerful effect on my entire life.

'68 brought a real change, after that the world turned to a more cultured and fortunately more westernized direction, and it was already neither necessary nor possible to live or think in these older ways, it was the end of the eastern Soviet system.

(Interview with Gábor Demsky, conducted by Peter Apor, Budapest, 2 December 2008.)

Liliana Ingargiola (b. 1947)

In '83 I decided to...to take a deep look at myself...at my life.



I was 35-36 years old, and thus at an age that has a particular significance for a woman. I wasn't married, I didn't have children, I'd never thought about having children.

I ended up having to go into analysis because I was panicking, I could hardly walk, I...this [life change] was so huge for me that I had this type of reaction.

So I went into analysis, and I tried to find a path for myself in this new life, which was also an isolated life because, in order to allow myself to study, I'd lost my political role, my social role.

(Interview with Liliana Ingargiola, conducted by Rebecca Clifford, Rome? 29 November 2008).

Gáspár Miklós Tamás (b. 1944)



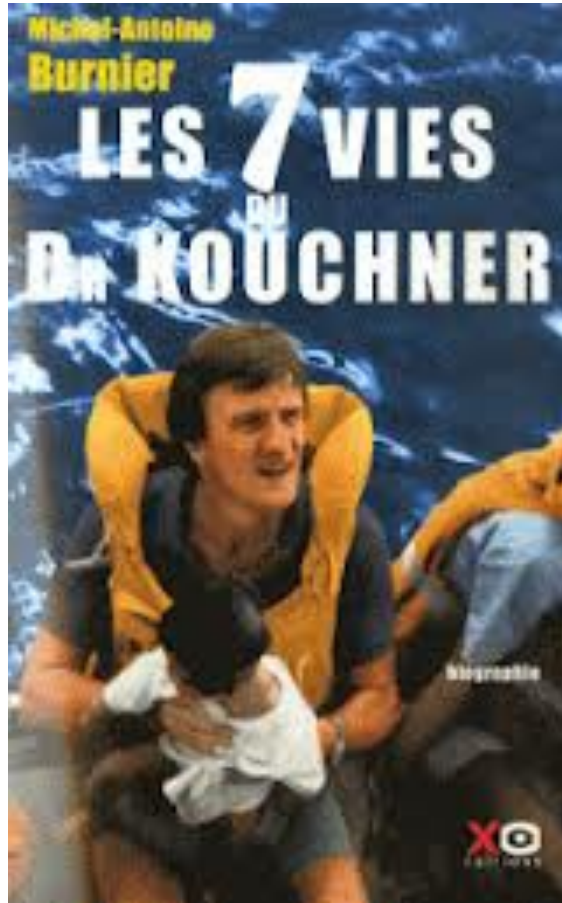
And so I became Marxist when I was 56 or 57 years old.

I am perhaps the only public person to have said publicly that we were mistaken and I am sorry. At all these conferences they were asking, ‘why don’t the East Europeans love democracy?’ they just didn’t like to be ill without a doctor and they didn’t like when they couldn’t buy nice food for their children, it was not so complicated.

They were just poor and impoverished and humiliated and there was a new rhetoric of competition in which they were also considered losers, incompetent, lazy bums. That disgusted me and to think that I was part of that establishment that spewed forth that kind of shit fills me with deep shame.

(Interview conducted by James Mark, Budapest, 5 March 2009)

Michel-Antoine Burnier (b. 1942)



It was only with Vietnam that we did something really culpable, which we tried to repair as best we could.

At the time of the Boat People, when Kouchner organised the *L'Île de lumière* boat to go to Vietnam and pull people out of the China Sea, I got going as an activist on the boat straight away, saying that you have to be able to undo what you have done.

(Interview with Michel-Antoine Burnier, conducted by Robert Gildea, Paris, 11 May 2007).

Seattle 1999, Paris 2005, London 2010, Washington 2011



Greece, Spain, Arab Spring and Via Campesina



Ole Vind (b. 1944) and David Graeber (b. 1961)

A lack of imagination is not having the imagination to see what's missing.



A relentless campaign against the human imagination...the murdering of dreams

