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A MEMOIR OF MAY

for the next revolution

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ONE

All the stories I wrote were true because I believed in what I saw.
Jack Kerouac

Le Champo was—and still is—the smallest of movie theaters in the Latin Quarter of Paris: so small the projected image is bounced back in a set of mirrors above the spectators' heads to fit the screen. It was some time in 1967 (I must have been nineteen) when I saw *The Red and the White* there. According to the standard liner notes the movie "clearly portrays the utter futility of war." It was banned in the Soviet Union for not being heroic enough, which amounts to the same thing from another angle. But the scene that struck me then—it's repeated in varying forms in the movie—has men chased down an alley by enemy soldiers. Some turn left and survive; others turn right, and die.

I'm telling you this because in June of 1968 I was arrested at the factory town of Flins, outside Paris: as a worker and an activist in the largest trade union in France I'd gone to Flins in solidarity with striking

auto workers who were being evicted from the factory they'd been occupying. Because I'm a Jew and therefore was a "foreign element" I was summarily judged and deported to America as a "Danger to the Security of the State," an honorific I still keep on my business card, next to "PhD." I was sent back to the land of my birth but not my culture. I lost everything: a career in the theater, the woman I was in love with, the culture that was mine, my friends. Since then I've been hungry at times, homeless briefly. At one point I was close to death, which is on 43rd Street between 10th and 11th. I developed a mild case of PTSD that hasn't quite left me, coupled with a permanent sense of my own inadequacy. I spent time in the mental ward of an inner-city hospital—it seemed like a waste back then, but it gave me some insight into the logic of cops and doctors and others struggling to provide us all with rationalizations that save us the trouble of providing them for ourselves. I made friends and more than friends with welfare recipients and junkies in East Harlem. I've gone down to the "hiring place" to sit on wooden benches, hoping for a day's job. I even had a job in publishing once, one of those real jobs they used to have where you turn up every morning at 8:45 and wear a tie. I quit

after I saw Norman Mailer bounce in one day to collect his royalties in jeans and open shirt. There is some shit I will not eat.

Futile, my gesture, back in 1968? James Baldwin, an exile three times over, wrote:

> *Perhaps everybody has a Garden of Eden, I don't know; but they have scarcely seen their garden before they see the flaming sword. Then, perhaps, life only offers the choice of remembering the garden or forgetting it.*

Remember or forget? I saw the workers' and students' uprising of May-June, '68 in Paris. I saw the Garden of Eden, but if you were there you wouldn't understand—that's what I need to explain to you and for myself. And then I had to choose between remembering or forgetting: to make sense of it for myself and for you, or to lie to you and for myself. What you need to know today is not who was a hero, or should be, that's what the French call *du cinéma*. It's whether you yourself, if you ever have the blessing of a choice, will have the smarts to recognize what that choice means, and the guts to make the only choice that, looking back, will have made it all worthwhile.

Because the movie I saw back then wasn't about futility, exactly. In the opening sequence a Red Army officer, confronted with arrest and execution, carefully puts down his ammunition belt and jumps off a tall building; in the next-to-last a squadron of Hungarian volunteers, confronted with overwhelming force, chooses to march toward the enemy singing the *Marseillaise*. It was all obvious to us back then, and if we'd had our doubts we could have walked two doors down to *Le Balzar,* Jean-Paul Sartre's habitual café by the Sorbonne, and asked him. You make decisions because decisions must be made in a futile world. The hard part is making the decision that won't, in retrospect, have been futile. I've had fifty years to answer for myself if what I did—what I am, Sartre would have told us—was in vain. And now I'm writing for you who some day soon perhaps will have to make sense of decisions you can't avoid: stuff like going on strike, or walking out of school, or turning left or right. *Si jeunesse savait; si vieillesse pouvait*. "If only the young ones knew; if the old ones could." I did my share, your turn is next.

TWO

There is pleasure in descending so long as one believes one may climb back up again.

A nobleman of the Old Regime

By January, 1973 I had completed my Bachelor's degree in America. It had taken about two years—actually, it had taken an afternoon covering the campus at Columbia University, dropping in on one department head after another to persuade each one I'd already earned the credits I needed back in France. I had a hard time with the head of the Music Department who wanted to quiz me about some Medieval composer he called "Duffy," until I realized he meant Guillaume Dufay.

So I decided to go back to France and pick up my life. Technically I could do that because my orders of expulsion had been illegal to begin with. Practically that wouldn't make much of a difference; it wouldn't help me when I went to the Police to get my residency renewed, or when I tried to get a job and needed a work permit.

A gallery owner around the corner from where I'd lived had been asking after me, he said he knew people who could help. I dropped by.

After all, it wasn't all my fault, he told me. Being young, I'd been led astray. I was led by leaders whose names, again…? I looked out the gallery window. The gallery looked down the street to a radical bookstore and meeting-place. In those days those bookstores were closely watched, sometimes raided, and trashed on occasion. A few days later I flew back to New York and I didn't return to France for another twenty-five years.

Recently I was contacted by a young French filmmaker whose life project was documenting radical characters like me. Eventually I found out she'd been mentored by another store owner on the other side of the same street: the original gallery must have gone out of business, or maybe the police eventually hired two snitches, one for each side of the street since the first one wasn't up to the job. Perhaps this filmmaker was just another hanger-on, one of those all-too-common fellow-travelers whose affected sympathies mask a terror of whatever movement they claim to support, and who often end up sabotaging those movements as surely as any snitch.

Sometimes I feel as if my years since '68—as a student, a teacher, a writer and so on—have been one long, failed audition for the role of

repentant revolutionary: the role of the honest saboteur. All that's been asked of me is to repent my ways and the job, the grade, the contract will be mine. I expect on my deathbed I'll be surrounded by black-clad capitalists in top hats and frocks angling for a confession. Now, with the fiftieth anniversary of '68 approaching, the coffin-birds are gloating that all the living witnesses are dying off: at last they can publish their research without fear of contradiction. Only they must have decided I wasn't dying fast enough because recently some Professor Coffinbird sent out a call asking for oral histories. I told him I would talk if he promised not to edit my interview. Naturally he edited my interview. No matter: I hadn't taken him on to set the record straight but to figure out what all the coffin-birds expected me to say so I could contradict them, not for their benefit of course, that would be wasting my time, but for you all.

According to some well-known historian or other the purpose of History is not "The task of judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of future ages." Perish the thought: History "wants only to show what actually happened." Historians, according to this theory, are human search engines programmed to pick out from the mountains of facts and thoughts of people past those that are significant to

themselves and their masters, and that in itself would be reason enough to let myself be interviewed, so I could figure out whatever it is the Time Police are after, the better to tell you whatever it was about May, '68 they wouldn't understand to begin with. And the latest theory about '68, the theory Professor Coffinbird was trying to get me to demonstrate, is that everything we did was the result of "an aversion to the Reality Principle," which is a fancy fake-Freudian way of saying we couldn't take reality as it was back then. Except, how the hell can you tell the Reality behind the Principle if you weren't there yourself? Or do you think "Reality" is the same at any time in History? 'Course you do, Professor, or you wouldn't be a professor, one who professes to believe whatever bullshit will get him the job, which happens to be in the History Department. No grand concept of History, no History Department. No History Department, no job.

Not that I, myself, know what that reality was. Nobody's entitled to say "What Really Happened," least of all those who were there, even less so those who weren't. My job is not to tell the truth but to dispel the lies; because if the purpose of History isn't "instructing the present for the benefit of future ages," then what's the point?

There's a concept called the People's Veto: when people riot or revolt or join a movement they don't at first know what they're doing it for, only what they're doing it against. Only in the process of opposing what they hate do they discover what they want and need. Well, there's got to be another concept, call it the Empiricist Veto, that consists in claiming nothing ever happens unless it's witnessed by those with the proper authority to be witness: it is better to be the designated witness than to have actually witnessed anything at all.

Guess what, Professor? I just vetoed your veto. All the People know is, that they're doing what the cops don't want them to do; all they are saying, is what the Thought Police won't hear. Only by first rejecting the rejecters can they figure out what they want for themselves; only by contradicting the liars do we find our way back to the truth. Isn't it nice to know you're needed, Prof?

Nietzsche says somewhere that people would rather suffer the pains of Hell than confront the fact that their lives have been pointless. Nietzsche was a cock-eyed optimist: there are plenty of people who not only welcome that their life was pointless, being pointless is their calling. In the past fifty years a whole caste has emerged that one

historian calls *rentiers de 68*, annuitants living off the proceeds of their militant investment. Like the repentant rebel in the last pages of Nineteen-Eighty-Four they're allowed to survive as long as they can confirm the pointlessness of their own sacrifice. "He always loved Big Daddy."

If that's your bread and butter Tony Judt's your three-star Menu Dégustation. Judt's authority as a "Public" "Intellectual" is based on the assumption that "I was there" has a transcendent validity: the fact that Judt was one of those privileged students hanging around the Latin Quarter in May of 1968 must inevitably lead to the conclusion that May '68 consisted of a bunch of privileged students hanging around the Latin Quarter.

How privileged is that? "We in the West were a lucky generation," says Tony-the-Baldrekfresser. "Most of us went on to useful employment in education or public service."

That's it? Your meal ticket? François Maspero was one of those oft-banned publishers with an oft-closed, raided, or occasionally bombed bookstore in the Latin Quarter—he was eventually jailed and driven

out of business. In 1960 (and again in ‘65, ‘67 and ‘68) Maspero reissued Paul Nizan’s *Les Chiens de Garde* (*The Watchdogs*). Nizan had been a friend of Sartre at the École Normale Supérieure, the elite advanced school where Judt briefly dropped by and where I might have been headed if I had worked hard and kept my nose clean back then. The point of such schools, as Nizan tells it, is that you were supposed to feel privileged to have been handed the job of doing their thinking for the workers and the peasants—not to mention others:

> *I docilely believed that the worker in the street, the farmer on his farm owed me gratitude because I devoted myself in a noble, pure and disinterested way to the Specialization of the Spirit.*

In other terms, a Judt: I can imagine Tony’s classmates at Norm’ Sup’ casually pronouncing his name in the German manner, “Youdt,” which could easily be heard as “Youtre,” kike. Always good discreetly to remind those people how grateful they should be.

I must have been fifteen-sixteen, the School social worker had found me a spot in a camp in the Alps for a Spring break. Halfway up I stopped at a farmyard to wait for a pickup, and I got to talking to the

farmer, a real People and not particularly impressed with me: as she proudly told me, her son was going to be a teacher himself. Guess what, Tony? Proletarians think, without my help or yours. Some in fact are good at it, and I would find out how good they were in ‘68, but I guess you, Tony, were too busy doing their thinking for them. Xavier Vigna, one of the few young historians who’ve bothered to ask what workers were about back then, says the educational level of working-class people in France had risen tremendously in the ‘fifties and ‘six-ties: the line worker of ‘68 was the barista of today. And does that mean in ’68 the workers rose up because they wanted better jobs—or was it because they’d thought and read and talked enough about it to conclude their jobs were going to be shit no matter what? Ask your friendly barista.

From its founding in the last decades of the nineteenth century the French educational system had been committed to streamlining the Nation and its colonies. All classes and ethnicities were to be molded into privileged dependents—with varying degrees of privilege, of course. In every part of the Empire the first History lesson on the first day of class began, “Our ancestors the Gauls had blond hair and blue eyes.” All Frenchmen: little Vietnamese, little Africans and little curly-

headed Jews. Imagine what havoc this must have played with those budding Oedipal configurations…

At least back in my day there was a pretense of promise: work hard, don't make trouble, think as we tell you and you too can be the next Tony Judt—that was the deal at Lycée Henri IV which I myself attended, a feeder school for Norm' Sup'. Nowadays if I mention H-IV, the reaction in Paris is, I must have been tremendously privileged. Today H-IV is just another junior form of Harvard or Oxford: you don't get in for your potential or your smarts, you get in because it's assured you'll duplicate and validate the values of the Upper Bourgeoisie and the easiest way to be trained for that is to be a son of the Upper Bourgeoisie to begin with. But it wasn't quite that way back then: we were all going to get our chance. Some of my classmates commuted from the Red Belt, the worker's suburbs of Paris; there were also nobility, even a couple of fascists. There were occasional fist-fights in the schoolyard, though they were kept in check by the presence of the Schoolyard Proctor, a lovely gruff man who'd been tortured into a pretzel by the Gestapo as an object lesson, and whose presence alone could quiet the beast. Then there was Yvan Blot, the homeroom Nazi, trying to work up the guts for a pogrom. Blot had picked up the line

"Jew, Jew, come out and fight!" but he was scared shitless that a Jew might take him up on it. One day Blot sidled over and squinted up to inform me that he didn't want me to marry his sister; I graciously explained that I saw no need to *marry* his sister; nor his mother, for the same reason. Sometime later he came up to me as I was leaving school and asked if I'd accompany him to meet his friends. I told him, sure, but I expected to be treated with respect. That was too much, and Bloch stomped off in a rage. He's now a highly respected politician, retired from service in various center-right governments and considered an intellectual. But all this was nothing like the University, where the Student Union office was occasionally firebombed by rightist goons.

Those days before May have been called the *Trente Glorieuses*, the thirty years of "glorious" (meaning: "economic") expansion, but it didn't come across that way. At Henri IV there was a sense, especially among the faculty, that the bottom had fallen out of the promise: the country was still facing the struggles of the 'thirties, the Vichy Revolution, the Resistance and then the Algerian civil war topped by the Gaullist coup and the Dirty War waged by embittered right-wingers and their friends in the Police. One day my buddies dragged me off

to the School chaplain (Jews in Europe are always getting dragged off to the chaplain for a friendly chat.) I was hoping for some theological argument because we were bred to discuss. Instead he spent the time telling us all how important it was to prepare for a good career, not to make waves, etc. It was hard to make a case for Frenchness in a State of appalling violence and repression, psychic, physical and intellectual at once, yet that was the Frenchness the faculty and chaplain were sworn to uphold. One day in the classroom one of our more outspoken teachers picked up a circular from the Provost of Studies asking him to include Civics in his presentations and tossed it away, telling us all, "I'll teach Civics when there are fewer than 45 students in this classroom!" What we'd begun to sense back then is the official liberal line today in France: there are no privileges affecting the People that the State is bound to respect.

The building-high monument on the Place Saint Michel is the moral center of the Latin Quarter. It depicts the fall of the Rebel Angel and like the Bronze Horseman of Saint Petersburg it's a threat posing as protection. For most of us a full awareness of the nature of that threat had come on February 8, 1962, when the police sent a band of peaceful demonstrators tumbling down the stairwell of the Metro station at

Charonne, killing nine, including a fifteen-year old boy—the demonstration had been called to protest right-wing violence and the State must have taken it personally. For me the awakening came on the first day of what should have been my last year at the Lycée, my first class in *Philo*, an intensive preparation in correct thinking that would culminate in the State-wide test, the Baccalauréat. Professor began in the tried-and-true tradition of asking, "What is Philosophy?" and, as expected, he rang through all the changes before concluding, as the clock wound down in perfect synch:

> *In the last instance, to be a philosopher means to accepts life as it is. Thus, in Alfred de Vigny's novel* Grandeur et servitude militaires *the French officer who murders a sixteen-year old enemy officer in his sleep is the greatest philosopher of all, because he's doing his duty.*

Was he serious? Was he baiting us? Was he Right or Left? Yes, and yes, and neither. He was just an old-fashioned intellectual drill-sergeant preparing us for the typical Baccalauréat question, which must be answered with a balanced view, an appropriate quotation from a great Right-wing French thinker balanced against a quotation from a great Left-wing French thinker to cover all the bases because your

questioner could be either Right or Left, but either way he would be French. The professor's sadism wasn't feigned, nor was it based on any particular political opinion, except that the Nation is above moral judgement. I looked up at my classmates hunched over their notebooks: "Philosophy = murder 16-year old in sleep—will that be on the test?" I walked out, and I've never been back.

Not that they would have wanted me after that. A few weeks afterward on the street I met my favorite teacher, or rather the teacher who had most encouraged me, perhaps because he saw me as a talented scholar, perhaps because, as a former member of a fascist militia he had some unresolved guilt toward Jews. When I told him I'd left school he sweetly asked me if I had considered a career as a garage mechanic and walked on. It's good policy to remind those people—be they black or Vietnamese or Jew—that their privileged status can be withdrawn at any time.

As it turns out there is a third category among the Fallen Angels: those who try to forget, those who try to remember, and those who are assured of getting back in, like a friend of mine, of the minor nobility and major schlitz, who days after I'd landed in New York in '68 wrote

me an apologetic letter reminding me that she'd been the one who'd convinced me to join the demonstrations (which she hadn't) and if I wanted she had contacts with the upper echelons in the Police—which I didn't. Maybe I should have turned her in as a "leader," I'm sure she would have run with it.

But I don't have a quarrel with those who knew they were among the privileged and tried, be it ever so feebly, not to be. I'm more concerned with those who were hammered, day and night, with the argument that they were the privileged ones—people like Tony Judt—until they swallowed it whole. Europe in those days was—as it still is—a curious combination of Capitalism and Old Regime: everybody has their place and everybody can be whatever they aspire to be, given their place, of course. When I was thinking of dropping out from the Lycée I went to one of my teachers and asked what I should do; if I could only hold out one more year, he said, I'd end up at the University where, he assured me, there were people conducting real conversations about the issues that concerned me. I'm not sure that would have made much of a difference, even if such people had existed back then. Today French cultural life from one end to another is the equivalent of those discussions in the Lycée schoolyard whose point was to

be pointless because they revolved around assumptions as asinine as anything a Medieval scholastic could have dreamt up: not about anything at all except affirming one's privilege to discuss. And things were only slightly better back then: a year after drop-out I was hanging on the beach at Matala in Crete, passing around a copy of Foucault. (That Joni Mitchell song about the Mean Old Daddy? I swear it wasn't me.) I can't say I understood the Foucault, much as I enjoyed it. I knew about Lacan, but only through a friend of my girlfriend who claimed to be his girlfriend; the others, Lévi-Strauss, Derrida, etc. even less so. It took me a long, long time to figure out what these people were saying.

Then there was Sartre, and Sartre was on another level, and still is for the Judts and such: the retro Satanas, the cause of all that's wrong with '68. But it's important to say why Judt and the others hate him so: because we loved him so. Or maybe it's the reverse: I've grown to love him so because the Judts and Chomskys hate him. Sartre was what all shit-eaters desperately dream to be, that only gets further away from them the more they try: a real public intellectual, not a Public Intellectual with a PR firm behind him, and the State, and the full force of Capital. What Bernie Sanders is to the Democratic Party

Sartre was to the Intellectual Establishment: a Boll Weevil of the Mind. He was our own celebrity, not the celebrities we'd started to be force-fed in the tabloids.

Not that I knew Sartre any more than anyone else. I'd seen him once or twice, once at the Balzar with Simone. In '65 I'd gone to hear him speak, along with others, at a conference published later as "Que peut la littérature," and then gone off with friends until long after midnight we were arguing over onion soup at les Halles. Then in the early months of '68 we were rehearsing Sartre's play, *The Devil and the Good Lord* and Sartre came to rehearsal for my first run-through. (He thought I was too young. Maybe he was being polite.) What I remember from that day is the stage hands standing by. "Un grand bonhomme," one called him, meaning at once a great man and a regular guy, someone who does his job as you do yours backstage; someone who's got your back. You can say what you want of Sartre's cowardice in World War Two, or his supposed defense of Stalinism, or his support of shallow Maoists later on, it was Sartre who'd stood against the State in opposition to the Algerian War. My mother once tried to corner her cleaning lady: why did she continuously vote for the Communists Party? "Because they're the only ones who ever stood up for

us." Nineteen-sixty-eight marked the moment when the Communist Party (and, by extension, the USSR) showed it didn't back the People after all. With Sartre it was the opposite: he was the privileged intellectual who was always at the front of the march, not as a privilege but because at least his privilege might serve to protect the others from a police charge.

A radical shrink once wrote that "People frequently leave behind the knowledge that the school gave them but not its spirit." I got lucky, I did the opposite: the skills I learned in school—analytic skills especially—have never left me. Hours spent parsing texts in Greek, Latin and French for the slightest philological slippage give you a near-intuitive sense of the evasions, the repressions, the questions not asked; still, it took a long, long time before I learned to turn those skills to good use. At my doctoral defense my adviser angrily asked what made me think, just because I'd experienced '68 I had the authority to talk about it? Looking back, my answer should have been:

"Because, Professor, I grew up in France at a particular historical moment, when there was powerful, almost overwhelming pressure to enforce the ideology of the privileged subject. Your intellectual edifice

rests on a fantasy of Authority out of Immanuel Kant, the Pretzel of Königsberg. For you the justification of a statement or proposition is rooted in the subjectivity of the speaker or observer, and that's the point of your question. The speaker validates the lines that validate the speaker in a grand epistemological circle-jerk. Since you're an art historian I'll explain it this way: the bored bourgeois waiting for two hours to see Picasso fantasizes that by paying he's validating his own authority as someone who understands Picasso, and it's the system of authority and persuasion and hard, cold cash that validates the belief that, because he's seeing a Picasso he must be understanding a Picasso. The hand you're dealt's the hand you've dealt yourself, Professor, and dealing yourself that hand is your fantasy of freedom."

"The difference is, that in the days leading up to May there was a powerful counter-pressure as well, like the pressure you must be feeling from me right now—at least I hope so. Back then I'm sure I didn't understand what Sartre and the others were up to. What I did sense, even then, is that the world he articulated could be our world. Whether in retrospect his explanation was "correct" is irrelevant: Sartre, unlike the Communists, would have said you can't place bets with History. And now, after ten years of study I've just begun to

understand what the stakes were then, even perhaps what the stakes are now, that's why I'm entitled to talk of '68 as you and Judt and all the others are not. You can't dance with one tuchas at two weddings. You can't at once remember and forget. Least of all can you forget what you've never known to begin with."

I passed my doctoral defense; but that's because I kept my trap shut about those things. Then a few years later I was invited back to lecture at some French academic conference. As I went up to the podium the chair told me I hadn't given her sufficient material for an introduction, and I could I add something. "Tell them I'm a veteran of sixty-eight." "Monsieur est soixante-huitard," she repeated, and the audience burst into applause. Then I read my paper. Then there was a stunned silence, until someone at the back of the audience asked, "That part about the subjectivity of perception, is it like the whale in the movie Moby Dick?" Kids, let's take out our pencils and breathe deeply. We're going to have to start all over again.

THREE

Dictatorship means "Shut your trap." Democracy means "Talk on."
Old '68 Saying.

If I had to turn in a leader back in '68 it would have been Georges Wilson, the director of the *Théâtre National Populaire*, the National People's Theater and my boss, and proud to take the rap. Wilson had taken up the TNP's mission of making quality theater accessible in both the positive and the negative sense: accessible at extremely reasonable prices and accessible because it was presented without a glimmer of pandering. I remember Wilson and his lead actor coming offstage, loudly complaining that the audience tonight was too easily satisfied: a bunch of goody-goody consumers desperate to be among those who "get it," desperate to be on the good side of Culture. Wilson was the kind of stage director who, if he had to explain a scene in rehearsal, would tell us "these are the good guys and these are *les flics*—the cops." Nobody thought twice about it because everybody hated the cops, even the guy who ran the corner grocery; except that Wilson said so openly, despite the fact that his theater was at the mercy of the State and its subsidies—or perhaps because of it. It must

all have seemed terribly unfair: the most successful ambassador for French culture abroad was Sartre; the most vibrant, best attended theater in Paris was the one that best pushed the buttons on the General—and Wilson pushed them plenty. In the face of Sartre or Wilson, a government whose primary interests were economic development and the exploitation of French culture for the State's own ends was clueless but not powerless. The showdown came on February 14, 1968.

I was probably rehearsing directly underneath the spot where it all happened but I wasn't aware of it. A demonstration had been called to protest the Government's attempt to control the Cinémathèque, one of the world's great film archives. A number of protesters, including François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, were bloodied or beaten by the flics. This would rank as the first major action of '68 if you ignored the strikes that had been flaring up sporadically or the recurrent student rampages that were so hallowed a tradition that the chant that accompanied them, "O, E, E, O, E, O," was the sequence of vowels in the First Declension of verbs in Classical Greek. What was unexpected and unique, is that the State's attempt to take over the Cinémathèque backfired. I'm told Daniel Cohn-Bendit was involved in the

resistance, and though my opinion of Dany-le-BS is too low for me to believe it I'll pretend to believe it anyhow so long as it drives the point home that '68 did not consist of privileged students. Or at least if it did consist of students, privileged or otherwise, there remained an indeterminate number of students willing to lend a hand to serious business.

But as I said, I was barely aware of this. It was just life-as-usual, no worse than the occasional explosion of a right-wing bomb or being threatened by a flic or having Yvan Blot punching me from behind while we were lined up for classes. I'd be coming home from rehearsals late at night and the Seine would be barred by a wall of cops-in-arms; or I'd be heading down the rue du Four (I wanted to get tickets to the Living Theater) and the street was misty with tear gas; then the woman I was in love with told me she'd been among the students bodily ejected from the courtyard of the Sorbonne on May 3rd, protesting right-wing violence against University students.

It's all a haze: I remember a sequence of meetings, massive meetings of theater and film professionals to discuss what must change after the Cinémathèque affair though I don't remember the Cinémathèque

itself being mentioned. The expression *ralbol* had not been invented yet. (It sounds like "Ras-le-bol," as in *J'en ai ras-le-bol*, *I've had it up to here*.) I remember one large meeting where a well-known director took the podium to propose some appeal or other to the Government, and the grizzled theater professional next to me sneering that the time for self-serving appeals was past. *Ralbol*.

If I had to finger those leaders" who drew me in I might call out G. R., a soft-spoken actor who specialized in wise old men and cynical sophisticates on the stage and off. We students, apprentices and early-in-their-careers were standing on the steps of the Theater one day discussing the need to stand up for ourselves and here was G. R. practically dancing with glee, singing a bawdy song: "Vivent les étudiants ma mère, vivent les étudiants!" Only one among us butted in to complain that not only were we ruining our careers, we were ruining his own. He later became well-known, playing the creepy boyfriend in a Rohmer flick. Then at age thirty-four he found out he had AIDS and stepped off a tall tower. You turn right you die, no use blaming yourself or others.

The rest is a blur. It was like trying to get in on a conversation so multi-sided there was no way of wrapping one's mind around it: sleeping in friends' sixth-floor walkups; walking everywhere; going on marches—none violent, at least for me, though violence was never too far off. I remember the flames of the Paris Stock Exchange in the dusk on May 24 and this was the biggest demonstration of all. You got the sense the cops were giving up, there were just too many of us. I remember another monster meeting of theater people and G. R. pulling his jaded-old-man act to tell the audience that he'd come to represent the TNP and if they couldn't calm down and resume their discussions he might as well leave. I remember walking in at the Sorbonne on a discussion about the profession of Psychology and there was my former psychologist, a wonderful, smart woman, barely older than I, holding the floor. I never saw her again and never found out what had become of her. Was it true, as Tony claims, that all the "girls" were made to wash the dishes while we men discussed the Revolution? Not in my crowd. I guess I was too much in awe.

Mostly I remember the nights of May 15th and 16th. There was going to be a debate about the theater at the newly-built campus at Jussieu. Perhaps because of the cheap neon lighting and the drywall

classrooms, Jussieu attracted the rads among the rads—the real ones. Nobody would want to spend time in that place unless they meant business. I recently read the place is still crammed with asbestos, and that somehow that's all the fault of us *soixante-huitards*. Cause and effect?

Like many Americans in Paris of all ages I'd been active in the anti-Vietnam War movement, one of the few means of political expression the French State tolerated, but only when it suited their own game and you were never sure what that was or when they'd pull the rug on you. Back then I'd been critical of the older Americans who were getting involved, all they seemed to do was talk and plan and, when I complained, to retaliate by quoting Eugene V. Debs at me. I learned much later that by '68 they, too, were somewhere on campus, organizing American deserters. Rousseau's Law states that it's impossible to change Society because those who would change it are already determined by the society they want to change. Rousseau was wrong: the circumstances change the people and the people change the circumstances. Turn right, turn left, but either way you're going to have to choose.

So I'd gone to Jussieu to talk about the Theater and you were thinking I was going to talk about the Situationists, weren't you? You know, Situs, the ones who supposedly "played a preponderant role in May 1968…" and who "made up the majority in the Occupation Committee of the Sorbonne," according to Wikipedia. Considering there were eight Situs in all of France in '68 that's a tall order. Then again, I never met a Situationniste I didn't like; or liked for that matter. In fact, I'd never heard of them until America. In 1966 in Strasbourg a couple of Situs had hijacked University funds to publish a meant-to-shock pamphlet, so of course the journos, whose job is to look for explanations everywhere except where the explanation lies, figured the Situs must be the cause of the upheaval.

That evening, May 15th, I was in a classroom at Jussieu and the plan under discussion was to occupy the Odéon Theater. I had no issue with the workers occupying their own workplace—I'd seen how that worked out at the TNP. Conversely I thought some other group occupying another group's workplace was divisive, and therefore counterproductive; also disgustingly competitive. I went up to a rep from my own union, the CGT, and told him what I thought. "Don't worry," he told me confidently, "I'll throw in a few nihilistic proposals and

that'll keep them talking all night." I went back to my own place down the street. The next day I heard the Odéon was occupied. Years later I read that the occupiers had come from the Sorbonne, not Jussieu, which could well have been, taking over the Odéon was such a dum-bass thing to do, such a surefire way to drive a wedge between the workers and the students, that I would have been surprised had there been only two groups of idiots vying for the honor.

The following night I came into the Odéon through the stage door: it was guarded by a motley crew of aspirings and I happened to know one of them from acting school. I may be confusing my memories with a passage in Flaubert, but my friend might have been wearing a *casque de pompier*, one of those ornate gilded firemen's hats that double as helmets in a Greek tragedy. By the time I made my way to the stage it was crowded with the most pissed-off looking actors I'd seen short of a crowd scene in an amateur production of Enemy of the People. In the back sat Barrault, one of the great actors of the twentieth century and the Odéon's director, practicing his thin, jaded smile; next to him his partner Madeleine Renaud, looking ready to bite. In the center stood Dany-le-Hambone, spouting some nonsense about bourgeois actors who sold their souls which I later learned was

patterned on the rhetoric of the French Revolution of 1789. Dany had an amazing ability to pick up bits and pieces of revolutionary rhetoric and throw them around out of context as if they made sense—the Professor Corey of Praxis. If there'd been a Baccalauréat in Rant he would have aced it.

As usual he was talking beside the point: the logic behind the discussion at Jussieu had been, that Culture was an impediment to day-to day culture, the culture of the streets; and so, by abolishing Culture one allowed culture to flourish spontaneously. It was the kind of thinking that permanently boiled under the surface of French Culture: a desperate attempt to throw one's own self-consciousness off-track. To quote one of those lines we were supposed to regurgitate at the Baccalauréat, "Everything's been said and we have come too late, after 7,000 years or more of men who think." Make that 7,322 since the passage was written in 1696. In a culture were spontaneity was precluded a revolution of any kind would have to begin by imagining itself spontaneous, often to the exclusion of everything else, to the point where the exclusion of everything else became its own dynamic. Because I'd been hanging with a handful of African Americans who were raising funds for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

Committee; and because I was vaguely acquainted with a few Jazz musicians I was attuned to these French fantasies of spontaneity for which black folks despised them. From time to time I'd run into my old friend Diop from the Lycée. He was from Senegal and his dad was a big shot in the Africanist movement. We'd occasionally trade views of how outsiders are defined and marginalized in France: of the assumption that any man with a dark complexion and curly hair must be a sex machine and any woman with same must be a smoldering slut, and that includes Jews and Jew-esses which is okay if you go for those short-term and mutually exploitative relationships that Diop was fond of. Otherwise, not so much.

So the Odéon went spontaneous. One day I wandered into one of the intermission areas where somebody thought they were going to start a group to create a New Music. Unfortunately they had no idea what that meant since they had no idea what the Old Music was. In any case their presence in these rooms begged the question, if Music was to be reinvented, why here? It must have been hard work for them to overlook the fact that the theater in which New Music was to happen was being kept open by an army of stagehands and techies who stayed on the job after the takeover to make sure the place ran

smoothly, a kind of revolutionary Bunraku. Earlier, at the TNP, I'd been struck by the armies of technicians and the technology itself, the backbone of a theater: so much that limited and determined your work, so many technologies and backstage support, so many relationships among workers, warped. Even then I was dreaming of running off to California and doing theater off the back of a truck for the grape pickers: street performances were illegal in France, and I'd seen musicians beaten and arrested. Recently I returned to the Juilliard School of Acting where I'd spent a few months after my expulsion to America, and heard the same doubt and hope from the young students there: was it at all possible to build a theater free of the full weight of capital? The idea was that the People would gain control over the instruments of production, not the reverse. Maybe Revolution really is Theater after all: too many people want to believe it comes from the Revolution Fairy.

"So… did you talk?" says the Professor with the same tremor in his voice you get from the priest in the confessional when he asks, "Did you touch yourself? Was there pleasure?" He's referring to the astonishing fact that people talked in '68, nowhere more so than in the main theater at the Odéon, where there was a 24-7 blabfest of people

expressing themselves. “Expressing themselves:” sounds like what happens to little boys when they touch themselves too long.

So I tell Professor Coffinbird, “Of course we talked.” And in French, too, which I suspect is above his pay scale. In fact, we’d been talking for a long, long time. Historians like to tell how the open squares and avenues of Paris were created to allow the cavalry to disperse crowds; but it was those same wide spaces that allowed the crowds to congregate in the first place. I remember how, in the winter of 67-8, those spaces were mobbed with hangers-on. One winter evening I was standing on the Place Saint-Michel with another bunch of young people, teasing and being teased by an old man by the name of Mouna, a legend in his time, a scraggly eco-anarchist who biked all over Paris distributing his paper, le Mouna Frères, always up for putting down “Caca-peepee-talism.” Suddenly someone started pushing through the crowd of us, snarling “Police!” There was a flash second of fear, and then we all laughed at ourselves, as if in a rehearsal for the next time, when the flic was real and we’d stand our ground.

Now it was May and people were standing their ground all over: at the Sorbonne, in the occupied factories, in the workplace. There were

practical issues raised all the time, with the usual proportion of drivelmouths. I remember a handwritten flyer posted on a shuttered bakery, describing the difficult conditions under which the bakers' assistants worked. I remember the discussions among the stage hands at the TNP, though of a different kind because that theater was in a ritzy part of Paris and the crew had every reason to fear they'd be attacked by *blousons dorés* ("goldshirts"), gangs of wealthy kids. I remember trying to get to the TNP one day when all the public transportation was gone, and I got picked up hitchhiking by a thirty-ish, independent small business owner. It wasn't that we agreed on much, but at least there was something approaching mutual respect and the sense that, yes, we might have a communality of interests somewhere. (Few people hate the French Government as much as small, independent businessmen and shopkeepers. Even today.) And if we could talk all over Paris as we did (actually, all over France and beyond), then why did we need the Odéon as a protected space for talkers? Years later in Lower Manhattan I would ask myself the same question: From what did we need to be protected? The Occupy Movement had begun as a demand for the restoration of public space, a demand widely supported by all manners of New Yorkers from any number of the

social classes, even small businesses. Within days Zucotti Park was turned into a demonstration of Participatory Democracy as a Spectacle exclusive to a self-appointed vanguard. The new organizers claimed to come out of French Situationnism and that must be true because, like the original version, theirs were the contradictory actions of a social group whose own interests were at odds with their self-professed goals; self-contradictory and therefore deliberately destructive of themselves and of others, with the distinction that they themselves could climb back up afterward; others, not so much.

At least in 1968 we didn't have those puerile hand gestures. The Odéon Theater was not the equivalent of a public marketplace of ideas but rather its seizure, just as Occupy would be: the seizure of a space that has existed forever, the spatial equivalent of what the French call breaking down an open door; staged spontaneity to displace that which grows from the contingent—from need.

There's an Ingmar Bergmann movie—I forget which one—in which a family isolated on an island goes through every form of neurotic hatred, until the daughter goes bonkers and has to be airlifted to the hospital. As the helicopter rises the father has a few comforting words

for his son and walks away. The son looks into the camera, tears in his eyes: “Papa talked to me!” Fadeout. There’s quite a few people, priests, politicians and professors above all, who’d like us to believe that this is what ‘68 in France was all about: that being listened to was all we wanted. In fact they started thinking that within weeks of the collapse and haven’t stopped since.

It’s the Lycée schoolyard all over again: you have the right to talk so long as it gets you nowhere; and because you have the privilege of saying it (not to mention the privilege of being privileged) a whole industry broke out after ‘68, that some would like to believe originated in ‘68 but was in fact the State’s response. The magic word was “Participation,” meaning isn’t it just wonderful that we’re all talking, Daddy and the kids, as long as Daddy makes the decisions. The lesson we were supposed to have learned from ‘68 was, that that shooting off your mouth makes all the difference in the world, actually: not because of what you say but because you’re the one who’s saying it. It’s the same old privilege as before, and it’s not what we were fighting for, it’s what we fought against.

FOUR

But one must disappoint. One must jump into the fire like ridiculous roast martyrs.
Pier Paolo Pasolini

The point was, to be getting nowhere. On June 7 I attended a sad mass rally at the Gare Saint-Lazare in Paris, the railway station from which you took the train to Flins. Flins was a factory town some twenty miles from Paris, a demonstration project for the efficiencies of American-style Fordism. The workers had occupied the factory and Flins was the isolated link the flics had decided to break. We'd heard about pitched battles in the fields against the workers and students. When I got to the Gare Saint Lazare there was a large crowd where there should have been a huge crowd, and someone was giving an impassioned speech. Flins was a trap. Nothing could be done. We should reserve our forces for a more propitious time. We were all in solidarity with the workers, of course, but there were no trains running, etc.

Of course it was a trap. But the French have a tradition of charging into traps and coming out the other end, it's called the *Furia francese*

or *Le baroud d'honneur*. The solidarity part seemed less obvious to me because why would we all mass at the Gare-Saint Lazare, from which the trains left for Flins, if not to help the comrades?

That was my Parzival moment — not the Wagner jerk, the other one. Parzival has been brought up to do all the right things—will he get into Norm' Sup'? Then one evening he sees something that would make the heart melt, maybe it's a broken old man, maybe it's a brother in distress. Except, being a well-bred young man he doesn't want to risk saying or doing the wrong thing. "Amfortas? There goes my career!"

I went up the steps to the Station platform and walked alongside the next departing train for Flins. Nobody there. I turned back and ran into a conductor. Were the trains running? Sure, but there were no ticket takers. I wandered back toward the exit, thinking I might go outside and tell somebody—everybody: "Hey! The trains are running and they're free!" Perhaps a huge rush of demonstrators would come pouring onto the trains, and…

Sooner or later everybody gets a revolutionary *esprit d'escalier.* If only, if only. If only I'd taken on Cohn-Bendit that night at the Odéon. If only, at the March on May 13… Once again this was my chance to make History. I was heading toward the crowd gathered outside the Gare Saint-Lazare, pondering how to raise the Masses, when I ran into Diop with his girlfriend of the moment. I told him the situation and Diop suggested we all three head for Flins. We got onto the train—it was empty, of course—and after half an hour or so the train pulled into Flins, where the station platform from one end to the other was lined with CRS, the worst attack humans the Police could muster. It was like that last scene in *The Red and the White*, with the lines of White soldiers confronting the revolutionaries. We crouched under the train windows and got off at the following station, where we decided to walk back toward Flins, crossing through the fields and hiding from the helicopters buzzing overhead.

By the time we got to Flins night had fallen and we found a barn to sleep. In the middle of the night I heard Diop and his girlfriend arguing. She ran out. The next morning we woke up hungry and went out looking for a place to share a croissant and a cup, and joined a few more young people wandering about until we ran into a real worker—

he must have been a worker because he wore a cloth cap. The comrade told us to follow him and led us directly to a group of flics. I lost sight of Diop. I was brought to a large storage shed on the Factory grounds, not so large that it wasn't already crowded with prisoners; there wasn't enough room to sit. As noon approached and we got hungry the room became progressively more stifling and a few of us started to pass out. Our game, then, was to go over to the closed glass door and knock on it, pretending to be making some desperate demand of the cop on guard, anything to keep the door open as long as possible to let in air without provoking him to violence.

Late afternoon we were piled into a *panier à salade*, the French equivalent of a paddy wagon; we sat on wooden benches, each of us facing a flic. My flic ignored me, crossed his arms and took a nap. The flic facing the scrawny kid next to me started in immediately:

> *So you think we're the SS, don't you, don't you? Let me tell you, kid, if we were the SS, what I'd do to you. First I'd stick electrodes to your balls, then…*

He was somewhat off historically since the idea of putting electrodes to the balls wasn't so much a Gestapo practice as a practice of French

security forces during the Algerian War—their agents were known to carry small portable generators known as "gégènes." By the time the van pulled into Beaujon Prison in Paris the kid was a mass of jelly, and the cop concluded, "Unfortunately we have orders not to." He was right about that. There'd been reports about women being raped in Beaujon and young men having their balls kicked in—I myself had heard it from an American friend who'd been picked up and released. Funny that you never hear about this part anymore, the bullying, the torture, and worse perhaps; but then isn't that the purpose of torture, harassment, of beatings, rape, humiliation and denigration of every sort, that the victims are the last people who'd want to talk about it? If the cops had gotten serious it would have taken me more than fifty years to reach the point where I was ready to speak out.

I got lucky, I missed most of this. I was stuck in a cell, fed a sandwich so dull it must have been catered from England. Spoke briefly to Diop, who told me I was being kept as a "foreign element," but as a Senegalese and therefore a member of the French Community he was being released. Many, many years later I was interviewed by some professor who'd written a book about the foreign elements that had been expelled. He knew enough to know the cops had been on the

lookout for those elements, he hadn't figured how they went about separating the good foreigners from the bad ones. Diop had made the cut.

That was the last time I saw him. He later wrote me a note telling me he'd found out about my expulsion, and felt awful, and if he could do anything for me, tell them he'd led me on, etc. I told him not to worry. Many years later I found out he'd gotten involved in immigrant rights and died. Was he the Diop who'd been beaten to death in a cell in Senegal? Did he die of AIDS? His family won't talk to me.

Next morning I was brought before an inspector, and this was my second Parzival moment. "So what were you doing at Flins," he asked. Perhaps I should have said, "Monsieur, I am a certified First Aid responder. I was concerned that people might be hurt." It wasn't much, but it might have helped, and in a sense it was the truth. But could I honestly have said that? I was like the guy in a Sartre story who's asked to reveal his friend's hiding place and pretends to reveal his friend's hiding place, thinking he's putting the fascists off the scent, but in the meantime his friend's changed hiding places and the fascists hunt him down. Turn left, turn right.

There's an interesting turn in the French Revolution—it's called the story of the Martyrs of Prairial. This was some kind of first, where a set of deputies were sent to the guillotine, not for what they'd done but for what was assumed to be their revolutionary or counter-revolutionary, sympathies, depending. That's the way the French judicial system works to this day: presumption of guilt or of innocence is the prerogative of the judge alone. A Jew or an Arab is guilty by definition—you can see it in their face. Other countries have a social system that manufactures innocence for the right people, and manufactures the reverse for others, but the French are more systematic. And since being "guilty" is who you are, why lie about it? Why be "inauthentic," as Sartre would put it, a Jew can only be himself by being what others make of him. The inspector wrote down (and this is all he wrote, and he spoke it as he wrote it): *Nez busqué, cheveux crépus, mine patibulaire; Expulsion immédiate*. In case you need a translation: "Hooked nose, curly hair, shifty look. Immediate expulsion." Overnight I was made a Jew. Not that I have any objections, mind you. It still beats a bris.

Hours later I was at police headquarters, on a bench with a few others, listening to a policeman lecture us about how our lives were ruined, we'd be crossed off Santa's list forever. Most of us were bored and

quiet except for a young Italian worker from Turin who had no family in Italy and was panicked he'd be sent back. There must have been many such workers caught in the net, "foreigners," "guest workers" and such. Eventually a couple of detectives turned up, cool and pleasant, well-dressed types. They didn't need to play good cop / bad cop because we'd seen nothing but bad cops for the past two days. I had a pleasant conversation and I'm sure I told them more than I needed, but what was there to tell? There's no Miranda rights in France. An hour later I was issued a formal notification that I'd been expelled from France and had thirty days to appeal. As I left the police headquarters a foot flic wandered over to me: "You're Jewish, aren't you? – Yes – *Ça ne vous a pas porté bonheur*, it didn't bring you luck, did it?" And he wandered off. Ten days earlier I'd watched a group of formerly French-Algerian Jews piled into a convertible and roaring off to the State-organized counter-demonstration, waving Israeli flags and honking "Al-GÉ-Rie / FrançAIse!" Good Jew, Bad Jew.

Many years later I learned that the orders of expulsion had gone to the desk of the Minister of the Interior, who threw them all back with the order to "expel this scum." I don't think he meant me personally.

Those expulsions were illegal at the time, but they were to continue into the Summer despite the Minister being challenged in Parliament.

I spent the following few days going about my business, contacting a lawyer, returning to the Theatre where rehearsals had taken up again. Wilson's position was, if anyone wanted to continue the strike he wouldn't replace them, but we were scheduled to open in Avignon that Summer and it was time to get back to work. On the way back from the lawyer's office I spotted a well-dressed young man sitting on a bench on the Metro platform with his modish girlfriend, showing off his revolver for her. Maybe getting the hell out wasn't going to be such a bad idea. In the meantime a couple of *gorilles*, as Government goons were called, were trying to track me down. They turned up at the Theater—I wish I'd been a fly on the wall. Wilson must have been informed because a few weeks later, back in New York, I got a lovely severance letter praising my work—in case I needed a reference, I suppose.

The gorillas caught up with me one morning at my mother's apartment and dragged me back to Headquarters where I was formally charged and escorted to an unmarked car. As I walked to the car a

couple of plainclothespigs in another car started shouting antisemitic invective at me. Word travels fast; or maybe it was all self-evident. As our car passed the Sorbonne I had a fleeting impulse to jump out and run for safety, but what was the point? The Sorbonne would be evacuated soon afterward. When we got to the airport the gorillas escorted me on to a plane, brought me to a seat, and called the flight attendant over: "Watch out for this one." The flight attendant looked me over: "Got a a parachute, buddy? No?" and turned her back and walked off. In any case there was nobody else to watch out for: the strike at Air France had only recently been broken and the plane was empty. A few minutes after takeoff the steward came over and suggested I move into first class since there was no-one there. "I apologize for the on-flight movie, it's way below your level of sophistication" he said, offering me a cigarette. I declined the cigarette but I kept the bottle of Poully-Fuissé he suggested I take with me. In my homeless days in New York City I carried it around in a shopping bag until the bag broke going down the basement steps to a walk-in mental-health clinic.

FOUR

My life is unimportant, but whatever part of it is important to others is important.

Peter Altenberg

Freud says when you bring back memories of the Good Safe Place you're really thinking about the womb, a cosy place in the mind where all your needs are met. Maybe that's why Tony, when he thinks about May '68, thinks of a good woman to cook his dinner. Me, I'm thinking of something that happened when I was nine, maybe ten, at the edge of a field where a dark row of pines marks another field. A few of us have trespassed, and there's some local kid and a bit of tension, us against that kid, then he whistles in his fingers and five other kids turn up behind him and that's the end of that. How did they do it? Where did they find whatever they found that made them trust each other? I felt envious and humiliated, not only for myself but for all those I was supposed to stand with, we who couldn't stand for one another if our lives depended on it.

For the longest time I couldn't understand why I'd had that immense, peaceful feeling, a feeling of release when we were marching half-a-million strong in the streets of Paris. Was it some kind of mystical experience? Must all mystical, or at least intuitive, or at least subjective personal experience be that of the egotistical self and not the group? If so, what kind of experience was ours, or that of each of us separately, and yet together?

There's an old movie, *Little Big Man*, in which the Wild West hero finds himself in a stagecoach under attack. Like every movie hero he hoists himself up to the seat where the driver is waving his Winchester and commands, "Hand me that gun!" – "No! It's mine!" May '68 wasn't like that. At least it wasn't like that for most of us, it only feels that way today, what with the Judts and Cohn-Bendits; what with all the professors and the pundits for whom the point of '68 was, and is, still, to fight off all the rest of us for ownership of the experience: "No! It's mine!"

Near where I live there's a beautiful building, well over a hundred years old, with a motto on its facade:

Freud must have passed that sign thousands of times, he liked to take his daily walk that way. I suspect he cracked a painful smile or two—not over the suggestion that an individual's striving for his own pleasure and satisfaction is the engine of social action, but over the naivete of the belief that pleasure and satisfaction are unconflicted, a single, unfettered drive. Only bourgeois vanity could fantasize that we're ruled by our selves, and that our self rules unhindered, kind of like the fantasy that you can "make" a revolution. For Freud (as for Spinoza) the quest for pleasure and the quest for satisfaction are interdependent and frequently conflicting drives: the self is not merely out for itself alone, it's self-destructive in the process since the satisfaction of

its needs is the momentary extinction of its own drive for pleasure: "This is Brother Eros and this is Brother Thanatos!" Seemingly this would agree with Coffinbird's insinuation that we were doing Revolution only for the satisfaction of our egos and we were therefore self-destructive, doomed to failure in our revolt against the Reality Principle, the Principle of You Can't Always Get What You Want. (There's something missing from that last sentence. Mick?)

"Did you hate your parents?", asks Professor Coffinbird, with fake nonchalance. There were types like that back then, *les fliquiatres* we called them, half flic, half psychiatrist, all trying to feed us what we were supposed to be thinking so we could feed it back to them and claim the prize. Of course I hated my parents, what kind of a sicko does he think I am? The kind of sicko who starts a revolution, almost overthrows the Government, and gets himself thrown in the clink just because he hates his *parents*? Yes, that's what he thinks.

There's nothing as normal as hating your parents, and Freud had his thoughts about this, too. Society from the horde on down, he wrote, is based on hating your parents and then hating yourself for hating them and hating your children in return because if you hate your

parents just imagine how your children are going to hate you, too. Coincidence? Freud didn't come up with the concept of dual drives until after the collapse of the Hapsburg Empire and the death of the Emperor, the Whiskerdaddy of them all, when you were allowed, finally, to say out loud how hateful Daddy had been. This was the time when Freud came up with a model of the Mind that included the Superego, the guilt-inducing, rage-inducing, internalized Daddy; the Daddy who has to be confronted under the mask of State and Law and Führer and all the coffinbirds whose job is to preserve Society by making sure we keep up the self-hatred so we can pass it on to our children and so on. Until December 1967 contraceptives for women weren't legal in France. (My girlfriend had got her diaphragm from England because a friend had brought it over as a gift.) At least by '68 you didn't have to hate the kids you weren't going to have to have and you didn't have to hate yourself the morning after the Revolution. Now you know why the symbol of the French Republic looks like your mother in a red bonnet.

It's guilt, says Freud, that makes the family glue; it's guilt that makes the social glue. But Freud doesn't go far enough to clarify the difference between the two. Professor Coffinbird has no such doubts, he

thinks he knows what it all means when somebody rebels against the State: to him it's all about releasing the id, the selfish, savage, infant beast that's waiting to be set free the minute Mommy/Daddy/Kaiser/Teacher turn their backs. As the Coffinbird triumphantly points out, there were kids running up and down Paris in '68, plastering the walls with carefully thought-out slogans, some of which even told everybody else to let their Inner Revolutionary out: All-Id, All-the-Time.

Coffinbirds are like your mother, they only hear what they want to hear. They think, because a few of us were spouting slogans, the slogans spoke the truth. They confuse the hard work of trying for spontaneity, the difficult search for a fulcrum to break through the mile-high wall of repression we endured, with some kind of wild, spontaneous upsurge of the inner self. It takes a lot of hard, conscientious work to be spontaneous—I should know, I used to be an actor. Rarely has it taken as much work as it did in the 'sixties, perhaps never as much as it did in France in the years leading up to 1968. Late in 1967 Lee Strasberg of the Actor's Studio in New York came to give a workshop in Paris. Strasberg was working with a translator, and at one point he told an actor to "take it easy." There was a moment of

embarrassed silence as the group realized there was no French equivalent for "take it easy." I'm not sure there's one today.

Freud and Marx thought along similar lines. Just as the Communism of the future could never be the imaginary, spontaneous Communism of the First Horde, so, too the Humans of the Future could never return to some pure, primitive and spontaneous being, they could only strive to overcome the beings we have become in Society, the children of the Superego. You'll never free yourself by letting the id go romping, and you sure won't liberate others. Back in New York City in the early 'seventies, when I worked in an anarchist commune we'd see these sad uneasy types turn up, looking for "those rebel chicks who, y' know, actually *like* to do it." It was hard work for them, it was hard work for us. I know it's hard for you today.

Our story is the story of Dostoevsky's Horse, a Parzival story for High Capital. It's also Nietzsche's Horse, and Brecht's Fallada, and Wagner's Parsifal, each in its own way. In Dostoevsky's version Raskolnikov's on his way to killing the exploiter when he recalls in a dream the savage beating of an old horse by a peasant. To Freud this shows another side of Dostoevsky's drive toward "self-punishment for a death wish

against a hated father," which it is, but it's not only that. The peasant shouts "Don't meddle! It's my property!" as he beats his horse to death, and Raskolnikov's father shrugs it off: "It's not our business!" As a young man Dostoevsky had joined the Revolution, had been condemned to death, and only at the last minute had been reprieved and sent to Siberia by the benevolent mercy of the Tsar, Our Little Father. Does that mean Dostoevsky as a young man cleverly pretended to be a revolutionary protesting against the inhumanity of it all, in order to get himself punished? You think he did all that because he hated his father? Or is it rather, as Freud suggests in passing, that Tsar and State manipulated Dostoevsky's preexisting, highly developed yearning for self-punishment for their own purpose, which was to persuade him all resistance against the Great Father was futile, much as the State did for us? Raskolnikov's dream or Dostoevsky's not about the meaninglessness of suffering, it's about the futility of resistance to those who cause the suffering: Our Father always wins.

Perhaps indeed to love and hate your parents is your fate, a biological necessity; perhaps the sense of guilt's your fate as well. We're all vulnerable in that way, some more than others, myself included, and Dostoevsky was perhaps the most vulnerable of all. But it takes a

whole, highly developed social system to persuade us that our relationship to the Führer or Tsar of Kaiser (or Guide, as de Gaulle briefly styled himself) is as fated as our relationship to our fathers and mothers.

In the 'sixties some of Freud's followers came up with another angle. Now, they claimed, the State was playing the kind permissive daddy, "repressive tolerance," they called it. Yet nothing had changed because, whether Daddy's was being brutal or permissive or both in turn the manipulation and the guilt remained. The State, the Law, the Führer are not in any way organic, biological embodiments of the Superego: Superego, Id or Other are simply masks the State takes on or switches at will. If anyone back then had claimed the State was too permissive we would have thought they were nuts. We knew quite well what daddy to confront, and this was not our parents; this was not the Universal Fated Daddy, or the Tolerant Daddy; this was the Daddy put before us at that particular place and that particular time, and that place.

In fact our parents and elders were fine with what we did back then: once you're past a certain age you're not in shape to run from the

police. Instead, you cheer from windows and balconies; you pitch in with the neighbors to bring water mixed with lemon juice for those whose eyes got burned by teargas. If we were in the process of demonstrating our hatred for our parents then, our parents didn't seem to mind: perhaps they, too, felt liberated. In light of all the domestic violence directed at children and women within the French family; in light of the brutality brought home by workers and husbands from the workplace, by the colonized from their encounters with the police and the bureaucracy, by the students from their encounters with a collapsing educational system, we weren't so much misdirecting our rage against our parents as redirecting it where it properly belonged. No wonder the older ones respected us for it: it let them off the hook.

There's nothing natural about the guilt and rage that's carefully cultivated by the State. The all-purpose metaphysical claim that suffering or violence is "meaningless" collapses before the sudden revelation (like a glimpse of Eden) that a violence or suffering only makes sense within the senselessness of a particular social framework. The original Parzival doesn't fail because he sees the suffering of Amfortas as meaningless; he fails because he doesn't have the tools to ask of

others and himself what the meaning is, because that meaning lies outside the meanings he's been taught. He's a Good Little Knight who discovers in a flash that all his training can't help him overcome a rush of feeling that's the opposite of everything the State has taught him. And this moment—this moment of refusal—is the moment the Mind short-circuits; vetoes itself; confronts and checks the internalized "self-punishing self." For years I couldn't stop being the little boy driven to do something self-punishing, by standing up when a co-worker's fired for no reason or a country is invaded, until I figured out the punishment didn't come from me. At last I understand that sense of elation in those marches, the joy at simply allowing oneself to speak. That supposedly spiritual moment is not the moment when the id takes over, it's the moment when the superego's guilt-inducing act is thwarted and the self begins to think for itself; when the mind gets critical; when the worker begins to figure things out. The People's Veto isn't merely a Veto by the People, it's a veto by the Mind, and the Mind doesn't pull things out of its butt. Unless your name is Schicklgruber Jr. the Führer's not your daddy.

In the months before May I noticed tags in the Metro: "Spartakus." I didn't know much about Spartakus, the radical workers who tried for

a General Strike in Germany in 1919; or the history of worker's councils, the deliberative assemblies in the factories and workplace. Years later I found out that if I didn't, others had: there were many sons of Spanish anarchists in the factories; there was Maspero. In France in 1947 there'd been huge wildcat strikes and walkouts against the orders of the Communist Party and the unions: no doubt this is what union leaders and the Party officials were afraid of on May 13, when a massive march of workers and students and everybody else decided No, they weren't going back home right now. Was it spontaneous and unrehearsed—all Id—when the strikers turned their strike into factories occupations, and the occupied factories into worker-run factories? The tip-off is the promise, not merely to occupy the factories but to start them up again without the boss.

"You were manipulated by your leaders, then," says the Professor. I would say, rather, that our leaders were manipulated by us. I was at the end-point of the demonstration in the late afternoon of the 13th, by the massive bronze statue of the rearing Lion of Belfort on the place Denfert-Rochereau in Paris, with the Communist and union leaders shouting over megaphones: we'd made our point, it was time to go home, while everywhere small groups were branching off. I read

much later that Cohn-Bendit was in the crowd, shouting for people to follow *him*. I joined a group that he eventually caught up with as its leader; inexplicably, we headed for the Eiffel Tower. We all finally came to rest next to the Ecole militaire and some union member or other started to tell our group what Cohn-Bendit was going to say and Cohn-Bendit cut him off, saying he didn't need anyone telling him what to say, which was unkind of him because he himself had no idea what he should say anyhow, let alone what we should be doing. He finally settled for calling on us all to occupy the factories, of which there were few indeed by the École militaire, which begs the question, when exactly did he finally figure out where he was leading us?

Freud begins his book on Mass Psychology (or the Psychology of Groups) with an example the Professor finds unfair, I'm sure. Freud's model for a mindless group manipulated to behave against the self-interest of each isn't a bunch of spoiled hippies, it's the Army and the Church. That same senseless joy I felt marching is similar to the joy felt by the recruit as he "dies for the Kaiser," in reverse. It's joy, at last, to have one's guilt removed, except in our case our guilt was to be removed as an end, not a means to further manipulation by Church and State and Kaiser. Freud thinks that same tremendous sense of

liberation was that felt by Dostoevsky, followed seconds later by the most vicious, self-induced punishment, the epileptic fit. We wanted only the abolition of that sense of guilt, and its instigators.

Marx says somewhere that the proletariat isn't the bearer of Revolution because it's born that way but because it's the only class that has no stake in the class system. (Janis Joplin said pretty much the same thing.) Some are born having no stake in the System, some (like Bobby McGee, for instance) achieve Having-no-Stake-in-the-Systemhood; some, like Sartre, build a career out of conceptualizing the meaning of Having-a-Stake, otherwise known as Engagement. And some, like myself, have Having-no-Stake-in-the-Systemhood thrust upon them when they lose everything as I did, and then must spend the rest of their lives fighting to get back to that magical moment without investment; fighting the System's ploys to get us reinvested, stuff like having nothing to eat or no place to sleep; stuff like feeling guilt for whatever we've not done to deserve this. Years ago I was standing at Zucotti Park talking to another guy in a suit who worked on Wall Street and who'd joined the protests because, as he put it, these kids don't know the half of it. Suddenly I found myself shoved from behind and some Sarah Lawrence type shouted at me, "We've got a march to

go to, *Sir!*" Revolution was her career and she was heading for the top, and like any boss or Kaiser she was going to ensure we all felt it. Zucotti Park was just her next workplace: a competitive, sado-masochistic fantasy of individual heroism in which the role of the leader, be it King or Kaiser or Brave Young Rebel, was to egg us on to greater and greater self-punishment for our initial impulse of grief and empathy, like Amfortas telling Parzival to fuck off and mind his own business: "No! The spear is mine!" So I shouldn't be harsh on Dany-the-Deluded, or on the Sarah Lawrence type: they taught me how to be a revolutionary, which consists in not leading; in not avoiding that moment of joy, but ignoring the sense of fated punishment that follows and precedes it. Die for Dany? *Come on.* Working in the theater, first as an actor, then a stagehand, then an electrician handling live wires thrity feet above the stage, you learn who you can trust, or rather, you learn how to trust: the good co-worker who's not going to climb all over you to get ahead; the skilled and experienced ones who use their skills to help their brothers up. Like those kids at the edge of the wood, our common goal is the autonomy of each in pursuit of the common goal: not to replace the State but to do the job without it; not to abolish work but to get the job done that's the job worth doing;

relations among brothers and sisters, not relations between the children and the boss; and this is as true of writing books as of wiring a Fresnel.

When we reached Beaujon Prison we were searched one-by-one by policemen under the supervision of a commander. The flic searching me found a book I'd brought along—I still have it somewhere. He turned to his commander; he was almost in tears: "It's a book, Commandant. It's just a book. Can he keep it? Can he keep it?"

It was a privilege.

Paris, May 13, 1968

Vienna, May 13, 2018