"*Tout est possible!*": Using Historical Re-Enactment in a University Classroom

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In May of 1968, a sudden uprising took France by surprise. What started as a straightforward protest over cramped facilities and inadequate resources at the recently built Nanterre University on the outskirts of Paris mushroomed into an expression of youthful discontent and, eventually, exasperation with France's aging leader, Charles de Gaulle. The tension was ratcheted up still further when workers—first in the vicinity of Paris and then further afield—began to protest over working conditions and levels of pay. Even the intervention of union leaders and the negotiation of an agreement with the Government did little to quell dissatisfaction. At its height, the rebellion that had begun so simply in May 1968 involved approximately 9 million French workers and threatened both to topple France's wartime savior and reorganize fundamental internal social relations.[1] If the May protests receded as quickly as they arose, with more modest immediate repercussions than expected,[2] the period was no less exhilarating—or disconcerting, depending on one's perspective—for those who lived through it.

How might an instructor recount this story and make plain the various strands of thought that clashed amidst the discontent in

1968? How might she or he communicate something of the hope, fear, anger, and self-reflection occasioned by the events some forty years and thousands of kilometers away, in a classroom situated in a new campus of Wilfrid Laurier University in the former industrial hub of Brantford, Ontario? These were the questions I grappled with as a young instructor teaching a first-year course entitled "The World in the 21st Century."[3] Taking as my guide the slogan from 1968 that "*Tout est possible!*"—Anything is possible!—I decided to venture into what was, for me at least, uncharted territory, and include a mandatory re-enactment[4] of the May events in my introductory interdisciplinary course. The phrase from which I drew inspiration turned out to be prescient, as we shared memorable experiences together and I reached the conclusion that, even after taking into account the inherent potential dangers, there were very real pedagogical rewards to be earned from this innovative teaching method.

Re-Enactment Objectives and Debates Surrounding Them

Few academic disciplines have undergone the academic scrutiny that history has since the end of the Second World War.[5] At the same time, popular notions about the value of this discipline have been shaped by a number of less than approving aphorisms. History has been said to be "written by the victors," it has been called "the lie agreed upon," and has even been written off as nothing more than "bunk."[6] Perhaps the vitriol with which history has been dismissed stems from the enduring belief that the discipline is most useful as a blueprint, enabling us to learn lessons from and avoid the costliest mistakes of the past.[7] This frustrated hope only heightens the exasperation of those who feel betrayed by its practitioners—much as people decry the inaccuracy of weather forecasts in daily conversation.

Even those who continue to insist that history *is* a valuable pursuit agree that the way it has been taught has not necessarily heightened its appeal. The American historian, David Thelen, has noted:

> History poses a profoundly troubling paradox in American culture. On the one hand, there has never been greater popular interest in history—expressed in genealogy, reunions, museums, films. On the other, academic historians lament shrinking audiences for their scholarship, and surveys report that Americans do not recognize people or events from American history…Americans use the past

> actively and critically to live their lives, but they feel disconnected from and distrustful toward "history" where they usually encounter it, in school.[8]

A growing consensus among historians has emerged to the effect that, if history is to be revitalized, it will require recognition of the disconnect between popular and professional, as well as an embracing of innovative methods of exploring the past, such as re-enactment.

The problem is that few of the new methods have engendered as much controversy as re-enactment. Katherine Johnson, a Performance Studies scholar, has declared herself guardedly optimistic about the potential of this method, but has also noted that "it remains on the fringe, held at arm's length, the charismatic, but troubled (and troubling) distant relative."[9] The Australian historian, Greg Dening, famously opined that "The most unhistorical thing we can do is to imagine that the past is us in funny clothes."[10] Meanwhile, Jerome de Groot has suggested that "To paraphrase an adage, the re-enactor knows the price of everything in the past but understands the value and significance of nothing."[11]

Part of the problem here is definitional. When most people think of re-enactment, their minds run to simulations of great battles, undertaken by passionate amateurs who can appear to be preoccupied more with the authenticity of a weapon or costume than with the meaning of the events they recreate. However, to limit re-enactment to this specific form is to do it an injustice. As numerous authors have pointed out, re-enactment has "become an increasingly common device in a range of media and has gained respectability as a pedagogical and museological tool."[12] In the process, our understanding of what might be identified as re-enactment has expanded. One expert has suggested that "Recent scholars use the term to include everything from living history museums, technical reconstructions and 'nostalgia' toys (e.g., tin figures, dioramas and architectural models) to literature, film, photography, video games, television shows, pageants, parades and, reenactment's most ubiquitous instantiation, social and cyber groups devoted to historical performance."[13] Whether it is a matter of instructors making use of video games when exploring an event like the D-Day landings, historical sites like Colonial Williamsburg producing live plays featuring the likes of Thomas Jefferson, or museums like London's Imperial War Museum creating immersive experiences such as

its Blitz and Trench exhibits, re-enactment has assumed a greater importance in the last few decades.[14] For the purposes of this article, I will be using the term "re-enactment" in a more restricted sense, to refer to "a social and personal re-creation of history, based on an exercise of historical imagination and bodily mimicry of certain historical circumstances."[15] This is what I attempted between 2000 and 2014 in my introductory interdisciplinary course.

What were some of the factors that motivated my leap of faith and what were some of the advantages that I anticipated in taking this route? My earlier career had confirmed for me that students were often only vaguely aware of the past. I frequently saw major gaps in their knowledge of Canadian history, let alone world history. Furthermore, I was noticing an increasing tendency towards presentism, in which the past is judged by contemporary standards.[16] As our campus was new and appealed especially to potential local students, we had a higher percentage of mature learners among our numbers, particularly in the first decade of operation, and I bargained that these students would bring a degree of awareness of the past and a wealth of lived experience to the study of events that were formative for the twenty-first century.

After listening to a fascinating presentation on the use of re-enactments in history courses at the 1999 conference of the Society for French Historical Studies in Washington D.C., I decided to employ this method in my class. I knew immediately that I would need to support this choice with clear objectives grounded in the emerging literature. I identified six main benefits that I believed the use of the re-enactment could offer. These were: a) enhanced student engagement; b) personal growth for individual students; c) development of *historical empathy*; d) improved understanding of the interplay between past and present; e) greater awareness of the interaction between individual agency and larger historical forces; and f) the opening up of history to become something more than a static account of the past.

With respect to engagement, the simple fact of trying something that was different created a degree of interest among students. Whether enthusiastic or trepidatious, there was a buzz that preceded the event. But there was more at play than this. Like the experiences that have popped up at museums around the world, a re-enactment seeks to be immersive. Its creators bank on the power of *affect* to

enliven the experience. What has been described as the affective turn has had a profound influence on academic fields at universities around the world in recent years, none more than history.[17] Believers in the power of affect contend:

> [P]reconscious feelings and impulses are altered by smells, hormones, gestures, and images, and that these affective incitements change depending upon the qualitative conditions of social relations. This understanding of affect suggests that what we imagine to be individual and specific—impulses, attitudes, emotions, and feelings—in fact have a social, historical, and therefore shared dimension. Neither biologically deterministic nor humanistic, this approach allows for bodily experience to be understood as a dynamic registration of environmental change.[18]

In other words, "affect" refers to those forces that act upon human beings in order to either increase or retard their ability to act. A song may motivate a person before an important sporting contest. A smell may encourage us to purchase more items in a department store. In the same manner, the creation of an environment embracing all the senses may encourage a deeper engagement with the past among university students seeking to understand an event that, on the face of things, is remote from their own experience.[19]

Another goal that motivated my decision to employ re-enactment in my course was to stimulate personal growth. As a student at Frederik Meijer Honors College observed:

> I was assigned to be a woman who was an author and feminist. I would never stand up on a desk and give a passionate, five-minute speech off the bat, but that's what my character did in real life, so that's what I did. It pushed me to become a better speaker.[20]

I saw countless instances where a normally reserved student, whether feeling moved by the passion of the debate or comforted by the degree of anonymity afforded by the crowd, made an outsized contribution to the May 1968 re-enactment. One student, a journalist in the simulation, made a mental note of the way her peer, who was cast in the role of de Gaulle, played a much more prominent part in the discussions that ensued. She asserted that "Even if the props were limited, I would say that this element of theater, of inhabiting a role it definitely gave some people more freedom to step outside of themselves…[Her friend] absolutely was de Gaulle for the moments that he was in that role."[21]

One of the most significant objectives of my re-enactment was the fostering of a sense of historical empathy. This is "the process of students' cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures to better understand and contextualize their lived experiences, decisions, or actions. Historical empathy involves understanding how people from the past thought, felt, made decisions, acted, and faced consequences within a specific historical and social context."[22] But it is precisely here that doubts still sometimes linger. Critics worry that re-enactment is nothing more than theatricality. Recently, there has been a degree of pushback against the notion that any measure of theatricality diminishes the utility of re-enactment as a genre of historiography.[23] More and more experts are concluding that "taking reenactment seriously as a methodology is worth the risk."[24]

As Vanessa Agnew suggested, re-enactment has something real to offer the academy. Perhaps it is not always the "straightforward narratives…authoritatively presented" that she describes; neither is it always "preoccupied with the minutiae of daily life" as she insists.[25] One of the features of the simulation I developed was that it did *not* provide a simple idea of what transpired in May 1968. At the same time, the focus was on not so much the accuracy of this or that piece of clothing or placard, but on the clash of ideas in the heat of the moment. What is revolution? Can students drawn from the comfortable middle class truly understand the concept? Are workers more concerned with improved working conditions and pay over a reorientation of society? What is owed a great leader who may be in the twilight of his career? These and other questions were the real stuff of our re-enactment and there was no single, clear answer being expressed in the Spring of 1968.

Another core objective of the re-enactment in my course was to underline the interplay between past and present. One student in an early group that took part in the simulation offered a perceptive observation about this interplay. He noted, "The de Gaulle camp definitely over-prepared this as an academic, organized debate and what was funny was watching them amongst this chaos you almost saw exactly what you would assume would be a government response to this…I'm going to stand, I'm going to make a speech and that's going to make it all better."[26] In others words, the ineffectual nature of set speeches in the present (the chaotic town hall meeting

punctuated by heckling and civil disobedience) mirrored the labored initial response of the President of the Republic in 1968. In this way, it was easier for students to understand how a seasoned leader could misread the rapidly evolving situation on the ground. The same student admitted that he was cognizant of the overlap between his "staged" resistance during the re-enactment and his genuine resistance in response to the U.S. invasion of Iraq at the time he was in my class.[27] It is little wonder that another participant in the re-enactment commented that she was "using the world I live in to help create how I felt about it [the May events]."[28]

Given the reticence of some academics when it comes to re-enactment, it is interesting to note that there is a healthy historiographical tradition of embracing the performative. The most famous example of this can be found in the work of R. G. Collingwood:

> How, or on what conditions, can the historian know the past? In considering this question, the first point to notice is that the past is never a given fact which he can apprehend empirically by perception…[T]he historian is not an eyewitness of the facts he desires to know. Nor does the historian fancy that he is; he knows quite well that his only possible knowledge of the past is mediate or inferential or indirect, never empirical….My historical review of the idea of history has resulted in the emergence of an answer to this question: namely, that the historian must re-enact the past in his own mind.[29]

It is worthwhile keeping in mind that the idea of re-enactment in the historical process is not an entirely new concept.

Equally important in the aims I established for the re-enactment was the goal of highlighting the interplay of individual agency and larger, impersonal forces. With respect to individuals, there has been a particular emphasis in the museum world on giving due recognition to the role played by flesh and blood human beings in historical phenomena. The In Flanders Fields Museum in Ypres, Belgium is an especially good example of this. It explores the large-scale events of the First World War, but "in parallel sets out a course of eyewitnesses. Those who were there are called up again to have their accounts told by real-life actors."[30] The strategy is simple: encourage the connection between the student/visitor in the present and the everyday people who lived through the past

experience being chronicled. As one observer has put it, "If we can make the story about a person, then we can suddenly transfer that potential experience of one person to the larger group experience. You can truly humanize the story."[31]

Beyond valorizing the role of the individual in history, it is important to accentuate the delicate dance that takes place in history between individuals, who exercise personal agency, and seismic forces that act in a subterranean way to make an outcome more or less likely. As David Thelen has put it, "Individuals construct from time, place and circumstances, not determinants of their behaviour but horizons of possibility and constraint, including relationships, pressures, and conventions from which they frame choices and take responsibility for them."[32]

Ultimately, the suite of objectives that I have enumerated thus far relates to the larger goal of the course re-enactment, which was to make of history something less rigid and lifeless and something more organic, open and fluid. Instructors who are committed to this goal want students to grasp the *messiness* of history.[33] As one of my re-enactment participants aptly observed, "As a historian in that classroom I definitely thought 'Isn't this a great way to show that messiness?'…to see it is different than reading or hearing what another historian said." He went on to explain the benefits of such "live-action history," recalling that his instructors in history courses always encouraged him to convey multiple viewpoints in his written work, but suggesting, "At a second-year level we can't *expect* a student to do all the research to bring in those multiple perspectives."[34] What transpires in these environments, then, is a sort of liberation in which re-enactment's "emancipatory gesture is to allow participants to select their own past in reaction to a conflicted present."[35]

Preparations for the Re-Enactment

Having determined that I would use re-enactment and having enumerated a series of learning outcomes, it remained to choose a specific historical moment to recreate. I chose the May 1968 events in France for a few reasons. Most students were familiar with the concept of the counter-culture from the 1960s, so there was a certain *frisson* that was created by the thought of exploring

so volatile a period. At the same time, events in French history in the 1960s, and the cultural foundations that made them possible, were largely unknown to the majority of participating students. This fact helped create a certain distance from the events and prevented the exploration of issues that might be emotionally fraught for participants. For example, even before the location of unmarked graves at the sites of Canadian residential schools in recent years, there was considerable emotion around the question of the schools and the assimilationist agenda that gave them birth. There would have been many students for whom such a theme would have been inappropriate. By comparison, May 1968 in France was safe. One final factor in the selection of the May events as the subject of our simulation was that, both in France and further afield, there was mounting interest in the 1968 uprising, which would make source material more readily available.[36]

I developed a series of measures designed to prepare the ground for the re-enactment. First, I always strove to include two introductory lectures. The first was a broader survey of the 1960s as a period of flux on an international scale. It dealt with themes including the generation gap, the sexual revolution, feminism, decolonization, and technological change. The second was more narrowly focused on forces that shaped France in this era. These included the French revolutionary tradition, defeat and occupation in World War II, the rapid social and economic changes of the post-1945 era, and the towering presence of Charles de Gaulle.

It is worth lingering on crucial figure of the President for a moment; he was closely identified with the Resistance during World War II, and was viewed in nearly hagiographic terms in the immediate post-war years.[37] By May 1968, however, de Gaulle was 77 years old and, for many young French citizens, he represented a bygone era. Youth had no recollection of the war or the internecine struggle occasioned by defeat at the hands of Nazi Germany. Their lack of deference, coupled with an emerging desire for free expression and more egalitarian social structures, gave the lie to the editorialist at *Le Monde*, who wrote a few short months before the uprising that "France was bored."[38] At the same time, the alacrity with which de Gaulle lost the confidence of the people surprised both friend and foe. As one historian has put it, "General de Gaulle died in November 1970. But this was his official death. His real death,

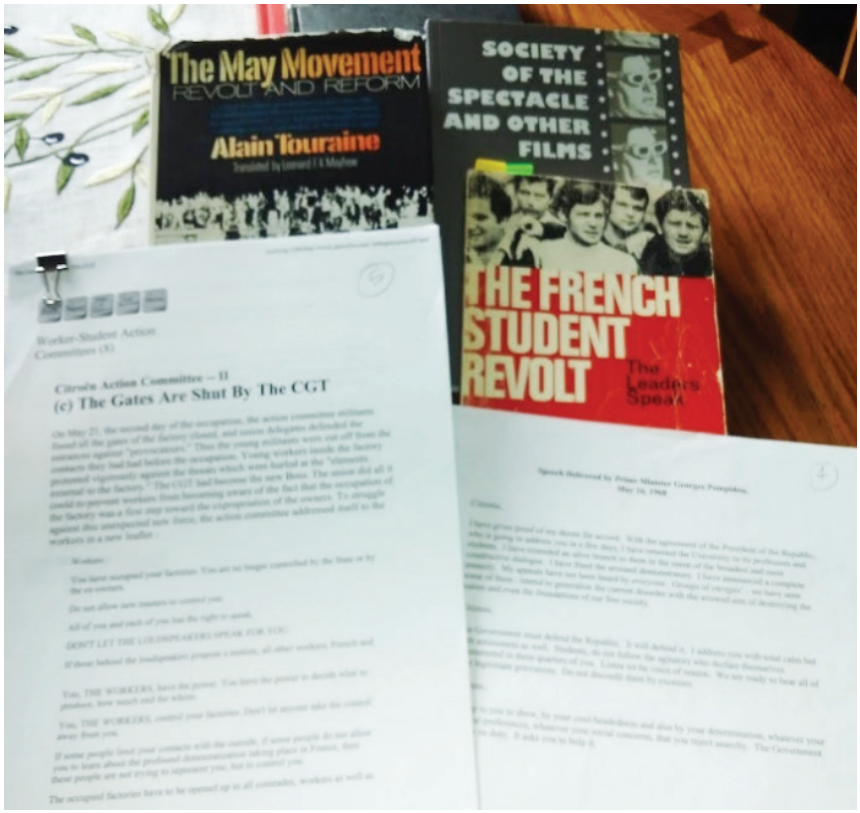

Figure 1: Some of the materials gathered for students to use as they prepared for their re-enactment roles.

it has been argued, took place in May 1968. The most prestigious head of state in the western world saw his reputation and authority destroyed *within a few days*."[39]

I utilized a second important method of preparation for the re-enactment. I always scheduled tutorial time for students in the class to work together to prepare their contributions. I carefully gathered primary and secondary documents related to the uprising and placed them in folders according to the role being played, such as student radical, politician, worker, union leader, etc. (**Figure 1**).[40] These were not exclusively for use in class, but could be signed out by individuals for further study. It was my hope that, in reviewing these documents, students would be gripped by these artifacts from

the past. I also knew that those who are not trained historians tend to look back on the past and attribute a sense of inevitability to events such as the fall of a Charles de Gaulle. If nothing else, the primary documents from the time demonstrate that the situation was developing extremely rapidly.

With respect to the groups in which the students worked, these served a couple of critical functions. Students were placed in their groups after a few weeks of the course, so that I could get a sense of their strengths and weaknesses. I worked hard to keep tutorial members together to facilitate preparatory work. I also tried to ensure that strong individuals were present in every group. In this manner, the likelihood that all points of view would be articulated clearly was increased. In addition, I counted on the power of the group to encourage quieter students to participate more vocally in the proceedings. In allocating students to factions, I sought to ensure that certain groups were especially strong: the journalists and the situationists.

The journalists would need to have a solid grounding across areas of content so as to draw out participants on various key subjects. They would also have to be sufficiently poised to assert their will and maintain order in a chaotic environment where chanting, heckling, and acts of civil disobedience would occur. Another group that played a significant role in the re-enactment was the situationists. This was a group of leftist intellectuals who believed that "The entire life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail appears as an immense accumulation of spectacles."[41] This was a variation on the "bread and circuses" thesis, which held that French citizens were anesthetized to societal inequities by consumerism and other glittering attainments that momentarily satisfied them. Students working in this group needed strong reading skills (to get through the challenging work of the philosophers) and great confidence (to attempt a theatrical intervention in the situationist style during the re-enactment). One group of situationists walked up to the front for their introductory statement linked together by paper chains, with all but one of their members wearing duct tape over their mouths. The leader removed the tape from her compatriots, shouted "Free your mind!", and everyone broke their chains together. It was a highly effective moment that silenced the crowd and gave the intellectuals a platform from which to speak (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2: A group of situationists enact a piece of political theater, in which paper chains are broken and taped mouths are freed to express opinions about the state of French culture.

Intricate contributions like this one require ample time to plan, and the dedication of tutorial time to group planning was critical. It allowed students to coordinate their opening statements and work up responses to anticipated questions from other groups or the journalists. It also provided the student and worker groups in particular the opportunity to plan their strategies for disrupting the meeting. Participants were told that civil disobedience, within acceptable bounds, was permissible. Usually, this meant the fabrication of banners and placards modeled on those used in 1968 (**Figure 3**). But it could entail something more elaborate. In one instance, my heart sank as I saw a group of students approach the front of the lecture hall armed with spray paint. I was about to intervene when I noticed bedsheets being unfurled; I heaved a sigh of relief as slogans were emblazoned on the sheets and hung in prominent positions. "*Tout est possible*" implies that vigilance on the part of the instructor is needed!

Figure 3: A bespoke poster used in one of the re-enactments, cleverly combining two slogans from the uprising ("It is forbidden to forbid!" at top, and "Be Young and Shut Up!" below with its accompanying image).

In tutorial time allocated to preparation for the event, students were to create a brief (250-word) biography of their character, whether fictional or historical. This would help them to understand their character's motivations and, in particular, their attitude with respect to the tactics of the revolutionaries. In addition, participants were encouraged to come dressed in period costume. Wearing the uniform of their character—whether well-heeled conservative observer, student radical, laborer, or politician—helped students immerse themselves in the moment (**Figure 4**). Finally, by allowing civil disobedience, I was inviting students to experience the effectiveness of certain forms of protest and to live through moments of frustration and even anger when they were not being allowed to speak.[42] Once again, there had to be clear limits. On one occasion, and one only, I cast some class members as police officers. The result was a variation on the Stanford Prison Experiment of 1971, where those

Figure 4: A student cast as Socialist leader, François Mitterrand, makes his pitch for support in defeating President de Gaulle.

cast as prison guards became abusive of "prisoners." In this case, the student playing student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit, as well as a couple of lieutenants, were handled roughly by authorities, prompting me to discontinue the role of police officer in the future.[43]

To augment my introductory lectures and the work students put in with the files that I had prepared, I would also show clips from films depicting this era in French history. I used a number of films with varying degrees of success. Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle* (1958) offered a charming portrait of the collision of the two Frances—one sleek, suburban, and modernizing and the other resolutely traditional, agrarian, and chaotic.[44] The humor of the film and the use of prominent symbols tended to appeal to the students. Seymour Drescher's documentary, *Confrontation: Paris, 1968* (1970) tended to be less entertaining, but contained plenty of archival footage that conveyed something of the disorientation of the period.[45] Finally, Louis Malle's *Milou en Mai* [*May Fools*] (1990), while exploring family relations as much as political concerns, did communicate the

expectations of the bourgeoisie, first dashed by the elderly President and then encouraged when he delivered his second, much firmer, renunciation of the uprising at the end of May.[46] My eventual practice was to combine documentary and fictional works so as to choose the best elements from both and provide as much context as possible.

The Day of the Event

After considerable preparation, the day of the re-enactment would arrive. There was invariably an air of excitement in the room as we gathered.[47] As noted above, I encouraged students to dress in character where possible. Inevitably, there was a range of interpretations of what this meant, but it was not unusual to see business suits for politicians and union leaders or fringed shirts and beads for the student radicals. One young woman, cast as an assistant to socialist François Mitterrand, came in a striking, pale pink skirt and matching jacket, wearing her mother's horned-rimmed glasses and her hair in a bouffant.[48]

Watching her interact with her political master, I realized how the costume was influencing her demeanor. She was attempting to walk that line between being dressed in a business-like manner and retaining a certain feminine charm, like so many women of the era, who were exploring new frontiers in the world of work but were coming up against age-old gender stereotypes at the same time. But her costume was affecting her in other ways also. Katherine Johnson described the physical and mental impact of costume when participating in the Jane Austen Festival Australia:

> Sitting down, the tightness of my corset squeezes my ribcage, digging into my shoulder blades, forbidding me to slouch. My shoulders, accustomed to hunching over a computer, are forced to mimic the metal rods of my undergarments, straight and strong. My core muscles feel tense with the effort of sucking my stomach in, flinching away from the corset's constrictive grasp. Stomach in, shoulders back, fabric and steel combine to sculpt my body into a supposedly more feminine form.[49]

While the student in my class did not have to contend with the very real interference of a corset, her suit was tailored and so restricted her movement. But it was her elaborate hairstyle that truly impeded her movement. As she subsequently remembered:

> The outfit that I wore, it was a woman's suit from the '60s. I'm not used to that kind of dress, it's a little bit more restrictive for me, but

> it was the hair that was actually restrictive…I styled it in a bouffant. It hurt. It was just so many bobby pins in my head to make it like that. I had a headache at the end so you could see how a woman would be restricted by how she had to look.[50]

Her costume choice meant that her physical appearance limited her movement, in the same way that her gender would have dictated a less assertive role in the events of May 1968. The physical echoed and was a reminder of the situational.

The re-enactments would all begin in the same way. After standing for "*La Marseillaise*," the journalists would address the various groups (participants were seated according to a plan clearly displayed on the whiteboard at the front of the class), laying out the rules of engagement. Opening statements of two to three minutes would take place. President de Gaulle would begin, followed by Mitterrand (or one of his staff), Prime Minister Georges Pompidou (or his proxy), student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit, union leaders, radical workers, "average" Parisian supporters of the President, and situationist intellectuals.[51] In these opening remarks, students would often draw from contemporary documents. This would help participants to assess the complexity of the situation. For example, de Gaulle's first broadcast response to the events of May, delivered on May 24, left many confused or disconcerted. The President initially dangled the possibility of a referendum, stating, "I need the French people to say they want it. However, our Constitution provides precisely by what means he can do it. It is the most direct and the most democratic way possible, that of the referendum."[52] As future commentators have pointed out, de Gaulle was initially uncertain how to react to the students' uprising. The suggestion of a referendum over popular participation in government only emboldened some who hoped for regime change. I would have the de Gaulle figure save a reading from his May 30 speech,[53] much more defiant in the face of the revolutionaries, for later in the Town Hall, to signal a shift in the political situation. This would show students that the truly revolutionary moment was passing.

Once opening statements had been delivered, participants were free to raise questions of particular participants. The journalists were also prepared to step in if conversation or debate lagged (or became too heated). Generally, certain recognizable themes would emerge with regularity. President de Gaulle would be chastised for

his dismissive early response to the students. He would be grilled about his age and whether he was able to lead anymore. Socialist François Mitterrand would be questioned as to his sincerity in rallying to the students' cause and would be accused of a naked grab for power.[54] Students would be told that, in pursuing revolution, they were too willing to throw out the good of the Fifth Republic with the bad. Union leaders would be criticized by workers for thinking that a few francs in extra hourly pay was sufficient when they were preaching a fundamental reorganization of society. Those opposed to the uprising would suggest that the community of thought between workers and students was illusory and that the youth of Nanterre would betray the laborers at the first opportunity.

In the process of raising these key points, important issues facing France would come to the surface. The suspicion of Danny Cohn-Bendit on account of his German heritage resonated with conservatives who viewed Germany as France's once-and-forever enemy. At the same time, the attacks on Cohn-Bendit struck a chord with workers and students who were not native-born, particularly in light of the colonial legacy represented most graphically by Algerian Civil War and the ongoing conflict in Vietnam. The apparent split between unionist leaders and their membership underlined the extent to which union functionaries had been co-opted into the French elite, as well as the degree to which working-class dissatisfaction was never too far from the surface in French life.

These issues were all significant. However, I also wanted to demonstrate the convergence of the political and the personal. I would secretly prime the "average French couple," who were supporters of de Gaulle, to single out a pre-selected female student and make an emotional appeal to her to reconsider her activism. I would also secretly prime the wife in this couple to later have second thoughts and to express support for her daughter's pursuit of justice and a fuller role in society. The first confrontation—between parents and child—would emphasize the generational divide that was apparent throughout the 1960s, wherever activism reached new heights. The second debate—between husband and wife—would serve to highlight the extent to which many women were becoming politically active for the first time and would underline that gnawing question in the minds of affluent women captured by Betty Friedan in the American context: "Is this all?"[55]

Evaluating Impact

Evaluation was a challenge given the number of students engaged in the re-enactment. I would engage in assessment in real time, taking notes during the simulation and noting those who were active in the twenty-minute debrief that immediately followed the gathering. I would also refer to the video recorded each time we conducted the simulation when finalizing student evaluations. Students would receive a printed sheet from me that addressed their efforts regarding costume and props, the frequency of their interventions in the re-enactment, and their grasp of the content specific to their role.

At the same time that students were being evaluated, I was keen to continually assess the effectiveness of the re-enactment in attaining the objectives I had set. I sought feedback from participants in the debriefing sessions. Generally, they indicated that they found the process both entertaining and helpful in assimilating the various currents of thought that were swirling at the time of the unrest. One mature student noted that "This teaching technique is very effective in fixing the event in the minds of the students."[56] Another pointed out that "In the process of working through the re-enactment, some of the complexities of the original participant's [sic] positions emerged, and by 'living' the events, the class participants gained a perspective and an understanding which would be difficult to gain from a textbook or a lecture format."[57] It became clear that some students retained a vivid memory of the May 1968 simulation. One participant (now a university history instructor himself) remarked, "I still think about this assignment. It is just one of the things that I will walk away with [from his university experience]."[58]

It is crucial, of course, to remember that an exercise like this has limits. The rough handling of Daniel Cohn-Bendit by police in one re-enactment necessitated a reconsideration of the role of authorities in the re-enactment. It is also essential that the instructor remain vigilant so that blatantly racist or sexist comments are not slipped in under the guise of "remaining true to character." Finally, we must acknowledge that "the past is a foreign country."[59] However successful our efforts, we can never *relive* what happened in May 1968. Our interpretations of these events are inevitably colored by our own values and predilections and by the influence of contemporary events, as was illustrated in the case of the student

reflecting on the overlap between his theatrical resistance and his activism after the invasion of Iraq. In a similar manner, following the 2008 financial crisis, students demonstrated greater awareness of the vulnerability of working-class and middle-class citizens and an intensified distrust of corporations.

Having said all of this, it is undeniable that the re-enactment of the May 1968 uprising in France served some valuable purposes. Students appreciated the atmosphere of contestation better, having been through this experience. Those who tried to make reasoned arguments found themselves facing all manner of disruption. Despite this, many persevered in raising important questions—be they about the disaffection of workers whose leaders seemed to have lost touch or about the extent to which student radicals had a coherent plan for national renewal. Furthermore, the crowd mentality allowed some of the less outgoing students to participate more fully by singing, chanting, or heckling speakers. Certainly, in some cases, their utterances were little more than *ad hominem* attacks or sarcastic remarks. However, a significant minority would return to themes of real importance, such as police brutality in the suppression of the protests, racism underpinning low wages in industry, and the President's inability to connect with the younger generation. At the same time, virtually everyone would feel the power of the crowd, who "far from being social abstractions, were composed of ordinary men and women with varying social needs, who responded to a variety of impulses."[60] Finally, real creativity was shown in everything from the costuming of individuals to the signs that they created and the forms of protest that they deployed. At a time when instructors often encourage students to be informed and engaged, some of the strategies used in this re-enactment could be appropriated for student activism on issues such as rising tuition costs, racial injustice, or gender inequity.

Conclusion

There is no question that, in the minds of some academic historians, mere mention of the term "re-enactment" conjures up images of Monty Python's "Batley Townswomen Guild" recreating the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on a muddy pasture, their handbags the only weapons.[61] Re-enactment, in the guise of an

organized simulation of a historical moment in order to gain some insight into what transpired, remains a controversial technique. There are some who have argued that, in accommodating the affective turn, we have turned history into little more than a carnival thrill ride with little or no epistemic value. However, there is an emerging body of academic literature that counters that attending to affect results in heightened interest and superior retention of important details.

Other skeptics contend that the past remains a "foreign country," and no amount of period dress or memorization of famous speeches will assure us safe passage into it. While I appreciate the metaphor, I prefer another of more ancient lineage: "the river." It was the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus (sixth century BCE), who claimed "No man can step in the same river twice, for it's not the same river, and he's not the same man." However, we now know that the original Greek was a little more nuanced, suggesting that Heraclitis understood that neither the river nor the human being stepping into it were *entirely* different. The cycle of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation, like the process of human memory, ensured that there were traces of both the original waterway and person that remained the second time around.[62] In this way, we can see that the borders between past and present are not so clearly delineated as we are sometimes led to believe. The memory of the French Revolution—particularly its radical phase between 1792 and 1799—had a bearing on bourgeois attitudes to public protest. The memory of how de Gaulle stood virtually alone against the forces of collaboration in 1940 made it difficult for those of a certain age to toss the President aside after he may have lost touch with contemporary trends.

No, most certainly, the past is not the present day in fancy dress. But even the gap between expectations and values in the past and their contemporary equivalents can be illuminating. The young female radical, confronted with her parents' anguish at her actions during the protests, will sense the gap between the parental expectation of a dutiful daughter being acted out in the simulation and her own experience of being encouraged to believe she can do anything a man can do. She will also see the gap between her mother's (at least initial) deference to her husband and the current expectation of equal consideration in matters financial, political, and social. If nothing else, this will reinforce the sense that the status quo today has not *always* existed and that there is a debt of gratitude owed to those

who fought in favor of a woman's right to hold her own beliefs. It will do so more effectively than the most well-meaning lecture that reminds listeners of those on whose shoulders we stand.

In addition to gaining a sense of the power of affect, the interplay between past and present and the telling gap between our day and the past, participants in our re-enactments over the years were able to sense the ways in which the personal and the seismic comingled. Individual agency played its part in May 1968. Daniel Cohn-Bendit may not have been the first or the deepest thinking student radical. However, he had a certain charisma and he quickly became the face of student protest. De Gaulle's various decisions—from leaving Prime Minister Pompidou to initially deal with the uprising, through delivering his conciliatory speech of May 24, to his subsequent visit to French troops stationed in West Germany—all had important consequences. At the same time, large impersonal forces played an equally influential role in the May days. The revolutionary tradition in France ensured that many French citizens had a pre-existing set of images that corresponded to terms like "bourgeois" or "radical." The logic of capitalism, particularly through the period of rapid industrialization known as *Les Trentes Glorieuses*, the thirty years of unprecedented economic growth in France, helped create the conditions in which a peripheral debate about the quality of education on a suburban campus could escalate into a more widespread revolt challenging the entire political system.

The benefits listed above are all important. But there is one final outcome that is arguably the most significant of all. The participants in my re-enactments, in experiencing even a diluted moment of discord, came to see how frustrating such moments can be. In the failure of well-polished speeches and neatly ordered statistics to hold sway over raw emotion and antagonism, they were given a sense of the cost of engaging in political discourse, as well as the necessity of making the attempt. In the multiplicity of interpretations of the state of 1960s France, they earned a sense of history as something open and fluid, not static and determined. Here, the metaphor I like best is conversation. Consensus on the development and impact of a historical event may be reached for a period of a time. However, inevitably, a new cache of materials or a novel synthesis of existing resources yields a new thesis about the event in question. The ensuing conversation may be loud at times, even vociferous.[63] But it

continues apace. That is what makes history fascinating. Anything that can move students away from the image of history as the ritual repetition of name and dates, anything that can enlist more than just their intellects in pursuit of an objective has a better chance of sparking a connection, however fleeting, between them and the flesh and blood people who laughed, sang, shouted, and argued in May 1968. It can, in the words of the radicals themselves, suggest that "*tout est possible!*"

Notes

1. Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 3-4. Ross notes that May '68 was the largest mass movement in French history and the only legitimate "general" strike in the developed world after World War II.
2. In truth, a lively debate has emerged regarding the actual significance of the May events in French history. For a strong overview of contributions to this debate, see Julian Jackson, "The Mystery of May 1968," *French Historical Studies* 33, no. 4 (Fall 2010): 625-653.
3. The course changed a great deal in the period during which the re-enactments were used (2000-2014). It began as a full-year course called "The World in the 20th Century," became two separate term-length courses, and finally evolved into a single-term course focused on the twenty-first century. In 2000, we had 39 full-time students enrolled on the whole campus. Subsequently, course enrollment would occasionally reach 100, necessitating the creation of two separate in-class events.
4. I have used the hyphenated spelling except where a source has chosen to use the alternate spelling.
5. Hayden V. White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) began what is referred to as the literary turn in historiography, which, among other things, challenged the notion of objectivity in history. For a response to the issues raised by White and others, see Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1994). Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice*, third ed. (London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019) offers an excellent overview of the discipline more generally.
6. These assessments come from Winston Churchill, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Herny Ford, respectively.
7. Though enduring, this view of history is a faulty one. See for example Peter Farrugia, "Introduction: Navigating the River of History," in *The River of*

History: Trans-National and Trans-Disciplinary Perspectives on the Immanence of the Past, ed. Peter Farrugia (Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 1-31.

8. David Thelen, "Learning from the Past: Individual Experience and Re-Enactment," *Indiana Magazine of History* 99, no. 2 (June 2003): 155. See Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) for a detailed exploration of this bivalent reaction to history.

9. Katherine M. Johnson, "Rethinking (Re)Doing: Historical Re-enactment and/as Historiography," *Rethinking History* 19, no. 2 (2015): 193.

10. Greg Dening, *Readings/Writings* (Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 209.

11. Jerome de Groot, "Affect and Empathy: Re-enactment and Performance as/in History," *Rethinking History* 15, no. 4 (2011): 588.

12. Vanessa Agnew, "Epilogue: What Is the Task of Reenactment?" in *Historical Reenactment: New Ways of Experiencing History*, ed. Mario Carretero, Brady Wagoner, and Everardo Perez-Manjarrez (New York: Berghahn Books, 2022), 163. See also Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb, and Juliane Tomann, "Introduction: What is Reenactment Studies?" in *The Routledge Handbook of Reenactment Studies: Key Terms in the Field*, ed. Vanessa Agnew, Jonathan Lamb, and Juliane Tomann (London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2020), 1-10.

13. Vanessa Agnew, "History's Affective Turn: Historical Reenactment and Its Work in the Present," *Rethinking History* 11, no. 3 (2007): 300.

14. For video games as history, see Adam Chapman, *Digital Games as History: How Video Games Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2016). For a discussion of Williamsburg's foray into live theater on site, see Scott Magelssen, "Review of *Revolutionary City*," *Theatre Journal* 59, no. 1 (March 2007): 117-119, in which he particularly notes the way that contemporary issues such as government surveillance of Americans and use of torture during the war in Iraq are subtly referenced in the script. For the Imperial War Museum's innovation in the realm of "experiences," see Jennifer Wellington, Aaron Cohen, Anne Hertzog, and Susanne Brandt, "Museums," *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/museums>. Former IWM Director Noble Frankland claimed, "These so-called 'virtual reality' experience exhibitions, however thrilling they may be, are the stuff of theme parks rather than historical museums." See Frankland, *History at War: The Campaigns of an Historian* (London, United Kingdom: Giles de la Mare Publishers, 1998), 175.

15. Mario Carretero, Brady Wagoner, and Everardo Perez-Manjarrez, "Approaching Historical Reenactments," in *Historical Reenactment: New Ways of Experiencing History*, ed. Mario Carretero, Brady Wagoner, and Everardo Perez-Manjarrez (New York: Berghahn Books, 2022), 1.

16. There has been disagreement over whether presentism is a danger or not. Alexandra Walsham suggested, "Our sensitivity to this charge persists despite the scepticism about the possibility of escaping the biases of our cultural formation and conditioning that is the legacy of postmodernism. It is now widely recognized

that a degree of presentism is an unavoidable problem of historical method. But there is also enhanced awareness that the awkward questions we bring to bear on the foreign country of the past simultaneously yield some of the richest insights into it." See Alexandra Walsham, "Introduction: Past and…Presentism," *Past & Present* 234, no. 1 (February 2017): 215. What my students were displaying was a less self-aware and linear view of history in which our era is viewed as *necessarily* a more enlightened time.

17. See Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd, eds., *Performing Heritage: Research, Practice and Innovation in Museum Theatre and Live Interpretation* (Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2010); Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Iain McCalman and Paul A. Pickering eds., *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn* (Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

18. Rachel Greenwald Smith, "Postmodernism and the Affective Turn," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 57, no. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2011): 423.

19. Another technique to enhance the teaching of history that has gained traction in the university setting is the battlefield tour. Having participated in a number of these though Wilfrid Laurier University, I have seen firsthand how "walking the ground" can make the past come alive in new ways. For an exploration of battlefield tours in the specific context of the memory and history of the Great War, see Catriona Pennell, "Taught to Remember? British Youth and First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours," *Cultural Trends* 27, no. 2 (2018): 83-98.

20. Student quoted in Leah Twilley, "Reenactment Takes Center Stage in the Classroom," *Grand Valley Magazine* 14, no. 4 (Spring 2015): 22, <https://www.gvsu.edu/gvmagazinearchive/reenactment-takes-center-stage-in-the-classroom-320.htm>. The class was employing an innovative pedagogy called Reacting to the Past (RTTP), developed by Professor Mark Carnes at New York's Barnard College in the 1990s, which has grown in popularity with instructors since.

21. Interview with Laurie Fosty, March 11, 2023. The same student was also moved to reconsider the nature of media and the role of bias in journalism, recognizing that her own natural bent was rather conservative and less well disposed to the radicals taking part in the re-enactment.

22. Jason L. Endacott and Sarah Brooks, "An Updated Theoretical and Practical Model for Promoting Historical Empathy," *Social Studies Research and Practice* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 41.

23. Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011), 17-18.

24. Iain McCalman and Paul A. Pickering eds., *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn* (Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 13.

25. Vanessa Agnew, "Introduction: What Is Reenactment?" *Criticism* 46, no. 3 (2004): 330.

26. Interview with Evan Habkirk, February 22, 2023.

27. Interview with Evan Habkirk, February 22, 2023.

28. Interview with Amanda Zimmerman-Tangorra, February 22, 2023. In the interest of full disclosure, I should note that these two students are both educators and so have given considerable thought to matters of pedagogy. I was still caught off guard when the young woman noted that the video of her year's simulation (that I had shared in advance of our interview), with its grainy images and muffled audio, was itself a relic of time past.

29. R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1982), 282.

30. "The People," *In Flanders Fields Museum*, <https://www.inflandersfields.be/en/in-flanders-fields-museum-1/mensen-e>.

31. David B. Allison, *Living History: Effective Costumed Interpretation and Enactment at Museums and Historical Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 48.

32. Thelen, "Learning from the Past," 159.

33. Twilley, "Reenactment Takes Center Stage," 3.

34. Interview with Evan Habkirk, February 22, 2023.

35. Agnew, "Introduction: What Is Reenactment?" 328. Essentially, what is taking place is a form of co-creation. See Paul Durica, "Past Imperfect, Or the Pleasures and Perils of the Reenactment," *Journal of American Studies* 52, no. 4 (November 2018): 936.

36. Johan Kugelberg and Philippe Vermès, eds., *Beauty is in the Street: A Visual Record of the May '68 Paris Uprising* (London, United Kingdom: Four Corners, 1987) and Leslie Kaplan, *L'Excès-L'usine* (Paris, France: P.O.L., 1987) offered pre-existing analyses. During the period that we ran the re-enactments, the following appeared: Andrew Feenberg and Jim Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets: The French May Events of 1968* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001); Mark Edelman Boren, *Student Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004); Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2013). Prominent films on May 1968 from the same period include: *May Fools* (dir. Louis Malle, 1990); *The Dreamers* (dir. Bernardo Bertolucci, 2003); *Regular Lovers* (dir. Philippe Garrel, 2005); *Something in the Air* (dir. Olivier Assayas, 2012).

37. An interesting study of de Gaulle is Julian Jackson, *A Certain Idea of France: The Life of Charles de Gaulle* (London, United Kingdom: Penguin 2018).

38. See, for example, the interview of Emmanuel Laurentin by Sally Gimson, "1968 and All That: One of France's Leading Journalistic Historians Discusses the New Style of French Protest," *Index on Censorship* 46, no. 4 (December 2017): 44.

39. Douglas Johnson, "Barricades of Yesteryear (French Student Protest of 1968)," *History Today* 38, no. 6 (June 1988): 6.

40. In this regard, I found two collections particularly helpful. These were Hervé Bourges, *The French Student Revolt: The Leaders Speak*, trans. B. R. Brewster (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968) and Alain Touraine, *The May*

Movement: Revolt and Reform, trans. Leonard F. X. Mayhew (New York: Random House, 1971). I included the former in the file dedicated to the student radicals.

41. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014), thesis 1, p. 2, as cited in Alastair Hemmens and Gabriel Zacarias, eds., *The Situationist International: A Critical Handbook* (London, United Kingdom: Pluto Press, 2020), 151. This was a variation on Karl Marx's statement to the same effect but substituting "commodities" for "spectacles" in his *Capital*. See Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London, United Kingdom: Penguin, 1990), 125.

42. One student admitted that his costume was meant to mirror his own intent. "I dressed like the character Hyde on *That 70s Show* because I did not anticipate being more than tangentially involved in proceedings." When the authorities reacted aggressively to his early protests, he realized that "everything had changed." Interview with Evan Habkirk, February 22, 2023.

43. See Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House, 2007). The experiment remains to this day a controversial one, with some peers accusing Zimbardo of unethical methods.

44. The former is symbolized by his sister's "gravel-lined, flagstone-paved 'garden' that is suitable for everything except growing things and enjoying the sun." See Robert Cardullo and Jacques Tati, "The Sound of Silence, The Space of Time: Monsieur Hulot, Comedy, and the Aural-Visual Cinema of Jacques Tati (An Essay and an Interview)," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 17, no. 3 (2013): 359.

45. *Confrontation: Paris, 1968* (dir. Seymour Drescher, 1971), available at <https://freedocumentarystreaming.com/films/confrontation-paris-1968>.

46. Roger Ebert, in his review of this film, noted that he "collected a few black and blue marks across the back of my legs, souvenirs of police truncheons when I made the mistake of trying to sightsee in the middle of a riot." See Roger Ebert, "Reviews: *May Fools*," July 27, 1990, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/may-fools-1990>.

47. One of my colleagues went so far as to state that "The '1968 revolution… re-enactment' efforts of his students over the years have become something of legend here, and the kinds of excitement that the students generate through their participation in this learning exercise will no doubt be one of those learning moments that they will revisit fondly." Rob Feagan, Letter to the Dean of the Brantford Campus, January 15, 2006.

48. She later admitted that her choices were aimed at getting at the reality of the people we were studying. "It was something I could latch onto to help me understand the time period and my role," she declared. Interview with Stephanie Lemelin-Bazinet, March 5, 2023.

49. Johnson, "Rethinking (Re)Doing," 199.

50. Interview with Stephanie Lemelin-Bazinet, March 5, 2023.

51. In the very first year that we ran the re-enactment, I also included roles as university lecturers and conservative students, to further underline the multiplicity of views at the time. However, I discontinued these roles in an effort to streamline the operation of the simulation and limit confusion.

52. Charles de Gaulle, "Allocution du 24 mai 1968." Text and video available at <https://fresques.ina.fr/de-gaulle/fiche-media/Gaulle00142/allocution-du-24-mai-1968.html>.

53. Charles de Gaulle, "Allocution radiodiffusée du 30 mai 1968." Text and video available at <https://fresques.ina.fr/de-gaulle/fiche-media/Gaulle00366/allocution-radiodiffusee-du-30-mai-1968.html>.

54. The whiff of opportunism that many sensed in Mitterrand's actions during the crisis has only become stronger in many people's minds. Daniel Cohn-Bendit—now a Green Party politician—stated, "Nothing could have been more opposed to the spirit of '68…than Mitterrand's 'monarchic version of socialism.'" See Robert Zaretsky, "Everyone in France Wants to Claim the Legacy of 1968," *Foreign Policy*, April 18, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/18/everyone-in-france-wants-to-claim-the-legacy-of-1968/>.

55. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton & Company, 1963), 44.

56. Jim Horn, Letter to the author, January 10, 2006.

57. Laurie Fosty, Letter to the author, January 9, 2006.

58. Interview with Evan Habkirk, February 22, 2023.

59. The phrase was made famous by David Lowenthal, as a result of his book, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1985), but actually dates back to L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (London, United Kingdom: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), 9.

60. George Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1959), 232.

61. De Groot, "Affect and Empathy," 587.

62. A more accurate rendering of the Greek would be, "On those stepping into rivers, staying the same other and other waters flow." See Farrugia, "Introduction: Navigating the River of History," 3.

63. As recently as 2018, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the May events, wildly divergent views were expressed. On the one hand, the uprising was described as "a watershed moment." See Alicia Canter and Guy Lane, "Protests in Paris, May 1968 – Photographs Then and Now," *The Guardian*, May 2, 2018. On the other, it was declared equally firmly that "May '68 will be remembered all over the world this year as a great missed opportunity. But it was more than that: It was the end of a revolutionary illusion." See Mitchell Abidor, "What the Non-Revolution of May '68 Taught Us," *The New York Times*, May 5, 2018.

Appendix A: Documents Used in Preparation for the Re-Enactment

1. Speech Delivered by Prime Minister Georges Pompidou, May 16, 1968

Citizens,

I have given proof of my desire for accord. With the agreement of the President of the Republic, who is going to address you in a few days, I have returned the University to its professors and students. I have extended an olive branch to them in the name of the broadest and most constructive dialogue. I have freed the arrested demonstrators. I have announced a complete amnesty. My appeals have not been heard by everyone. Groups of *enragés* [The *enragés* were radicals who went into the streets clamouring for greater reform during the French Revolution]—we have seen some of them—intend to generalize the current disorder with the avowed aim of destroying the nation and even the foundations of our free society.

Citizens,

The Government must defend the Republic. It will defend it. I address you with total calm but with seriousness as well. Students, do not follow the agitators who declare themselves disinterested in three quarters of you. Listen to the voice of reason. We are ready to hear all of your legitimate grievances. Do not discredit them by excesses.

Citizens,

It is up to you to show, by your cool-headedness and also by your determination, whatever your political preferences, whatever your social concerns, that you reject anarchy. The Government will do its duty. It asks you to help it.

NOTE: The third of the three political figures cast in our re-enactments was Prime Minister Georges Pompidou. Less well known than either de Gaulle or Mitterrand, it was important to provide evidence of his early attempts to defuse the situation in early May and to provoke students to think about how Pompidou was left to "twist in the wind" to some degree by de Gaulle, when he decided to change course and pursue a more vigorous policy regarding the unrest.

2. Excerpts from "Information Sessions Held by the President and Executive Director of the Lever Soap Works, Monsieur G. Dery, and the Directors of Chemical Union (Room 34 - 28 Rue St. Dominique, Paris 7eme), Wednesday 12 June 1968 at 2:30"

…On my return, I found on my desk the telex of the claims made by the workers at the factory in Haubourdin…In addition, M. Michel reports to me the situation facing Lever Industrial in Bobigny (near Paris)…After publication of a draft of the Grenelle agreement Bobigny resumed work. The Chair of the Union, after three days of meetings, proposed the creation of two Commissions of study: a Training Commission and a Job Security Commission. Time passed. What was the situation on our premises after "Grenelle"? The Purchasing Dept. was functioning. The administrative services were functioning. The Sales Dept. was working. Lever Industrial also. Only the Haubourdin plant was not back to work and remained occupied.

The Vote of June 7

We arrived on Friday June 7, which was the fateful date of the vote to approve the draft agreements for Chemicals…The delegates, staff representatives and workers of Haubourdin met M. Bouquet, who explained to them our position with regard to their book of claims. A secret vote then took place last Monday. The result of this vote is rather extraordinary.

- 162 votes for the resumption of work;
- 162 votes against the resumption of work;

I would like to analyse this vote so that everyone is well-informed. In the first column I will quote you the numbers for and against the resumption of work by college.

But what do these figures represent with respect to the total staff complement of our Company? I note that of 2,114 paid employees, me included, there are 1,416 who are back to work or want to work, and 662 who do not want to return. 66%, or 2/3, want to work. A mere 1/3 thus prevents the other 2/3 from working.

Position	For	Against
Managers	40	0
Supervisors	85	2
Employees	54	29
Temporary Workers	39	20
Permanent Workers	444	611

Situation after the Vote

In these circumstances, it was not possible for me to call together the Central Committee, which requires three clear days, but events moved quickly. Because of the occupation of the factory, Management does not have access to important

files. However, in spite of the impossibility of consulting the files, I can say to you after a quick and approximate calculation what type of increase the claims of Haubourdin represents.

It represents in fact a request for increase of somewhere between 33% to 43% in wages which breaks up as follows:

- the increase in wages required is 12%;
- the reduction of hours to a 48 hour work week constitutes an increase of approximately 15 to 25%;
- the fifth week of paid-leave is estimated at 2%;
- the hundred hours of premium of leave account for 4%…

Source: The CGT-Lever Soap Archives at <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/cgt.lever/mai1968.html>.

NOTE: These excerpts demonstrate the breadth of the divide between rank-and-file workers and their superiors in organized labor, let alone management and ownership. They offer ammunition for both sides in the worker/union organizer debate. Unionists could point to the significant gains in the Grenelle Agreement negotiated with the Government, while laborers could emphasize the failure of unions to seize the moment for truly fundamental change.

3. Excerpt from *Guy Debord and the Situationists* by Peter Marshall

…In their analysis, the Situationists argued that capitalism had turned all relationships transactional, and that life had been reduced to a "spectacle." The spectacle is the key concept of their theory. In many ways, they merely reworked Marx's view of alienation, as developed in his early writings. The worker is alienated from his product and from his fellow workers and finds himself living in an alien world:

> The worker does not produce himself; he produces an independent power. The success of this production, its abundance, returns to the producer as an abundance of dispossession. All the time and space of his world becomes foreign to him with the accumulation of his alienated products…

The increasing division of labor and specialization have transformed work into meaningless drudgery. "It is useless," Vaneigem observes, "to expect even a caricature of creativity from a conveyor belt." What they added to Marx was the recognition that in order to ensure continued economic growth, capitalism has created "pseudo-needs" to increase consumption. Instead of saying that consciousness was determined at the point of production, they said it occurred at the point of consumption. Modern capitalist society is a consumer society, a society of "spectacular" commodity consumption. Having long been treated with the utmost contempt as a producer, the worker is now lavishly courted and seduced as a consumer.

At the same time, while modern technology has ended natural alienation (the struggle for survival against nature), social alienation in the form of a hierarchy of masters and slaves has continued. People are treated like passive objects, not active subjects. After degrading being into having, the society of the spectacle has further transformed having into merely appearing. The result is an appalling contrast between cultural poverty and economic wealth, between what is and what could be. "Who wants a world in which the guarantee that we shall not die of starvation," Vaneigem asks, "entails the risk of dying of boredom?" The way out of the Situationists was not to wait for a distant revolution but to reinvent everyday life here and now. To transform the perception of the world and to change the structure of society is the same thing. By liberating oneself, one changed power relations and therefore transformed society.

Source: The Nothingness.org Library at <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/73>.

NOTE: This excerpt underlines the density of the readings for those students recruited into the situationist group. It also emphasizes the centrality of spectacle and the notion that the lives of the workers were dominated by the "infernal rhythms" of the factory.

Appendix B: Sample Questions Used for the Re-Enactment

Questions for Journalists

For Students

1. What is the reason for your protest?
2. Some people say you are simply paving the way for Communism or Anarchy. How do you respond to that?
3. It seems that you are highly critical of many things, but do you have a positive plan to improve the way things are done in France?
4. How do you respond to those who question your lax attitude to sex and drug use?
5. Why do you think that certain sectors of the labor movement are suspicious of you?

For Labor

1. Why did you not support the students from the beginning? Why are you jumping on the bandwagon now?
2. M. Séguy, how do you feel about the rejection of the compromise settlement you worked out with the government?
3. What immediate reforms do you consider to be absolutely essential?
4. What do you say to those, M. Séguy, who call you the mouthpiece of the Soviet Union?

For Politicians

1. M. De Gaulle, do you feel that you have lost touch with the French people?
2. Do you have full confidence in your Prime Minister, M. Pompidou, even though he has compromised with the protesters?
3. Many of your supporters feel that the time has come for firmness. Do you agree?
4. M. Pompidou, why have you consistently followed the path of negotiation?
5. Do you see the current situation as revolutionary?
6. M. Mitterrand, you have offered yourself as a possible compromise candidate for the presidency. Why should France accept you?
7. On what basis do you feel that you will be better able to address the concerns of labor and youth?
8. Does your political maneuvering not have the faint smell of opportunism about it?

For the Middle Class

1. How do all of these protests and strikes make you feel?
2. Do you feel that the Government has taken appropriate action in a timely manner?
3. How worried are you about the possibility of a Communist takeover?
4. Which of our prominent politicians do you think is most likely to lead us out of this mess?