Cultural Resistance:

Production of Politics and Politics of Production in the Atelier Populaire

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Abstract

This thesis explores a poster-production facility in the French 1968 to reveal the production of politics, and the politics of culture. I argue that the work of the Atelier Populaire must be seen as a reaction to, and an insurrection against, a historically constructed culture of productive and social alienation. In particular, the Fouchet educational reforms – an attempt to ‘Americanize’ the university system – are unveiled by the students as a program to subject education and ideology to the needs and desires of the marketplace: to rationalize French society. The role of the State in implementing this rationalization placed its contestation squarely in the realm of State/Subject relationship. Particularly, the rationalization of the political placed the protestors demands within a contest over substantive citizenship. Building on that perspective, this investigation poses critical questions about substantive citizenship, notions of the social contract, and the legitimacy of technocratic democracy. My analysis not only adds to the existing literature on the French 1968, but also builds on the sociology of culture (Becker, 1982; Benjamin, 2002; Seidman, 1996) and political sociology literature (Alvarez et al., 1998; Marx, 2010; Mills, 1959; Tarrow, 1993; Zolberg, 1972). The Atelier Populaire’s critical response to rationalization, and their reconceptualization of the future is made visible by interviews with participants and by images and messages produced at the occupied art schools.
Preface

The purpose of this preface is to provide a (brief) historical setting for my exploration into the French 1968 experience. It provides information on French history from the 1950s to 1968 and introduces the poster production studio itself.

The memory of ‘1968’ carries a lot of cultural weight. For Americans, it is a culmination of Civil Rights activity, the war in Vietnam and the sexual revolution, among other things. Across South America, Western Europe, and China too, 1968 is a symbol for substantial and violent cultural revolt. It is not uncommon to think of 1968 as a period of intense social contestation – perhaps the most active period in common memory. Whether or not 1968 represents a pinnacle of social agitation is an extraneous question. Indeed, while open revolt may have been the signature of a globalized 1968 (the United States’ civil rights movement, the Prague Spring, South American Communist revolutions, etc), contests over culture are nonetheless constantly occurring without such visible battles. Even within the open revolt of 1968, there are examples of political struggles which are played out in less visible ways.

Of course, Paris, France did not escape the open revolt of 1968. Most prominently, brutal clashes between protestors and police in the months of May and June produced shocking images. However, there is also something about the French 1968 experience that penetrates beneath the street marches and police violence. It is also a moment when students and workers challenged their political and social rationalization that had disciplined their lives and prospects according to market principles. Rationalized culture was not only contested in street-battles with police, but also within realms of production and governance. The activism of the protestor-occupied École des Beaux Arts (trans:
School of Fine Arts) reveals how production was politicized, and how politics were produced.

The discontent expressed by the French protestors has its origins in a particularly tumultuous period of French history: given his central role in the French 1968, the legacy of Charles De Gaulle is part of understanding the moment itself. De Gaulle’s biography, because of the cult of personality that followed him through French politics, becomes itself a chronology of pre-’68 events. A veteran of the First World War, De Gaulle entered the Second World War as a General in the French military. The moniker ‘General De Gaulle’ would follow him through his career in French politics as well. In the aftermath of Parisian liberation, the Nazi-collaborator Vichy government was dissolved and a new constitution was written (that of the 4th French Republic). Dissatisfied by its concentration of power in a Prime Minister rather than a President, De Gaulle ‘retired’ from political life – leaving the ‘Gaullist’ political party to continue on his political ideology. Charles De Gaulle, self-proclaimed liberator of France, would soon make a comeback in a very big way – his brand of cult-of-personality politics would set the stage for the explosion of discontent in 1968.

The 1958 Algerian ‘Crisis’ was an important moment in French history. Not only did it force the constitutional crisis that brought De Gaulle to political power, but it was also, in many ways, the ‘Vietnam’ of France – a seminal moment for unearthing the discontent of students in France. The Algerian crisis revolved around an Algerian referendum of

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1 Which still-General De Gaulle insisted on ‘leading’ – despite the limited number of French soldiers in the operation.
2 This sentiment is iterated by Guy de Rougemont (de Rougemont, 2013) who said of being sent to Algeria: “I had to serve my country while not being okay with the principle of it... I had been, as thousands of young people at the time, sent into this war which was quite contrary to my [ideology].” (p. 1-5).
independence from its then colonial power France. A junta government (of Generals of the French Army stationed in Algeria) was unwilling to accept Algerian independence and, holding such position as nonnegotiable, threatened to stage a coup by parachuting into Paris. The generally weak executive powers in the Fourth Republic constitution paralyzed the government’s response, and it seemed increasingly likely that the invasion would go forward. On May 29th, 1958, at the behest of French President René Coty, Charles De Gaulle became the de facto president of France – with a guarantee of authoring a new constitution, the extension of extraordinary powers for six months, and the promise of a 7-year term as first president of the Fifth Republic.

The result of De Gaulle’s rise to power was the investment of governance in a strong presidential state. The combination of strong presidential power and De Gaulle’s cult of personality as the ‘savoir of France’ gives legitimacy to the credence that France was under a state of Gaullism. In many ways, the ideology of De Gaulle became the ideology of the State. The coopting of political institutions by the personality of De Gaulle – and consequentially the diluting of electorate power - was a complaint iterated by many 1968 protestors.

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3 Coty was pressured by the Algerian Junta government, headed by General Jacques Massu and General Raoul Salan, to install De Gaulle as president of the Fourth Republic.
The protestors of 1968 employed a myriad of methods for expressing their discontent. Particularly, the striking students and autoworkers occupied the Parisian art schools and began producing political posters: posters that would depict alienation in modern French society, and their conceptions of an alternative future. It was not just the images they produced that were political, however, it was also the way that they were produced. The production of politics was an important byproduct of the Atelier Populaire’s production of posters.

While there were a number of poster-production facilities across France, the idea of occupied Art Schools being turned into production facilities for the revolt had its genesis in [addition to the production and display of posters, May 1968 also prominently produced poetic and playful graffiti-slogans that were painted on walls across Paris.]
Paris. The two preeminent poster production facilities in Paris were the protestor-occupied École des Arts Deco (trans: School of Decorative Arts) and the École des Beaux Arts (trans: School of Fine Arts). While the occupation of these schools coincided with the larger occupations of Nanterre and the Sorbonne that focused on political discussion, that the art schools were positioned as places of production and collective governance is perhaps a larger cultural project then the Sorbonne occupation. Across Paris, schools and theaters were being occupied and used as amphitheaters for public discussion – but the poster facility in the School of Fine Arts expressed its cultural critique through production.

The Atelier Populaire, in many ways, mirrored industrial-factory production methods. In terms of material production, they fashioned a poster production line where poster designs were transferred to silk-screen frames; the design was printed on a continuous rolls of appropriated newsprint; the paper would then be cut into individual posters and moved to drying racks. Finally, a series of ‘runners’ would distribute the posters – affixing them on the walls of Paris (Seydoux, 2013, p.16). The assignment of operators to these points was non-specific – this unspecialized labor was both demanded by the participants and facilitated by the simplicity of the screen-printing process; any person could be trained for the whole process in about an hour. In fact, even notions of trained ‘artists’ were dissolved: anyone could submit a design for production, regardless of training; worker-designed posters were accepted without question.

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5 Two participants – Guy de Rougemont (2013) and Gerard Fromanger (2013) – identified the poster process as strongly influenced from Poland, Russia, Latin America, Cuba and the American movements. (de Rougemont, p.18) (Fromanger, p. 40).
6 For a more-detailed explanation, see: (U.U.U, 1969) – particularly the section titled ‘Organization and Methods.’
While the prerogative to design was uninhibited, the production of posters was subject to approval by a General Assembly. This General Assembly was, in the spirit of rejecting specialization, open to all people. Pierre Buraglio (2013), a participant in the Atelier Populaire, suggests that there were close to 1,500 participants during the daytime – dropping significantly at night (Buraglio, p. 32). The purpose of this body was to assure that the posters, steeped in individualism, spoke for the larger insurrection. Each poster design was displayed in front of the General Assembly, and the designer would be given an opportunity to present his or her design\(^7\). The design is then opened to critique by the General Assembly. Eventually the Assembly would hold a simple up-or-down vote and the poster would go into production.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) While some have placed May ’68 as a major advancement of feminism in French society, participant interviews suggest that a major sexual division of labor existed both within the general protest movement and particularly in the poster production facilities.

\(^8\) Designs by factory workers were exempted, and automatically put into production – the poster studio was ‘at the service’ of the worker strikes.
Introduction

“Culture is political because meanings are constitutive of processes that, implicitly or explicitly, seek to redefine social power.”

- Alvarez et al., 1998.

May 16th, 1968 - Paris, France: In the depths of the School of Fine Arts, an artist is sweeping the floors. His fine brush replaced with a broom, he sweeps poster shavings (cut from industrial rolls of newsprint) and empty printing-ink tubes (cast hurriedly to the tiled floor) out from under big block tables that fill the small studio. Today, he has done no printing, and he has forged no design. Today, he is sweeping. He is not alone in the room, however. A blur of faces, young and old, are swiftly moving around him. Some are attaching new silk to old frames; others are hanging wet posters on large clotheslines, lined 4 rows deep, with some posters finding space on the floors below. Still other faces are climbing
ladders to hang ‘proofs’ on the walls, a reminder that much has been accomplished and also that there is work still to be done; still more faces are scrunched up in deep focus while their owners tediously trace their designs in rubber-putty onto the newly assembled silk-screens. Some of these faces belong to students, some to workers, and some to famed artists. A week ago, any one of these faces might have been buried in a philosophy book, or a Balzac novel, or anxiously imitating the ink drawings of master artists; others were undoubtedly laboring in factories pounding sheet metal into car-panels, guarding their fingers against savage industrial machinery. This week, though, the factories are empty, and the master’s drawings lay unattended. This week, as the artist pushes his broom, the faces of students, of workers, and of citizens are smeared with ink and sweat. This factory of solidarity works through the night, and accomplished much more than just the posters it produced. This studio was to become a crucible for the social upheaval and alternative citizenship being performed in Parisian streets throughout the summer of 1968.

My research into May 1968 seeks to reveal the ways in which the Parisian poster studio itself was a site of fabricating an alternative citizenship. In course, my research is guided by three questions: 1) How did proletariat workers, virtually excluded from higher education and political office, form an alliance with bourgeois students? 2) In identifying the connection of State to rationalization, and of rationalization to alienation, what critique did the Atelier Populaire offer about the genesis of technocratic society? 3) If the State was advancing a neoliberal State/Subject relationship, then how did the Atelier Populaire contest this meaning of citizenship? What alternative did they envision?

Further, I ask what happens when social rationalization produces social alienation? Drawing a parallel with industrial workers who feel trapped by the rationalization of their
productive activity on the assembly line, I ask what happens when citizens, in an increasingly rationalized society, go on strike?

The image of the factory is one that is familiar to this modern industrial age: an intricate progression of materials along a pathway dotted with workers, all adding their small contribution to the greater product. Here, the pre-assembled materials are prepped, shaped and manipulated. Each station, manned by a trained worker, performs some task that is necessary to bring the pieces together. But in early May 1968, a new type of factory was churning in the halls of the School of Fine Arts in Paris. This factory did not produce cars and buses, nor did it process fabric to make shirts. This factory would be an engine for a cultural revolt - and just as its product of re-imagined ‘citizenship’ would be radical, so too would its means and organization of production be revolutionary. A place where the core of French society was critiqued, the poster factory was christened ‘le Atelier Populaire’ – The People’s Studio. There are a number of translations to Atelier Populaire, including ‘peoples’ workshop’ and ‘popular workshop.’ I translate it as ‘People’s Studio” because, as will be explained in the following chapters, the Atelier became a place where structures of labor and social relations were democratically studied, critiqued and reimagined. Thus, like an artist uses a studio to redefine his perception and create representations of that perception, so too do the students, workers and artists use the Atelier Populaire to redefine their perception and practice of society.

What, then, was so revolutionary and radical about poster production within the studio? What comes into view when we understand the products and practices of the Atelier Populaire through the lens of citizenship? Exploring these questions requires recognizing endemic social and productive alienation in contemporary French society; in
this light, the poster studio becomes a crucible in which the alienations of French society, a reflection of global economic and governance practices, were revealed both as products of a historical process and products of a political process. That is to say that alienating forms of political, economic, and cultural institutions emerged from the alienating tendencies of modern capitalism, and that the domination of those tendencies was enacted by a particular dominant conception of culture. That French society came to be founded on the separation of political, economic, and social institutions – in the same ways that labor came to be separated and specialized – was an indication to the Atelier Populaire and a larger protest movement that the cultural idioms of capitalist production had moved outside of its economic realm, and reproduced its alienating consequences in the everyday life of the French citizen. This alienation was a project enacted, rather than abated, by the State.

The unearthing of connection between the rise of capitalism and the specialization and separation of French society shattered the idea that the existence of specialization and alienation were ‘natural’ and ‘inevitable.’ Thus, if their current reality could be a historical fabrication, so too could they begin a new project of cultural construction which might come to solidify the cultural experiments of the studio – voluntary labor and democratic organization. In terms of the political, however, the historical nature of this connection indicated that internalized notions of efficiency and rationalization had come out of a political struggle over the reproduction of dominant culture. This struggle, in which the tenets of capitalism gained momentum, solidified dominant conceptions of culture – one in which rationalized and efficient work, not only in terms of material labor, but also in terms of mental labor and education, would come to be seen as ‘natural’ or ‘inevitable.’ Thus, the
alienation that arises as a consequence of that rationalization too was ‘inevitable’ and a natural ordering of French life under this dominant cultural conception.

Thus, it becomes less important that the Atelier Populaire produced posters, and instead the method by which production occurred becomes key. It was in changing the how of production – decreasing specialization, namely – that capitalist culture was fought and replaced. In studying not just the what of production in the Atelier Populaire, but also the how, this thesis makes the institutionalization of alienation visible, establishes the connection of history and biography, and explores their insurrection against a historically constructed culture of productive and social alienation. This analysis not only adds to the existing literature on May 1968, but also builds on theories elaborated by Howard Becker, Sidney Tarrow, Aristide Zolberg, Karl Marx, C. Wright Mills, and Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, & Arturo Escobar. In turn, these theories are connected by conceptualizing culture as a historically constructed situation in which a particular narrative and conception of society comes to dominate not just governance policy, but also comes to establish itself in the social mindset. The moment of May 1968 helps to illuminate these connections; it is a moment in which historically constructed notions of rationality and specialization emerge as productive and social alienation – and which inspire a highly visible practice of cultural politics in the Atelier Populaire. This practice (and the resulting rejection of current society, and reconceptualization of the future) is evident in interviews with participants and in the images and messages produced at the occupied art schools. Even further, though, this examination of the cultural politics waged by the Atelier Populaire poses critical questions about notions of the social contract, the legitimacy of technocratic democracy, and what Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2011) calls substantive citizenship.
In this thesis, I provide a review of French 1968 literature, and an overview of selected literature from the sociology of culture and political sociology. I then use primary and secondary sources to show how the Atelier Populaire was a site where new political spaces and subjects were produced. This is evidenced by analyzing structures of production and education within contemporary France, and by analyzing the content of the studio’s posters to glean the participants’ interpretation of these projects. I then use this framework of production to argue that the politics of the Atelier Populaire were set squarely within the realm of culture. The politics produced at the Atelier Populaire were a democratic project to develop substantive citizenship in the face of universal rationalization and technocratic democracy.
Literature Review

May 1968

This thesis is by no means the first exploration into the events of May ‘68. In the nearly 50 years since the occupations of Parisian schools and factories, the period has been memorialized by politicians, narrated by journalists, unveiled by historians and explained by sociologists – in their own various ways. The common memory and academic incursions represent May ‘68 in vast and often contradicting ways: no one is quite sure what exactly to make of the chaos. Despite the emergence of a cottage industry in studying the French revolt, there is still debate about whether the events actually changed anything. (Touraine, 1979; Debray, 1979; LaCroix, 1986; Morin et al., 1988; Ross, 2002; Kurlansky, 2005; Seidman, 2005). Of course, some reflections produced in the immediate shadow of 1968 incorporated the fading hope of revolutionary change. Post-events journalism took cues from French political historians, who attributed great significance to the events; particularly Adrien Dansette’s 1971 publication, Mai 1968 (Seidman, 2005, p.2).9

Some of the academic literature that followed the events emerges out of a ‘crisis’ framework. That is to say, that May 1968 represented a seminal moment of irreconcilable conflict between differing visions of society – particularly in forms of collective governance. The strikers reflect this in the rejection of reformism. Henri Lefebvre suggested that the French 1968 experience emerged from a dispute lead by social science students at

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9 This literature review draws indirect citations heavily from Michael Seidman’s thorough reflections on May ‘68 literature (Seidman, 2005, p.1-15). Michael Seidman has authored many pieces on the subject, and is often cited by ’68 historians and social scientists.
Nanterre against the new bureaucratic-consumer society – the resulting conflict was very nearly a complete revolution (1969, p. 118).

Adopting a slightly different approach, Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort, and Cornelius Castoriadis viewed the evenements more symbolically as a “rupture” (une brèche) with ‘conformist consumer society’ (Morin et al., 1988, p.185). This ‘rupture’ or ‘breach’ was not so revolutionary in itself, but rather severed the umbilical connection between new French society, and institutional encouragements of conformism. Sociologist Raymond Aron, who was otherwise critical of the events, agreed that May ‘68 represented a crisis of civilization and a cultural ‘rupture’, noting: “[The revolutionary students] deserve to be taken seriously. They will not be able to construct a new order, but they have ruptured the old” (1968, p.16).

This is to say that the students did not necessarily know how to develop a new mode of life, but provided the first attack in a revolutionary project to crack the plaster of a bureaucratic-consumer civilization.10

There is little agreement, though, on what type of culture May 1968 did, or tried to, produce. While some centered the events within an expanding realm of class struggles (class struggles outside of ‘productive’ activities), Régis Debray (1979) concluded that the events were “the cradle of a new bourgeois society” (as cited in Seidman, 2005, p.12) The events were, in fact, in the course of capitalist development – ushering in a new age of neocapitalism. The sense that May was the “critical moment” “when all became possible”, as Pierre Bourdieu described (1988, p.161), not only indicated that new ‘progressive’ social relations could be possible, but also that –conversely to the intentions of the protesters – these developments could be part of advancing capitalism, too.

10 There is a ubiquitous slogan that circulated in pamphlets, posters, and graffiti: “No replastering, the structure is rotten!”
Seidman (2005) suggests that some academic philosophers, namely Luc Ferry, Alain Renaut, and Gilles Lipovetsky, claimed 1968 as a resurgence of the same ‘revolutionary individualism’ that had been introduced in the 1789 French Revolution. They saw the ‘anti-hierarchical’ nature of 1968, and its rejection of ‘utopian political forms’ as evidence that May ’68 gave birth to the ‘narcissistic individualism’ that emerged in the 1980s. May ’68 was, then, primarily about pursuing individual pleasure through ‘revolutionary individualism’—“merely [reinforcing] the hedonism of 1960s consumer society” (Seidman, 2005, p.5). May ’68, having failed to break the back of bureaucratic-consumer capitalism, instead enabled a type of militant individualism that would form the basis for an emerging neocapitalist bourgeois class.  

However, sociologist Cornelius Castoriadis and political scientist Bernard Lacroix posed sharp critiques of the individualist theory. Castoriadis objects that “The interpretation of May 68 in terms of the preparation...of contemporary individualism constitutes one of the most extreme examples...to rewrite against all credibility the history which most of us have lived through and to alter the meaning of events” (Morin et al., 1988, p.185). While Lacroix (1986) insists that “[Ferry, Renaud, and Lipovetsky] have no desire to rediscover what people thought or what they wished to do. They completely ignore the meaning the actors gave to their own actions” (p.119).

Castoriadis and Lacroix are not incorrect in their strong critique of individualist theory. May ’68 in France was not simply a free-for-all of individualism. Instead, there are

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11 This might be seen more clearly in the ‘selling out’ of 1968 participants – many of whom are now at the helm of large corporations, and advocate against social welfare programs and collective bargaining that poison the well of capitalist-individualism, so to speak.
keen examples of collective restraint and organizational solidarity, as expressed by the actors themselves (U.U.U, 1969). In fact, the ‘revolutionary forces’ in 1968 France were well-organized, collective entities that often sacrificed individuality for the development and cultivation of comprehensive social reexamination.

Alain Touraine (1979) placed the May 1968 events as a turning point in revolutionary history – noting that the class approach to struggles of production (the ‘old left’) was becoming entrenched in new struggles outside of what would be considered the sphere of productive activities. Evolution of class struggle, seen in the May events, would come to “[foster] the birth of a ‘new social movement’” borne in the classist struggle of education, health and citizenship (Seidman, 2005, p.2). Appropriately, new class struggles inspired by 1968 would not be explicitly against the institutions of production but also increasingly against non-‘productive’ social institutions. The provocation of major actors, as in ’68, would not be based on political philosophy (as socialist or communist) but as ‘anti-technocratic’ and towards a reemergence of individual agency and meaningful participation. Unsurprisingly, this emphasis on anti-technocratic action was a reaction to a government without popular participation where a select few shaped the daily existence of the many. It is here that I suggest an analysis of 1968 struggles might move beyond a frame of material production and instead can be understood as a politics of citizenship: a critique of the relationship between a State and its subjects.

Above all, I argue that the events of 1968 France are a backlash against a series of political and economic policies that come to institutionalize technocratic rationalization and construct a particular type of citizenship. The contemporary moment might be understood as a historical project. That is to say, one that has been slowly built by wide-
ranging policy decisions – in this case, those that advanced a rationalization program in economic, political, educational, and social realms. These programs reverberate throughout society, and ultimately come to shape the relationship between citizen and state.

In her book *May '68 and its Afterlives*, Kristin Ross (2002) offers a crisis framework that builds notions of society as historically developed. She notes:

“[The political dimension to the events] lay in the central idea of May '68: the union of the intellectual contestation with workers' struggle. It is found in the verification of equality not as any objective of action, but as something that is part-and-parcel of action, something that emerges in the struggle and is lived and declared as such. In the course of the struggle, practices were developed that demonstrated such a synchronization, that acted to constitute a common – though far from consensual – space and time” (p. 74).

In other words, participants in the 1968 events acted in concert against specific constructions of inequality in a way that was deliberate and cooperative – even, as Ross notes, if it was far from consensual. Building on this, I argue that the participants were subjects of structural dissatisfaction long before the explosions of May and June. Their dissatisfactions with their unions, with industry managers, with the government emerged from the same historical processes by which social structures of hierarchy were erected.

Ross goes further, to center the conflict of 1968 within divisions of labor, noting:

“…Thus came the return throughout the culture of May to what we could call a thematics [sic] of equality: overcoming the separation between manual and intellectual work, refusing professional or cultural qualification as a justification for social hierarchies and systems of political representation, refusing all delegation,
undermining specialization – in short, the violent disruption of assigned roles, places, or functions” (p.78-79)

Ross’s centering of the ’68 battles within divisions of labor is a position that allows for a great intersectional understanding – the struggle against divisions of labor transcends the academic and industrial divisions of mental and physical labor through a complex web of social hierarchies, which emphasize the specialization of particular kinds of labor.

Ross’s introduction of May ’68 as a critique of specialized labor is powerful, but incomplete. I further Ross’s argument by suggesting that ‘a common space and time’ is the result of dominant conceptions of culture. The particular form of a reaction is informed by the particular subjugation of individuals under that hegemonic understanding of culture. Thus, asserting ‘thematics of equality’ is not just a form of existence the strikers wished to create; but this struggle is also the means by which citizens find the meaningful participation in the formation of culture that had been whittled away by technocratic and specialized formulations of society.

Culture and Politics

While this thesis uses May 1968 for its historical context, its more fundamental sociological contribution lays in elaborating and synthesizing theories of Howard Becker (1982), Karl Marx (2010), C. Wright Mills (1959), and Sonia Alvarez and Evelina Dagnino and Arturo Escobar (1998). It is also informed by Antonio Gramsci’s (2008) concept of hegemony, and Sidney Tarrow’s (1993) and Aristide Zolberg’s (1972) discussions of how to conceptualize resistance. Each theorist brings some understanding of culture or
production, and I reference these against the historical moment of May 1968 to synthesize a critical view of the production of politics and the politics of culture.

In a section of *The German Ideology*, Marx discusses the effect of specialization as one that involuntarily binds a man within a system of production and, under pain of losing livelihood, continues the domination of a specific organization of production. The antithesis of specialized labor lies in a desire for voluntary work, for the restoration of individual interest into the product of labor – to reject exclusive spheres of labor. Marx summarizes the desire for voluntary, unspecialized labor: “[it would be] possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.” This, too, is the spirit of the Atelier Populaire – to emerge from alienation, one must reject being trapped in the ‘fixation of social activity.’ That is, with specialization comes the contradiction between interest of the particular (individual) and the impetus for livelihood within the ‘general interest’ (of the ruling class). Thus the unspecialized labor of the Atelier Populaire produces voluntary work in which the individual interest and the general interest are not exclusive.

Given the location of labor in this study – poster making in an art school – we should also ground our theorization of labor in art. Though there is obviously much discussion of aesthetics and content within art circles, there are few modern sociological analyses of the production of art. Sociologist Howard Becker (1982), in *Art Worlds*, provides a detailed examination of modern art from the perspective of the division of labor involved in producing an object of art. The implication of producing art in a technocratic way described by Becker, however, is to produce a type of specialized, exclusive sphere of activity that
Marx predicts; one in which laborers become ‘cogs in the wheel’, tied not to their desires and expectations but to the demands a hierarchical authority – producing various forms of involuntary labor. Thus, Becker’s analysis emphasizes the involuntary nature of commodity art production.

What Marx and Becker are describing is a social situation of specialized, involuntary labor – a consequence of which is an alienating and troubling quotidian experience. Indeed, the subtext here is the interplay of economic and social structure with a citizen’s everyday life. C. Wright Mills (1959) writes eloquently about the connection of history and biography in *The Sociological Imagination*. His writing mirrors many of the feelings expressed by the political posters and graffiti slogans – a [sudden] feeling of being trapped in an unfamiliar house. What this connection also unearths is the possibility that, just as their current condition had been a result of historical process, so too could the Atelier Populaire participants use historical process to build a new future.

Specifically, this attempt to change the future can be conceptualized as a project to change the dominant culture. Culture, as the way in which individuals conceptualize their role within a larger society, is the foundation for justifying and legitimizing various forms of economic and political structure. To change culture, then, is to engage in ‘cultural politics’. Sonia Alvarez & Evelina Dagnino & Arturo Escobar make use of the term ‘cultural politics’ to describe “the process enacted when sets of social actors shaped by, and embodying, different cultural meanings and practices come into conflict with each other.” (Alvarez et al., 1998, p.7). Further, culture is political because dominant understandings of society are the products of social interaction – each participant seeks to redefine social power in such a way that advances their specific conception of society. Of particular
importance to Alvarez et al. are *alternative* cultural conceptions of marginalized populations. The ‘deployment’ of alternative conceptions unsettles dominant cultural meanings and thus are a site of political struggle.

The main theories deployed in this paper are supported by a number of observations by Aristide Zolberg (1972), Sidney Tarrow (1993), and Antonio Gramsci (2008). Zolberg and Tarrow, who propose and expand on ‘moments of madness’, respectively, give context to the French uprising in May 1968. Indeed, their eloquence on moments when all of society seems to be collapsing both helps to contextualize the revolt, and also poses questions about how to conceptualize the visible resistance. Antonio Gramsci (2008), in his study of education particularly, elaborates on the structural function of culture – suggesting that specialized vocational schools are designed to predetermine the pupil’s future.
Sources & Methods

For this project, I follow Glassner & Corzine (1982) who suggest both that fieldwork techniques can be applied to content analysis research, and that quantification is ‘inappropriate where textual meanings are latent.’ In other words, I examine the posters of the Atelier Populaire by analyzing their content subtext. This examination is evidence of the producer’s conception of society, and is not held as representative of the whole May movement. The posters selected here can be understood as a personal-historical record of Mai ’68. Within their images lies a particular representation of history – one that is drawn from the personal experience of students, artists, and particularly workers. While their political leanings may inform the perspective through which their understandings of French society emerge, it is nonetheless a deeply personal and carefully executed representation of their lives. It is, in essence, documenting the relationship between the designer of the poster and their world – a conception of the connection between daily life what perceived influence of particular social structures. It is largely a mode of expressing the perception of causal relationships – between capitalism and labor, and through this, between the state and capitalism.

In addition to a critical review of existing literature, this study incorporates a number of primary sources. These sources include online and print collections of posters produced at the Atelier Populaire, statements published under the name of the Atelier Populaire General Assembly, interviews with participants of the Atelier Populaire, and photographic documentation of the events (Hobsbawm & Weitzmann, 2008; Mahe, 2008). It is estimated that 500 (Gasquet, 1978) to 700 (Seidman, 2004, p.133) poster designs were
produced at the Atelier Populaire in 1968.\textsuperscript{12} Posters that were marked as produced in different poster studios were excluded as best as possible in order to correlate posters produced with biographical material available.\textsuperscript{13} In addition to printed collections (Rohan, 1988; Gasquet, 1978; U.U.U, 1969; Bibliotheque Nationale, 1978) this study draws on an online collection of posters archived at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (Zoummeroff, 2009).

I also draw on primary interviews conducted with identified participants in the Atelier Populaire (Bernard, 2006; Buraglio, 2006; De Rougemont, 2006; Fromanger, 2006; Miehe, 2006; Rancillac, 2006; Seydoux, 2006). Gene Tempest conducted these interviews in the course of her thesis at U.C Berkley. They are currently housed and archived at the Regional Oral History Office at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. The subjects of these interviews self-identify as participants in the Atelier Populaire (both at the School of Fine Arts and the School of Decorative Arts).

The posters, manifestos, and interviews were instrumental in exploring a range of theoretical perspectives for this project. My academic investigation into theory leads me through Becker’s conception of art as work, Marx’s notions of historical materialism, C. Wright Mills’ sociological imagination, Alvarez et al.’s iteration of cultural politics, and Glenn’s iteration of ‘substantive citizenship.’ What became apparent, as I synthesized

\textsuperscript{12} A publication under the name of U.U.U in 1969 catalogues one hundred and ninety seven that it claims were produced specifically at the Atelier Populaire at the School of Fine Arts.

\textsuperscript{13} The only distinction made between production facilities was often a stamped imprint indicating \textit{Beaux-Arts} or \textit{Arts-Deco}, signaling production at the School of Fine Arts or the similar studio at the School of Decorative Arts. Because of the anonymous nature of the posters, this stamped imprint was often forgone – making it difficult to determine exactly where each poster originated. However, all poster studios were very similar in function and structure, minimizing discrepancies in content analysis between posters produced at different studios.
diffuse theories, is that the moment being studied in May '68 is a reflection of all these theories, but underlying it is a tying-together of the political, the historical, and the cultural. That is to say that Becker, Marx, Mills and Alvarez et al. provide key insights, but the incorporation of their perspectives highlights a new theoretical understanding: that recognition of the historical, the connection of history and biography, and culture as political, contributes to the process of forming dominant conceptions of culture.
Revealing the Production of Politics

One way of analyzing the cultural politics in 1968 France is to analyze the posters of the Atelier Populaire. The posters themselves and accounts of how they were produced serve as a record of these politics. The posters portray not only a recognition of their alienation as a product of technocratic capitalism, but also relay a message about a reconceptualized future – one which accounts for the interplay of social structures and quotidian experience. The correlation of State structure to the everyday experience of its subjects provides a powerful critique of French and global society, illuminating the ways in which the Atelier Populaire, demanding a new form of everyday experience, came to criticize and replace the very modes of life that produced their educational, economic and political alienation. Particularly, the Fouchet educational reforms bridged the rationalization of society and the economy, and also bridged the anti-technocratic revolts of students and workers. The attempt to ‘Americanize’ the university is unveiled by the students as a project to subject education and ideology to the needs and desires of the marketplace.

The very production methods employed in the Atelier Populaire were symbolic of this critique, and embodied a rejection of the old, and an invention of the new. Howard Becker’s (1982) conception of art as work – in which modern art is subject to alienating demands of rationalization and the market – is improved with Marx’s historical materialism to reveal the political content of the production process – particularly the political process invoked in the division and specialization of labor. That is to say, to recognize the undemocratic and involuntary divisions of labor that had become ubiquitous in France. These divisions, particularly of mental and material labor, were not self-
determined by their holders, but rather formulated by calculations of economic efficiency and engendered classism.

Many of the positions presented in the May ‘68 literature are related to a Marxist analysis – Lefebvre’s conception of the bureaucratic-consumer society; the ‘breach’ or ‘rupture’ from old structure enunciated by Morin, Lefort, and Castoriadis; Seidman’s anti-hierarchical sentiment; the connection of history and biography extracted from Kurlansky; and Ross’s suspicions of divisions of labor and specialization. I argue in this paper that there is more work for a Marxist analysis to do. A close reading of Marx’s *The German Ideology* provides a critical insight into the causes, the nature, and the promise of May ‘68 as a revolutionary moment – and what, beyond material gains, it accomplished. I use the tools provided by Marx’s historical materialism to analyze primary documents in the direction of highlighting not only the political process of production in the Atelier Populaire, but also to highlight the larger scheme of cultural politics at play in pursuing an alternative conception of citizenship.

To apply Marx, and better understand the development of wide social specialization, we need a place of great intersection – one that at once incorporates divisions of mental and physical labor, specialization, and is a reaction to broad social isolation and alienation. The poster production facility at the Paris School of Fine Arts is a prominent example of the intersectional paradigm of May ‘68: it is an anti-hierarchical production facility that consciously rejects divisions of mental and physical labor, encourages creativity but rejects individualism, and fosters collaboration between workers, students, artists and civilians. The physical product of the Atelier Populaire (setting aside the intangible products of cultural politics and conceptions of citizenship) is the revolutionary poster that came to
overwhelm walls all across France, but particularly in Paris. In producing these posters, the Atelier Populaire at the School of Fine Arts was able to capture and portray not only the recognition of capitalist-style social alienation, but also their vision of a new cultural politics and a new conception of citizenship.

While some historians have produced limited content analysis of these posters, notably Michael Seidman (1996) in Revolutionary Collectivism: Parisian Poster Art in 1969, their exploration is limited to the graphics of the posters. The application of Marx’s historical materialism to these posters serves not to highlight the existence of Marxist thought, but to encompass the changing nature of revolutionary movements during the time: a leaving behind of purely ‘production’ class struggle, and the development of New Social Movements. Selected posters (analyzed later) come to embody previously discussed social alienations, often using terminology and symbols developed by Marx. What these posters come to indicate is precisely the shift in the French social-contract paradigm that is part-and-parcel of market efficiency and rationalization: a shift that increasingly defines citizens in terms of capitalist economics and progressively squanders democratic notions of culture.

The Atelier Populaire, with its curious position at the crux of both labor and social movements and as the congregation of intellectual and physical laborers, is a site that can be investigated using the analytical tools supplied by Marx. By that investigation, the

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14 There were many Ateliers that sprouted in 1968 – not only in France, but also an English adaptation in London as well. Each of the Ateliers had their own style and mode of operation. For example, the production facility at the Ecole de Arts Deco maintained similar production methods, but did not incorporate the General Assembly of Strikers that was integral to the anti-individualism of the Atelier Populaire at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts (School of Fine Arts). Two other prominent Ateliers were formed in Strasbourg and Marseilles.
transition from ‘old left’ movements to New Social Movements can be understood as indicative of the spread of specialization and alienation in the formation of a market society.\(^\text{15}\) That is to say that the increasing rationalization of social institutions and relationships, inspired by the rationalized economy demanded by capitalism, reproduced the same class tensions that had once been confined only to productive activities. Alienation was no longer the sole property of the proletariat. Rather, it had become part of citizenship itself.

This paper suggests that the Atelier Populaire, largely marginalized in previous works, is a point of intersection for alienation across French society (alienation in education; alienation in production; and alienation in the political), and that its production of posters (and thus material and social [re]production) in not simply an act of labor – rather it is a politicized process of production. In the context of acknowledging political form in production, it became important not just what was produced, but also how. What the Atelier Populaire comes to be, when conceptualized thus, is a place of cultural politics. A voice box for alienated peoples, the Atelier Populaire was a place where an alternative conception of citizenship – a more democratic conception of the social contract – was fabricated, distributed, and practiced by its participants. To arrive at this conclusion, I propose a re-conception of the French 1968 experience as one that is grounded in

\(^{15}\) David Plotke (1990) and Steven Buechler (1995) provide an excellent background on New Social Movements. They suggest that NSMs identify with social categories outside of economic position – for example: gender, race, sexuality, etc. While the ‘old left’ is arguably unobservant to these categories, and NSMs attempt to reduce inequality in them, the ‘new left’ often marginalizes the structural critiques that were advanced by proletariat movements. Thus, they might be improving one section of society, but are apt to leave much unchanged structurally. Plokte and Buechler conclude that NSMs are the extension of ‘old left’ struggles into social categories, but also that NSMs and proletariat movements need to cooperate because they each try to repair the other’s shortcomings.
historical materialism and the connection of history and biography – a conceptualization that draws critical conclusions about the politics of culture, the nature of citizenship, and reconciling technocratic democracy.

**The Specialization of Production and Culture**

As noted earlier, much of the previous 1968 literature has drawn from Marxist analyses. Clearly, then, Marx is by no means a novel approach to May ’68. However, I am proposing that Marx provides the tools by which a more critical understanding of culture politics comes into play. Thus, it is not enough to explain 1968 in Marxist terms. Rather, it is necessary to use the analytical tools of specialization, exclusion and involuntary labor to assess an understanding of not only what the strikers were performing, but why. The narrative provided by Marx forges the link between what was experienced in the biography of French daily life, and the project of rationalization that was encouraging alienation across society. The cause of productive alienation, in Marx's iteration of specialization, exclusion and involuntary labor, is part-and-parcel of the social alienation of that was exhibited in French educational reform, and also part of the specialized structure to which the Atelier Populaire was responding with unspecialized/democratic labor and governance.

Historical materialism relies on six developments within the physical organization of production in a society: 1) that material conditions determine physical response as a way of expressing a ‘definite mode of life’; 2) the division of labor becomes a system of ownership and a mechanism for distributing resources; 3) specialization within divisions of labor produce an ‘exclusive sphere of activity’; 4) the multitude of exclusive spheres
creates a interdependency for subsistence; 5) the interdependency creates a dichotomous relationship between the ‘particular’ (or individual) interest and the ‘general’ interest – the interest in keeping the dominant system of production running; and 6) the division of particular and general interest can be seen as engendering voluntary and involuntary work – and therefore democratic and non-democratic forms of labor, respectively. The effect of these developments is alienation between the laborer and the product of his labor – between the creative ability of a human, and the products demanded of him. Thus, it becomes not just what a person makes and produces, but more importantly how.

The effect of divisions of labor as a system of ownership and product distribution is to lay a foundation for a system of production in which subsistence is determined either by the quantity or by the quality of labor that an individual performs. Thus, it is not only what the individual makes, but also how they labor. This is not so consequential when any individual can perform any task – i.e., pound sheet metal the first week, make executive decisions the next, and coordinate delivery the third – because the unequal distribution of product is not permanent. It would fluctuate with whatever work the individual did on any given week, and thus (relatively) equalized distribution is possible. However, specialization cements the position of an individual within a division of labor and ensures that inequality in payment for labor remains permanent. Specialization, then, constructs exclusive spheres of activity – a tenet of alienation. That is to say, that when an individual becomes specialized in one specific activity, and when that one activity comprises the whole of that individual’s subsistence labor – relative to his position within a system of divided labor – the individual becomes unable to perform other tasks:
“For as soon as the distribution of labor comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape.” (Marx, 2010, p.37).

In production, the individual capacity for labor is wholly directed towards a specialized task, which excludes both the capacity to perform and the ability to perform others: one has neither enough time nor skill to act outside of their ‘exclusive spheres.’ In a cultural conception of alienation, I argue, this is the process by which political participation is boiled down to participating in the vote; the process by which education, far from being in pursuit of individual development, is pushed to develop specialized intellectuals. These cultural alienations form the ‘walls’ of Mills’ trap in which life suddenly seems so disquieting. The students of May ‘68 are reacting to the prospect that they might never know another form of mental labor than their ‘specialized field’ – that far from having an agency over the direction of their lives, they are cast permanently in one position. This unease of permanence is not so disparate from the alienation experienced by factory workers.

This tension between ‘particular’ interest and ‘general’ interest, and the involuntary work that it engenders, provides a way to understand the state of French society pre-68, and the form of reaction that follows.

This ‘general’ interest is not a ‘natural’ or inevitable structure, either – rather, it is built from the dominance of a particular class. The struggle to impose the interest of a particular class develops as it “conquer[s] for itself political power in order to represent its interest in turn as the general interest” (Marx, 2010, p.38).
The entire apparatus of political organization – the State – is thus an entity that advances the general interest of a particular, ruling, class. To counter particular interests that are contrary to the interest of the ruling class - particular interests that are erosive to the continuance of the general interest – the ruling interest (manifested as the State) makes “practical interventions” – police force action against physical threats; educational and hegemonic action against cultural threats; and exclusions from subsistence to economic threats.

In tracing the development of labor from material conditions, it is possible to conceive of modern labor not as a voluntary agreement between employer, employee and society which is entered into freely; but rather as a coercive measure in which one enters an intercourse with the ‘general interest’ under an existential threat of subsistence, and a physical threat of police action.

**Fouchet as an instrument of Alienation**

“The tendency today is to abolish every type of schooling that is “disinterested” (not serving immediate interests) or “formative...Instead, there is a steady growth of specialized vocational schools, in which the pupil’s destiny and future activity are determined in advance.”


One chapter of May 1968 discontent was the reformation of the education system. The Fouchet educational reforms were, as Feenberg & Freedman (2001) describe, an ‘Americanization’ of the French education system. What this meant, in practice, was the re-structuring of education towards efficiency, rigidness, and productivity. The transition between high school and college or university, and the use of entrance examinations, in particular, was a flashpoint for the implementation of this Americanized efficiency. The
idea proposed by the Fouchet reform was to ‘improve’ the education system by creating more distinct and rigid ‘pathways.’ That is to say, those who are to become engineers or architects would begin their ‘training’ early in high school while their other studies would fall by the way side – it was an extension of the technical training needed for specialization while also an abandonment of the ‘well-rounded’ citizen. This also implied that the ability to engage in other forms of labor, in other modes of life, is restricted by the need to focus completely on a particular track/pathway. While these tensions between freedom of agency over a student’s future and the need for specialized, exclusive laborers had previously existed in forms of academicism, the Fouchet reforms represented an overt State program to restrict agency over an alternative mode of life.\textsuperscript{16} That is, the Fouchet reforms were an unencrypted program of extending specialization. Seidman (2004) suggests the Ministry of Education (headed by Peyrefitte, successor to Fouchet: see footnote 18) looked to make the education system “better adapted to a marketplace where twentieth-century technicians were replacing nineteenth-century diplômes.” (p. 54). The tensions produced by efficiency programs like the Fouchet reforms had already been felt more generally, but the Fouchet reforms gave it a name and a face – its overt program became an obvious way to identify where these tensions came from.

The open attempt to reform the French education system was ready-made for protest. The French education system had always held a special place in their social narrative. It was a place of exploration, of liberty, and of autonomy. Whereas high school

\textsuperscript{16} As described by Berger (1969) – the strict control and reproduction of a specific type of mental labor: “rules [that] schematize and inhibit the artist’s imagination before he even begins work.” (p.22). This was manifest in the demand that students merely reproduce and copy their professors – there was little room for experimentation. The frustration felt by students is documented well in the Atelier Populaire publications, which rally heavily against the current state of the school system.
had previously been largely seen as separated from a university track – that is, one could focus on biology in high school, and study poetry in university – Fouchet narrowed those pathways. It was a reversal of the ability to have agency over what was even available to study. Under Fouchet, the science-focused would necessarily move to science tracks, and humanities-focused would necessarily move to a humanities track. The ability to change one’s mind, to realize one’s creative potential (or what Marx referred to as species-being), was restricted in the name of capitalist-style efficiency.

The French university, too, had been seen as a sanctuary for its students and thus as a sanctuary from market efficiencies. Whereas there had previously been few limitations on the length of time needed to complete study, Fouchet imposed rigid limits on how long one might be in university, and on what conditions they wouldn’t be allowed to continue (Feenberg & Freedman, 2001, p.5). While leisurely education was clearly a bourgeois privilege, it was nonetheless part of the social narrative of French society. It served as a means by which social reproduction was protected from an increasingly rationalized and ruthless efficient socio-economic approach to government and life. The elimination of this protection, even if it only applied to privileged society, was understood by those students as an assault on protections – and consequently the clear imposition of rationalization and ultimately alienation in the education system.

Perhaps a good analogy for how the Fouchet reforms were received was the extent to which they violated what had previously been university autonomy. The university had previously been largely separated from the state – they were trusted to handle misconduct within their walls, very rarely involving the metropolitan police. However, at the same moment that these reforms were introduced and being pushed, there was a great physical
breach of university autonomy. The storming of the Sorbonne courtyard by riot police was more than the presence of police on campus. Rather, it was the physical imposition of the State against a resistance to making the University more ‘efficient.’ It was the physical enforcement of rationality, of efficiency, and of punishment against resistors to such. It was a very physical expression of the types of interventions that the State, on behalf of a larger economic system, was pushing for in the university system. “The atrocities of [police action against students]”, an anonymous flier poster on a Parisian wall reads, “are not only the acts of a Fouchet, or a Peyrefitte, but are the result of a totalitarian and repressive regime...” (Ross, 2002, p.47). Again, it was not that these conflicts were new, but rather they could now be recognized as highly technocratic, alienating, and undemocratic pressures to secure specialization and rationalization in the interests of the ruling economic system – of the ruling class.

The Fouchet reforms are the bridge between society and the economy, and in this way the bridge between students and workers. The attempt to ‘Americanize’ the university is unveiled by the students as a project to subject education and ideology to the needs and desires of the marketplace. “Capitalism”, writes the National Executive of the University Teachers Union, “…finds a solution to its [need for technicians] in the narrow specialization of courses which is the basis of the Fouchet reforms...in the maintenance of a hermetic division into an educational system for intellectuals as ‘technicians’ (the university) and an educational system for intellectuals as ‘future leaders’ (the grandes écoles)...” (Bourges, 1968, p.92). The Fouchet reformation of the university, which had always housed divisions

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17 Alain Peyrefitte, Minister of Education after Fouchet during 1968, ordered the closing of Nanterre University after protests by the March 22nd Movement (head by Daniel Cohn-Bendit), long considered one of the first manifestations of student discontent in the May ’68 events. (Seidman, 2004, p.46).
of mental labor based on privilege, was clear in its intentions to formulate exclusive specialization, and to produce cogs for an increasingly complex and abusive wheel. Specialization and alienation was not just being advocated for the industrial worker, but increasingly for the intellectual technician. Faced with the Fouchet reforms, the students and professors grasped that the economic rationalism imbedded in modern capitalism was also imbedded in their systems of education, and ultimately their systems of politics. The *grandes écoles* that the students directly rallied against were the exact enunciation of an alienation from the political system.

Students in 1968 were expressing their dissatisfaction with the prospect of educational specialization in the same way that workers were refusing their continued exploitation at the hands of economic specialization; and in both cases, that specialization was directed explicitly at serving a system of market-capitalism. While the university had already been producing social and economic divisions, the Fouchet reforms made clear that the students faced a similar future as the proletariat in France. The revelation of subservience to capitalist demands in the university prompted a reevaluation of the entire French society. Systems of social relations, of race-relations, and of politics were revealed as subservient to the efficient and rationalized demands of the market – and had thus been transformed into systems in which the people had no real say. They were run by ‘specialists’ in politics, administration, and economy. Alienated from the very institutions that formed the bedrock of French society – the social, the economic, and the political – the workers, students, and residents of France took to the streets, demanding a new mode of life: demanding a new social contract.
Selected Posters of the Atelier Populaire

This section shows how this demand for a new social contract was graphically expressed (see Appendix for more posters and discussion). These posters were chosen from a number of archival sources: a retrospective publication by anonymous participants in the Atelier Populaire (U.U.U, 1969), two published collections (Gasquet, 1978) (Rohan, 1988), and the Philippe Zoummeroff Collection of May 1968 digital archive hosted by Yale University. While the participants of the Atelier Populaire largely frowned upon collection of the posters, examples have been preserved and published as a historical record of the events (U.U.U, 1969). One participant account claims that there were two ‘archivists’ at the Atelier Populaire who put aside a copy of each poster (Rougemont, 2006, p.4).
To start, this poster is of particular significance to the Atelier Populaire: it is the first poster produced collectively in the occupied studios of the School of Fine Arts. It is the genesis of collective poster making in *Mai '68.* It is therefore significant too that this poster embodies one of Marx’s strongest critiques of specialized labor – “[the] division of labor only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labor appears” (Marx, 2010, p.37). In contemporary French society, there existed a strong division between the physical labor embodied in factories, and the mental labor centered in the universities. This can be viewed as the *specialization* within these divisions: thus a worker had no authority to challenge an academic. The social separation and specialization

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18 It was, in fact, not printed by serigraph (via silk-screen), but by lithography – a far more technical and time-consuming process, but one that the art students were familiar with. The serigraph technique is soon introduced by Guy de Rougement, who had appropriated it from Poland and America.
spread beyond the factory and academy – a founding tension in *Mai ’68* is that students and workers alike declared themselves political; *violating* the separation engendered by specialization. Thus, what appears a quite simple poster actually poses perhaps the seminal question of *Mai ’68*: who is allowed to participate in what, by what authority, and with whom. The poster suggests that the dissolution of the boundaries constructed by mental and physical divisions and specialization is a solution to the effective disenfranchisement of the population.
Workers
French/Immigrants
Unite!

This poster is simple in its design and presentation, but contains a complicated message about the role of the state in dividing immigrant and French workers. In French industry, especially the automobile industry (epicenter of the ouvriers), the workforce was immensely bifurcated. That is to say that to compensate for the highly organized – and therefore relatively expensive – French workers, the management of factories relied on the labor of immigrant workers who were not represented by the French workers’ unions. They were paid substantially less, and we often under threat of deportation. The constant threat of being replaced by immigrant workers leads the French workers and unions to be
suspicious of the immigrants. This poster depicts the calculated role of the State in building housing projects for the factories – housing projects that came to be unofficially segregated. This can be understood as the state enforcing the [alienating] ‘general interest’ of segregating the workers and keeping them both suspicious of and in competition with each other.
This poster explicitly references the Fouchet reforms and suggests that the ‘mob’, as Fouchet referred to the strikers, will follow wherever his rationalization of education goes. This poster is particularly symbolic because it depicts the causal relationship between the advancement of specialization and rationalization in the Fouchet reforms with a growing alienation (‘the mob’) in general society. It also signals the rejection of alienation at the
hands of rationalization – hence, the mob will rise up and fight Fouchet wherever he goes.

Specifically, the imagery of police in this poster is a reference to the storming of the Sorbonne by police forces. This violated a long-held autonomy of the university in which police rarely interfered with university affairs. In many ways, this too is an example of disciplining education. It is a real physical disciplining of rebellious inefficiency.
In the hundreds of *Atelier* posters – from the both Atelier Populaire and its sister studios – that I have researched and analyzed, this poster stands apart as a strikingly simple explanation for what type of future the *Mai ’68* participants envisioned. Its simple beauty and striking message is first and foremost a creative production of voluntary labor. It is a paradigm of individual expression and design, produced collectively and voluntarily.
in a studio centered on critiquing the relationship between history and biography. Beyond its production, the message is an elegant condensation of so many paradigm shifts. It is articulating the daily experience of the individual in the context of the larger state: recognition that each person’s daily experience is intimately connected to a larger structure – whether it is social, political or economic. In this sense, the poster is communicating an understanding of citizenship – what it means to be part of a communal state. In declaring that “the State is each of us”, the poster is recognizing both that the interaction of political, economic and social forces affects the individual, and also that the individual is part-and-parcel of the State – that, in comparison to pre-68 French society where the individual was highly separated from political, economic and social institutions, a new form of society emerges; a new, more democratic, conception of citizenship in which individuals are included in collective governance and participation. The State is not politicians nor bureaucracies that alienate individuals from participating in their collective experience – the State is inclusive and open to each person who lives under, and is intimately connected to it: as are all people intimately connected to a super-structure.
Reconceptualizing Production

In *The Imaginary Revolution*, Michael Seidman asserts that the political posters of 1968 are “the most striking and enduring cultural legacy of May” (Seidman, 2004, p.130). While the posters certainly are striking, what of the processes by which they were produced? Something as provocative and revolutionary as the posters surely must have also been produced in revolutionary and provocative conditions. In a broad review of *Mai ’68* literature, an exploration into the production practices of the Atelier Populaire is wanting; Seidman offers only a couple of sentences about the production of the posters. Moreover, for good reason – the historical record of production within the Atelier Populaire is not as well developed as the records of posters produced. The retrospective produced by anonymous Atelier Populaire participants itself only briefly covers the internal workings of the studio (U.U.U, 1969). However, a thesis completed by Gene Tempest in 2008 uncovers much of the internal and quotidian operation of the studio, through interviews with a number of its participants (Tempest, 2008). The primary accounts allow for the internal labor structures, both practiced and idealized, to be catalogued and analyzed. Particularly, as Howard Becker’s *Art Words* (1990) shows, these practices and structures can be contrasted to and extrapolated from other forms of labor.

Connecting art and production, sociologist Howard Becker frames art as a process of work – and can thus be understood as being subject to many of the same relationships that traditional labor is (Becker, 1990). His analysis in *Art Worlds* is useful for discussing the Atelier Populaire: centered within art, but also a product of modern labor structures.
Art Worlds highlights a number of relationships within the production of modern art in a way that is highly analogous to the production of any other commodity good within a factory: in many ways his description of an art world - “all of the people [and institutions] whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that [society]...defines as art” (Becker, 1990, p.34) – is a metaphor for a highly atomized industrial factory; with the product moving from one ‘station’ to the next under the careful, directing eye of a the artist (a foreman, of sorts).

Becker, particularly, notes a highly specialized division of labor among four actors within Art Worlds: patrons, artists, support personnel, and distributors. In his analysis of modern art production, Becker notes that the highly specialized nature ingrained in each of these actors solidifies a particular division of labor and facilitates an intense interdependency. The result is a system of production in which each actor, highly divided from the others, is completely reliant on the others – and ultimately subjected to market forces; in terms of materials available, compensation, competition, education, social/economic position, etc. Becker’s unveiling and analysis of this system suggests that the combination of concrete specialization and intense interdependency in producing art leads to a large amount of involuntary work in the name of producing a commodity for market. This quite brief overview of Becker’s analysis will come to highlight what made the Atelier Populaire distinct in its production, and in doing so will highlight the influence of adjusting the structure of productive labor within the Atelier Populaire.

Perhaps the most readily recognizable structure of production in the Atelier Populaire was its reliance on a division of labor. This was a product of meeting huge
demand – the studio was run very much like a large factory: with hundreds\(^{19}\) of young people coming to produce between 1000-3000 posters in a single night (Fromanger, 2008, p 11). To produce such volume, in the midst of left-right tensions and street battles, a number of positions needed filling: watchmen and security guards are posted at the doors and on the streets, materials needed to be gathered, screens fabricated, posters designed, paper unrolled, ink ‘pulled’ across the screen, paper cut, posters hung and dried; and finally, distributed across the neighborhoods of Paris and beyond into the suburbs and countryside (U.U.U, 1969; Fromanger, 2008; Buraglio, 2008; Seydoux, 2008). For even a small operation, this entails a large number of participants. The scale of the Atelier Populaire’s operation was a great feat of collective participation. One division of labor that is immediately rejected, however, is the division of ‘mental’ and ‘material’ labor, highlighted by Marx as a penultimate division of labor (Marx, 2010, p.37). The division of mental and material labor, is a category of specialization – specializing in ‘thought’ labor or ‘muscle labor.’ The Atelier Populaire explicitly rejects this division and specialization:

“It is not a job for specialists. Those who come to take part enthusiastically in the production of posters are now numerous. They are workers and students, both French and foreign. Workers come with suggestions for slogans and to debate with the artists and students, to criticize the posters already made, or to distribute them outside.” (U.U.U, 1969, p. 3).

\(^{19}\) Pierre Buraglio, participant interviewed by Gene Tempest, estimated that “daytime gatherings had maybe 1,500 students” (Buraglio, 2008, p. 32). This was most likely referring to gatherings of the General Assembly, as opposed to those directly producing posters.
Continuing the divisions of mental and material labor, seen in broader French society, would have produced a poster workshop in which the workers were patronized by students and artists who would have ‘known better’ than the workers themselves, who were unaccustomed to mental labor. Instead, all aspects of the studio production were opened and weighted towards including workers.

This rejection of mental and material specialization is part of a larger rejection of specialization. Participants Pierre Buraglio, Gerard Fromanger, and Eric Seydoux are particularly coherent about the unspecialized nature of production in the Atelier Populaire:

Buraglio (2008):

“I printed a lot, I have swept, I have stood guard at night” (p.24).

Fromanger (2008):

“We had no role, we did everything...there were not THOSE who did the drawings, THOSE who cut the paper, THOSE passing the ink, THOSE drying, THOSE at the door.” (p.12-13).

What little training was needed could be provided easily and rapidly.\(^{20}\) Anyone could be proficient in less than an hour (Seydoux, 2008, p. 41). This structure of labor was one in which any participant was able to perform a number of roles in the production of posters. They were free to come and go from positions as they saw fit (Fromanger, 2008, p. 12). In a relatively linear reading of historical materialism, the rejection of specialization and divisions of mental and material labor are the lynchpin for unraveling the consequence

\(^{20}\) The exception to this is the first poster produced by the Atelier Populaire; which was in fact printed by lithograph. The adoption of silk-screening was a reaction to the ‘inaccessibility’ of lithography to those who had not trained comprehensively to use it.
envisioned by Marx – involuntary labor. Alienating divisions of labor are meticulously absent from production within the Atelier Populaire. In none of the literature or historical record surrounding the workings of the Atelier Populaire is there anything to suggest that there was the type of alienation enunciated by Marx, or described by Becker. This is precisely because the participants were not cemented within a particular position – thus, as the position could be filled quickly by any other participants, they did not rely on *specific participants* to be eternally in one role. Further, as will be explored more in the following section, the only ‘general interest’ was not in continuing a mode of production – but in perpetuating a social coalition that was driving revolutionary activity. In other words, it was seemingly more important to the studio to maintain intersectionality than it was to produce posters (U.U.U, 1969, p. 3).

The unraveling of historical materialism, grounded in the rejection of specialization, results in a near elimination of involuntary work. Participants were free to come and go as they pleased, free to exercise creative mental labor and physical material labor, relying only on their sense of commitment to maintaining the ‘general interest’ of intersectionality. What this *really* is, though, is more than the reduction of involuntary work – the freedom gained in the Atelier Populaire was a result of the developing connection between history and biography; between structure and individual; a social contract between worker and factory. These relationships could only develop in the creation of an *awareness* of the problems of their daily lives (Schnapp & Vidal-Naquet, 1969, p 573).

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21 The data regarding the sexual division of labor is unclear. See footnote seven.
22 See: the criterion for mass-production of a poster design. The ‘censorship’ enacted by the General Assembly did not inhibit the designing of posters – rather encouraged all to design a poster, even if it was not to be accepted by the General Assembly. Particularly, the censorship power embedded within the General Assembly, which was open to all, indicates the importance of intersectionality over quantity poster production.
This reflects the promise of historical materialism: theoretical tools through which the connection between structural modes of production and individual biography can be made visible and coherent. This ‘awareness’ is also a realization that their position in society (social, economic, or political) is a historical construct – and thus can too be deconstructed or reconstructed. The critique of production structures embodied by the Atelier Populaire is radical and revolutionary precisely because it is a structural realignment in reaction to that ‘awareness’ raised by theoretical tools and a sociological imagination.
Culture as Political

At first glance, the connection between cultural form and historical process is not evident. This disconnect is continued by the modern memory of the events, which relies on large and visible actions, leaving more subtle cultural changes invisible. In this way, the events of that summer in 1968 (‘les evenements’ and ‘Mai ‘68’ [‘the events’ and ‘May ‘68’, respectively.]) are popularly remembered as and often over-simplified to the largest strikes, street battles, and political figures that emerged between the months of May and June 1968. It is little wonder, either: the explosive months of May and June are the most obvious, and the easiest to understand: the country was indeed, by nearly all accounts, on the brink of revolution. In reflection of this feeling, mass demonstrations and political maneuvering are readily associated with the pinnacle of conflict. Certainly, it is tempting to correlate large events with the ‘essence’ of the events: to attach importance to size. Thus the ‘leftist’ parades of millions of workers and students through the Boulevards of Paris and the May 30th Gaullists march of 800,00 supporters down the Champs Elysees are generally accepted and acknowledged as the true conflict of 1968. Sidney Tarrow (1993) would suggest that these strikes, demonstrations, and political speeches are recognizable within our ‘repertoire of contention’ – that is, are the actions and symbols that we identify as strategies of conflict. Thus, we focus on and recognize only things that are internalized as

23 Charles De Gaulle, thinking the students and workers were on the verge of storming the Élysées Palace, fled Paris to a secret meeting with the commander of the French forces stationed in Baden-Baden, Germany. Further, he did so without informing any government official, not even his Prime Minister, George Pompidou. For 6 hours, the world wondered where Charles De Gaulle was – Pompidou unsuccessfully requested military radar track CDG’s helicopter, and famously shouted, “he has left the country!” (Dogan, 1984, p.245-277).
revolutionary. Immediately after 1968, the narrative espoused by the Situationists— that the popular actions were a vigorous release of spontaneous, primal creativity; a romanticized and unprompted expression of the human capacity for emotion – was incorporated into the ‘repertoire’, and thus became a common perspective around which the events were framed. The effect of this, however, was to make invisible the historical development of alienating tensions in an evolving capitalist society. To connect the social revolt with a spontaneous, primal-esque reaction is to make invisible the prospect that the disgust felt by so many millions was in fact a historical and highly logical conclusion.

A close examination of the historical moment preceding May ’68 reveals a number of national and international conditions, and political and industrial social structures, that formulated a particular mode of French civil society: a mode which the Atelier Populaire sought to subvert and replace. These conditions are directly related to the form of cultural and political revolt that was produced in May ’68 – and further, these modes of life were embodied in institutions that came to form the very core of modern French society: education, culture, labor and politics. In attempting to abate the tensions in these crucial institutions, the battlefield of May ’68 was set squarely in the realm of ‘the everyday.’ One response, then, among its many critiques, is a critique of art and education. Specifically it is a response to a stifling Academicism within the French university system – particularly the ways in which ‘education’ was seen as repetition. This was a system in which professors held great power, and directed education in such a way that focused on imitation of their

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24 The ‘Situationists’ were an avant-garde movement in 1968 France. Their general aim was to fabricate an existential ‘situation’ as opposed to fixed works of art— they described their actions as spontaneous and without notion or direction. For further, see: K. Knabb (Ed.), *Situationist International Anthology*. Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets. (2006)
own work, with little regard for the desires of students. The Atelier Populaire, with its reexamination of pedagogy, cultural meaning, labor practices and political process, presents an intersection of these tensions, and a crucible for understanding the cultural politics invoked in their resolution. Indeed, the very form and function the Atelier Populaire is shaped by structural tensions within modern capitalist society. Likewise, the Atelier Populaire’s reformation of labor relations emerges from a critique of the increasingly rationalized organization of work and a rejection of the ‘trade-unionism’ that came to define French workers’ unions. Politically, the Atelier Populaire rejects the stiff ‘Gaullism’ that dominated political structures for nearly 20 years.

Indeed, there seems to be a disconnect between acknowledging the tumultuous times of France in the ‘60s, and incorporating that history into explaining May ’68. While this does a disservice to May ’68 literature, it does a greater disservice to literature on culture, politics and citizenship – for the importance of studying May 1968 is not to clarify the moment itself, but to exploit its turmoil and reveal the battles over culture and citizenship that are enabled by connecting the history of rationalization projects, and the biography of French citizens.

One prominent example of this disconnect is global-1968 historian Mark Kurlansky (2005), who chronicles the French experience as one that arises out of a stale *boredom* –

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25 For the striking students and workers, this represented the perceived capitulation of unions towards the managers – securing only piecemeal victories. In early May, and later in their negotiations with managers, the official Unions were accused of resisting the strikes – opting instead to collaborate with the managers. Their image was one of enticing workers back to the factory floors, not demanding that they be emptied.

26 President Charles De Gaulle has an almost mythic and ubiquitous association with politics. He was the symbol of resistance liberation in WWII France, the mediator of the Algerian crisis, writer of the 5th constitution and self-modeled paternal figure. ‘Gaullism’ refers to the state in which De Gaulle’s personal political decisions were incorporated not only into legislation but also economics and State bureaucracy as a matter of policy.
drawing heavily from a ubiquitously quoted phrase, “la France, c’est ennui”: ‘France is Bored.’” (p.209). Kurlansky’s use of 

boredom

27 as the lack of change does not do justice to the tumultuous and rapid change occurring in French society after WWII. Far from being a decade of quiet French existence, the 1960’s was a time of great French turmoil: by Kurlansky’s own admission, the French-Algerian crisis dissolved a constitutional government and brought Charles de Gaulle back to power in 1958; the police grew vastly more militarized, shooting and killing Algerian protestors in 1960; University populations ballooned between 1958 and 1968, from 175,000 to 530,000 respectively – twice as many as Britain had; in this decade, American companies invested nearly $14 billion in Europe amid fears of the ‘Americanization’ of European life; in the decade of de Gaulle, a mass immigration of ‘about one million’ North Africans pushed prices and unemployment ever higher (2005, p.210-218).

France, then, was anything but bored in the run-up to Mai ’68. It was a society pulled between crises of government, colonial conflict, stresses in educational institutions, and an ever-increasing immigrant population. It is not the case, then, as Kurlansky continues, “it was in March 1968, while France was still bored, that Nanterre began to heat up” (2005, p.219). Rather, I suggest that France was just beginning to express latent heat that had been gathering from the frictions of the previous decade. It is a critical theoretical intervention, then, to account for these events as also the construction of a particular form of society. To dismiss the influence of these events by asserting that France had seen no action is to deny the very real consequences of these events that served as the practical

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27 The French word ennui, meaning ‘boredom’ according to the Oxford French Language Dictionary, can take a different meaning than a common English usage. It does not necessarily mean the lack of action, but rather an imposition of inaction. The French colloquialism tromper l’ennui – to ‘escape’ or ‘deceive’ boredom – captures this idea well.
implementation of programs of political dominance, economic rationalization, and social isolation.

Ennui as boredom is problematic, too, because it greatly limits explanations for why and how the French '68 events were organized – which then limits the ability to explore this moment as significant to a larger discussion of specialization, technocracy and alienation. To say that events happened because ‘France is bored”, that there is nothing going on, is also to say that the many forms of action in 1968 have no instigator – they are, instead, the products of unexplainable spontaneity. In discussing the causes of 1968 (particularly, rumored CIA provocation across Europe) Kurlansky (2005) insists:

“But there was no orchestration, not internationally, not even within France... All [Daniel Cohn-Bendit] and the thousands of others on the streets of Paris were doing was reacting spontaneously [emphasis added] to events...there were no plans” (p.224).

There was no specific pre-conceived plan, or international direction under which the actions of global or French 1968 were formulated and taken – in fact, the opposite is true. Nearly all existing political organizations were contested, and threatened by street-committees. That does not imply that the millions of others on the streets of Paris were not acting in concert against indicted social forms. Indeed, if anything, there was a globally orchestrated rationalization of economy and citizenship.

An implication of the frame of ‘boredom’ is to make invisible the very real and specific institutions and social constructions against which the actions were formulated. A much more fitting concept of ennui is the definition whereby boredom is an imposed condition which must be escaped from.
Rather than being unaffected by the decade of De Gaulle, I suggest that it is more probable that French society became increasingly embroiled in seeking answers to social questions posed by the writing of a new constitution, the reconciliation with colonial past, the transformation (or lack of change) in the post-Vichy police force, the ‘Americanization’ of European economics and a mass influx of immigrants. The actors in the French 1968 were not only reacting to specific events but also to a long-coming historically constructed situation. This difference is key – because the reaction to an event is only within the context of the moment, but the reaction to historical situation is in the context of social history. The lack of organizational structure does not mean the lack of purposeful and deliberate action.

Though spontaneous thought and action did play a role in the Parisian 1968, to frame the ’68 events from the perspective of Situationists (who describe the happenings as a spontaneous unleashing of political consciousness) leaves invisible the careful and delicate performance of cultural politics during the revolts – this performance is both part of, and a direct response to, the historical process by which dominant cultural conceptions are implemented and reproduced. Rather than manifesting spontaneously, these ‘peak’ activities were the result of long-standing tensions and a building anxiety against the economic, social, and political alienation felt in the run-up to 1968. Indeed, the works of Aristide Zolberg (1972) and Sidney Tarrow (1993) illuminate the compound nature of large-scale social unrest. Zolberg, in his discussion of ‘moments of madness’ and social unrest, suggests that society institutionalizes itself through daily social reproduction – meaning that the very ‘modes of life’ of a population, the ways people interact, consume, and labor, internalize a specific conception of society. I hold that this is reflective of the social contract between people and an economic system, and people and the state. In
May ’68, these contracts materialize as the relationship between waged labor and a capitalist economy, and the development of ‘economic’ citizens and the State – seen in the State’s implementation of policies of economic rationalization within institutions of education and politics. Consequently, the economically rationalized citizen, shaped by culturally institutionalized efficiency, results in the diminishing authority and capacity of the individual’s voice to claim agency in their daily relationships of labor and politics. For instance, the concentration of technocrat politicians (those who had attended the prestigious Ecole Superior for public administration) and the subsequent divestment of equivalent opportunities to those who had not attended meant that daily political voice became more and more diminished for more and more of the population.

Where I conceptualizing the development of alienation as part of social reproduction, Zolberg also notes that history, particularly French history, has provided examples where the social reproduction of society falls apart – he terms these ‘moments of madness.’ In other terms, this is not simply the failing of social reproduction, but rather the failing of one particular mode of social reproduction. One dominant conception of culture fails to be internalized, and a new one rises to dominance. Citing, particularly, the Paris Commune, French factory occupations of 1936, the liberation of Paris and May 1968, Zolberg describes moments of madness as the “fleeting conjunction of political radicalism and artistic innovation” where reproduction of the status quo is revoked, and ‘political enthusiasm’ becomes the order of the day (1972, p.205). However, Zolberg’s description in ‘Moments of Madness’ stops short of exploring what it actually means to ‘stop’ social reproduction. While he is not suggesting that culture ceases to exist, he seems to assess culture in a linear and definite way. Perhaps it is not that moments of madness stop
cultural reproduction, but liberate themselves from a dominant, exploitative form of culture in order to allow for another conception of culture, already being replicated among the subaltern, to take position as the dominant conception of culture.

Sidney Tarrow (1993), in his reaction to Zolberg’s ‘moments of madness’, elaborates on rejecting forms of social reproduction, and suggests that revolutionary moments provide an experimental crucible in which new forms of social contention could be developed. That is, Zolberg’s moments of madness are moments of creative destruction – the development of new ways to obstruct and deconstruct the dominant conception of culture. These moments expand what Tarrow terms ‘repertoires of contention’, or the available ideas of how to challenge the status quo. Tarrow explains, “Few people dare to break the crust of convention. When they do so during moments of madness, they create the opportunities and provide the models for others [to do so as well.]” (1993, p.302). The ‘convention’ that Tarrow refers to is the established forms of protest. He is suggesting that the ‘moments of madness’ described by Zolberg (1972) allow for new forms of creative action to be taken. I argue that these forms of contention are part of developing new culture, and that these new conceptions are informed by the perceived injustice that society is contesting. Thus, the specific experimentation with anti-technocratic forms of production and citizenship seen in the Atelier Populaire is not only a direct response to the contemporary conditions of economic, social and political alienation endemic in French society at the time, but also part of solidifying and glorifying new modes of life – new conceptions of culture.

Thus, while the large, highly visible demonstrations and riots of May and June 1968 are the most memorialized; it is in the study of less visible changes attempted in cultural
meanings of labor and citizenship where a different sort of conflict is found. These ‘different cultural meanings and practices’ are key to the struggles of 1968. The Parisian streets became the center of a struggle over the politics of daily life: the Gaullist side pushing for an increasingly rationalized and specialized society and the strikers demanding a stop to the progressively rigid and alienating structures of cultural and economic reforms. The prize of this struggle was a ‘mode of life’ that would emerge in the coming decades. Going further, this ‘mode of life’ was, at its core, a relationship between individuals, the State, and the economy. In this way, the fight over specialization and rationalization, I have argued, is a cultural contestation over the meaning of citizenship – the basic social contract not only between citizen and State, but also in the relationship of State and economy.

Whereas claiming events as spontaneous ignores the cooperation and political reckoning of the masses, understanding large events as a cumulative process enables an close exploration cultural politics – “the process enacted when sets of social actors shaped by, and embodying, different cultural meanings and practices come into conflict with each other.” (Alvarez et al., 1998, p.7).

It was precisely this imposed boredom that C. Wright Mills’ “Sociological Imagination” (1959) sought to illuminate. He uses the dialogue of history and biography to reveal the interplay of structure to quotidian life. Indeed, the sociological imagination is a powerful way of understanding the revolutionary potential of rejecting the spontaneous explanation. To Mills, the connection of history and biography might come to be the genesis of recognizing their discontent as social alienation:

“...men do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change and institutional contradiction. The well-being they enjoy, they do not usually
impute to the big ups and downs of the societies in which they live. Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary people do not usually know what this connection means for the kinds of people they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not... grasp the interplay of individuals and society, of biography and history, of self and world. They cannot cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them” (p.3) [italics added].

The Atelier Populaire and its participants bridged the connection between ‘individuals and society, of biography and history.’ They traced the frustrations of French society to an underlying structure of modern capitalism, whose cancerous inequalities and alienation tore through the very basis of society: the interplay of economy, politics, and culture. In other words, capitalism had altered the basic social contract not only between labor and production, but also between citizen and State. In recognizing a ‘structural transformation,’ the contentious response was irrevocably structural as well. One well-known slogan, both in posters and graffiti, declares, “no replastering! The structure is rotten.”

As predicted by Mills, the effect of developing a radical consciousness that connects history and biography was profound:

“The sociological imagination is the most fruitful form of this self-consciousness. By its use people whose mentalities have swept only a series of limited orbits often come to feel as if suddenly awakened in a house with which they had only supposed themselves to be familiar. Correctly or incorrectly, they often come to feel that they can now provide themselves with adequate summations, cohesive assessments, and
comprehensive orientations. Older decisions that once appeared sound now seem to them products of a mind unaccountably dense. Their capacity for astonishment is made lively again...” (p.7-8).

In many ways, that newfound astonishment is being described by the Situationists and the narrative of the ‘spontaneity’ of May ‘68 – it was as if, suddenly and inexplicably, a new society was imagined. The old seemed to fall so swiftly that it could not have been a slow development. By utilizing Mills’ concept of the sociological imagination, however, the revolutionary program of May ‘68 can be seen as itself a historical process – one that is rationally founded in the extrapolation of structural issues from the milieu of daily troubles.

Historical process, particularly towards alienated production and culture, draws from Karl Marx’s iteration of historical materialism. Particularly, it draws from the development of involuntary labor. When Marx describes the development of involuntary labor and alienation in The German Ideology, he is describing a political process by which divisions of labor, distribution rights, and ownership are determined by a cultural-political project. This is to say that seemingly innate economic positions are reflective of discriminations and hierarchies that develop from the basic mode of life. This is a key paradigm in the development of a radical/revolutionary consciousness. One source of strength in this consciousness is the historical nature of these relationships – they are not ‘natural’ or ‘innate’, nor permanent and concrete. Rather, just as they are the product of deliberate cultural constructions, so too can new conceptions be produced by a collective’s own deliberate cultural reconstructions. In the Atelier Populaire, they demonstrate this concept and even assert their agency further. Rather than maintaining the structures of division of labor, specialization, exclusive spheres of activity, interdependence, involuntary
labor, and alienation – whose developments are outlined in the previous sections – the participants of the Atelier Populaire deconstructed the cultural-political basis for mental and material divisions of labor; and concurrently refused to accept that specialization and alienation were implied at any division of labor. Instead, what they implemented was a production process that maintained non-mental/material divisions of labor, and rejected specialization – ultimately abating the alienation described by Marx, and making room for the infusion of their own cultural-political project.

The reaction of the Atelier Populaire and its participants to the tensions involved in the separation of each institutional sphere – where education belonged in the university; art and culture in the art schools; work and labor in the factory; and politics in the ballot-box – resulted in a single program of action which encompassed all institutionalized arenas of French life. The program of the Atelier Populaire, then, was not to reform the individual institutions and leave them so deeply isolated from each other – such a feature was engendered by Academicism, Gaullism, and liberalization. The Atelier Populaire, instead, was a project to expand the arenas of culture, labor, and politics; a project to bridge social divisions and, by removing the barriers between institutions, to allow participation in all realms of society. It is in many ways, a struggle for a democratic ordering of society; one which Alvarez et al. (1998) term ‘an alternative conception of citizenship.’ This democratic ordering would wholly reject the exclusionary consequences of institutional hyper-rationalization and economic efficiency that had been developed in the previous decades. Alvarez et al. elaborate: “an alternative conception of citizenship...would view democratic struggles as encompassing a redefinition not only of the political system but also of economic/social and cultural practices that might engender a democratic ordering for
society as a whole.” Thus, this paper argues that in studying the crucible presented by the Atelier Populaire, we are studying an enormous project: the cultural politics through which an alternative concept of citizenship was sought.
Conclusion

I have argued that the scene of my thesis, the poster studio in the Parisian School of Fine Arts, should be understood as a crucible for the politics of production, and the production of politics. In casting alternative conceptions of society, the students, workers, and artists were, in fact, re-defining social power. In this way, it was not simply what the poster-studio produced, but also how. Their method of production and governance was part of their redefinition of social power. Grounding the actions of the Atelier Populaire in the politics of culture asks the reader to consider broad implications for reconciling specialization and democratic social projects. Using this poster production facility, I explored dominant and alternative productions of citizenship. In doing so, I sought to answer these questions, among others: 1) How did proletariat workers, virtually excluded from higher education and political office, form an alliance with bourgeois students? 2) In identifying the connection of rationalization to alienation, and of State to rationalization, what critique did the Atelier Populaire offer about the genesis of technocratic society? 3) If the State was advancing a neoliberal State/Subject relationship, then how did the Atelier Populaire contest this meaning of citizenship? What did they envision? These questions place my work within both the realm of 1968 literature, and also within political sociology and the sociology of culture.

Being the visible actors of 1968, students and workers are no strangers in revolutionary projects, certainly. But in the contemporary moment, French workers and Students could not have been more separate. The French workers were virtually excluded from higher education and political office, while the students enjoyed leisurely academic
pursuits. How was it, then, that the proletariat workers (in France’s large auto, aero and bicycle industries) came to be aligned with bourgeois or petit bourgeois students?

Indeed, as one poster claims, it seemed like the beginning of a long struggle (*Mai ’68: Debut de un Lutte Prolongee*). The bond between workers and students was found in identifying specialization as a root of alienation – a position iterated by Marx in the German Ideology. The specialization of education under the Fouchet educational reforms, and the specialization of work under industrialization was a removal of social and productive agency from both populations.

Given the role of the State in implementing the Fouchet reforms, and also in supporting (or at least providing structure for, and fiercely protecting) the rationalization of production, and given the political exclusions that manifest in technocratic politicians and limited political participation, the battle for cultural agency was set squarely in the State/Subject relationship. It was set squarely in the realm of substantive citizenship. That is, citizenship that is not based on formal recognition – through the right to vote, official documentation etc – but rather as a citizenship as the real participation in collective governance.

In recognizing and fighting the State’s role in rationalizing society, the protestors and striking workers were contesting a hegemonic culture. They rejected the notion that specialized work and rationalized education was beneficial to the individuals trapped in them, nor that it was in service of a greater public good. Indeed, it was as if the Students and Workers were fleeing capitalist culture. Not only rejecting it, but also running towards something new: a democratic reordering of society, education, and production. A slogan
painted on an overturned car expresses this nicely: “run comrade, the old world is behind you!”

While certainly there were many cultural contestations unfolding across the globe in 1968, the Parisian moment gives us an instructive opportunity to expose the politics of culture. In closely examining the Fouchet educational reforms and the content of the political posters, we reveal the political power structures that shape the form of daily life – that is, we expose the cultural authority that implements a hegemonic project of rationalization and specialization. The posters produced by the students and workers, representative of a cultural dissent, show whom the protestors blamed for their emerging alienation – the State. Likewise, the imposition of educational reforms by France’s education minister Christian Fouchet (1967) was interpreted as the State advancing a cultural rationalization for the benefit of capitalist interests.

This cultural reformation coincided with a global transition from the welfare state to the neoliberal state. The protestors’ engagement with the Fouchet reforms and State economy unveiled the changing nature of the State’s allegiance – just as the emerging neoliberal state shifted accountability/protection of its subjects out of the State and into the marketplace, so too did the State come to encourage alienating specialization, rather than try to abate it through welfare. Coupled with limited political participation, the State’s purported role as benefactor to the people was delegitimized.

While the Atelier Populaire of May 1968 reveals the politics of culture, and the students and workers found alliance in their shared specialized alienation, we are left with a ‘so what?’ moment. Specifically, we must ask – what does it mean to contest dominant culture, and further what happens when that contest falls in the realm of citizenship? As
the participants of the Atelier Populaire ‘run’ from the ‘old world’, how can we understand their actions as themselves a cultural project? To answer these questions I draw on Karl Marx’s historical materialism, and C. Wright Mill’s Sociological Imagination. Synthesizing their arguments, I conclude that culture is historically built – it is a political process of engineering a dominant culture.

This is not a position that is prevalent in 1968 literature. One widespread explanation of the French 1968 is that the students and workers were reacting to ‘boredom’: a phrase greatly associated with May ’68 is “France, c’est ennui.” France is Bored. But if France was bored, it was made that way. The previous decade had been too tumultuous to think France was stagnant. – Michael Seidman notes that the French-Algerian crisis dissolved a constitutional government and brought Charles de Gaulle back to power in 1958; the police grew vastly more militarized, shooting and killing Algerian protestors in 1960; University populations ballooned between 1958 and 1968, from 175,000 to 530,000 respectively; in this decade, American companies invested nearly $14 billion in Europe even amid fears of the ‘Americanization’ of European life; in the decade of de Gaulle, a mass immigration of ‘about one million’ North Africans pushed up prices and unemployment (Seidman, 2005, p.210-218). Indeed, rather than ‘not participating’, the French masses faced a distinct lack of political opportunity and what Marx terms a ‘fixation of social activity.’ That is the cementing of social/economic roles as a product of rationalized society.

What does it mean to contest culture? Under what circumstances? How can we understand the May ’68 actors’ actions as a cultural project? To answer these questions, I have drawn on theory from Aristide Zolberg, Sidney Tarrow, C. Wright Mills, Alvarez et al.,
and Evelyn Nakano Glenn. May 1968 was, indeed, as Zolberg describes, a ‘Moment of Madness’ – when society had been liberated from a hegemonic culture. Furthering Sidney Tarrow, I argue that this is a moment not just for adding to the repertoire of contention, but also for experimenting with culture building. Indeed, having had, as Mills’ describes, ‘an awakening’ in an absurd ‘house’ of rationalized culture, the participants of the Atelier Populaire not only identified their current situation as historically constructed, but also identified their future as one which could be constructed as well. It was the universal feeling of absurdity – the absurdity of specialized labor, the absurdity of exclusive fields of education, the absurdity of technocratic politics and society – that created and maintained May 1968. While the Atelier Populaire was a project to expand democratic participation within many realms of society, the role of the State in implementing their alienation meant that their reaction was an attempt to change the relationship of State to Subject – to implement an ‘alternative conception of citizenship’, as noted by Alvarez et al.. Indeed, the participants of the Atelier Populaire were engaging in what James Holston (2009)\textsuperscript{28} calls a form of insurgent citizenship, aiming to combat an entrenched system of institutionalized inequality. The insurgency shown by the unspecialized production of posters, and the democratic and participatory ordering of collective governance had the effect of ‘destabilizing’ the present, and ‘defamiliarizing’ the narrative of ‘old citizenship.’

Envisioning a future citizenship, one poster declares: “l’etat c’est chacun de nous.” – “the State is each of us.” The protestors sought an insurrection of technocratic democracy in order to create a democratic citizenship with meaningful participation: a State that is inclusive and open to the social and productive agency of all citizens. When the relationship

\textsuperscript{28} As described and cited in Evelyn Nakano Glenn’s (2011) ‘Constructing Citizenship’.
between State and Subject becomes one that is revealed as counter to individual and larger societal interests, citizens go on strike. This strike against ‘technocratic democracy’ is manifest by rejecting an entrenched State/Subject relationship while engaging an insurgent one. The insurgent citizenship of the Atelier Populaire was one the sought to reinvest personal agency into the type of life they would lead – a position that is antithetical to the social fixation of specialization.

While the Atelier Populaire has thus far largely been studied only for the aesthetic content of its posters, my study illuminates the cultural politics at play in the posters studio. Indeed, the Atelier Populaire narrates the building of an alliance, the unveiling of politics in culture, and what it means to contest culture. Further, my study of the Atelier Populaire questions the compatibility of State-sponsored rationalization and democratic projects. What emerges is the revelation of specialization as a root of alienation, and recognition of the State’s role in implementing that rationalization. Accordingly, the contest of culture is centered in the State/Subject relationship. Particularly, this contest is over a meaning of citizenship that implied the removal of personal productive and social agency, and a social fixation outside of meaningful political participation.

When society is reconfigured along the lines of social rationalization and specialization, questions of citizenship, social contract, and technocratic democracy become imminent and unavoidable. What is the meaning of political participation in a world in which politicians and State administrators are a specific class of specialized laborers? In the wake of political exclusions, what becomes the relationship of citizens and the State? To whom are programs of economic/social rationalization and specialization geared towards? Are they programs which are meant to advance a meaningful species-
being, or are they programs to incorporate otherwise non-participatory citizens into capitalist forms of production? What does it mean when a State apparatus *advances* a hegemonic conceptualization of capitalist society, as opposed to *abating* the ill effects of capitalism?

These are difficult questions. Questions that surely have no clear, authoritative answer. However, the lack of definite answer does not leave this exploration fruitless. Rather, 1968 Paris, France is a moment that can be made to *reveal* these tensions. May 1968 is a project that *forced* the question, which demanded answers, and even began to provide them itself. 1968, and the Atelier Populaire specifically, which publically performed cultural politics – the means by which dominant cultural explanations are challenged, and new conceptions put forward for debate – and asked huge questions about citizenship and the social contract and hold contemporary reverberations. While they may have found partial answers in the collective and unspecialized production of posters within the Peoples’ Studio, they were unable to complete their insurrection of hegemonic capitalism. How could a moment that held such radical and comprehensive ideas of change have capitulated and dissolved? This is the contradiction of May 1968 – to at once hold a popular promise of equality and also be so completely defeated.

When the Unions went back to the factory lines, it was not merely the dissolution of a protest coalition – it was the reaffirmation of a way of life. In returning to their specialized and rationalized lives, the Unions essentially endorsed a modified system of alienation. They accepted that their position within economics, and indeed their position with mental and material divisions of labor, was one that could not be radically changed. Alienation was abated in terms of nominal comforts – but not eliminated. Likewise, as is
shown by the post-capitulation posters, the realm of politics remained largely within a symbolic vote. Like the return of the workers to the factories, the resurgence of Gaullist parties is more than it seems. The political realm of the street – the place that students and workers had seized – was conquered by the vote. This is to say that democratic participation of politics was reduced to the right to vote – consensual collective governance in the streets had been defeated by a militarized police force and the impetus to earn a living.

The revolutionary moment failed not because the revolutionary coalition fell apart. The revolution failed because, when pressed, the alternative conception of citizenship as democratic agency over production, modes of life, and species being failed. Instead, the old forms of politics as electorate vote, work as wage earning, and society as preparation for the economy persisted. What the moment had highlighted, and failed to change, was the very core conceptions of citizenship and the social contract. The State became a vehicle for preparing a capitalist workforce – the State was no longer responsible to its citizens in terms of providing a protective structure for individual agency, but rather was a mechanism by which agency could be reduced to specialized functions which would prove ‘efficient’ for capitalist production. The rationalized State was not a project of collective governance but a project of cultural orientation, in which the apparatuses of the State were appropriated to implement a dominant conception of rationalized society. It is such that the massive demonstrations, the political revolt and the productive reimagination of May 1968 and the Atelier Populaire was a response of cultural politics. In the face of State institutions implementing projects of rationalization, the Atelier Populaire, in particular, was a democratic project to expand the realm of politics. That is to say that the Atelier
Populaire, with its unspecialized production and democratic collective governance was a way of formulating and asserting an alternative conception of society – one which combatted the hegemonic, and inescapable, conception of rationalization and specialization as *beneficial* for the individual. In fact, as is evidenced by the Atelier Populaire posters and interviews, this specialization and rationalization was part of intense social alienation.

Of the many question forced by the Atelier Populaire and its participants, this above all stands as a critical intervention: the dichotomy of technocratic democracy. What is the meaning of democracy and democratic participation under a system of qualifications, specialists and exclusive spheres of activity? The vote may be equalizing, but is that a meaningful and substantive participation in politics? This is a question that is the very core for the individual: *agency*. The complete and total inability to determine one’s future – or even to have a meaningful say in collective governance – is the foundation of this dichotomy between technocracy and democracy.

When expanding this conflict of citizenship to the legitimacy of the State, we are presented with the contradiction of what I call technocratic democracy – the undemocratic injection of rationality in an ostensibly democratic governance project. The world we live in has become increasingly oriented towards efficiency – the watchword of capitalism. Likewise, collective governance projects have also been playing a larger role not only in providing protective structure, but also in developing a *type* of citizenship that serves the needs of capitalism. The relationship of State to Subject is one that increasingly seeks to prepare specialized workers – in both mental and material labor – for participation within exploitative industry. The subsequent alienation from substantive political participation is antithetical to democratic society – both within governance and also society. As the Atelier
Populaire has shown, the political is everywhere. While it is often only understood as the formal vote, culture itself – quotidian existence, and the meanings we assign to life - is constituted by cultural politics. The oxymoron of technocratic democracy comes in the fixation of social activity away from these forms of politics – amid a shift of responsibility from subject to economy, the technocratic State only retains its façade of ‘democracy’ through a limited political participation. 'Technocratic Democracy' is oxymoronic because it entails a restriction of political and personal agency within a project that is based on equal and fair participation of all.

In relating the alienating tendencies of specialization and State projects of rationalization, I argue that the Atelier Populaire is far more than just a poster production studio: it is a crucible in which to view a critique of the State/Subject relationship and an exercise of substantive citizenship. It is through this lens that we might come to see rationalization and therefore specialization as opposite to democratic projects. The restriction of agency that is inevitable in specialization limits the political participation of those who have been rationalized – instead, the political is left in the hands of specially trained technocratic politicians. Even further, the rationalized citizen is unable to participate meaningfully in politics even if they wanted to. As one poster iterates, the moment of 1968 was one in which meaningful participation in society and industry – and particularly politics – had been dissolved. The Atelier Populaire rejected this notion, and instead sought a form of citizenship and State that was based on expanding personal and political agency. Indeed, rather than a State run by some, for some; the Atelier Populaire demanded a State with the participation of all. “l’etat est chacun de nous” – The state is each of us.”
Appendix: Selected Posters from The Atelier Populaire

The posters selected here can be understood as a personal-historical record of Mai ’68. Within their images lies a particular representation of history – one that is drawn from the personal experience of students, artists, and particularly workers. While their political leanings may inform the perspective through which their understandings of French society congregate, it is none-the-less a deeply personal and carefully executed representation of their lives. It is, in essence, documenting the relationship between the designer of the poster and their world – a conception of the connection between daily life and what perceived influence of particular social structures. It is largely a mode of expressing the perception of causal relationships – between capitalism and labor, and through this, between the state and capitalism. Vytautas Kavolis notes that there is a ‘psychological congruence’ in artistic expressions, concluding:

“art content reflects not social reality itself, but the diverse modes of emotional involvement with social reality. The primary social function of art content may be the enhancement of a sense of affective relatedness to impersonal cultural norms and social institutions” (Kavolis, 1964, p.470).

At the essence of this poster art, then, is an expression that enunciates the relationship between ‘cultural norms and social institutions.’ Those ‘social institutions’ influence these ‘cultural norms’, which are understood as the normal daily experience. Thus, it is a relationship between a ‘normal’ experience and the various social institutions that direct daily life. This is the same type of connection enunciated by C. Wright Mills: the personal connection of ‘the interplay of man and society,’ and, more broadly, the
connection of ‘personal troubles’ and the ‘structural transformations’ that manipulate their lives (Mills, 1959, p.5)

Being a relationship between the designers and the their interplay with society (social institutions, specifically), these posters give evidence of the historical situation of Mai ’68. In particularly being posters expressing the tensions of French society, they give evidence of the nature of these tensions, and their understanding of the genesis of these tensions.

In analyzing the posters, they seem to confirm the development of labor relations as enunciated by Marx in *The German Ideology*. The selection here represents the embodiment of the Marxist elocutions of division of labor as ownership/means of distribution, specialization/exclusive spheres of activity/interdependence, the general/particular interest, and voluntary/involuntary labor. These categories were chosen to represent key stages in Marx’s development of labor. Particularly, I chose to limit the division of labor to the division of labor as a system of ownership/means of distribution because, as will be highlighted later, the production method by which these posters were fabricated provides a lens through which we might understand the cascading repercussions of labor as ultimately being a construction of specialized work. Also worth noting is the grouping of specialization, exclusive spheres of activity, and interdependence. I chose to group these stages of labor together because they, particularly, are closely related and happen in tandem with each other. That is to say that the increased ‘specialization’ occurs with an increasing exclusion to other activities, and the gradual development of ‘exclusive spheres of activity’ is in tandem to an equally gradual growth of ‘interdependence.’
These posters were chosen from a number of archival sources: a retrospective publication by anonymous participants in the Atelier Populaire (U.U.U, 1969), two published collections (Gasquet, 1978) (Rohan, 1988), and the Philippe Zoumeroff Collection of May 1968 digital archive hosted by Yale University, While collection of the posters was largely frowned upon by the participants of the Atelier Populaire, examples have been preserved and published as a historical record of the events (U.U.U, 1969). One participant account claims that there were two ‘archivists’ at the Atelier Populaire who put aside a copy of each poster (Rougemont, 2006, p.4). A conglomeration of posters was sorted according to expressions of historical materialism. That is, posters were selected for their textual reference, symbolic depiction of labor conditions predicted by Marx, or because they formed a relationship between history and biography – that they formed a connection between social frustration and a structural domination. Posters were also sorted according to the ‘time-period’ with which they dealt – either enunciating the contemporary conditions or articulating a vision for the future. For each temporal focus, the selected posters where compared with each other, and sorted thematically by the tenants of historical materialism presented earlier. Each poster in a category is meant to highlight a particular social implication of that theme: e.g. for contemporary conditions; the rationalization of the education system, the physical military interventions made by the State on behalf of an economic interest, etc. The purpose of this methodology is to provide an insight into how participants conceived of their society and how they proposed to transform society; as viewed through the lens of historical materialism. The posters are divided into subsections – following the principles characterized by Marx. By highlighting the use of historical materialism to portrait their contemporary society, the posters also
highlight the infiltration of the same consequences — alienation. A discussion will follow a content analysis of the selected posters.
“I participate, you participate, he participates, we participate, you-all participate; they profit.”

This poster encapsulates notions of divisions of labor – particularly as forms of distribution and ownership of labor and product – that are enunciated in The German Ideology. First being that the focus of the complaint is not just what is made, but how: the
balance of participation is in question, not the type of product being manufactured. In that vein, what is particularly being questioned is the distribution of labor input and distribution of product output (profit): Marx and Engels note; “with the division of labor,”(My particular participation, your particular participation, his particular participation), “is given simultaneously the...unequal distribution both quantitatively and qualitative of labor and its products” (Marx, 2010, p.37).
“1936: 40 Hour Work-Week.  
1968: 48 Hour Workweek.  
2000: 56 Hour Work-Week.”

This poster emphasizes the notion of equating a particular *quality* or *quantity* of labor with a share of distribution of product (profit). Thus, a subsistence-wage workweek in 1936 is 40 hours. However, to receive a subsistence-wage in 1968 means more *quantity* of work for what is ostensibly the same return of profit; even great quantities predicted for the year 2000. Marx’s observations in *The German Ideology* allow us to grasp an underlying message of this poster: that the unequal distribution of labor can be understood as a historical process in which there is a relationship between quantity of labor input and distribution of profit – controlled by the owners and manipulators of production and profit.
This was a concept that was fully embraced not only by the poster-printers but also by the ouvriers (striking workers), as they often were the source of slogans and poster designs.
"Who creates?  
For who?"

The fundamental question of this poster is elegantly simple: ‘who creates for who?’ While this poster, too, asks how production is made, it also asks an essentially different question: to who do the profits of production go? From The German Ideology, this can be interpreted as an enunciation of division of labor as a system of ownership and thus as a
system for profit distribution. From the underlying *mode of life* (e.g. patriarchy, racism, classist) emerges the ‘owners’ of the product – and thus the power to mete our distribution.
“Buy more – they’ll profit [alt: take advantage] more. The expansion is for them.”

This poster begins to answer the question posed by *Qui Cree?*. Particularly, the focus on *buying* is important: this places the discussion of benefit squarely within the realm of money and profit. Complementing the *40H Workweek*, which focused on unequal distribution of labor, *Achetez Plus* elaborates the unequal distribution of profit. The
message is simple – no matter the price, or quantity of the product that is bought, the workers will be paid the same and the ‘owners’ of production will appropriate any and all profit.
“Let’s break the old cogs.”

For Marx, there is a connection between specialization and the development of exclusive spheres of activity and interdependence. In poster productions from the Ateliers, too, there is a close association with division of labor, specialization, exclusive spheres, and interdependence. This poster embodies these concepts well: men are trapped within their given ‘cogs’ (specialization), unable to perform anything but the function of their cog (exclusive spheres), and each is connected to the others in such a way that they all must
function for ‘the machine’ to work, and therefore to survive on waged labor (interdependence). The declaration, *let’s break the old cogs*, is both a symbol that the producers and designers sensed the tensions highlighted elsewhere by Marx, and also saw their destruction as a necessary part of abating those tensions.
To start, this poster is of particular significance to the Atelier Populaire: it is the first poster produced collectively in the occupied studios of the School of Fine Arts. It is the genesis of collective poster making in *Mai ’68*. It is therefore significant too that this poster embodies one of Marx’s strongest critiques of specialized labor – “[the] division of labor only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labor appears” (Marx, 2010, p.37). In contemporary French society, there existed a strong division between the physical labor embodied in factories, and the mental labor incarcerated in the universities. This can be viewed as the *specialization* within these divisions: thus, a worker had no authority to challenge an academic. The social separation

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29 It was, in fact, not printed by serigraph (via silk-screen), but by lithography – a far more technical and time-consuming process, but one that the art students were familiar with. The serigraph technique is soon introduced by Guy de Rougement, who had appropriated it from Poland and America.
and specialization spread beyond the factory and academy – a founding tension in Mai '68 is that students and workers alike declared themselves political; violating the separation engendered by specialization. Thus, what appears a quite simple poster actually poses perhaps the seminal question of Mai '68: who is allowed to participate in what, by what authority, and with whom. The poster suggests that the dissolution of the boundaries constructed by mental and physical divisions and specialization is a solution to the effective disenfranchisement of the population.
To maintain low salaries [wages], Capitalism needs unemployment. Soon to be 700,000 unemployed.

This poster is a striking example of the contradictions that emerge from specialization, exclusive spheres of activity, and interdependence – namely the development of contradictions between the ‘particular’ or individual interest and the ‘general’ or ruling interest. It is suggesting that in order to maintain the system of capitalism (for which low wages are necessary), that unemployment is a necessary condition. It can be read another way: in order to maintain capitalism, 700,000 people must be subjected to unemployment – and the following economic, social, and familial hardships
associated with unemployment. The needs and interests of the individual are thus subjugated by an overriding ‘general’ interest that serves a ruling class. Further, in this image, the hand with two stars (representing the two stars ubiquitously associated with De Gaulle) is the enforcer of *chomage* – unemployment. The embodiment of the ‘general’ interest in the state will be discussed later.
Despite the treason of the Labor Union ‘Heavyweights’ against infernal work cadences for our 40-hour workweek, we fight!

While the ‘general’ interest certainly dominated forms of government and academy, so too did it infiltrate even the unions who were supposedly supporting the interests of the workers. These unions, particularly the largest (CGT, etc.), routinely ignored the greater demands of the street demonstrations and ouvriers (striking workers), and instead...
negotiated with factory owners for only marginally improved conditions. Whereas the
workers were demanding a guaranteed 40-hour workweek, as demonstrated here, the
Unions were hoping to negotiate for a 48-hour week. This was received as a betrayal of the
particular interest of the workers in favor for supporting the ‘general’ interest of
maintaining the current system of production and hence unequal distribution and labor.
Recall from earlier: The subsistence system [a worker] is born into requires her to sell her labor for a wage – and until her wage needs are met, she has no excess labor for individual pursuits. In the conflict between her individual, or ‘particular’ interest, and the alien force of existence, the ‘general’ interest; the impetus to sell her labor is not voluntary – it is, in fact an involuntary act, without doing so she would be hard-pressed to survive...

This particular poster astutely captures the nature of involuntary labor: the hands are shackled by the ‘nuts and bolts’ of factory life – ironically themselves indistinguishable
from any other nut; locked under key (located just under the left shackle) – meaning that the designers doubt this is a natural development: where a key exists, there exists someone who placed and secured the lock; the result of this involuntary work is ‘infernal work paces.’\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{30} Also translated as \textit{deadly work-paces} – reflecting the dangerous nature of French industry at the time.
This poster more explicitly represents the consequences of involuntary labor – workers in the French construction industry (which is profitable for the owners, and the speculators) remains an under-paid a bifurcated labor market, but also the most dangerous in France. These figures represent the annual figures for workplace injuries in the
construction industry in the years before 1968. It highlights the profiting of a particular class over the physical disfiguring of the workers who make the product for their profit.
Unlike the other posters in this section, which depict specific embodiments of the ‘general interest’ within the State, this poster utilizes a more general association between the State and the condition of alienation, inequality, and the forced passivity of French society. The Lorraine Cross, the symbol adopted by De Gaulle for political campaigning, is thus here the embodiment of alienation, privilege – all run-through with indifference. From
Marx, alienation and inequality (the two ‘pillars’ of De Gaulle, depicted here) are the products of pursuing the general-interest over individual benefit. De Gaulle, here, is grounded in the indifference engendered by interdependence, and thus the inability and discouragement from breaking the system.
Workers
French/Immigrants
Unite!

This poster is simple in its design and presentation, but contains a complicated message about the role of the state in dividing immigrant and French workers. In French industry, especially the automobile industry (epicenter of the ouvriers), the workforce was immensely bifurcated. That is to say that to compensate for the highly organized – and therefore relatively expensive – French workers, the management of factories relied on the labor of immigrant workers who were not represented by the French workers’ unions. They were paid substantially less, and we often under threat of deportation. The constant threat of being replaced by immigrant workers leads the French workers and unions to be
suspicious of the immigrants. This poster depicts the calculated role of the State in building housing projects for the factories – housing projects that came to be unofficially segregated. This can be understood as the state enforcing the ‘general interest’ of segregating the workers and keeping them both suspicious of and in competition with each other.
This poster is a direct reference to the May 6th police storming of the Sorbonne university courtyard – an act that violated a long-held separation of the municipal police from the university, who had been allowed to handle matters of the school with autonomy. The Rector of the Sorbonne, who was also perceived as implementing the unpopular Fouchet reforms, called for the assistance of the municipal police. This picture can be
understood, in terms of The German Ideology, as the ‘general interest’ embodied in the state, making “practical interventions” against a physical manifestation of resistance – the occupation of the university by students explicitly rejecting the Fouchet reforms.
This poster is both a striking metaphor for the unprecedented militarization of the police and a specific reference to the rumored presence of the military just outside of Paris in late May – supposedly leaked by the government to the media. This is perhaps the most literal application of Marx’s *practical interventions* of the State on behalf of the ‘general interest.’ Because the anti-‘general interest’ sentiment had matured by late May to include the separation of migrant workers, the education system, the unions, the factories, the police, the press and media, and De Gaulle himself – a collective effervescence of ennui with

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31 For added effect, it coincided with CGD’s speech dissolving the National Assembly and calling a new election, and a long-planned counter rally by the Gaullists up the Champs-Elysées. Some have speculated that this frightened the Unions enough to accept the bargaining of the government (CITE)
the stale and repressive – the heavy, military-like response of the police constitutes a practical intervention against all aspects of anti-‘general interest.’ Hence, the police too embodied the general interest of the ruling bourgeois and came to be the enforcer of a particular type of order, and the executioner of different types of resistance. In response to the general dissatisfaction with labor relations (‘light salaries’), the police responded with ‘heavy tanks.’
A youth worried too often by the future

As seen in the previous section, the posters produced by the Atelier Populaire act as a historical record of social conditions at the time – at the very least, a conception of society as understood by the participants. More than just express conditions, though, they also

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32 This phrase is a direct reference to Charles de Gaulle – on May 24th, 1968, de Gaulle gave a radio and television address in which he described why the students were upset: “[there are] deep confusions, especially in the youth, who are anxious about their proper role [in society], and for whom the future worries them too often” (de Gaulle, 1968). While this may have been close to the truth, de Gaulle’s prescription was exactly the educational and economic reforms that had sparked the events in the first place – highlighting his complete incomprehension of the motivations and aspirations of the younger participants.
drew connections between overlaying social structures and the quotidian experiences they felt and lived on the streets. The posters also articulated a particular conception of what the future might look like – conjuring images of a practical application of their theory. A derivative of employing the tools of historical materialism – and by connection, a sociological imagination – is a reimagination between how social structures of the future might interact with the individual to produce a new daily existence. The following section contains a number of thematic (historical materialism) posters that imagine new social constructions that could come to replace those highlighted in the previous section. The participants of the Atelier Populaire not only revealed the connection of contemporary social structure to an individual biography; they also extended the understanding of that interplay to their conceptions of the future.
This poster, produced by relief on linoleum, depicts a seamless connection between an industrial wrench and a fountain pen. In contrast to the stark division of mental and material labor seen in the deep divide between pre-68 university students and young workers, the future for this designer – and for the General Assembly which approved the poster – was one in which the dichotomy between physical labor and mental exercise (and expression) would cease to exist. Marx notes, too, the weight of a mental/material division of labor: “Division of labor only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labor appears.”\textsuperscript{33} In other words, the genesis of involuntary labor and alienation, among other possible consequences of divided labor, relies heavily on the separation of mental and material labor. This is reflected in the bureaucratic separation of

\textsuperscript{33} Marginal note by Marx: “The first form of ideologists, priests, is concurrent.”
the French political realm – where only those who had been trained at the Ecole Superieur would enter politics. All other political participation was relegated to the vote; the extra-suffrage action taken by the street protestors and the intense police-state response is indicative of this divide, which rests heavily on a mental and material division of labor. The anticipation of dissolving this division in the future is an incorporation of historical materialism and a comprehension of the interplay between labor structure and individual biography.
The operations of the Atelier Populaire, itself, expressed hopes and expectations for the future. The Atelier Populaire did not just produce posters – it produced forms and modes of labor that would be the vanguard of social process for a reorganization of society. This image, depicting the screen-printing process, captures the type of labor that the Atelier Populaire was trying to construct. It maintains a division of labor, as demonstrated by the various roles being filled by the participants, but rejects a specification and an exclusive position in and of those roles. There is no reason why the people pulling the ink might not switch with those holding the frame – with only minimal and simple training needed to allow anyone in that studio to perform any task. The result of this ‘interchangeability’, discussed earlier, reduces the impetus of involuntary work. Thus, those holding the frames are not cemented to that position – they are free to pull ink; to hang or distribute posters; to design and express. This new form of labor also rejects the old structure of interdependence, wherein the entire project is dependent on the operation of each worker, and only that worker (because they are cemented to that position). The
ink-pullers could, desiring to design a poster, refuse their position – and someone else could immediately fill it.
Workers of the P.T.T
[Postés, Telegraphs, Telephones]
The State bosses have deceived you.
Your Union bureaucracies have let you down.
Continue the struggle with the Postal Sorters.

While experiments in labor structure within the Atelier Populaire might dissolve interdependence in production, this poster highlights the rise of another interdependence. This new relationship is not grounded in the physical labor in a factory, but rather in a type of ‘social labor’, in which multiple sections of society engage with the hope of producing new social relationships. Thus, when the poster – as many others do – declares, “continue
the struggle with the Postal Sorters”, it is a call for unity and solidarity among those who wish to see the ‘state bosses’ and ‘union bureaucracies’ removed from positions of power. It also indicates that the Postal Sorters cannot accomplish this alone. The very project of social change lies in a multiplicity of ‘social-laborers’ struggling together for a common end.
Equal pay for Equal work.

Just as, in Marx's enunciation of historical materialism, a productive interdependence gives rise to a 'general interest' (in keeping the system functioning), so too does a new social interdependence give rise to a new 'general' interest. The intersectionality requirements for a social change coalition, articulated by the previous poster, informs a 'general interest' that is inclusive and participatory. Specifically, in this
poster, the general interest is one that which rejects racist divisions among workers.\textsuperscript{34} In contrast to the contemporary general interest of the State (see footnote) – which was to keep French and Immigrant workers separate as to lower wages and keep French workers from striking (out of fear of being replaced by immigrant workers) – the new social interdependence creates a general interest in which racial lines \textit{must} be dissolved, and projects of inclusion and intersectionality designed.

\textsuperscript{34} These divisions are discussed in a previous poster, in the previous section, depicting the state intervening to keep white and black workers apart.
In the hundreds of Atelier posters – from the both Atelier Populaire and its sister studios – that I have researched and analyzed, this poster stands apart as a strikingly simple explanation for what type of future the Mai ’68 participants envisioned. Its simple
beauty and striking message is first and foremost a creative production of voluntary labor. It is a paradigm of individual expression and design, produced collectively and voluntarily in a studio centered on critiquing the relationship between history and biography. Beyond its production, the message is an elegant condensation of so many paradigm shifts. It is articulating the daily experience of the individual in the context of the larger state: recognition that each person’s daily experience is intimately connected to a super-structure – whether it is social, political, or economic. In this sense, the poster is communicating an understanding of citizenship – what it means to be part of a communal state. In declaring that “the State is each of us”, the poster is recognizing both that the interaction of political, economic and social forces effects the individual, and also that the individual is part of the State – that, in comparison to pre-68 French society where the individual was highly separated from political, economic and social institutions, a new form of society emerges; a new, more democratic, conception of citizenship in which individuals are included in collective governance and participation. The State is not politicians nor bureaucracies that alienate individuals from participating in their collective experience – the State is inclusive and open to each person who lives under, and is intimately connected to it: as are all people intimately connected to a super-structure.
Cultural Resistance: Production of Politics and Politics of Production.

Citations


Bibliotheque Nationale, Les affiches de mai 68 ou l'imagination graphique (Bibliotheque Nationale, 1978).


