

PARIS MAY '68 AND PROVO AMSTERDAM '65

TRYING TO UNDERSTAND TWO POSTMODERN YOUTH REVOLTS

Marcel H. Van Herpen

ABSTRACT

The author – who was himself an occupant of the Sorbonne in 1968 – tries to analyze the links between May '68 in France and the Dutch Provo movement (1965 – 1967). Using Ronald Inglehart's postmodernization theory he argues that both May '68 and Provo were part of a postmodern value shift. Because the Netherlands was the most postmodern country in the world in the early 1960s, the youth revolt started there earlier than elsewhere. Through its anti-authoritarian, humorous, playful and apolitical character Provo expressed the postmodern value revolution in an idealtypical way. Despite its political overtones May '68 was – as Provo - in its essence not a political, but a cultural revolution. As Provo it did not overthrow abstract and distant power structures (the government, the ownership of the means of production), but it fundamentally changed the concrete and immediate power structures in daily face-to-face relations.

I. Introduction: A Tiny Dutch Republic in the Occupied Sorbonne

During the roaring May-June days of 1968 a small group of Dutchmen were among the occupants of the Sorbonne in Paris. In the library *Gaston Paris* they had established their own Dutch department. The library was situated at the end of a long corridor on the first floor: a sober rectangular room with long reading tables and wooden bookcases against the walls with the books locked up behind glass doors. They had baptised their department *La République Provo* – named after the protest movement that shook the Netherlands from 1965 to 1967. I was one of the occupants. The existence of this small Dutch republic within the walls of the occupied Sorbonne has remained until now largely unknown. But probably the discussion on the Provo movement that we organised in the afternoon of Monday, 10th June 1968, in amphitheatre - a small auditorium with a creaking, wooden floor - was one of the last debates in the occupied Sorbonne.

What was I looking for in the French capital? The revolution? Not really. Even at that time nobody really believed that a revolution was taking place. Later one would speak of the May 'revolt' or – even more prosaically - the May 'events': a revolution that was not a revolution, not even an aborted one. But what was it? According to the British historian Eric Hobsbawm "Most human beings operate like historians: they only recognize the nature of their experience in retrospect."⁽²⁾ This is certainly true. But even a greater temporal and analytical distance does not guarantee a clear view. Recently the French historian Georges Mink wrote in *Le Monde*, "Being a distant event, the year 1968 should have definitively 'cooled' by now, and consequently arranged among the objects of observation of the social sciences. That, however, has not been the case. And not only in France."⁽¹⁾ Even forty years later, 'May '68' still remains an *unidentified historical object*. This for several reasons. The French sociologist Raymond Aron already asked in his *Mémoires* in 1983 the question: "Why, still today, is one so passionately for or against the 'May events'? The answer to this question seems to me relatively easy today. The historian or the sociologist constructs an object, "the May events", which is so heterogeneous that – according to the elements of this object that one takes into account - the problem and the explanation changes."⁽³⁾ Aron is right. 'May '68' is one of the best examples of a 'container' category – a category which is so broad and contains so many – often contradictory – elements that it is difficult to get a clear view. How easy it is to pick some elements and construct "one's own '68'" becomes clear when we look at the negative political instrumentalisation of this period, made by Nicolas Sarkozy on 29 April 2007 during his presidential campaign, when he opened a frontal attack on the 'ideas and inheritors of '68'.

"After May '68," Sarkozy told his audience, "you could no longer talk about morals. That was a word that had disappeared from the political vocabulary.(...) May '68 has imposed on us intellectual and moral relativism. The inheritors of May '68 have imposed the idea that everything had a value, that there was no difference at all between good and bad, between true and false, between beauty and ugliness. (...) They have tried to make believe that no hierarchy of values could exist. They have proclaimed that everything was permitted, that authority was finished, that good manners were finished, that respect was finished, that there was nothing great left, nothing sacred, nothing admirable, no more rule, no more norm, nothing is forbidden."

At the end of his philippic Sarkozy promised his enthusiastic audience “to turn the page of May ‘68 once and for all”, and to restore ‘morals, authority, respect, work, the nation’.(4) History repeats itself, but always in a different way. Sarkozy’s call to restore ‘morals, authority, respect, work, the nation’, reminds one of the critics of the French Revolution, such as Edmund Burke and Joseph de Maistre. The fact that a French Presidential candidate – almost *forty* years later – deemed it necessary to attack May ‘68 is an indication that the impact of the movement is still important today and even more important than many may think. In fact it is. May ‘68 is a watershed in post-1945 history. Why? Not so much because it was an institutional revolution (although it brought some institutional changes), but because it was a fundamental revolution of our value system: May ‘68 was part of the first *postmodern* revolution.

A Postmodern Value Shift

Critics and analysts often express their amazement that this youth protest took place in *democratic* and *affluent* societies, in societies that never before had been so rich and prosperous and in which all material needs seemed to be met. The point is that, far from being an inexplicable fact, this material affluence seems to be the ultimate *cause* of this movement, because it brought about a deep and lasting change of the value system. This value revolution has been analysed by the American sociologist Ronald Inglehart. Inglehart made use of Abraham Maslow’s theory that people satisfy a hierarchy of human needs.(5) In accordance with Maslow, Ronald Inglehart reasoned “that the age cohorts who had experienced the wars and scarcities of the era preceding the West European economic miracle would accord a relative high priority to economic security and to what Maslow terms the safety needs.”(6) The same was, according to him, *not* true for the generation born after World War II, who had grown up in an environment of a continuing economic expansion. This new generation developed a *postmaterialist* attitude. This did not necessarily mean that this generation rejected the consumption society, it meant that they – unlike their parents – *took* the satisfaction of their material needs *for granted*. This ‘taken-for-grantedness’ made this generation more open for higher values of self-expression and issues concerning the quality of life. In a survey of 43 countries this theory was tested – and validated.(7) The new postwar generation, Inglehart and his international team

discovered, was 'postmaterialist' and this historically unique new generation was gradually replacing the older, 'materialist' generations. In Inglehart's surveys there were about 20 percent postmaterialists in 1970. In 1990 this had more than doubled to about 43 percent.(8) The postmaterialist value shift was, according to Inglehart, part of a broader value shift, which he called *postmodernization*. It was characterised by more emphasis on imagination and tolerance, especially a much greater tolerance towards sexual minorities, such as gays and lesbians. Postmodernists also supported equal rights for women and were much more in favour of abortion, divorce, and euthanasia. They were deeply anti-authoritarian, wanted a further democratization of decision-making processes, and were, more than any previous generation, interested in quality of life issues, such as the environment.

II. The Dutch Provo Movement: The First Postmodern Revolution?

In the World Values surveys of 1990 the Netherlands ranked as the most postmodern country.(9) The Dutch were the most tolerant of all 43 represented nations in respecting the individual's free choice in case of abortion, divorce, euthanasia, suicide, and the freedom of women not to have children. Also the acceptance of homosexuals was highest in the Netherlands. Only 10 percent of the Dutch public was unwilling to have homosexuals as neighbours (the US: 38 percent). The Netherlands already took this frontrunner position in 1970, when it ranked highest on the postmodernism scale among nine Western countries.(10) Without taking too much risk, we may therefore assume that in the early 1960s the Netherlands was already a postmodern frontrunner in Europe. Being one of the first countries to experience the postmodern value shift, we may expect this value shift to express itself *earlier* in the Netherlands than elsewhere. In fact it did. The Dutch Provo movement of 1965-1966 was, probably, *the first postmodern youth revolt in Europe and even, maybe, in the world.*

The Dutch department in the occupied Sorbonne was given the name *la République Provo*. The name could not have been better chosen. Because the Dutch Provo movement, that started as early as 1965, was the first European youth movement that expressed the postmodern value revolution, and was, as such, the direct forerunner of May '68.

Provo: Another Dutch Revolution that preceded a French Revolution?

The French don't really like it when events in other countries are presented in such a manner as to take away or diminish the glory and uniqueness of historical French events by putting them in an international context.(12) It is, for instance, in France hardly known that five years before the French Revolution the Netherlands already had an important democratic revolutionary movement – the 'Patriots' – which is considered by historians, such as Fernand Braudel, R.R. Parker, and Simon Schama, as a direct precursor of the French Revolution.(13) Hundred and eighty years later the Netherlands was again the theatre of a popular movement and this time the revolutionary vanguard were not the Patriots, but the Provos. What exactly was the Provo movement (14) and why should it be considered a forerunner of May '68? The great difference of the Provo movement with other protest movements in the 1960s is its *apolitical* character.(15) In Germany students protested against the war in Vietnam, against the *Notstandsgesetze* (emergency decrees), the Springer press, etcetera, and were, as such, deeply politically motivated. Not so in the Netherlands. The Provo movement started in 1965 as an absurdist movement around 'anti-smoke' rituals organised near 'het Lieverdje', a statue of an Amsterdam streetboy, offered by a cigarette company to the city. These 'happenings' on Saturday night on the Spui square attracted more and more spectators and began to make the police nervous. According to the Dutch novelist Harry Mulisch, the happenings started with the 'marihuette play': "But marihuana didn't almost play a role, unlike hay that looked like it ('marihoe'), and the rules were not understood by anybody, what was also intended. Also the police did not understand anything and organised frequently raids(...). She would never understand that there was nothing to understand, and even less that she was called by the participants themselves: because the arrival of such a bunch of big, uniformed, nicotine addicted cancer candidates was a *happening*."(16) When the police continued 'to restore order' the movement grew in force without losing its absurdist, humorist and 'ludiek'(17) character.

In publications of the Provo movement different plans were developed, such as a *white chickens' plan* – transforming police officers (in Amsterdam called 'blue chickens') into social workers; a *white bikes' plan* – a plan to provide free bikes,

painted white and permanently unlocked, for public use; a *white dwellings' plan* – an appeal to squat empty apartments, including the empty royal palace on the Dam square, as a solution for the housing problem, etc. The rude and awkward way the police reacted to these ‘provocations’ (they confiscated the first white bike, ‘because it created an invitation to theft’, or arrested a girl for offering currants to the public in the street) led to an spiralling escalation of Provo actions and police charges – in which the public sympathy was mostly on the side of the Provos. Provo became a nationwide movement and even the smallest towns and villages had their own, local Provos. The Provos strictly adhered to their humourous and ‘ludiek’ approach and even eventually got a seat in the City Council of Amsterdam. When in May 1966 the movement officially dissolved itself, it immediately transformed itself in an equally successful ‘Kabouter’ (gnome) movement that remained active until the early 1970s.

Provo as Homo Ludens

What made the Provo movement so unique among the youth and student revolts of the sixties was its humorous and playful character. Play, as is explained by the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga in his famous study *Homo Ludens*, is only at the surface without a goal, without an immediate interest. In its core it is full of sense. Play is a free action that has two aspects: it is a struggle *for* something and a theatrical exhibition *of* something.(18). The deeper significance of the *ludieke akties* (playful actions) in Amsterdam that ridiculized the overreaction of the police was the attempt to shatter the self-righteousness of the authorities and thereby to enhance the sphere of personal freedom. It was no coincidence that in these years Herbert Marcuse’s book *Eros and Civilization* became the bible of the young generation. In the second chapter of this book, with the title *The Origin of the Repressed Individual*, Marcuse introduced a new term: *surplus repression*. This ‘surplus repression’ was distinguished by him from ‘basic’ repression, which was a necessary modification of the human instincts in order to survive in civilization. ‘Surplus repression’, on the other hand, was an *unnecessary* repression which was the product of social domination.(19) The Provo movement’s playful provocations targeted this ‘surplus repression’ - personified by the police that restrained their freedom to organize joyful ‘happenings’ in a dull and boring city. And, as Huizinga rightly analysed, the anti-authoritarian happenings were not only a struggle *for* this freedom, but at the same

time equally a theatrical exhibition *of* this freedom. Postmodern *anti-authoritarianism* was, therefore, a basic feature of this movement.

A second feature of the Provo movement was its clear *postmaterialist* stance. Mulisch has characterized very well the value rift between the parents, born before World War II, who were fully submerged in the new consumption society, and their offspring, born after World War II, when he wrote: “While their parents, sitting on their refrigerators and washing machines, were watching with their left eye the TEEVEE, with their right eye the CAR in front of the house door, in one hand the kitchen mixer, in the other De Telegraaf (a conservative daily, MHvH), the children went on Saturday evening to the Spui (where the happenings were).”(20)

Provo was also one of the first movements in Europe to pay attention to problems of the environment, especially the *urban* environment, characterised by traffic congestion and polluted air. Polluting cars should be replaced by freely available, environment friendly white bikes. Therefore Provo can be considered as one of the first modern youth movements that has put environmental themes on the agenda.

A fourth feature was that Provo, in a more general way, preached *tolerance* for deviant behaviour and this was not the least contribution of the Provo movement that it totally changed the cultural climate in the Netherlands, making the country more open to dissenting voices and minorities. It is no coincidence that in the wake of Provo new emancipation movements emerged, especially the feminist and the gay movements.

Only in the end the Provo movement embraced more political themes, when it began to attack the monarchy and spoke out in favour of a republic. As such it joined the democratic republicanism of the eighteenth century Patriot movement. But Provo’s anti-monarchism fitted well into its postmodern anti-authoritarianism – as it was directed against the unelected members of the House of Orange, whose authority was not based on any special merit, but on something wholly non-egalitarian and irrational: birth.

Provo was not only the first postmodern revolt, it was a postmodern revolt *in optima forma*. Through its mostly apolitical character it expressed the postmodern revolution in its purest - almost idealtypical - form - as a *révolution des mœurs et valeurs*.

II. Provo and May '68 in France

Let us now turn to May '68. On the surface Provo and May '68 seemed to be very different. But were they? May '68 was a special event. This for four reasons. It was comparatively *late*. It had an extremely *explosive* character. Unlike elsewhere it developed into a *generalised* revolt in which the students are joined by factory workers, as well as by the new professionals. And – last but not least - students made use of new models of action: *the occupation of buildings*, which they copied from the workers' movement. Despite these differences, May '68 is less a political than a cultural revolution and – as Provo before – its real target is not politics, not even the economy, but society.

May '68: The Late Revolt

The first characteristic of the French May revolt is that it was a rather *late* phenomenon – not only in comparison with Provo, but also with other student and youth revolts around the world. The strange silence in France drew likewise the attention of the French press. In *Le Monde* of 15 March 1968 there appeared an article written by Pierre Vianson-Ponté with the title “When France is bored...”

“What characterises our public life today,” the author wrote, “is boredom. The French are bored. They don't participate in the great convulsions that shake the world.” And he continued: “The youth is bored. Students demonstrate, move, fight in Spain, in Italy, in Belgium, in Algeria, in Japan, in America, in Egypt, in Germany, even in Poland. They have the idea that they have conquests to make, a protest to be made heard, at least a sentiment of the absurd to oppose to the absurdity. The French students are only interested to know if the girls of Nanterre and Antony have the possibility to visit the rooms of the boys, what is, after all, only a limited conception of human rights.”(21)

The quietness of France was felt as an anomaly, certainly against the background of France's reputation as the revolutionary country *par excellence*. In retrospect, France has upheld its reputation: the relative silence of France before May '68 was the

silence before the storm. Only one week after this article was published the movement of 22 March was formed at Nanterre.

The 'Champagne Effect'

A second characteristic of May '68 was its extreme force. There were four reasons for this. In the first place there was the fact, mentioned above, of its *delayed* character. Confronted with the movement in other countries, frustration must have been building up in France, thereby creating a *champagne effect*: a sudden outburst of all the repressed energy, strengthening the readiness for action.

Secondly, there existed a French *tradition* of popular upheavals, caused by a lack of flexibility in the French political system to modernize itself and to adapt itself in a gradual way to changing circumstances. This is also the explanation given by the French sociologist Alain Touraine for the unexpected force of the May movement: "It is the power of the state and bourgeois conservatism, joining forces as so often, which usually give social movements in France an explosive character. You have to shout very loud in order to be heard, kick in the doors to be received."(22)

A third reason for the strength of the French movement was the fact that in France, unlike in other countries, the new student movement *joined forces* with the labour movement that used the situation, created by the former, to proclaim a general strike. Ironically, this merger of new and old opposition forces, which gave its extraordinarily strength to the French movement, at the same time contained and restrained the movement. It kept it embedded in the existing legal order, because the leftwing political parties and trade unions, including the communist PCF and the communist-led CGT trade union, were unwilling to challenge the political status quo.(23)

A fourth, and not least important, factor that explains the force of the French movement is the *reinvention of an old model of action*: the permanent occupation of buildings. It was a model of action the students had copied from the workers' movement.(24) The immediate source of inspiration for the occupations of May '68 appears to have been the occupation of the Rhodiaceta nylon fibre factory in Besançon in February-March 1967, when during a month almost 3000 workers occupied their factory. This occupation obtained an almost mystical significance in France after a film maker made a movie of it, which he – tellingly - gave the title *À*

bientôt, j'espère (See you soon, I hope). The movie was shown nationwide on French television in February 1968.(25)

The reinvention in May '68 of this old model of action of the labour movement turned out to be a strike of genius. In a scattered, chaotic, and unorganised movement the occupied buildings of Centre Censier, the Sorbonne, and the Odéon created a *headquarters*, from which actions could be initiated and led.(26) It also created also a *focus* for those who wanted to join the movement, or, more simply, show their sympathy. The occupation of university buildings and factories further guaranteed the *continuity* of the movement, by creating a nation-wide archipelago of bases of resistance. Especially the occupation of university buildings was a new development, politically as well as legally. In the American labour conflicts of 1936 judges had to weigh the rights of the owners of the factories against the rights of the workers (and often decided in favour of the first). But who were the owners of the university buildings? These buildings were not privately owned. They were built for the general interest and financed by the state. A reason for which the occupants claimed, if not a legal right, then at least a moral right to occupy these buildings.

Was May '68 a Political or a Cultural Revolution?

Compared with the hurricane of May '68 the Provo movement was, perhaps, only a soft and gentle springtime breeze. May '68 witnessed the greatest general strike that took ever place in France, with up to nine million people involved. After May '68 there has developed a growing controversy over the exact character of the May events. Particularly the question as to whether May should be called a political or a cultural revolution has become the subject of a heated debate. In a recent book, *May '68 and Its Afterlives*, Kristin Ross, who is a professor of literature at New York University, defends the thesis that May '68 was primarily a *political* revolution. 'The clear ideological targets of the May movement' were, according to her, "three: capitalism, American imperialism, and Gaullism." And she continues: "The immediate political context in France was in fact one of triumphant Marxism" "How then do we arrive," she asks, "twenty years later, at a consensus view of '68 as a mellow, sympathetic, poetic 'youth revolt' and lifestyle reform?"(27) One of the causes of this, in her eyes false, interpretation, is the fact that the Marxist concept of 'class' has been replaced by the sociological concept of 'generation'. Kristin Ross

fails to see that May was, indeed, in its essence, not a class conflict, but a generation conflict: it was primarily the work of a new, young generation, born after World War II, an age cohort characterized by new, postmodern values. To establish the anti-capitalist character of the event, she refers to the *self-definition* of the insurgents. And she is right: many student-activists of the 1960s considered themselves as neo-marxists or left socialists. But this *subjective* self-definition, which was part of the *Zeitgeist*, is a far cry from the *objective* role the students played. Immediately after the events, in 1968, Alain Touraine wrote on the student activists: “Their conscience and their action are disconnected. Rejection of the bourgeoisie and appeal to the proletariat (...): the movement reconstructs the social struggles of the past (...).”(28) Jürgen Habermas would equally criticize “the illusionary equation of the rebellious youth with a revolutionary avant garde.”(29) And Ronald Inglehart observed – rightly - a gradual evolution towards a *new* self-definition in the years that follow: “When Postmaterialists first appeared in significant numbers in Western Europe during the 1960s, they tended to think of themselves as Marxists. But this tendency weakened during the 1970s, and by the late 1980s it had all but vanished.”(30)

Unlike 1848, when revolutionaries tried to establish a democratic state, and unlike 1917, when revolutionaries tried to establish a socialized economy, the impact of 1968 was hardly political (there was not even a parliamentary ‘regime change’ in France), and even less economic. The French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis asked: “What is the most important political event in France since twenty years, if not more?” And he answered: “It is May ‘68. Well, who has made May ‘68? What political party has made May ‘68? Not one. And nevertheless, ten years later, France has been more influenced by May ‘68 than by the Commune.” And he concluded: “...the real place of politics is not there, where one thought it was. The place of politics is everywhere. *The place of politics is society.*”(31) Indeed, the real importance of 1968 was that it revolutionized *society*. And although the students may have imagined that they were overthrowing the Gaullist state, were combating American imperialism, or were introducing an anti-capitalist economy in France, based on *autogestion*, the reality was quite different. As Dominique Memmi recently wrote in an interesting essay: “May ‘68 could very well be first of all a revolution of the private sphere.”(32) This is, indeed, what happened. Memmi draws, rightly, attention to the fact that the power structure in daily *face-to-face* relations had become

unbearable for those on the weaker, receiving side. Not only the power relationship in the patriarchal family was questioned, where the old, unequal relations between husband and wife and (to a lesser degree) between parents and children had become unbearable; but also face-to face relations outside the family: such as the unequal power relationship between teacher and student, between the new professionals and the management, etcetera.(33) And this phenomenon was new. Provo and May '68 were not so much about changing *abstract and distant* power structures (changing a government or changing the owners of the means of production). They were more about changing the power structures in the *direct, nearby, daily* environment. One of the May slogans, written on a wall in Paris: *À bas la vie quotidienne* (down with daily life), seemed to express this aspiration very well.

Provo and May '68 expressed and brought an *aggiornamento* of no longer bearable and sustainable power structures in daily face-to-face relations. Both movements were about the abolition of old forms of domination, that were - in Marcuse's terms - experienced as an unnecessary *surplus* repression. May '68 brought a breath of fresh air in closed institutions where since times unknown an imposed order reigned. In the first place in the family, where not only wives, but also children got increased possibilities of exit and voice.(34) The exit possibility of married women grew enormously - not only because it became more easy to divorce, but also by the enhanced possibility to work outside home and thereby becoming economically more independent.(35)

But Provo and May '68 were, more specifically, an explosion of 'voice'. 'Happenings', demonstrations, occupations, street protests, 'ludieke akties', posters, pamphlets: they were a unique opportunity to express one's grievances and to reinvent a better world. For such carnival-like feasts of expression the Germans use the term *Ventilsitte* - an outlet to blow off steam. May '68 and Provo were huge 'expression' festivals. As such, they were not only a means to obtain certain goals, but a source of pleasure in themselves. This is also how Hirschman explained the absence of a 'free rider' problem in '68. Because, according to him, these free riders "cheat themselves first of all". (36) Participating in actions is not only a cost, it is also a great pleasure: "The sudden realization (or illusion) that I can act to change society for the better and,

moreover, that I can join other like-minded people to this end is in such conditions pleasurable, in fact intoxicating, in itself.” (37)

May '68 and after

Karin Ross asked, when '68 was the work of a generation, “why ‘youth’ not have continued to perform as political subjects?”(38) A good question. But the question can equally be asked for movements and revolutions of which the main actors are social classes. Albert O. Hirschman wrote a small, brilliant essay: *Shifting Involvements*, in which he tried to find an explanation for this fact. “An important ingredient of the ‘spirit of 1968’,” he wrote, “was a sudden and overwhelming concern with public issues – of war and peace, of greater equality, of participation in decision-making. This concern arose after a long period of individual economic improvement and apparent full dedication thereto on the part of large masses of people in all of the countries where these ‘puzzling’ outbreaks occurred. While poorly understood at the time they took place, those outbreaks are today classed as abnormal and quixotic episodes; in the course of the seventies, people returned to worry primarily about their private interests, the more so as the easy forward movement that had marked the earlier period gave place almost everywhere to uncertainty and crisis.”(39) Hirschman tried to answer “the question whether our societies are in some way predisposed toward oscillations between periods of intense preoccupation with public issues and of almost total concentration on individual improvement and private welfare goals.”(40) He thinks that there exist, indeed, such oscillations.

In my opinion Provo as well as May '68 do not totally fit in Hirschman's binary schedule. Because in both movements – as *postmodern* movements – the preoccupation with public issues was *not* disconnected from a concentration on private interests and individual improvement, as was the case in earlier times. The revolt of a new, postmodern generation, which was more occupied with individual freedom and Maslowian ‘personal growth’ than with ‘material’ issues, was conducted in order *to revolutionise the private sphere*. Dutch feminists in that time coined the expression: “Het persoonlijke is politiek” (personal questions are political questions). They, indeed, were. Just as personal questions (such as abortion), became political questions, political questions became personal questions. Both were intertwined.

Provo and May '68 were, therefore, a unique phase in Hirschman's 'Shifting Involvements' – a phase in which public action *coincided* with a preoccupation with individual improvement – improvement not so much understood as material improvement, as an improvement of personal *well-being*.

NOTES

(1) Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes – The Short Twentieth Century 1914 – 1991*, London (Abacus), 1994, p. 257. The same thought was expressed by Hegel, when he wrote in his *Philosophy of Right* that „the owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk”.

(2) Georges Mink, “En 1968, une Europe chantait, l’autre pas...” in: *Le Monde*, 4 January, 2008.

(3) Raymond Aron, *Mémoires*, Paris, (Julliard), 1983, p. 481. (My translation, MHVH). Raymond Aron who in 1968 was one of the fiercest critics of the movement, came later to a more positive assessment. Cf. Serge Audier, *La pensée anti-68 – Essai sur une restauration intellectuelle*, Paris (La Découverte), 2008, chapter 3 : ‘Raymond Aron, père du discours anti-68 ?’

(4) http://www.u-mp.org/site/index.php/s_informer/discours/nicolas_sarkozy_a_bercy (My translation, MHVH).

(5) According to Maslow people tend to satisfy their needs in a certain order, starting with basic physiological needs - such as food, drink, and shelter – followed successively by safety needs, needs of belongingness and love, and esteem needs. On top of these four ‘deficiency’ needs there are, finally, ‘growth’ needs: needs of self-actualization. Abraham Maslow developed his theory for the first time in his article “A Theory of Human Motivation”, published in 1943 in the *Psychological Review*, 50, pp. 370 – 396.

Text available at <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm>

(6) Ronald Inglehart, “The Silent Revolution in Europe – Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies, in: *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (December 1971), p. 991.

(7) The results and an evaluation of the survey of the period 1970 – 1994 are published in Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization – Cultural*,

Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies, Princeton, N.J., (Princeton University Press), 1997.

(8) *ibid.* p. 35.

(9) *ibid.*, p.157.

(10) Ronald Inglehart and Christian Wenzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy – The Human Development Sequence*, Cambridge/New York (Cambridge University Press), 2005, p. 103. The eight other countries were the US, Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, Denmark and Ireland.

(11) The pro-choice actions of the Dutch feminist movement *Dolle Mina* were conducted with the slogan ‘*baas in eigen buik*’ (boss in one’s own belly).

(12) This phenomenon can also be observed in the flood of books and publications that accompanies the fortieth anniversary of May ’68 in France. Only a few pay of these pay a more than minimal attention to the international context.

(13) Braudel, for instance, wrote on the Patriot movement: “This revolution, which I would in no sense under-estimate (it is a proof *a contrario* of Dutch success), has been insufficiently recognized for what it was, the first revolution on the European mainland, the forerunner of the French revolution, and unquestionable a serious conflict, which divided even bourgeois families, father against son, husband against wife (...) with unbelievable ferocity.” Cf. Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15th – 18th Century*, 3. *The Perspective of the World*, London (HarperCollins), 1985, p. 275. Cf. also R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution*, Princeton (Princeton University Press), 1974. According to Palmer “...of the various revolutionary agitations in Europe before the French upheaval, the Dutch Patriot movement had been the strongest.” Palmer even ascribed the invention of the modern word ‘democrat’ to this movement. It was ‘first coined by the Dutch’. Its first currency ‘was in the Low Countries, in the Dutch revolution of 1784 – 1787 (...)’ (p.15). See further Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators – Revolution in the Netherlands 1780 – 1813*, London (Fontana), 1992. This Dutch democratic, bourgeois

movement had been crushed in 1787 – two years before the French Revolution - by the Orangist party with the help of British diplomacy and the Prussian army.

(14) The word ‘Provo’ was coined by the Dutch criminologist Wouter Buikhuisen in his study *Achtergronden van nozemgedrag* (Backgrounds of the behaviour of rebellious youth), published in 1965. The term was proudly accepted by the rebellious youth to refer to itself.

(15) According to James C. Kennedy ”the counter-culture that manifested itself especially in Amsterdam, was less *political* than counter-cultures in Berlin, Paris, San Francisco and New York. Although a great part of the counter-culture in the West was characterised by play elements, this was often mixed with a ‘revolutionary’ policy. This was not the case in the Netherlands, where play dominated.” James C. Kennedy, *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw – Nederland in de jaren zestig*, (New Babylon under construction – The Netherlands in the 1960s), Amsterdam/Meppel (Boom), 1995, p. 120.

(16) Harry Mulisch, *Bericht aan de rattenkoning* (Message to the Rat’s King), Amsterdam (De Bezige Bij), 1966, p. 59.

(17) The word ‘ludiek’, which comes close to the English word ‘playful’, was coined by the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga in his book ‘Homo Ludens’. For Huizinga play, although older than culture and shared by both humans and some animals, was a constituent part of culture. Cf. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens – Proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur*, Groningen (Tjeenk Willink), 1974 (first published in 1938).

(18) Johan Huizinga, o.c., p. 13.

(19) Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization – A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, New York (Vintage Books), 1961, p. 32.

(20) Harry Mulisch, o.c., p. 62.

(21) Pierre Viansson-Ponté, «Quand la France s'ennuie», *Le Monde*, 15 March 1968. (My translation, MHVH).

(22) Alain Touraine, *Le mouvement de mai ou le communisme utopique*, (The May Movement and Utopian Communism), Paris, (Seuil), 1968, p. 35. (My translation, MHVH).

(23) By proclaiming a general strike the PCF and CGT only *blocked* the social and political system, without defining an exit strategy. As such it fitted into what Pierre Rosanvallon later has called a *démocratie de rejet* (democracy of rejection), or the exercise of a 'negative sovereignty', which he opposed to a *démocratie de projet* (project democracy). Cf. Pierre Rosanvallon, *La contre-démocratie – La politique à l'âge de défiance*, Paris (Seuil), 2006.

(24) Factory sit-ins took already place in the US in the 1920s and 1930s. According to Jim Pope "between 1936 – 1939 American workers staged some 583 sit-down strikes of at least one day's duration." As a rule these occupations did not exceed 24 hours, but after President Roosevelt's smashing re-election in 1936 "week-long factory occupations took place." Occupations of factories for longer periods took equally place in Italy in the 1920s and in France in 1936 – just before the socialist government of Léon Blum was installed. Cf. Jim Pope, "Worker Lawmaking, Sit-Down Strikes, and the Shaping of American Industrial Relations, 1935 – 1938", in: *Law and History Review*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Spring 2006.

<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/lhr/24.1/pope.html>

(25) Cf. Nicolas Hatzfeld and Cédric Lomba, "La grève de Rhodiacta en 1967", in: Dominique Damamme e.a, ed., *Mai-Juin 68*, Paris (Les Editions de l'Atelier), 2008, pp. 102 – 113. It is interesting to note that the authors stress the fact that the majority of the activists are of a new, young generation. They have no material problems, are rather well paid and could easily find another job. The goal of their occupation was not a higher salary (although this is what they will get in the end), but to change the authoritarian management style and to obtain better working conditions – all of which fits very well in an emerging *postmaterialist* value system.

(26) In May the students started the occupations. The first building they occupied was the Centre Censier on 11 May. The Sorbonne followed on 13 May. The first factory occupations began on 14 May. The Odéon was occupied on 15 May.

(27) Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, Chicago and London (The University of Chicago Press), 2002, p. 8.

(28) Alain Touraine, o.c., p.13. (My translation, MHVH).

(29) Jürgen Habermas, „Die verschiedenen Rhythmen von Philosophie und Politik – Herbert Marcuse zum 100. Geburtstag“, in : Jürgen Habermas, *Die postnationale Konstellation – Politische Essays*, Frankfurt am Main (Suhrkamp), 1998, p. 238.

(30) Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*, o.c., pp. 317 – 318.

(31) Cornelius Castoriadis, “Ce que les parties politiques ne peuvent pas faire” (What Political Parties Cannot Do), in: *Une société à la dérive – Entretiens et débats 1974 - 1997*, Paris (Seuil), 2005, p. 152. (My translation, MHvH). Castoriadis, a former Trotskyist, is one of the most lucid analysts of '68. In the book *Mai 68 – La Brèche*, written with Edgar Morin and Claude Lefort, and first published in 1968, he already implicitly answers to criticisms à la Kristin Ross, indicating that for hundred and fifty years the proletariat had been the revolutionary class ‘because of its real situation in the production process’. In modern societies, however, the industrial proletariat no longer is a majority, ‘and its relative weight is declining’. Feelings of alienation are, according to him, more deeply felt by the new, intellectual, professions. Therefore “youth is, as such, a social category, supported by a division of society which is, in certain aspects, more important than its division in classes.(...) This division, wrote Castoriadis, “can no longer be based on ‘status’ or ‘class’, but on behaviour; and the first determine the second less and less in a univocal way. Today the pertinent division becomes the one between those who accept the system and those who refuse it.” Without having access to (later) surveys that will establish the emergence of a new ‘postmodern’ individual, Castoriadis already speaks of a ‘profound anthropological and system crisis’, ‘the breakdown of values’ that manifest itself especially in the young generation. Cf. Cornelius Castoriadis, « La révolution

anticipée », in : Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort, Cornelius Castoriadis, *Mai 68 – La Brèche, suivi de Vingt ans après*, Paris (Arthème Fayard), 2008, pp. 121-194.

(32) Dominique Memmi, “Mai 68 ou la crise de la domination rapprochée”, in: Dominique Damamme, *Mai-Juin 68*, o.c., p. 35.

(33) And not only the new, highly educated professionals. Think about the young age cohort which was over-represented in the occupied Rhodiaceta factory in 1967. What they demanded was not primarily higher wages, but a less authoritarian management style.

(34) Cf. Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty – Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Cambridge and London (Harvard University Press), 1970. As Hirschman has indicated, exit and voice are ways of handling loyalty problems. When loyalty to an institution is declining, one can react by leaving (exit) or by expressing one’s grievances (voice). If the grievances are taken serious and eventually lead to changes in the institution, the protesting party may be satisfied and his loyalty restored.

(35) Exit and voice elements in the movement were already indicated by Alain Touraine in 1968 (*before* Hirschman developed his theory), when he wrote that in the May movement “there were two opposed attitudes: on the one side the affirmation of a counter-society, appeal to spontaneity, imagination, desire, against the whole social machinery; on the other the effort of modernization, participation and, finally, social integration” (Touraine, o.c., p. 33). It is not difficult to recognize in the first attitude an ‘exit’ reaction and the second ‘voice’, leading to new loyalty.

(36) Albert O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements – Private Interest and Public Action*, Princeton, N.J., (Princeton University Press), 1982, p. 87.

(37) *ibid.*, p. 89. That the actions of ’68 were not only experienced as a burden, but equally, or even more, as an expression of the *Lustprinzip* is also emphasized by the French sociologist Edgar Morin, who noted that in the first two weeks of May ’68 “the offices of psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, general practitioners, gurus were

suddenly emptied, in the generalized euphoria, the paralysis of the social order, the joyful communication between everyone and everybody, until, with the restoration of order, the stomach ulcers, headaches, insomnias, nauseas, depressions, reappear.”

Cf. Edgar Morin, *Pour une politique de civilisation*, Paris (Arléa), 2008, pp. 19-20.

(38) Karin Ross, o.c., p.206.

(39) Albert O. Hirschman, *Shifting Involvements – Private Interest and Public Action*, o.c., p. 89.

(40) *ibid.*, p. 3.

© Marcel H. Van Herpen, 2008

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the written permission of the author. Only copies for personal use are permitted.

Marcel H. Van Herpen is director of the Cicero Foundation, an independent pro-EU and pro-Atlantic think tank www.cicerofoundation.org