

## **1968–2018: plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose (?)**

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### **Abstract**

In what follows, I would like to propose that our relationship to May '68 is more complicated than any straightforward affirmation or rejection of our contemporaneity with the political sequence that bears its name and date. Moreover, it is by understanding why it becomes difficult to simply affirm or deny Badiou's claim that we are able to grasp how our relationship to '68 involves, by necessity, both responses. So, while it may be the case that what we share with '68 is our search for an answer to a singular question – namely, *what form will collective subjectivity take such that it is adequate to the abolition of itself and its present state of affairs?* – what is also made clear is that the possible solutions this question solicited in 1968 are significantly different from those offered up in 2018. And it is in this way that we are forced to recognise that if there is a double bind proper to '68 it is of an altogether different nature than the one posed to us in 2018. For the movements of '68, their double bind was the one precisely identified by Deleuze who remarked that “May '68 was a becoming-revolutionary without a revolutionary future,” (Deleuze 2004) while the double bind of the Left in 2018 is defined by its internal division or split between those who call for a reinvestment in the Party-form and electoral politics and those who reiterate their commitment to the recomposition and furthering of extra-parliamentary struggle. And so, in the concluding section of this essay, we will see how it was Blanchot rather than Badiou who best captured the double bind of our present moment; this dialectic between melancholic reflection and farcical repetition, which has come to serve as the horizon of contemporary struggles.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than constituting some set of solutions or revolutionary program, May '68 appears to persist in the form of a problem. For someone like Badiou, this problem of '68 belongs strictly to the order of *politics* insofar as the era was defined by, and preoccupied

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<sup>1</sup> Part of the impetus for the writing of this essay comes from the Badiou quote that appears in this issue's call for papers. The quote in question reads as follows: “We are commemorating May '68 because the real outcome and the real hero of '68 is unfettered neo-liberal capitalism.” Upon reading this one may feel compelled to revisit Badiou's original essay in which this statement appears; if only due to the fact that a conclusion such as this appears to be at odds with the very place reserved for May '68 in Badiou's thought as a whole. And so, if it sounds at odds with Badiou's own thinking on this topic, it is because it is – for the sentence directly preceding the quote just read reads, “There is also a second even more pessimistic answer [to why we are commemorating May '68 forty years after the fact].” Now, the purpose of this prefatory remark is not to put any of the editors on trial but rather to revisit Badiou's own analysis in detail and to inquire into whether or not his thesis remains true in light of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this year of global revolution. So, by revisiting Badiou's original remarks delivered on '68's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we must ask whether or not we remain contemporaries of '68, or have the relations between the Left in 2018 and the Left of 1968 undergone a substantive transformation?

with, the question, “What is politics?” (Badiou 2015: 40) while for those like Guattari, ’68’s problematic was *socio-economic* in essence: “...one specific battle to be fought by workers in the factories, another by patients in the hospital, yet another by students in the university. As became obvious in ’68, the problem of the university is [...] the problem of society as a whole” (Guattari 1984: 66).<sup>2</sup> And for others still, such as Jean-Luc Nancy, the problem of May reveals itself to be decidedly *metaphysical* in nature – “Democracy is first of all a metaphysics and only afterwards a politics” (Nancy 2010: 34).<sup>3</sup> Thus it seems that the fate of May ’68 is to remain an eternal site of contestation, always irreducible to any single sequence of events. Hence the suggestion that “the meaning of May” signifies less a resolution of contradictions and more so a formulation of a set of problems. However, it is still necessary to ask whether or not we remain its contemporaries fifty years on. In other words, this is to ask whether the problem that has come to preoccupy the Left of today is still that of a search for the relevant forms and organisation of political subjectivity capable of ushering in a qualitative transformation of capital that serves as the criterion of contemporaneity. For as Badiou suggests, today “we have the same problem and are the contemporaries of the problem revealed by May ’68: the classical figure of the politics of emancipation was ineffective” (Badiou 2015: 47).

In what follows, I would like to propose that our relationship to May ’68 is more complicated than any straightforward affirmation or rejection of our contemporaneity with the political sequence that bears its name and date. Moreover, it is by understanding why it becomes difficult to simply affirm or deny Badiou’s claim that we are able to grasp how our relationship to ’68 involves, by necessity, both responses. So, while it may be the case that what we share with ’68 is our search for an answer to a singular question – namely, *what form will collective subjectivity take such that it is adequate to the abolition of itself and its present state of affairs?* – what is also made clear is that the possible solutions this question solicited in 1968 are significantly different from those offered up in 2018. And it is in this way that we are forced to recognise that if there is a double bind proper to ’68 it is of an altogether different nature than the one posed to us in 2018. For the movements of ’68, their double bind was the one precisely identified by Deleuze who remarked that “May ’68

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<sup>2</sup> Or as Guattari says further on, “Significantly, after May ’68, most revolutionary movements failed to grasp the importance of the weak link that had become apparent during the student struggle. Quite suddenly, students and young workers ‘forgot’ to respect that was due to the superior knowledge and power of teachers, foremen, managers, etc. They broke away from the old submission to the values of the past and introduced an entirely new approach. But the whole thing was labelled spontaneism, in other words a transitional manifestation that must be left behind for a ‘superior’ phase, marked by the setting-up of centralist organisations. Desire surged up among the people; it was noted, but expected to quieten and accept discipline. No one realised that this new form of revolt would in [the] future be inseparable from all further economic and political struggles” (Guattari 1984: 66).

<sup>3</sup> For as Brault and Naas write it in the translator’s foreword, “Democracy must therefore be thought as the incommensurable sharing of existence that makes the political possible but can in no way be reduced to the political. As such, it is first of all a metaphysics and only afterwards a politics. It was May 68, Nancy argues, that demonstrated all this in an exemplary way and so deserves to be not simply remembered and commemorated but rethought and renewed” (Nancy 2010: xi).

was a becoming-revolutionary without a revolutionary future” (Deleuze 2004), while the double bind of the Left in 2018 is defined by its internal division or split between those who call for a reinvestment in the Party-form and electoral politics and those who reiterate their commitment to the recomposition and furthering of extra-parliamentary struggle.

Thus, unlike the movements of '68, the Left of 2018 does not find itself in a condition where the existence of a revolutionary process lacks its attendant, emancipatory, future. Rather, our current cycle of struggles is circumscribed by the temptation of engaging in *either* a melancholic reflection of a past that is to ground struggle in the present *or* a farcical repetition of this past pure and simple. And so, in the concluding section of this essay, we will see how it was Blanchot rather than Badiou who best captured the double bind of our present moment; this dialectic between melancholic reflection and farcical repetition, which has come to serve as the horizon of contemporary struggles.

## 1. Badiou's 'Four May's

“I would like to begin by asking a very simple question: why all this fuss about May '68 [...] 40 years after the event? There was nothing of the kind for the thirtieth or twentieth anniversary” (Badiou 2015: 45).<sup>6</sup> Thus begins Badiou's reflections on the fortieth anniversary of the events of '68. And not without justification, for it is indeed strange that May '68 becomes worthy of national commemoration only once forty years of silence have come to pass. Beginning with this question, Badiou identifies two of the dominant modes of responding to this question. On the one hand, there is a set of answers that can be said to be pessimistic and propose the idea that it is possible to commemorate May '68 precisely because it no longer has any socio-political influence on the present.<sup>4</sup> In other words, such a view holds that commemoration is possible precisely because what was really achieved through the events of May was the establishment of the conditions of possibility for neoliberalism.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, there are those answers that are decidedly optimistic – ranging from arguments that view this commemorative moment as a looking towards the past for the inspiration needed to change the present, to those who still hold on to a certain image of insurrectionary politics, which is said to contain the promise that another world is indeed possible.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “We can now commemorate May '68 because we are convinced that it is dead. Forty years after the event, there is no life left in it” (Badiou 2015: 45).

<sup>5</sup> “The libertarian ideas of '68, the transformation of the way we live, the individualism and the taste for *jouissance* have become a reality thanks to post-modern capitalism and its garish world of all sorts of consumerism [...] Sarkozy himself is the product of May '68, and to celebrate May '68 [...] is to celebrate the neoliberal West” (Badiou 2015: 33-4).

<sup>6</sup> “This commemoration [...] may mask the vague idea that a different political and societal world is possible, that the great idea of radical change, which for two hundred years went by the name of 'revolution' [...] is still quietly spreading, despite the official pretense that it has been completely defeated” (Badiou 2015: 45).

Now, in contradistinction to these positions, and by emphasising what he takes to be May '68's irreducibly complex character, Badiou argues that there are not *two* but *four different* May's:

the reason why this commemoration is complicated and gives rise to contradictory hypotheses is that May '68 itself was an event of great complexity. It is impossible to reduce it to a conveniently unitary image. I would like to transmit to you this internal division, the heterogeneous multiplicity that was May '68. *There were in fact four different May '68's*. The strength and the distinctive feature of the French May '68 is that it entwined, combined and superimposed four processes that are, in the final analysis, quite heterogeneous. (Badiou 2015: 34-5, emphasis mine)

In place of both optimistic and pessimistic mystification, says Badiou, the reality of 'May 1968' was that of a political sequence whose realisation was due to the coordination and combined effects of (i) the student/university uprising, (ii) the general and wildcat strikes organised by workers, and (iii) the cultural protestations which arose most notably from young people and filmmakers. Hence, Badiou continues, it is precisely for this reason that it comes as no surprise that the symbolic sites of '68 are "the occupied Sorbonne for students, the big car plants (and especially Billancourt) for the workers, and the occupation of the Odéon theatre" (Badiou 2015: 39).

Now, while each of these segments of '68 correspond to the first three iterations of May, what is it that constitutes this supposed 'fourth' May? And what is its relation to the university, factory, and the struggles of everyday life? According to Badiou, this 'fourth May' is nothing other than the generalisation of what one could call an 'absolute refusal' or 'absolute rejection' regarding '68's movements' relation to previous cycles of revolutionary struggle. Moreover, this collective refusal centered on two elements that, historically, have been seen as theoretical and/or practical givens regarding the question of how best to achieve revolutionary transformation: the classical model of how revolutions are to proceed and the subject of history.

Regarding the first, the fourth May embodied a shared rejection of the Leninist outline of revolution – or what Badiou, in his essay on Sylvain Lazarus, calls 'the bolshevik mode of politics' (Badiou 2005: 39) – across these various social movements; a vision of revolution that proceeds via workers' parties, backed by labour unions, all while professional revolutionaries organise the masses in the bid for seizing state power.<sup>7</sup> For Badiou, it was

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<sup>7</sup> Or as Badiou recounts from his own experience of May, "At the time we assumed that the politics of emancipation was neither a pure idea, an expression of the will nor a moral dictate, but that it was inscribed in, and almost programmed by, historical and social reality. One of that conviction's implications was that this objective agent had to be transformed into a subjective power, that a social entity had to become a subjective actor. For that to happen, it had to be represented by a specific organisation, and that is precisely what we called a party, a working-class or people's party. That party had to be present wherever there were sites of power or intervention. There were certainly wide-ranging discussion about what the party was [...]. But there was a basic agreement that there was a historical agent, and that that

this rejection of revolutionary orthodoxy, which was characteristic of the fourth May, that ultimately laid the grounds for the unification of the student, worker, and cultural struggles active during '68. And it is for this reason that Badiou will go on to define this fourth May as a collective attempt to construct "...a vision of politics that was trying to wrench itself away from the old vision... [a politics] seeking to find that which might exist beyond the confines of classic revolutionism" (Badiou 2015: 43).

In addition to this collective rejection of "classic revolutionism", the other defining characteristic of this fourth May was its rejection of working-class identity as being the sole determinant of one's revolutionary potential. For Badiou, this rejection, which was founded upon the idea that "the classical figure of the politics of emancipation" was "ineffective", had its validity confirmed by his own experience of factory workers' welcoming himself and his university colleagues during a march to the Chausson factory in Reims:

What happened at the gates of the Chausson factory would have been completely improbable [...] a week earlier. The solid union and party *dispositif* usually kept workers, young people and intellectuals strictly apart [...] The local or national leadership was the only mediator. We found ourselves in a situation in which that *dispositif* was falling apart before our very eyes. This was something completely new [...] This was an event in the philosophical sense of the term: something was happening but its consequences were incalculable. What were its consequences during the ten 'red years' between 1968 and 1978? Thousands of students [...] workers, women [...] and proletarians from Africa went in search of a new politics [...] A political practice that accepted new trajectories [...] and meetings between people who did not usually talk to each other [...] At that point, we realised [...] that if a new emancipatory politics was possible [...] it would turn social classifications upside down [and] would [...] consist in organizing lightning displacements, both material and mental. (Badiou 2015: 45)

Thus, says Badiou, to commemorate and reflect upon the events of '68 means to necessarily confront and understand it as a political sequence that was realised only because of students, workers, cultural producers, and historically marginalised identity groups (youths, women, Algerians, etc.) sharing one and the same horizon of struggle – replete with its dual rejection of the politics of parliamentarianism, party led unions, and transitional programs; and the figure of the worker as the sole bearer of revolutionary potential. Moreover, it was a political sequence whose guiding question was the following: "What would a new political practice that was not willing to keep everyone in their place look like?" (Badiou 2015: 45). And it is precisely in this sense that 1968 is said to mark the

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agent had to be organised. That political organisation obviously had a social basis in mass organisations that plunged their roots into an immediate social reality [...]. This gives us something that still survives today: the idea that there are two sides to emancipatory political action. First there are social movements [...]. Then there is the party element, which consists in being present in all possible sites of power, and of bringing to them [...] the strength and content of the social movements" (Badiou 2015: 40-1).

birth of a political subjectivity defined by a defiance of the social positions ('places') allotted to it by capital. Or as Kristin Ross puts it, and in a manner similar to a Badiouian theory of the Subject:

May was a crisis in functionalism. *The movement took the form of political experiments in declassification, in disrupting the natural 'givenness' of places; it consisted of displacements that took students outside of the university, meetings that brought farmers and workers together, or students to the countryside [...]* And in that physical dislocation lay a dislocation in the very idea of politics — *moving it out of its [...] proper place, which was for the left at that time the Communist Party.* (Ross 2002: 25)

And so, the notion of there having been not two, but "four May's", retains its analytical usefulness insofar as it allows us to conceive of '68 on its own terms; as a form of politics whose horizon of struggle was one that rejected past and present iterations of left-wing politics and gave consistency to a collective subjectivity via the fourth-May-as-diagonal "that links the other three [May's]" (Badiou 2015: 44). Thus, in following Badiou we are necessarily led to the conclusion that it was only by virtue of the diagonal function of the fourth May that '68 succeeded in giving a new meaning to struggle itself; a vision of struggle no longer subordinate to any party line; no longer in want or need of recognition from the established institutions of the Left; no longer faithful to a notion of revolutionary agency confined to the point of production; and thereby making it possible to (briefly) live in reality what we have long been promised to be in truth: *non-alienated, collective, and thus free.*

## 2. From 1968 to 2018

Today, however, things do not seem as clear as they did during 1968. With respect to politics, the radical left (at least in the United States and UK) is increasingly confronted by an internal split between that portion of the Left that has invested its energies and belief in progressive change, in candidates and parties on the parliamentary left (Labour in the UK, DSA-backed candidates in the Democratic Party in the United States, etc.) and the extra-parliamentary portion of the Left, which remains ever skeptical of achieving the radical transformation of our social totality via presently existing political institutions and organisations. And this alone is already a significant divergence from Badiou's assessment regarding our relation to the legacy of '68. For if we are the contemporaries of '68; and if '68 was truly defined according to the diagonal function of this "fourth May" which united various social movements via the shared rejection of both the Party-form with its unions and the electoral process; then, from the vantage point of the present, this consensus forged during '68 has now been put into question (Milburn 2015).

An analysis such as this was already put forward in 2015 by Plan C's Keir Milburn. In their article "On Social Strikes and Directional Demands", they note how one of the key contributing factors that has led to this impasse is the failure of the movements of 2011 to bring about the desired and/or expected level of change. As they put it, "[A]n impasse was reached in both the pure horizontalist rejection of representative politics and the initial attempts to address the crisis of social reproduction autonomously from the State and capital" (Milburn 2015). Reflecting upon Syriza and the limitations of a straightforwardly parliamentary approach to radical change, Milburn, in my estimation, correctly underscores the fact that electing various Left leaning parties into power reveals what is inherently limiting regarding this reinvestment of the Party-form – and this largely happens either through compromises made between the elected government and the EU or by the EU's, IMF's, and World Bank's, isolation of said government in order to elicit the desired set of austerity measures, thereby rendering it amenable to the demands of the market: "Neoliberalism [...] seeks to either replace points of democratic decision with pseudo-market mechanisms or, where this isn't possible, insulate points of political decision from pressure and influence from below" (Milburn 2015).<sup>8</sup> So what are we to take away from all this?

**i) The Left:** First, in terms of a collective subject whose consistency is drawn from a shared horizon with its principles and analyses, it would be more accurate to say that, today, we are witnessing the undoing of the 'fourth May's' unifying function, which can be seen in the internal split between electoral and extra-parliamentarian approaches. And just as "we must not forget [...] that May '68's last slogan was *élections piège à cons* [Elections are a con]" (Badiou 2015: 42), we must recognise that one possible slogan that could encapsulate the Left of 2018 would be the idea that "elections are a mode through which class struggle *can again* be waged".

**ii) The Subject of Politics:** Second, while the problem of constructing a form of subjectivity adequate to the current organisation of capital remains as urgent as it was in 1968, this problem is, in fact, an insufficient ground upon which to establish contemporaneity since this was a problem that every historical period had to pose and answer for itself – regardless if the solutions to this problem assumed different names such as *sans-culotte*, the peasant, the slave, the colonised, and of course the worker. And regarding the current relation of Capital's socio-economic structure to the possible existence of the long sought after agent of abolition, the prospects of the Left being able to determine for themselves the form and organisational structure struggle will assume

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<sup>8</sup> Of additional importance here is that of Yanis Varoufakis' anecdote regarding a conversation between himself and Christine Legarde (head of the IMF). As the story goes, after Varoufakis informed Legarde that it would be mathematically impossible for Greece to repay its debt according to the austerity measures proposed by the IMF, Legarde in fact agreed with his economic calculations but replied that the austerity package was something that *must* be done – a telling remark, as it reveals the function of the Troika as the set of institutions who secure the smooth running of neoliberalism regardless of the material needs of those who live in debtor countries.

appears to be even more difficult than in 1968 – a milieu that, as we saw, was already characterised by the established parties and unions fighting both their electoral rivals and those who defected or exercised insubordination in the face of union and party officials. What is more, given the recent research on various forms of struggle seen in the work of someone like Joshua Clover, it is worth emphasising what he lays out so carefully: the strike and the riot continue to be, in large part, overdetermined by the accumulation and production of value – and this, in spite of everything that is redeeming in Marx’s notion of the “multiplication of the proletariat”, which refers to the process that follows from Capital’s increasing turn away from production and toward circulation and consumption (reproduction) for the extraction of value.<sup>9</sup> That is, the multiplication of the proletariat, for both Marx and Clover, is still a process of generalised precarity rather than the generalisation of a collective and antagonistic Subject.

*iii) The Party, The State:* However, if it is precisely a shared orientation defined as anti-state, anti-party, and anti-parliamentarian that is lacking from our present and whose absence is felt in the Left’s division from itself, the solution cannot simply be calls of support for more “diversity of tactics”, because when the parties of the Left end up in power what we have seen in the past and what may come again in the near future is the repression of all those extra-parliamentary groups’ struggles, whose very existence participated in building a political climate favorable to the Left as a whole. This is a tendency that realised itself in post-’68 France and whose most well-known example is that of the Italian Communist Party’s “historic compromise”. And regarding the recent years leading up to 2018, we have also seen echoes of this from Corbyn’s Labour Party. For instance, in Labour’s 2017 manifesto one reads that the Labour Party will promise to rectify the damage done by Theresa May cutting funds to police and emergency personnel. (UK Labour Party 2017: 46-7). How exactly? By placing an additional 10,000 more police officers on the streets to, ostensibly, “keep our communities safe”. And all of this while Corbyn was meeting with well-known grime MC’s (e.g. JME), all of whom come from communities that are at the highest risk of being harassed, beaten, wrongfully stopped and searched, verbally and physically assaulted, or worse, by the police themselves.

### **3. Double Binds of ’68; Double Binds of 2018**

To conclude, and given the preceding analysis, we can agree with Badiou’s claim regarding our contemporaneity with ’68 insofar as ours is a time defined by a search for an

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<sup>9</sup> As Joshua Clover (2016) writes, “The long-term tendencies are apparent, and the signs we might expect to indicate a secular reversal nowhere to be seen [...] In this context, class might be rethought in ways that exceed the traditional model [...] with its relatively static and sociologically positivistic ‘working class’ and accompanying forms of struggle. Given the relative dwindling of this form of labour, Marx must mean something else when, arriving at this conclusion regarding surplus populations, he proposes that ‘accumulation of capital is therefore multiplication of the proletariat’” (159).



adequate resolution to the problem discovered in occupied universities and barricaded streets (i.e. the classical figure of revolutionary subjectivity has been found to be ineffective). That said, what is perhaps the more interesting and relevant point to underscore is that despite this sharing of a single problem, the “double bind” characteristic of ’68’s cycle of struggles is of a qualitatively different order than the one characterising revolutionary politics in 2018. And it is precisely on this issue of affirming our contemporaneity while also establishing what differentiates ’68 from the present that the political writings of Maurice Blanchot become relevant.

Written in the December of ’68, Blanchot would articulate what Badiou would only come to argue forty years after the event.<sup>10</sup> Namely, that the problem confronting the movements of ’68 was the question of developing novel forms and organisations of struggle that would adequately resolve the crisis experienced in the face of the notion of revolutionary subjectivity born out of 1917: “*May, a revolution by idea, desire, and imagination, risks becoming a purely ideal and imaginary event if this revolution does not renounce itself and yield to new organisation and strategies*” (Blanchot 2010: 106). Given the benefit of our vantage point it would not be controversial to say that the movements of ’68 largely failed to develop the forms that struggle must take relative to the historical and material conditions of the 1960’s. And as Blanchot and Badiou both argue, this is not to say that May ’68 was an absolute failure for its singular achievement was to reconceive the political horizon of future struggles to come. This being the case, we can say that the double bind proper to ’68 is characterised by the realisation of a “becoming-revolutionary without a revolutionary future” (Deleuze 2004). That is, ’68’s achievement was its recognition of the inefficiency and impotence of a certain dogmatic image of revolutionary thought, and its demonstration of this historical break through the collective practices embodied by each of the “four May’s”.

However, in addition to the prescience of his analysis, Blanchot’s reflections gain additional significance with respect to the task of determining whether or not our contemporaneity with May extends beyond this shared problem and includes the same double bind. Towards the end of the very same series of reflections, Blanchot provides his analysis of what, in the wake of ’68, it will mean to participate in, and organise on behalf of, the ruptures, insurrections, and revolutions to come. In light of the theoretical contribution of what we could call Badiou’s “contemporaneity thesis” (i.e. seeking out new forms for political subjectivity and its attendant organisations that would ensure its reproducibility),

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<sup>10</sup> This statement should not be taken as an implicit critique or some thinly veiled *ad hominem* at Badiou’s expense. Badiou himself admits such a point in a moment of self-criticism in his reflections on the fortieth anniversary of ’68: “The fourth May ’68 is seeking to find that which might exist beyond the confines of classic revolutionism. It seeks it blindly because it uses the same language as the language that dominated the conception it was trying to get away from [...] They were – to use the beautiful, colourful language of the Chinese once more – ‘raising the red flag to fight the red flag’ [...] What we failed to see at the time was that it was the language itself that had to be transformed, but this time in an affirmative sense” (Badiou 2015: 43).

Blanchot's contribution is that of highlighting two particular dangers, or threats, that await revolutionary politics after '68. Politics after '68, says Blanchot, finds itself confronted by:

- (a) The temptation to repeat May, as if May had not taken place or as if it had failed, so that it might someday reach its conclusion. Thus we see the same tactics of agitation that had meaning and effect in February-March-April poorly and painfully retried [...]
- (b) The temptation to continue May, without noticing that all the force or originality of this revolution is to offer no precedent, no foundation, not even for its own success, for it has made itself impossible as such [...] everything is posed in other terms, and not only are the problems new but the problematic itself has changed. In particular, all the problems of revolutionary struggle, and above all of class struggle, have taken a different form. (Blanchot 2010: 108)

And it is by virtue of Blanchot's diagnosis that we also arrive at what distinguishes the political condition of 1968 from that of 2018. For unlike '68's double bind of a really existing revolutionary process devoid of a revolutionary future, it is these two temptations that form the double bind proper to 2018, which is that of a dialectic between *melancholic reflection* and *farcical repetition*.<sup>11</sup>

So if we are to claim the existence of a double bind that is proper to our present, it is not defined by the logic of a "becoming-revolutionary without a revolutionary future" – for what can be said about the progressive and radical Left in 2018 is that, at the very least, each segment offers some vision of an emancipated future world (and this is true regardless of the degree to which their respective proposed futures have been more or less theorised). Rather, what we are seeing today is a Left caught between this temptation of prolonging a political sequence that in reality has already come to pass, or of faithfully emulating the images of struggle that became associated with '68 as a whole. Moreover, and to perhaps make matters worse, the double bind of melancholic reflection and farcical repetition is one that pertains to *both* the parliamentary *and* extra-parliamentary segments of the present day Left (whether this be in the guise of a nostalgic reinvestment of the Party-form as object of the desire for revolution, or as embodied in the mass mobilisations whose form and organisation simply repeat the past in the present). In other words, while it may be the case that we remain the contemporaries of May due to the shared confrontation with the single and self-same problem ("how to continue revolutionary struggle in light of the fact that the classical figure of the politics of emancipation has been found to be ineffective?"), the current cycle of struggles continues to search for an adequate solution under an altogether different set of historical, material, and thus political, constraints.

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<sup>11</sup> The generalised use of melancholia in the phrase "melancholic reflection" should be taken in the sense Freud gave to the term, whereby a particular subject (political and/or psychoanalytic) is unable to consciously identify and overcome the loss of desire's object.

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