

The Art of Occupying

Romanticism as Political Culture in French Prefigurative Politics

Gomes, Catarina Pessanha

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SOLBJERG PLADS 3
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THE ART OF OCCUPYING: ROMANTICISM AS POLITICAL CULTURE IN FRENCH PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

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Catarina Pessanha Gomes

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THE ART OF OCCUPYING:
*ROMANTICISM AS POLITICAL CULTURE IN FRENCH
PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS*

Catarina Pessanha Gomes

Supervisors:

Professor Dennis Schoeneborn

Copenhagen Business School

Department of Management, Society, and Communication

Professor Mitchell Dean

Copenhagen Business School

Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy

CBS PhD School

Copenhagen Business School

Catarina Pessanha Gomes
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ABSTRACT

Prefigurative social movements seek to enact the types of society they want to bring about, imagining novel ways of organizing social, political, and economic relations. While occupations and prefigurative politics are part of global struggles to radically transform current institutions, the discourses and practices of these activists are influenced by local epistemologies and historical contexts. My thesis contributes to the literature on prefigurative politics by considering the influence of Romanticism both as a cultural movement and a political culture that provides activists with resources to legitimate prefigurative practices within the context of French politics. While previous literature has shown how prefigurative politics has inherited values and strategies from an anarchist heritage, influencing horizontal and self-organizing, considering Romanticism as a political culture enables us to understand locally situated practices such as imaginative, cultural, and symbolic forms of interventions aimed at bringing future worlds into present spaces.

Firstly, this thesis focuses on historical developments that have informed an axiological appreciation of creativity, imagination, and experimentation, and on how values inherent to artistic work have been progressively mobilized within political strategies. Applying a pragmatic sociology perspective that takes conflicting moral values into consideration, Romanticism is here understood as a cultural movement aspiring to recover a relationship of grace and inspiration between oneself and the world that has been undermined by industrial capitalism. These values are mobilized within a critique of a competing worldview based on values of rational, science and progress. Within this conflict, Romanticism draws on resources and objects, first and foremost the imagination, constructed as a political object capable of transforming social and political structures. I emphasize three properties of the Romantic conception of imagination that are central to prefigurative politics. First, as a *poietic* force imagination can lead to radical change by generating new images and reconfiguring meaning through language. Second, as a *collective* capacity it constructs organic communities through shared significations. And thirdly, as a *proleptic* process there is no gap between what is imagined and reality, thus the imagined world is already upon those who envision it

Secondly, this study engages with political cultures that have emerged from the Romantic opposition to modernization and industrialization. Romanticism serves as the starting point for two political grammars: one based on the Nietzschean emphasis on imagination and creativity,

the other an Alternative grammar that focuses on alternative forms of organizing outside the state. While both grammars attribute a political value to imagination in its capacity to produce alternative futures, the Nietzschean grammar mobilizes imagination in cultural, artistic, and sometimes destructive interventions. Within this form of engagement, artistic creation is above all the creation of situations, the very production of a civilizational alternative in a space-time of its own. By contrast, the Alternative grammar is formed through a compromise between values of the inspired city and the civic city and aspires to another form of human organization in which the inner self is fully restored. This grammar supports forms of engagement aimed at constructing vibrant communities outside the state in which individuals are brought together by affective experiences resulting from a shared life and the enactment of pre-capitalist values.

Thirdly, this thesis uses the French social movement of *Nuit Debout* and its consequent occupation of public space in spring 2016 as an illustrative case to study how activists mobilize forms of justifications built upon an axiological appreciation of imagination and creativity to legitimate prefigurative politics and utopian ideals. While the occupation of the Place de la République was brought about through the coming together of different streams within the radical left, including Socialists and Republicans, participants who mobilized a Nietzschean or Alternative grammar were more likely to support prefigurative actions over traditional forms of engagement. Nevertheless, these participants did not conceive of prefiguration in identical ways, for while the Nietzschean grammar supports forms of cultural and symbolic prefiguration, the Alternative grammar partakes in collective utopias and forms of democratic organizing conjointly with a Social Republican grammar. The prefiguration of another world combines both artistic and symbolic interventions, while the constitution of new forms of organization give rise to alternative forms of political representation. These competing values gave rise to conflicts between a critique of democratic institutions and constituent initiatives and a critique targeted at symbolic prefigurative actions that invest a discursive field without considering asymmetrical power relations.

While my analysis discusses the pitfalls of political Romanticism, including its spontaneity and indecisiveness, it also emphasizes how imaginative politics engages both strategically and symbolically with the notion of utopia. Values of imagination and creativity support tactics that generate symbolic performances of world-building, reinforcing the group's consciousness of its capacity for self-creating, fostering direct democracy, and promoting other models based on collective ownership. By shedding light on the intellectual and moral heritage of prefiguration,

this dissertation provides a new understanding of the role of prefigurative politics in reactivating the creative capacities of the social body and ultimately in empowering society's capacity to challenge instituted significations as well as to institute new collective rules. The art of occupying, I argue, is to do so without drifting into an eternally creative and thus ultimately self-destructive process.

DANSK RESUME

Prefigurative bevægelser søger at genskabe den type samfund, de ønsker at frembringe, og forestiller sig nye måder at organisere sociale, politiske og økonomiske forbindelser på. Mens målsætninger og præfigurativ politik hører til en global kamp for den radikale transformation af institutioner, er aktivistiske diskurser og praksis påvirket af lokale epistemologier og historiske sammenhænge. Min afhandling bidrager til disse undersøgelser ved at betragte romantikkens indflydelse både som en kulturel bevægelse og en politisk kultur, der giver aktivister ressourcer til legitim præfigurativ praksis inden for rammerne af fransk politik. Mens tidligere litteratur har identificeret hvordan præfigurativ politik arvede værdier og strategier fra en anarkistisk arv, der påvirker horisontal- og selvorganisering, gør det, at betragte romantikken som en politisk kultur, det muligt at forstå mere specifikke veje til at bringe fremtidige verdener ind i det nuværende rum såsom fantasifulde, kulturelle og symbolske former for indgreb.

For det første fokuserer denne afhandling på historiske udviklinger, der informerer om en aksiologisk forståelse af kreativitet, fantasi og eksperimenter, og hvordan værdier, der er forbundet med kunstnerisk arbejde, gradvist blev mobiliseret inden for politiske strategier. Ved hjælp af et pragmatisk sociologisk perspektiv, der tager hensyn til modstridende moralske værdier, forstås romantikken her som en kulturel bevægelse, der stræber efter at genvinde et forhold med ynde og inspiration mellem sig selv og verden, der er undermineret af industriel kapitalisme. Disse værdier mobiliseres inden for en kritik analyse mod et konkurrerende verdensbillede bygget på værdier med rationel, videnskabelig og teknologisk kontrol. Inden for denne konflikt producerer romantikken ressourcer og objekter, først og fremmest fantasien, takket være denne at det bliver muligt at transformere hverdagen: Fantasi er konstrueret som et politisk objekt, der er i stand til at gribe ind i den sociale verden. Jeg understreger tre egenskaber, der er centrale for præfigurativ politik: Som en poetisk kraft er fantasi i stand til at producere radikale forandringer ved at skabe nye billeder og omdanne mening gennem sprog, som en proleptisk proces hvor der er ingen kløft mellem det man forestiller sig og virkeligheden, og som en kollektiv kapacitet, konstruerer den organiske samfund gennem fælles betydninger.

For det andet beskæftiger denne undersøgelse sig med politiske kulturer, der kommer fra den romantiske modstand mod modernisering og industrialisering. Romantik fungerer som

udgangspunkt for to politiske grammatikker, en baseret på en Nietzsche-fokus på fantasi og kreativitet, og en alternativ grammatik, der fokuserer på alternativ organisering udenfor staten. Mens begge tillægger fantasien en politisk værdi i produktionen af en alternativ fremtid, mobiliserer Nietzsche-grammatikken sidstnævnte i kulturelle, kunstneriske og undertiden destruktive indgreb. Inden for denne form for engagement er kunstnerisk skabelse frem for alt skabelse af situationer, selve produktionen af et civilisationsalternativ i en egen rumtid. Den alternative grammatik dannet i et kompromis mellem den inspirerede og den borgerlige by stræber efter en anden form for menneskelig organisation, hvor det indre jeg er fuldstændig gendannet. Det understøtter former for engagement, der opbygger livskraftige samfund uden for staten, hvor enkeltpersoner bringes sammen af virkningsfulde oplevelser, der skyldes et fælles liv og afspejler prækapitalistiske værdier.

For det tredje bruger denne afhandling den franske sociale bevægelse af Nuit Debout og dens deraf følgende besættelse af offentlige pladser som en illustrativ case til at studere, hvordan aktivister mobiliserer former for retfærdiggørelser bygget på en aksiologisk forståelse af fantasi og kreativitet til at legitimere præfigurativ politik og utopiske idealer. Mens besættelsen af Place de la République fremkom ved at samle forskellige strømme inden for den radikale venstrefløj, herunder socialister og republikanere, var deltagerne, der mobiliserede en ikke-Nietzscheansk og alternativ grammatik, mere tilbøjelige til at støtte præfigurative handlinger i stedet for mere klassiske former for engagement. Ikke desto mindre opfattes præfigurering ikke til i lige så høj grad som den ikke-Nietzscheanske grammatik at understøtte former for kulturel og symbolsk præfiguration, mens en alternativ grammatik deltager i kollektive utopier og former for demokratisk organisering, sammen med den socialrepublikanske grammatik. Præfigureringen af en anden verden blandede både kunstneriske og symbolske indgreb og oprettelsen af nye organisationsformer, der gav anledning til alternative former for politisk repræsentation. Denne afvigelse vil give anledning til konflikter mellem en kritik af demokratiske institutioner og konstituerende initiativer og omvendt en kritik rettet mod symbolsk præfigurationshandling, der inndsætter et diskursivt felt uden at overveje asymmetriske magtforhold.

Mens min analyse diskuterer faldgruber i fantasifuld og kulturel politik, understreger den også, hvordan dette utopiske kompromis frembød et gensynsmoment for den radikale venstrefløj af både symbolsk og strategisk betydning. Værdier af fantasi og kreativitet kan tjene til at legitimere taktikker, der genererer symbolske forestillinger af verdensopbygning, skaber rum, hvor alternative veje bliver mulige, og styrker gruppens samvittighed over dets evne til selvfremsstilling,

støtter direkte demokrati og fremmer andre modeller baseret på kollektivt ejerskab. Ved at kaste lys over præfigurationens intellektuelle og moralske arv, giver denne afhandling en ny forståelse af præfigurativ politiks rolle i genaktivering af det sociale systems kreative kapacitet, hvilket i sidste ende giver samfundet evnen til at udfordre instituerede betydninger såvel som at indføre nye kollektive regler. Kunsten ved at okkupere er, at gøre det uden at flytte ind i en evigt kreativ og dermed i sidste ende destruktiv proces.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADELS	Association pour la démocratie et l'éducation locale et solidaire
AMR	Alliance Marxiste Révolutionnaire
CFDT	Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail
CNPF	Conseil National du Patronat Français
CPE	Contrat Première Embauche
DAL	Droit au Logement
FHAR	Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire
FI	France Insoumise
GAM	Groupe d'Action Municipale
GIP	Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons
LCR	Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire
ND	Nuit Debout
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPA	Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste
NSM	New Social Movements
PCF	Parti Communiste Français
PS	Parti Socialiste
PSU	Parti Socialiste Unifié
SSE	Social Solidarity Economy
TAZ	Temporary Autonomous Zones
TINA	There is no alternative
WSF	World Social Forum
ZAD	Zone à défendre

We have no reason to mistrust our world, for it is not against us. Has it terrors, they are our terrors; has it abysses, those abysses belong to us; are dangers at hand, we must try to love them. And if only we arrange our life according to that principle which counsels us that we must always hold to the difficult, then that which now still seems to us the most alien will become what we most trust and find most faithful. How should we be able to forget those ancient myths that are at the beginning of all peoples, the myths about dragons that at the last moment turn into princesses? Perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave.

Letters to a Young Poet (Rilke, 1934, p. 69)

1 PREFIGURATION: ACTUALIZING UTOPIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

...why is it that, even when there is next to no other constituency for revolutionary politics in a capitalist society, the one group most likely to be sympathetic to its project consists of artists, musicians, writers, and others involved in some form of non-alienated production? Surely there must be a link between the actual experience of first imagining things and then bringing them into being, individually or collectively, and the ability to envision social alternatives—particularly, the possibility of a society itself premised on less alienated forms of creativity?

The New Anarchists (Graeber, 2002,)

1.1 Introduction

Humankind has always created narratives envisioning more desirable forms of existence. From feasts of ambrosia on Mount Olympus to tales of the Garden of Eden, these marvelous worlds represent unfulfilled possibilities deemed unachievable within our earthly life, including dreams of another place where we would not need to work to survive and where we would be equal to our neighbors, living in communion with nature and ultimately escaping from life's vicissitudes. While literary descriptions of earthly paradises can be traced back at least to Plato's *Republic* (Platon, 2016), it was the scholar and statesman Thomas More (1478–1535) who first coined the term for this idea as old as time with a clever play on words, since 'utopia' comes from the ancient Greek *eu-topos*, which translates as 'the good place', but also resembles the word *ou-topos* meaning nowhere, a place that cannot be (Abensour, 2008, p. 406).

The idea of a narrative or literary fiction expressing a world presented as an (almost) impossible fantasy stands in sharp contrast with modernity's vision of utopia. Modernity brought about a transformation in the meaning of utopia, which came to denote a blueprint for an ideal society that includes an account of the kind of social organization required for its realization. Utopia came to be viewed as paradise within reach in this earthly life and no longer merely a compass pointing in the right direction. At the heart of this paradigm shift was a displacement of the origin of earthly misfortune, no longer seen as originating from our flawed moral nature but from improper and malfunctioning social and political organizations. This led to a growing politicization of utopia in the 18th and 19th centuries (Roza, 2015, p. 357), with the rise of political utopias intended as practicable programs establishing new forms of social organization¹ (Roza, 2015, p. 231). In this sense the 18th and 19th centuries saw the rise of numerous narratives echoing calls for a collectivistic organization of society, opposing the principles of private property and forms of work enslavement that constitute the bedrock of industrial development. Examples range from Charles Fourier's project for the liberation of desires and sensorial pleasures within a collectivistic organization (Desanti, 1971; Fourier, 1841a) to Proudhon's idea of a society built upon a network of workers' cooperatives, progressively abolishing the need for the state (Proudhon, 2013). Turning away from its literary and poetic roots, utopia became a social(ist) program offering another vision of politics as an alternative to the prevailing order, creating other forms of contestations and stories of collective struggles at the margins of institutional politics and the state (Riot-Sarcey, 1998, p. 176). This leftist stream of political utopianism was overshadowed in the course of the 19th century by a materialistic conception of history that dismissed utopian ideals on account of their lack of theoretical consistency and their imaginative vision of a future society (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 29). Utopias 'on the pretext of reorganizing society, want to bolster up the foundation of existing society and consequently of society itself' (quoted in Buber, 1996, p. 1).

¹ This point has been contested by those who argue that Plato intended the *Republic* as a practical political treatise and a feasible program for Greek cities, unlike modern views of utopia (Russell, 2017, p. 156).

The utopian project was critiqued for ignoring the advantages of industrialization for the working classes and was considered detrimental to the progress of socialism and above all to the socialism of progress. Far from being revolutionary, it was argued, utopianism had become bourgeois.² However, the idea of ‘utopia as the desire for a different, better way of life’ (Levitas, 2011, p. 209) did not vanish. While utopian socialism*³ was discredited on account of the disconnectedness of its imaginative vision from material conditions, Marxism as a political philosophy and communism as a political program believed in a better future worth fighting for, and translated ‘the hope for a transformed future with a specifically socialist content’ (Levitas, 1990, p. 25). The 20th century thus became a theater of confrontations between political projects, with communism and social democracy offering two alternative visions of happiness centered on competing values. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union constituted the key turning point, after which not only the hope for an alternative future but also surprisingly the very desire for such an alternative seemed to be left behind. Indeed, the collapse of the Berlin Wall was equated by some with the end of utopia, as triumphalist discourses of western democracies promised the ‘end of history’, with humankind reconciled around Western liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 8). As hopes for radical transformation vanished, nothing appeared on the political horizon other than endless pragmatism and reformism.

While the image of another future no longer seemed necessary in the years following the fall of the Communist bloc, the very idea of thinking of an alternative also came to be widely seen as potentially dangerous. Driven by an anti-utopian fear, the desire of an alternative form of organizing came to be equated with communism, totalitarianism and fascism (Levitas, 2000). In a post-communist world, utopia has become not only a place that cannot be but also a downright dangerous fiction equated with violent enforcements ultimately threatening individual freedom. This equation of utopia with totalitarianism on the part of the political right carries the implication that ‘the system (now grasped as the free market) is part of human nature’ (Jameson, 2004, p. 35). Depicting historical developments as the inevitable outcomes of natural laws, political leaders present capitalism as the only game in town, proclaiming ‘there is no alternative’ – the infamous acronym TINA (Séville, 2017, p. 449). This discourse naturalizes the prevailing system of human

² Marx’s criticism has been over-emphasized, however, as both Marx and Engels recognized the merits of utopian socialists’ critique of capitalism. Their dispute seemed rather to be with utopian socialist *movements* rather than with utopian socialists (Levitas, 1989, p. 27).

³ Definitions of words and terms marked with an asterisk can be found in the Glossary in Appendix 1.

organization and distribution of power, contributing to a process of acculturation by which values and meanings appear timeless, and therefore, indisputable. As a particular form of organizing the relationship between the state and the market, neoliberalism has intensified capitalist logics, transforming capitalism into an ethos that values individual freedom in the sense of unrestricted entrepreneurial activity, free markets and free trade, in the advancement of a political project appearing as the only possible way (Harvey, 2007, p. 2).

This anti-utopian, reformist and liberal political turn has been supported by the cultural paradigm of postmodernism, whose very definition is “incredulity toward metanarratives”, i.e. the impossibility of collective ‘grand’ narrative gaining widespread legitimacy⁴ (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). While modernity always included antinomy, postmodernity was born from the very disappearance of the idea of *an other possible*, i.e. of utopia. Postmodernism is thus not only the absence of a great story but of *any* other story (Maderthaner & Musner, 2010, pp. 54–55). Utopian narratives of the 19th century, based on the idea of another and better possible future, have since been replaced by a postmodern narrative serving a globalized capitalist system. More specifically, the close connection between postmodern cultural production and consumerism expresses the logics specific to late capitalism, namely the loss of a sense of temporality, entrapping the subject in a perpetual present, with historical experiences vanishing as soon they have been lived through, a severe case of ‘historical amnesia’ (Jameson, 1988, p. 125). Incapable of connecting experiences, identity and a sense of history, the only resource left to free-floating individuals is the mirror through which they perceive the experience of living. The search for a collective alternative has thus been replaced by individualistic problematics wherein the vision of a perfect individual contemplating and indulging in their own reflection forms the only remaining utopia (Lipovetsky, 1989). In such a context it is easy to understand how Russell Jacoby’s *The End of Utopia*, published at the turn of the millennium, deplored the fact that “a utopian spirit – a sense that the future could transcend the present – has vanished” (Jacoby, 1999, p. xi).

Unprecedented economic, social, and environmental crises have since unveiled the reality behind the tales of liberal democracy and other promises of economic globalization. The narrative of the ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama, 1992) has itself crumbled to pieces, actualizing the need for an

⁴ This is particularly the case in a western context, as other cultural and geographical settings explore other narratives, ontologies and epistemologies.

alternative...in order to survive. This conscience was stirred by ecological disasters caused by human activity, such as the Bhopal disaster in 1984 and the Louisiana oil spill in 2010, calling into question the benefits of unregulated economic activities. However, while environmental catastrophes attract fleeting media attention and impress public opinion, albeit temporarily, scientists, scholars and journalists have documented the deadly impacts of unrestrained economic logics that transform entire regions into ‘death-zones’ where biological life is no longer able to sustain and regenerate itself (Markowitz & Rosner, 2018). The rapid pace of climatic change, causing unprecedentedly high temperatures, the severity and recurrence of climatic disasters such as hurricanes and forest fires, the alarming extinction rates of global flora and fauna, have all led to an evolution in scientific discourse and policies regarding the impact of human activities, moving from the defense of environmental protection in the 1960s (Carson, 2019 [1962]), to reflections on the possible collapse of Western thermo-industrial society (Diamond, 2011; Servigne & Stevens, 2015) and even the extinction of the human species before the end of this century (Rothman, 2017). With the future looking ever more like a dystopian, post-apocalyptic movie, the capacity of capitalism to produce a system guaranteeing the protection of any values other than short-term profit has been called into question. In this regard, Naomi Klein demonstrated how the current economic paradigm is ultimately responsible for climate change, since the dominant ideology of deregulated capitalism opposes any measures that threaten to harm its (short-term) interests, to the great detriment of the planet and everything on it. Such prioritization of profit over other values is manifest, for example, in free trade agreements (Klein, 2016, pp. 48, 70, 359). In addition, despite a decline in global extreme poverty rates,⁵ wealth inequality and capital accumulation continues to rise worldwide, ultimately threatening our democratic systems in ways that contradict the premises of eternal economic growth beneficial for all (Piketty, 2013, p. 671).

Despite an environmental breakdown looming on the horizon and gloomy prospects for the future, this generalized sense of crisis had the effect of “reviving history” (Maderthaner & Musner, 2010, p. 71). Faced with the prospect of a dystopian future that will condemn the world's vast majority to poverty, a lack of resources and a dehumanized existence, collective and individual movements resurrected the idea that ‘another world is possible’. Despite a plurality of

⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/09/19/decline-of-global-extreme-poverty-continues-but-has-slowed-world-bank>

perspectives, one of the common features of this new front of resistance has been the establishment, design and creation of structures that would make it possible to exit from capitalism. Utopia is thus no longer perceived in negative terms but has regained its positive connotations, associated with an exit from capitalism and the realization of better possibilities. A decade after the end of the communist utopia, part of the left reorganized at the global level to champion the return of utopia.

1.2 The return of utopia: another world is possible

At the turn of the millennium, several pivotal events brought together activists, non-governmental organizations and unions to challenge globalization, not only as a process leading to the proliferation of information technologies and exponential growth in production and trade, but also as a discourse claiming this process to be inevitable, irresistible and outside of human control (Brown, 1999). Challenging this fatalistic outlook on globalization, an international network of activists sought to change the meaning of globalization into a bottom-up transformative project constructed around competing social and environmental values.

The World Social Forum first held in 2001 in Pôrto Alegre was a crucial moment in the formation of this new leftist global collective identity. It acted not only as a counter-summit to the Davos World Economic Forum but also set forth a joint proposal for a different world in opposition to the current economic and political elite. The Forum developed a joint critique of the neoliberal worldview that resulted not only in permanent environmental and socio-economic crisis but also degraded the meaning of human existence within a capitalist ethos, ultimately building a world based on the “dispensability of our humanity” (Shiva, 2003, p. 115). United against the common enemy of corporate capitalism and neoliberal globalization, what would soon come to be called the ‘global justice movement’ created a federative movement around common values such as humanism, ecology, democracy, independence from the market, solidarity, cooperation and support for pluralism and diversity, with the aim of building another civilization on these grounds (Löwy, 2017). The Forum addressed a plethora of issues, including the idea of the Social Solidarity Economy* (SSE), environmental sustainability, natural medicine, sustainable food production, urban living, indigenous people’s livelihoods, and human rights. Above all,

participants pledged allegiance to bringing about a radically different world based on this common set of beliefs. The *utopian* character of this event lies in its conscious exploration of alternative social organizations, confronting what exists and seems inevitable with something better that is worth fighting for (Boaventura de Sousa, 2006). In their preface to the collection of essays published shortly after the Forum, Fisher and Ponniah (2003) welcomed the return of utopia to the international political scene “as radicals from all over the world [...] renew the process of envisioning another world,” triumphantly concluding that “The impossible was suddenly starting to look possible” (Fisher & Ponniah, 2003, pp. xi–xii).

However, while utopia is a historical project in the sense that it is not only a way of imagining different futures but can also be understood as a concrete practice through which historically situated actors seek to reimagine their present and transform it into a plausible future (Gordin et al., 2010), the Porto Alegre project of “Another World is Possible” must be understood as part of a reconfiguration of the post-communist radical left in response to two decades of pervasive liberal discourse. In Porto Alegre, *the post-communist left developed a new counter-hegemonic strategy based on the imagination and creation of alternative futures*. The pursuit of an alternative world emerged as the common ground uniting a “movement of movements” (Hardt & Negri, 2003, p. xix) in the form of an alliance between otherwise disparate new social movements* (NSM), young activists, and anarchist currents in a common project in opposition to neoliberal ideology.

This common critique is directed not only at the unequal distribution of opportunities and wealth caused by the neoliberal project but also at the concomitant restrictions placed on our capacity to imagine alternatives. In other words, the alternative becomes the existence of alternative itself by making it possible to imagine a different world. The global justice movement formed a counter-hegemonic discourse demonstrating that what had previously been presented as a neutral and ‘natural’ situation arose from an oppressive relationship. This movement further strives to show, in the words of Fisher et al. (2003, p. 1):, “that hierarchical relationships can be subverted, made horizontal, by pursuing a larger collective project – that is to say, it offers a visionary discourse. It proposes utopia.” While the World Social Forum has not put forward a common program, utopian projects have emerge as a common denominator of the post-communist radical left, exposing neoliberalism’s anti-utopian nature, evident in Thatcher’s ‘TINA’ dictum.

The World Social Forum further highlights the fact that the global left no longer apprehends the effects of capitalism in terms of class theory of political economy but concentrates instead on

building an oppositional culture through alternative symbolic representations. Its strategies and practices have the ability to “seize oppositional imagination” (Evans et al., 2005, p. 668), “creatively resisting neoliberalism” (Purcell, 2009, p. 160), and capturing the collective imagination within a cultural warfare (Evans, 2000). By adopting counter-hegemonic practices, the globalization from below movement questions values central to the neoliberal project it opposes, in particular hierarchical relations based on individual property rights. These counter-hegemonic projects are thereby able to advocate for other rights dependent on common property, as well as democratic and participative organizations advancing the redistribution of economic and political power. This emerging global transformation project seeks to replace the dominant regime that undermines the democratic project with one that maximizes democratic control by the greatest number. The project of radical democracy has become a point of agreement for multiple constituencies and interests, compensating for its scant resources by its capacity to generate a new imagination centered on the renewal of the idea of government by the people (Evans, 2000). Radical democracy is also at the core of community-based experimentations in which the notion of political and economic autonomy takes precedence over taking power, achieving victory within a representative parliamentary system, and the question of the state.⁶ This applies in the case of grassroots social movements such as the Zapatista autonomy movement in Mexico, Brazil’s Landless Workers’ Movement, and the *piqueteros* in Argentina, experimenting with local forms of organizing that empower communities by constructing new forms of participatory governments and reinforcing self-reliant forms of development. This may range from experimenting with self-production, agroecology, collective gardens and barter, ultimately forming the conditions to establish non-market alternatives (Stahler-Sholk, 2007). More generally, authors writing on these developments have emphasized the spread of a “collectivistic-democratic” logic supporting direct participation and collective decision-making in opposition to bureaucratic and hierarchical logics (Rothschild, 2016). According to Rothschild (2016), the democratic process of this cooperative model, which is predominant in the SSE model, cooperatives, internet-based enterprises, and civil society organizations, also rests on the notion that the common, understood as intellectual and material property, must be socially or collectively owned in order to maintain egalitarian decision-

⁶ John Holloway’s work is representative of this autonomist stream of thought (Holloway, 2003). This distrust of the state is challenged by another reading that promotes “real utopia” and the Social Solidarity Economy, seeking social transformation not only in the interstices but sometimes also in collaboration with institutions of power and the market (Wright, 2006).

making processes. This juxtaposition between multiple possible futures built upon differentiated trajectories and subjectivities and with an emphasis on collective action, radical democracy, and communitarian ideals, reflects the complexity of the concept and role of utopia in the 21st century.

While utopia today represents the opening of possibilities, its form has also evolved. Far from the 18th-century blueprint that meticulously and ambitiously delineated the contours of an anticipated future, the 21st century saw the rise of “real utopias” in the sense of feasible and practical alternatives (Wright, 2013). In the words of Erik Olin Wright, “the study of real utopias mainly focuses on institutions that in one way or another *prefigure* more radical emancipatory alternatives” (my emphasis Wright, 2013, p. 9). These novel ways of organizing for another future have proliferated, including forms of participative budgeting, solidarity finance, urban agriculture, unconditional/universal basic income projects, and work-owned cooperatives. While the World Social Forum launched an appeal for another possible future at the start of the millennium, the values and principles it promoted had already been foreshadowed within various institutions and initiatives guiding this movement. Another future is not only possible but is already at work – as revealed by studies studying prefigurative politics.

1.3 Prefigurative politics: imagining and creating another future

The historical development of prefigurative politics shows strong proximity with both Marxism and anarchism*. One of the first intellectual engagements with this concept dates back to 1977 when Carl Boggs published his analysis of prefiguration and its origins in the problematic relationship between Marxism and social change, emphasizing its anarchist roots (Boggs, 1977). Engaging with the history of democratic and non-hierarchical revolutionary forms, as well as with the events of his time, Boggs described what he called the ‘prefigurative tradition’ as “the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture and human experiences that are the ultimate goal” (Boggs, 1977, p. 100). While novel forms of organizing have propelled prefiguration to the front stage in recent years, this is not in any way a new phenomenon or even a fundamentally new debate, since today’s practices have their predecessors in the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s (Maeckelbergh, 2012). Indeed, during the 1960s the new left’s political culture became

increasingly connected with spontaneous assemblies and democratic debates, anti-organizational politics and anti-bureaucratic logics, including counter-institutions mirroring the ends one wants to achieve (Breines, 1982, Ch. 4, especially pp. 49–53).

As with the concept of utopia, prefiguration* was brought back from the past to describe and analyse social movements that protested current structures of power and discourses on the inevitability of capitalism, by taking matter into their own hands, collectively experimenting with other forms of social organization, relations, and modes of being. For example, the Occupy Wall Street movement enabled participants to engage with forms of social relations that could be quite different from those to which they were subjected, recreating inclusive and communal relationships outside of power structures reproducing social inequalities and exclusion (Reinecke, 2018). Participants experienced first-hand that another society, with other forms of social relationships and organization, was possible.

As a defined characteristic of today's new social movements, prefigurative tactics seem to be applied everywhere, including organized community activities such as local food production projects (Wald, 2015) and neighborhood policies (De Wilde & Duyvendak, 2016), new forms of activism against gender violence (Tadros, 2015), experimentations during mass strikes (Bonilla, 2010), green urban communities (Mason, 2014), personal and family-oriented practices (Williams, 2017) and square movements (Harsin, 2018; Murray, 2014; Reinecke, 2018; Van de Sande, 2013). This “prefigurative fever” in the literature makes grasping the specificity of the concept a daunting task, for it seems to be applied to everything from housing practices to cabaret performances, from the new to the old world. However, one can start with a very simple definition. Prefiguration means *putting into practice the forms of social organization*, the human relations, and the modes of being that one would like to see happening and that one would like to *anticipate*. From this definition, one can see that the relationship with prefiguration is both a *praxis*, the act of putting into practice what is perceived as constitutive of another future, and a *conscience*, that reflects on the possibility of another future and its possible occurrence in the present. Another way to present this distinction is to reflect on the relationship between prefiguration and utopia. On the one hand, prefiguration as a praxis is built on the idea that the best of worlds is possible in the here and now. It puts into practice utopia in the sense of *eu-topos*, the good place, in the present. On the other hand, prefiguration as a conscience engages with the idea of uncompletion, of the best of futures that is not here, yet can be pursued: it is the conscience of utopia as *ou-topos*, the non-place. I will briefly discuss the first type of engagement with prefiguration, before

addressing the second approach, where this study hopes to bring a contribution.

1.3.1 Prefiguration as practice of *eu-topos*

This first stream of literature engages with prefiguration as the phenomenon through which individuals, collectives and communities engage with practices in the present that foreshadow an anti-capitalist, anti-hierarchical and democratic future. It connects to the dimension of utopia as *eu-topos*, the idea that new institutions and alternative forms of organizing can bring about concrete and real utopias (Wright, 2013), in contrast to the 19th century socialist blueprints⁷. Therefore, this literature primarily focuses on empirical studies analyzing the organizational aspect of prefiguration, that is to say the creation of democratic, horizontal, autonomous (counter)institutions, the pursuit of ethical commitments, and the possible strategic advantage of prefigurative organizing. Through its emphasis on the ethical pursuit of horizontality and radical democracy, and the commitment to expressing these values within organizations, this literature is heavily influenced by anarchist ideals, values, and concepts.

As Mathijs van de Sande (2013, p. 230) comprehensively defines it, prefiguration or prefigurative politics refers to an action, practice, moment or development in which certain political ideals are experimentally actualized in the here and now rather than merely aspired to and hoped for in a distant future (Van de Sande, 2013, p. 230). In prefigurative politics, therefore, the means applied are deemed to embody or “‘mirror’ the ends one strives to realize” (Van de Sande, 2013, p. 230). This stream of academic research uses the term ‘prefiguration’ to designate the collusion between means and end, i.e. the actualization of democratic, anti-hierarchical and participative values that are immediately applicable (Maeckelbergh, 2011b). This definition of prefiguration also seems to be predominant in the understandings of activists who comprehend prefiguration as an ethical endeavor, the embodiment of anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian ideals within organizations (Luchies, 2014, 2015). The commitment that means must mirror the ends one tries to achieve has a strong resonance with anarchism core ideas and theories

⁷ However, this analysis purposefully omits the multiple attempts to bring socialist utopias to life, such as the creation of phalanxes in France and in the United States and the rise of the cooperative movement in the 19th century (Chomel et al., 2013; Guarneri, 1991).

(Kropotkine, 2004), and unsurprisingly the concept of prefigurative politics remained central in anarchist theory, supporting modes of organizing, envisioning and putting into practice values of autonomy, collectivism and mutual aid (Springer, 2018).

Accordingly, this first stream of literature focuses on empirical studies that envision prefiguration as synonymous for organizing differently particularly in the political and economic spheres. With empirical examples of alternative economic practices such as the Piqueteros and the occupied workplaces in Argentina, this ‘prefigurative praxis’ is built upon the belief that “a self-determined life under capitalism requires a radical redefinition of the realm of economic practice in the ‘here and now’” (Dey, 2016, p. 571). The term is used to designate practices that contribute to dismantle oppressive systems and challenge inequalities in our everyday life (Lorente, 2021), experiment with direct democracy (De la Lata, 2020), despite the difficulty to sustain those practices and group dynamics over time (Demaris & Landsman, 2021). This was particularly striking in the case of the Occupy movement, such as Occupy Wall Street and Occupy London (Reinecke, 2018), whose encampments ended up creating a series of collective structures responsible for maintaining the occupation in ways that simultaneously illustrated a different future and actualized the movement’s democratic, anti-hierarchical and anticapitalistic ideals.

Departing from the idea of an idealized future, prefiguration is here concerned with developing autonomist spheres from capitalism, where other practices can occur, a strategy through which anti-capitalistic ideals become possible. All of these forms seek to set up the best of worlds in the present, starting counter-institutions capable of empowering people and communities. Synonymous with radical and participatory democracy, with the social and solidarity economy, prefiguration here stands for the practice of creating counter-institutions enforcing principles of radical and participatory democracy, or the social and solidarity economy, ultimately creating autonomous spheres from capitalism (Dinerstein, 2015). Thus, the prefiguration of democratic ideals also has a strategic role that extends beyond the actualization of values in the present (Maeckelbergh, 2011), creating new institutional forms supposed to replace present ones, and providing material solutions to exit capitalism (Murray, 2014). More than an ethical gesture, prefigurative organizing constitutes a “strategic commitment to developing revolutionary organizations that embody the structures of deliberation and decision-making that a post-capitalist society to contain” (Raekstaad, 2018, p. 363). Raekstaad unapologetically assumes its Marxist take on prefiguration, as a strategy to bring about large-scale social change, through developing democratic alternative to organize production and consumption. While the means must mirror the

end, the eye is set on the target: “(...) whether something is prefigurative in the first sense is determined only retrospectively” as “prefiguration is disconnected from the intentions and goals of the agents doing the prefiguring” (ibid, p.361).

However, a second stream of literature contradicts Raekstaad's assumption that prefiguration is disconnected from participant's intentions ⁸, instead focusing on discourses of future temporalities, anticipation and the theatricalization of this relationship as central to the concept of prefiguration.

1.3.2 Prefiguration as conscience of *ou-topos*

Instead of seeing the best of world as possible in the here and now, this vision of prefiguration sees the desired end as an elusive, always provisional, ever-changing end. Nevertheless, this better place that is *not-yet* here can be mobilized to change the lines, to create other narratives, ultimately changing the course of things. In this vision of prefiguration, the best of world does not need to exist: we only need to *act as if* to make a change in our present conditions. Thus, this last way to think about prefiguration requires to think about the notion that another future is possible, projecting itself in it, acting as if, bridging the gap between imagination and reality. In other words, feeling and imagining this projected future is inseparable from putting it into action.

In this stream, the individual and collective self-conscience of future and present temporalities is inherent to the process of prefiguration. Participants need to express the conscience of opening possibilities in the present, and creating, through their actions, a different future. *In other words, the modes of justification of their actions and modes of struggle need to refer to a conscience of the future, of anticipation and creation of this future, in order for it to be seen as prefiguration* (Creasap, 2021). Thus, a particular attention is given to the modes of being and the discourses surrounding participant's practices within this part of the literature. This is critical, as the term prefiguration tends to be used as label for any practice that engages in concrete anti-capitalist and democratic solutions. Thus, I completely agree with Jeffrey and Dyson's

⁸ I do not mean that this stream of literature fails to consider participant's vision of the future, instead that it is not their main focus as they emphasize the practice of putting these futures into place.

statement: “In our view, the term loses its explanatory power and specificity unless it is viewed as a self-conscious effort to direct energy into practising in the present the future that is sought.” (Jeffrey & Dyson, 2021, p. 644). Here, what distinguishes prefiguration from other forms of anticapitalistic and autonomist struggles is that the action is justified from the perspective of another imagined future. In this definition, it is a completely different perspective on the good place: it is the other place, the imagined place, the in-between space, or the place that ultimately cannot be, the *ou-topos*, that justifies a change in the course of action. In this view, prefiguration is a discourse that mobilizes the anticipation of another future to justify a different action in the present.

Unlike in the above-mentioned stream of literature, where social change is brought about because actors embody the best world in the here and now, living by the values they wish to see in the world, and setting up new form of organizations that reflect their commitments, in this second stream, actors summon the elsewhere, precisely what cannot be. *It is thus no longer an ethical gesture but a creative, imaginative, and artistic gesture.* It is through summoning what does not exist and (and cannot exist) that social change is achieved. I believe Bloch's concept of the “not yet being” and Bakhtin's reading of carnival in the Renaissance, illustrate this relationship between prefiguration and social change.

1.3.2.1 Bloch's concept of hope and anticipatory politics

Bloch's major work, *The Principle of Hope*, is a poetic and esoteric study of the transhistorical essence of utopia, as a silent presence in the backstage of History, from Orphism to Mozart's symphonies, from Judaic messianism to Hoffmann, from Schelling's philosophy of art to Marx's materialism (Löwy, 2018). Bloch's vision of utopia, as a driving force of history and a part of human subjectivity, is built upon its absence. Unlike the discourse of concrete, feasible utopia, here humans become in touch with utopia's possibilities through what is not here yet, and the inner experience of both *lack* and *desire*. Bloch's “principle of hope” is above all a subjective, emotional, and inner process, the realization of an unmet need that becomes the starting point for an imaginative, dream-like journey of what could be. This dream-like state leads to an urge to realize this unfulfilled possibilities of the material world, ultimately reducing the gap between what could be and what is. Moving from the imagination into the real world, Bloch's “anticipating conscience”(Broca, 2012) encapsulates the relation between prefiguration and what could be, as

self-creation of the conditions of its own realization. However, Bloch's ontology of the "not yet being" expresses the unfinished nature of utopianism: it is an unfinished process, never fully completed, always open to a new transgressive conscience that could change its course (Gardiner, 1992).

Nevertheless, despite this unfinished nature, the conscience of the "not-yet being" acts as a fuel for social transformation by providing a desire for action and change born in the imaginative realm, a necessary complement to Marxist's disenchantment and rational analysis:

For Bloch, utopia was essential to historical materialism as a theory that 'posits the transformation of the world from within itself' (1986: 267). As he writes in *The Principle of Hope*, historical materialism allows us to envisage the real, historical possibility of creating 'another world beyond hardship' (267), a 'real democracy', 'beyond expropriation and alienation', in which human beings can live in harmony with each other, and with their environment (1376). To achieve this, Bloch believed that more than analysis and critique were needed. He distinguished between what he called the 'cold stream' of Marxism, concerned with the 'unmasking of ideologies' and the 'disenchantment of metaphysical illusion', and the warm stream, which he described as the 'liberating intention and materialistically humane, humanely materialistic real tendency, towards whose goal all these disenchantments are undertaken' (209). Bloch saw both analysis and vision as necessary for social and political emancipation, but argued that the warm stream of Marxism had been historically neglected. He saw utopianism as belonging to that warm stream, and set himself the task of revitalizing it. (Moir, 2018, p. 10).

Like literary productions and political fiction, prefigurative tactics appear as a novel social creation responsible for manifesting an imagined future in a specific time and place. In this regard, previous studies have drawn on Ernst Bloch's work on utopia as an ontological property, characterizing prefiguration from the point of view of the effects produced by anticipation of what is not yet here, thus reviving the notion of hope (Dinerstein & Deneulin, 2012). In contrast with studies focusing on the organizational question, this literature engages with prefiguration as a concept encapsulating changes in the individual and collective consciousness. Indeed, for Dinerstein and Deneulin, the very function of anti-capitalist and anti-development movements lies in hope, as the creation of an alternative way of living opens up our collective consciousness to

the “not-yet-become” – something that can already be experienced even if it is not part of the current material reality. By reactivating people’s anticipatory consciousness of what the future could be, prefigurative politics alter the given past-present-future temporality, containing future realities within the present, or in the words of Dinerstein and Deneulin (2012, p. 595): “Acknowledging the existence of the not yet become in every reality opens up the possibility of anticipating other realities.”

As a conscience of what is not here but could be, prefiguration is part of a critical epistemology of possibility within an environment of cultural conflict and colonization of politics that strives to prevent alternatives from emerging or renders them insignificant (Amsler, 2016). Hope counteracts this refusal of possibilities, embracing new possibilities of organizing that derive from an initial state of rejection. Within this ontology of possibility, prefigurative movements constitute an experiential critique, moving beyond refusal and indignation to denaturalizing dominant concepts and showing alternative ways of organizing society (Dinerstein, 2016). Its true transformative potential thus lies in prefiguring an alternative society and doing so within a post-development paradigm (Dinerstein, 2017). In this sense, manifesting utopia in the present forces us to look for the world’s unclosed possibilities, retaining a hopeful and open perspective towards a different future.

1.3.2.2 Bakhtin's reading of carnival and artistic politics

Seemingly at odds with Bloch's mystical writings, Bakhtin's material analysis of the phenomenon of carnival also engages with the idea of utopia as a critical disruption of the present, of the established order, whose temporally finite nature nonetheless allows for “something else” to happen. Lachmann, Eshelman, and Davis described how Bakhtin foregrounds this relationship between elite and popular culture, and the historically unprecedented moment when highbrow and lowbrow cultural practices meet during the Renaissance (Lachmann et al., 1988). While Bakhtin studies this particular historical moment, he produces a critique of the Stalinist era's popular culture, which lost its subversive nature and played a role in keeping people, bodies, and minds in line within the dictatorship. Against this authoritarian and restrictive force, Bakhtin develops his concept of carnival: a moment in time where social roles, orders and values are joyfully inverted, anticipating an anti-hierarchical world. Here, it is the *staging of utopia*, the presence of utopia as a myth within the carnivalesque game, which allows for this reversal of order (ibid,

p.118). The word myth is important, as this practice is not built upon the idea of a possible world, but of an impossible world summoned by creativity and staging, in an elaborate critical discourse of upclosed possibilities. Just as in Bloch's work, the ideal world is summoned only with the aim of provoking a displacement, an *ouverture* of the possibilities.

Although this staging of the myth of utopia is temporary, it leads to an inversion of values, a critique of institutions, authority, and hierarchies, where the collective rises up against the loss of another possible future. It is the staging of the myth of utopia, and if its lack in everyday life, that disturbs power, rather than its realization and propagation in the here and now. In other words, rather than the realization of a concrete and feasible utopia, there is a production of a narrative which notes its disappearance. This is what Gardiner (1992) describes as the critical role of the carnivalesque utopia. Borrowing the concept of critical utopia from Moylan, Gardiner describes the open-ended and self-reflexive nature of carnivalesque utopias, which continually consider the possibilities of what is not yet. Exploring forms of emancipation outside of relationships of domination and hierarchy, critical utopias constitute a reflexive discourse on possibilities and limits within a society, and instead of a coherent discourse on the world to come, deconstruct their own utopian discourse through a multiplicity of forms and possibilities. In Gardiner's words, critical utopia is "reflexive in the sense that they are aware of the limitations of the dominant Utopian tradition, but also in that they are self-ironizing and "internally" deconstructive. Accordingly, they attempt to realize the contours of a desired future society in their very textual form via the incorporation of elements of contradiction, ambiguity, and openness. In so doing, they disrupt the unified and homogeneous narrative of the traditional Utopia and demonstrate the multiplicity of possible futures." (Gardiner, 1992, p. 25).

Carnival is the epitome of the critical utopia, as a discourse appearing through a constellation of symbols, practices, and symbols, questioning as much as producing new categories of thoughts. This self-conscious process of deconstruction and reconstruction, brings another possibility forward, albeit temporarily. It thus fulfills utopia's role according to Ricoeur:

May we not say that imagination itself through its Utopian function has a constitutive role in helping us rethink the nature of our social life? Is not Utopia this leap outside the way in which we radically rethink what is family, what is consumption, what is authority, what is religion, and so on? Does not the fantasy of an alternative society and its exteriorization

‘nowhere’ work as one of the most formidable contestations of what is? (Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, quoted in Gardiner 1992, p.27)

Literature on prefigurative studies has emphasized the performative, creative and imaginative dimensions of prefigurative movements, which often seek to materialize, manifest, and produce a new world within an occupied or temporary space, thus revealing a creative process at play. This crafted dimension of prefiguration, with its emphasis on experimenting and creating another world through an ongoing process, reveals the focus in prefigurative politics on bringing forward imagined dimensions.

Taking in consideration the role of crafted and imagined the prefigurative discourse, these studies bring forward the specificities of such engagements with prefiguration. It is worth noticing that, compared to the forms of prefiguration previously discussed, the engagement with imaginary and creative tactics has been predominantly discussed in European contexts, as it refers to specific epistemologies and ontologies (but more on that latter). One of the most productive readings of prefiguration thus conceives of the concept as a communitarian approach to human creativity, responsible for the production of the social fabric and life itself on the margins of the capitalist economy (Gutiérrez Aguilar et al., 2016). This production is a permanent creation of forms of human organization, types of social relations and bonds. In the words of Gutiérrez Aguilar et al. (2016, p. 81), “as humans our destiny is to permanently create, reinvent, update, modify and ratify the social forms of our concrete communities [...] the reproduction, production, and use of our condition of existence in communities is not the result of automatic repetition or reiteration. It is rather about constantly re-creating and re-inventing [...] relations between the members of such a dynamic collectivity.”

Previous studies have also emphasized the imaginative process at play within prefigurative practices. As an imaginative act, prefigurative politics affect the social fabric and impacts our imagination in relation to collective and political issues. By enacting other possibilities within a space, it impacts the way communities imagine themselves as political subjects, empowering forms of collective action (Bonilla, 2010; Klein, 2019). Prefiguration, then, is an inherently creative and transformative process of bringing forward real practices whose potential depends on how we read them and how we imagine them generalized within an “imaginative totality” that shapes what is possible to even consider (Levitas, 2013). Cooper has described how prefiguration

uses fiction and acting ‘as if’ to constitute its condition of legitimacy, by enacting, improvising, and imagining categories of meanings behind present institutions (Cooper, 2020). Here, prefiguration is defined by this particular relationship between the real and the ‘as if’, which can occur in a playful, artistic, and cultural mode. What is important to know is that the impact comes from not being real: “This is partly because innovative, utopian or provocative actions happen despite lacking the institutional conditions they seem to require. But it is also because actions reimagine their conditions of possibility, and act as if they were already there. Prefigurative action entails a significant reimagining of the environment in which action”(Cooper, 2020, p. 896). Between fake institutions, mimicking state's attributes, and other forms of role play, these less discussed dimensions of prefiguration place a spotlight on the performative aspects of prefiguration, in the sense of “retrospectively creating the authorizing conditions relied upon.” (ibid, p.908). The value of ‘as if’ can be explained through its proleptic nature, as the capacity to act as if one had already reached states which are not possible in the present (Swain, 2019). According to Swain, prefigurative politics, by imagining and representing the future as if it already exists, empower communities and lead to new collective competencies to make it happen, akin to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Square movements, in particular, have been described as places where actors can express their creative potential within new collectivistic logics (Pleyers & Capitaine, 2017, p. 12). Previous studies have connected the utopian hopes expressed within prefigurative tactics with aesthetic and imaginative politics within protest movements. Juris (2009), for example, has described how there is a tradition of combining occupational politics with forms of performance and spectacle to attract media attention and challenge dominant codes, while Tancons (2011) has described how occupations enact festive and carnivalesque strategies. Occupations are seen as cultural interventions – as the expression of an aesthetic revolt against neoliberal regimes through symbolic actions (Werbner et al., 2014). In this account, the actors’ imaginative creations constitute repertoires of engagement with which to manifest utopian alternatives by constituting visual, material, poetic and performative embodiments of an alternative and horizontal social organization that counteracts the symbolic production of authoritarian regimes. Through organized participatory performances, such occupations creatively counteract the passivity of modern life, distorting symbols of power in a critique of corruption and authority. The use of Guy Fawkes's mask by the Indignados movement is revelatory of the carnivalesque aspect of contemporary movements, since in the carnival the person disappears behind the mask. Guy

Fawkes stylized white figure, grimy smile and dark facial hair has propagated within anti-hierarchical movements, such as the Indignados, the anti-G8 and the Anonymous. Another example of this carnivalesque logic is the reversal of hierarchies, such as the famous: “We are the 99%”, where up is down and down is up.

At this point it is important to note that the term prefiguration has been used rather indistinctly and ambiguously to describe two types of political practices, as alternative organizing and as performance of an anticipatory conscience. The term prefiguration thus refers to distinct temporalities intertwining two different notions of ends, i.e. as an intrinsic value constituting an end in itself, reflective of an anarchical terminology, and as the expression of a desired future, an end to be achieved (Gordon, 2018). The first finds its value in the generative temporality that actualizes values in the present, while the second relies on hope and anticipation. While prefigurative politics as alternative and anticapitalistic organisation “in the here and now” relate to anarchist heritage and ethics of means to end (Boggs, 1977; Graeber, 2002; Springer, 2018), practices built upon hope, creative experimentations and performances relate to other, less-examined historical heritages. Thus, this thesis chooses to focus on the latter side of prefigurative politics, *not as organizing for a better future but as conscience, discourse, and performance of the gap between what is imagined and reality, contributing to the literature that explored historical heritages informing these tactics*. In the next section, I bring forward two ways in which this study contributes to this understanding of prefiguration, through studying its historical roots and considering other political cultures responsible for shaping such practices. As prefiguration is a historically and geographically situated practice, this study will focus on a European tradition, and particularly its Romantic heritage.

1.4 Contribution

1.4.1 Imagined futures and pre-capitalistic past: the spectre of Romanticism

Prefiguration as anticipatory conscience relies on an inner process of lack, anticipation, and hope for a future actualized within the present. Previous studies dealing with the historical roots of

prefiguration highlighted its proximity with Christian exegesis, and its visions of social transformation as anticipation of a better life to come. These authors do not, by any means, ascribe religious intentions to prefiguration, merely pointing out how the concept itself secularizes religious ideas of better futures contained within this one. In this regard, Skrimshire (2015) has emphasized how discourses on anti-capitalist futures make use of an apocalyptic rhetoric to counteract ideas surrounding the end of politics, noting that even though it contains a political and atheistic dimension it nonetheless reflects transcendental aspirations. Even those who engage with more radical forms of utopian movements (Price et al., 2008) keep describing the function of utopia as part of a religious and transcendental rhetoric of “hope that a change was coming” (Price et al., 2008, p. 136), redemption, extinguishing evil and ultimately exalting “the power of charismatic prophet-like leaders and the supernatural visions of a satisfying collective past or apocalyptic future which motivate and galvanize grassroots members” (Price et al., 2008, p. 153). Scholl also gives a brief yet convincing account of the religious and millenarian origins of utopian thinking and prefiguration (Scholl, 2016). Indeed, one can find the idea of embeddedness of present and future temporalities in Saint Augustine's *The City of God*:

Later, in *City of God*, St. Augustine proposed that Christianity involved an awareness that two worlds—distinct but overlapping—exist within this one. Although Christians could not remain aloof to earthly affairs, it was necessary for them to stay alert to the work of providence that animated them. Whereas the actualization of the divine was projected into future, some glimpses could—through devotion—be lived in the present. In this way, Augustine bound the conception of prefiguration to the messianic promise. – (Scholl, 2016).

Readings of Bloch's *Principle of Hope* also highlight its religious, millenarist and esoteric influences. For example, Jonas' work, the *Imperative of Responsibility*, forms a critique against Bloch's secularized eschatology and its unchecked and unrealistic ambitions for social transformation (Arno, 2015, p. 12). Gardiner has a different take on the matter, arguing how Bloch's world-in-the-making is always in perpetual unfinished motion (Gardiner, 1992), which absolves him from any eschatological ambitions. What stands for sure, is that there is something transcendental in this warm Marxist stream that goes beyond the idea of concrete utopias and alternative organizing, something of an inner, personal relation to an invisible force that escapes our experience of the everyday life, and that can lead us to a brighter future.

In this regard, Lowy points out how Romanticism constitutes a missing reference for

understanding not only Bloch's concept of hope, but an entire generation of Jewish intellectuals that engaged with utopia and radical social transformation (Löwy, 2014). Labelling Bloch as a revolutionary romantic, Löwy addresses the historicity of the concept of hope, contradicting assumptions of its historical neutrality. On the contrary, the Blochian concept of “not yet being” relates to this profoundly romantic idea of inner potentialities, of what is not yet, a state where everything is still undefined, unfinished, un-institutionalized and thus pregnant with possibilities: a properly romantic dialectic between past and the future. Unsurprisingly, dreaming states and feelings take a central place in Bloch's work, as a receptive space open to the emergence of possibilities. It is this dreaming space, and particularly the dream of an idealized past that fuels utopia drive for action. Löwy emphasizes how, unlike the preconceived dreamy and melancholic contemplation of the past, Romanticism engages with the past into a living source for revolutionary action, for a praxis oriented towards the fulfillment of utopia (Löwy, 2018). In doing so, he opens here a theme that remain at the margins of the literature on prefiguration: *its relationship with the past*. This relationship is two-fold, as an inherited relationship between inner-life and political action, and as reference to a pre-capitalistic past.

Firstly, Bloch's principle of hope reflects an attention to inner life, to dreaming, to the imagination as capable of reconstructing reality, of superimposing past and present that is properly Romantic. The Romantic imagination is what sustains the desire for the idealized object, like the Stendhalian lover crystallizing and thus preserving the object of his love from reality, while transfiguring his own life experience; yet it is also what justifies the pursuit of a better future. While literature has associated prefiguration within imagination and creativity, the lens of the Romantic imagination allows us to see the specificities of this form of political and cultural movement, specifically within the European context. Here, better futures are not within our reach because we have the technical capacities, or intellectual knowledge, or because we are under some kind of threat that forces us to act, but because we are capable of imagining them. Of course, every political action has been first through of and then put into action; *what is specific to prefiguration is that it finds its justification in this inner, imaginative process. The possibility of a radical difference, the imagination of what has never been though become resources to legitimize, defend and pursue a different course of action*. With this, I do not mean prefiguration is a self-centered, individual process focused on individual transformation (i.e-reimagining oneself), on the opposite, that this inner resource is mobilized to justify practices directed towards societal transformation.

Secondly, while prefiguration is often rightly defined as a relationship of hope between a capitalistic present and a post-capitalistic future, there might be something in its discourse and action that presents a relation to a pre-capitalistic past. Maybe post-capitalism is not at the horizon, and it is visible only looking back at collective practices of the commons, a vibrant time before the state and its rigid, social organization. My thesis contributes to explore these dimensions of prefiguration, as inherited strategies from the past that contribute to its discourse and justification, and a reference to anti-modern and pre-capitalist past, mobilizing the concept of Romanticism.

1.4.2 Creative performances, counter-culture and conscious self-creation: the role of the avant-gardes

The distinction in the literature review also points out to a gap between an anarchist and counter-cultural strategies within prefiguration that should be further explored. Indeed, while prefigurative movements strategically develop autonomist spheres from capitalism, creating organizations with decision-making structures that advance anticapitalistic objectives, other engagements focus on counter-culture embodying libertarian ideals (Raekstaad, 2018). This dual approach is symptomatic of the greater divide between anarchism and libertarianism regarding social transformation, between overturning power structures and bringing other living possibilities, which often dismisses the latter for its individual, and self-centered approach. At present, prefigurative politics continue to be thought of in terms of instrumental politics. In this view, the utopian dimension, and the focus on group dynamics prevents participants from engaging in confrontational politics, thereby reducing prefigurative politics to a project of private liberation (Smucker, 2014). Even in more positive approaches, prefigurative politics are seen as strategic by progressively becoming strong political organizations capable of engaging with dominant institutions (Young & Schwartz, 2012).

Acknowledging that movements strategically focusing on overthrowing power structures probably have a better chance of achieving it, does not exclude that counter-cultural forms of prefiguration pursue other unnamed strategies and purposes. In this sense, such logics are an inherent part of social movements, which are defined by their commitment to the logics of symbolic and cultural production. Some might even say that the particularity of social movements

is precisely this engagement with cultural and symbolic production (Melucci, 1985), i.e. their engagement in symbolic struggles to control the production of information and reverse dominant codes. And since the challenge is to change cultural norms, the organizational form is more than an end as it also constitutes a challenge in itself, i.e. a “symbolic challenge” (Melucci, 1985, p. 801). While Melucci has examined the role of social movements in relation to specific issues, difference and otherness, more recent studies have focused on how these movements seek to achieve counterhegemonic cultural force, creating new political imaginaries through the production of discursive spaces that escape hegemonic significations (Escobar, 1992). These movements achieve this, according to Escobar (1992, p. 36), by engaging with actors’ creativity and with society’s creative capabilities, whereby “actors recognize themselves as pursuing a cultural project”. (Escobar (1992, p. 41) goes on to declare that: “Generally speaking the task ahead is the construction of collective imaginaries capable of orienting social and political action.”

I believe a better understanding of the historical legacy of prefiguration practices can lead to an enhanced understanding and more comprehensive knowledge of this form of engagement, including its potential strategic aspects regarding cultural production. In this regard, engaging with the history of the intellectual engagement with prefiguration brings us back to its nature as a cultural movement. Indeed, Mead in her anthropological work *Culture and Commitment a Study of the Generation Gap* (Mead, 1970), mobilized the term prefigurative culture seven years before Boggs' seminal work, to describe counter-cultural movements that experience in the present something that might occur in the future (Trott, 2016, p. 268). Thus, further engagement with counter-cultural and aesthetic logics is needed to get a better understanding of local and historically situated prefigurative practices, particularly in the European context.

While Gardiner (1992) points out to a correspondence between Bloch and Bakhtin, in the attention given to artistic, literary, architectural movements capable of presenting aspects of utopia in real life (for Bloch), and a proximity to the revolutionary avant-gardes of the time (for Bakhtin), these dimensions have not been explored within the literature on prefiguration. Indeed, although some forms of prefiguration are supported by principles and values and a lexicon derived from aesthetics traditionally associated with artistic movements, past research has not investigated these as possible traditions informing prefigurative politics. As actors in history themselves, researchers may have normalized these values as part of the experience of prefiguration without reflecting upon their historical construction, thus reproducing assumptions that this process naturally involves creativity, imagination, and artistry. Authors who have engaged with anarchism as part

of the historical roots of prefigurative politics (Graeber, 2002) have likewise not considered how global struggles against neoliberalism, direct actions against authority, and democratic aspirations, could have taken on many forms other than creative experiments, performances at global summits, and in general a discourse appealing to people's capacity to create and imagine their own futures with the aim of bringing these alternative realities into the here and now.

Thus, previous research has not paid sufficient attention to the conditions of possibility – or what one could also call the “conditions of imaginability” (Gordin et al., 2010, p. 2) – that lie behind creative and performative types of prefiguration, engaging with history of our present in which activists' collective and individual imaginative and creative properties are taken for granted. Prefiguration, and utopia in general, I argue, must be understood as a historically situated practice that is dependent on certain conditions to come into existence and reflects what we collectively think is possible or doable. Imagination and creativity are not only ontological properties but historically situated practices and techniques used by historical actors to understand and change their particular circumstances.

In summary, my thesis contributes to a reading of prefiguration as a cultural movement, within a European context, considering the heritage of previous movements breaking boundaries between art and politics, and thus looking at cultural production as a valid strategy.

1.4.3 Research questions and structure of the thesis

This study focuses on Romanticism as a means of tracing and understanding (1) the historic construction of artistic values and culturalist strategies as part of symbolic and aesthetic prefigurative politics and (2) the specific value of symbolic, aesthetic, and imaginative types of prefigurative politics in regard to the resurrection of utopia and the pursuit of a fairer, more democratic and fulfilling society.

In line with my view of prefiguration as a practice justified through references to imagined futures, this study adopts an approach inspired by French pragmatic sociology (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991). This approach involves an analysis of historically

constructed theoretical arguments based on a particular political theory and a vision of one's own place in the world (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, pp. 177–183). Using this framework of analysis, Boltanski and Thévenot re-constituted different cities (*cités*) that correspond to models of greatness based on competing values and higher principles: the inspired city, the domestic city, the city of renown, the industrial city, the civic city and the mercantile city (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, pp. 201–245). Each city has its own higher principle or what constitutes the common good (*le bien supérieur commun*) that determines the value of an action and establishes a type of greatness derived from adherence to this principle. While these cities are based on abstract constructions, they can be mobilized within actors' discourse in the form of grammars, i.e. a coherent ensemble of rules justifying specific forms of engagement – in this case political engagement.

With this perspective in mind, my first research question interrogates the historical construction of principles and values behind the engagement of prefigurative politics with imagination, experimentation, and creativity. In emphasizing these values, participants mobilize a grammar based primarily on the 'inspired' city. Cities in this sense are a cohesive system of values derived from a form of superior moral good that justify actions oriented towards attaining this higher good: they are idealized visions of goodness (moral values) orienting actions. In this, the inspired city can be traced back to Saint Augustine's *The City of God*. It establishes inspiration as the superior common principle and supposes a direct relationship between subjectivity, inspiration, and creativity, seen as a spontaneous personal outburst flowing simultaneously within oneself and into the world, which is immediately re-imagined and transformed as a result. Inspired greatness is achieved through distaste for rational techniques, a desire to create oneself in a world respectful of singularities and plurality, and liberation from knowledge through experimentation. The inspired city ultimately hopes to establish authentic relationships between liberated humans based on warmth, originality and creativity (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, pp. 201–206). Participants mobilizing such a grammar pursue and justify actions oriented towards the higher purpose of creativity and inspiration. Building upon Boltanski and Thévenot's work on the inspired city and on pragmatic sociology (Chapter 2), I first explore and set out how Romanticism constitutes a cultural movement that mobilizes arguments drawn from the values of the inspired city in a critique of industrial capitalism. In doing so, Romanticism constitutes imagination as a superior resource capable of producing alternative significations, of conveying other futures into the present, and ultimately of self-constituting society in the process.

Secondly, this thesis examines the political cultures and forms of engagement derived from Romanticism. Chapter 4 describes two distinct grammars and their forms of political engagement constructed from Romanticism and its critique of modernity. One of these grammars, formed from Nietzsche's philosophy, not only sets up forms of engagement centered on the self but also actions that erase the boundary between art and political action. The second grammar, derived from Charles Fourier and utopian socialisms, seeks to establish an alternative to capitalist modernity by putting in place more fulfilling forms of social organization. Chapter 5 analyses how these two romantic political grammars were mobilized within the French social movement of *Nuit Debout*, how they engage differently with prefigurative tactics, and which forms of compromise and conflict emerge between these and other political grammars. The final chapter of this dissertation comprises a discussion on the role of imaginative, performative, and cultural tactics within prefigurative politics, highlighting the potential of these tactics to construct a space wherein people can consciously create, reinvent, and permanently transform the types of human organization we believe to be possible. The artful process by which utopia happens in such a space is not oriented solely towards counter-cultural practices or lifestyle positions, I argue, but allows for a self-created society built upon its imaginative and creative properties. Prefigurative tactics not only actualize values, demonstrating the existence of a possibility and instilling a sense of hope; they also materialize a performance in which the social perceives its own creative capabilities, thereby reinforcing the capacity and desire for radical democracy. This corresponds to the definition of autonomy as a process by which society is able to maintain a reflexive relationship with its creative abilities.

2 RESEARCH FOCUS, METHODS, AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

2.1 The case of Nuit Debout: occupying the Place de la République

This thesis focuses on the case of Nuit Debout as an exemplary case study of how aesthetic principles, values and actions play a role in prefigurative and utopian politics. Preliminary observations of the events at the Place de la République led me to identify the co-existence of occupations, aesthetic performances and prefigurative intentions of world-building, revealing an engagement with practices that have not been described and analysed by previous literature on prefiguration, at least not with the intention of focusing on its specific artistic and aesthetic nature. Nuit Debout emerged in the context of the Socialist Party government's declaration of a state of emergency in November 2015 in response to terrorist attacks in Paris.¹⁰ Under the cover of anti-terrorist laws, the state of emergency exacerbated an already oppressive situation for far-left and radical left activists. These oppressive measures included placing environmental activists under house arrest during the COP21 Summit (the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference),¹¹ increased police brutality and violence against the occupation of Notre-Dame-des-Landes,¹² the government project of depriving individuals involved in terrorist attacks of French nationality, and a generally tougher response towards unions, protests, and labor struggles – as exemplified by the exceptional legal proceedings undertaken against former workers at the Goodyear factory in Amiens-Nord.¹³

¹⁰ <https://www.gouvernement.fr/en/state-of-emergency-in-metropolitan-france-what-are-the-consequences>

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/nov/27/paris-climate-activists-put-under-house-arrest-using-emergency-laws>

¹² <https://zad.nadir.org/spip.php?article2684>

¹³ https://www.challenges.fr/entreprise/goodyear-amiens-nord-proces-de-huit-ex-salaries-pour-sequestration-de-cadres_51994

This hardening of government positions and increasingly repressive climate reinforced a sense of solidarity that brought together different political actors in common protests. The government's repressive stance towards far-left activists created forms of affective solidarity among different factions, with shared criticisms of state's violence, security measures and liberal reforms serving as key unifying factors. In this regard, the death of the 21-year-old environmental activist Remi Fraisse,¹⁴ killed by a grenade during a demonstration against the controversial Sivens water reservoir in 2014, became a symbolic and unifying event¹⁵ in terms of opposition to the violent police repression of demonstrations.

The Nuit Debout movement has its origins in the 'Call of the 58' (*L'appel des 58*)¹⁶ which was launched in November 2015 by intellectuals and politicians including Olivier Besancenot from the *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* (New Anticapitalist Party), and Jean-Baptiste Eyraud from the *Droit au Logement* (Right to Housing) association, as well as economists such as Frédéric Lordon and actors from the cultural world. Their objective was to publicly defend the right and freedom to demonstrate during the state of emergency. A few months later, in January 2016, the group evolved into *Stop Etat d'Urgence*¹⁷, a collective of 150 associations calling for a national demonstration against the state of emergency. The final straw was the government's reform of the Labor Code pushed by the Minister of Labor, El Khomri, and championed by the then Minister of the Economy, Emmanuel Macron, bringing last-minute amendments transforming this law into "a declaration of war" on labor rights (Farbiaz, 2016, p. 15). One-to-one agreements with employers would take precedence over collective employment rights, indemnities for industrial workers would be capped, and companies would have an unlimited extension of their right to dismiss employees. In an already oppressive context, the *Loi Travail* (labor law) buried any possibility of reconciliation between the Socialist Party government and the far left. In this context, Nuit Debout became the first large-scale social movement since the 2006 youth protests against the *Contrat Première Embauche* in 2006 – another measure to dismantle labor rights.

¹⁴ https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2020/01/09/mort-de-remi-fraisse-non-lieu-confirme-pour-le-gendarme_6025308_3224.html

¹⁵ This event was a traumatic and disquieting experience for the Romantic left, especially for those involved in occupation struggles. The *Mauvaise Troupe* collective, among others, recalled how their activist experience was shaped by the police attacks against Notre-Dame-des-Landes and the killing of Rémi Fraisse, creating a collective identity built on an experience of occupation and resistance to the state's violence .

¹⁶ https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/etat-d-urgence-58-personnalites-revendiquent-la-liberte-de-manifester-30-11-2015-1986060_23.php

¹⁷ <https://www.stopetatdurgence.org/>

From its beginning, this social movement was characterized by both innovative forms of activism, such as self-organized forums, street performances, spontaneous actions, and more traditional forms of organised political action (demonstrations, strikes...). For the first time on the French political scene a large-scale social movement was driven by social media, namely a petition launched by feminist activist Caroline de Haas which gained over a million signatures and subsequently triggered a nationwide movement of strikes and demonstrations, and the hashtag #onvautmieuxqueça¹⁸, launched by YouTube creators to protest degraded working conditions.

However, it was a joint meeting held on 23 March 2006 that led to the decision to occupy the Place de la République. This meeting brought together socialist and anarchist unions, such as Francois Ruffin, the documentarist and editor of the newspaper *Fakir*, and members of the union SUD PT (*Solidaires Unitaires Démocratiques- Postes, Télégraphes et Télécommunications*), actors from the entertainment world like the Parisian theater company *Jolie Môme*, left-wing intellectuals such as Frédéric Lordon, and collectives involved in housing issues such as the *Droit au Logement* and *Jeudi Noir* associations. The press release clearly stated its anti-capitalist and unifying ambitions in the fight against “the logic of neoliberalism” and all measures leading to the private expropriation of collective wealth¹⁹. From the start their intention was to create a unified movement between a socialist left involved in labor struggles, i.e. of the *unionized* and *unemployed*, and an anarchist left close to autonomist and environmentalist struggles. The idea of Nuit Debout was brought forward by a member of the theatre company *Jolie Môme*, who first suggested a public occupation. In the search for a collective identity, the name ‘Red Nights’ (*Nuits Rouges*) was briefly considered before being rejected as too divisive, leading to a compromise in the name of Nuit Debout (Up all Night, Standing Night or Rise up all Night). Arising from these various unifying ambitions of the left, Nuit Debout provided an umbrella for joint actions among youth movements, unions, associations, and various political collectives engaging in a power struggle against the Socialist government. Following movements in the United States, Spain and Greece, the French capital became the scene of confrontations with the Socialist government, bringing the far left to the forefront of the political scene.

The occupation of the Place de la République took place after the demonstration on March 31, rapidly expanding into a collective organization of what became at once a democratic forum,

¹⁸ <https://twitter.com/OnVautMieuxQueCa?src=hash>

¹⁹ <https://tendanceclaire.org/contenu/autre/Leur%20combine.%20nos%20luttes.pdf>

a space of discussions and a collective identity for various autonomous actions opposing the labor law (demonstrations, occupations, performances, blockades, and other forms of autonomous and organized protests). While structured commissions were responsible for the logistics of organizing the space (sound systems, cafeterias, security, social media, etc.), the wide variety of themed 'commissions' set up at Nuit Debout reflected as unusual blending of influences, including street art performances, collective attempts at rewriting the Constitution, discussions of political economics, feminism and ecological concerns, poetry readings, opera performances and social workers' actions. Starting as a social movement against the labor law, Nuit Debout rapidly became an arena for debate in which different factions of the far and radical left, along with first-time protesters, elaborated visions for the future in search of a common strategy. While horizontal forms of organizing are characteristic of counter-globalization movements, with small affinity groups making progress on specific issues and reporting back to the general structure or submitting specific items for voting under the umbrella of a large General Assembly (Graeber, 2002), the co-existence of square politics with aesthetic performances gave Nuit Debout its unique flavour, which triggered my curiosity.

2.2 Research focus

The starting point of this thesis is the assumption that symbolic, utopian, and aesthetic prefigurative practices in square movements and other forms of occupation of urban spaces find their justification through a 'political grammar', that is, a mode of justifying actions, beliefs and social values that refers to a particular vision of a Higher Good, constructed from an interpretation of the world based on the potentialities of a 'self' or creative individual. This grammar provides activists with essential resources for engaging in forms of collective action that prefigure more democratic and egalitarian worlds, by using resources derived from aesthetics, such as imagination and creativity. This research direction is based on the following two presuppositions:

- 1) there is a historical, but marginalized, link between prefigurative politics and values of imagination and creativity;
- 2) this link provides actors with resources to carry out and justify forms of political engagement, which combine artistic concerns and occupations of spaces, as well as the ability

to accept compromises and arrangements with the republican and socialist values.

2.2.1 Preliminary Observations

These presuppositions were first formulated on the basis of my preliminary observations of various activist circles close to libertarianism* and anarcho-communism*, such as the information and debate website *Basta Mag*,²⁰ the online anti-globalization and libertarian communist think-tank *Mr Mondialisation*,²¹ and various social enterprises within the framework of the Social and Solidarity Economy in France, such as alternative currencies, local food networks, self-managed housing and sustainable consumption and production cooperatives. Publicly available information related to these experimentations was collected over a period of six months and recorded using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. These observations were motivated both by my personal interest as a citizen viewing the state of the world with outrage – and as such naturally interested in current forms of resistance and alternatives – as well as by the initial phase of this research project. At that time my interest was in the modes of formation of a discourse of social entrepreneurship constructed around the persona of the entrepreneur as saviour and in identifying more radical forms of collective social enterprises that challenged asymmetrical power relations and such individualistic discourses. These preliminary observations allowed me to identify several research directions that informed my research hypothesis.

2.2.2 Constructing the research focus: connecting modes of political engagement with historical value construction

During this initial research phase I discovered several correspondences between the contemporary activist and entrepreneurial discourses²² observed in my preliminary research field and my earlier

²⁰ <https://www.bastamag.net/>

²¹ <https://mrmondialisation.org>

²² The word ‘discourse’ is used here in the sense of everyday life as social text, though it is nevertheless connected to macro-levels of discourse by constituting a common way of viewing the world (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000).

reading on French intellectual life between the 1960s and 1980s conducted as part of my academic coursework. On the one hand, I found that contemporary discourses surrounding activist practices enacting participative forms of democracy and individual and collective creativity echoed the concerns of far-left* intellectuals in the earlier period, in particular in their criticisms of bureaucratic logics, productivism and capitalistic exploitation. I further found that discourses in the field of the Social and Solidarity Economy reflected themes I had encountered in Foucault's concept of the 'care of the self', including the importance of working on one's interiority, developing and investing in the self throughout one's life and of cultivating modes of association based on such relationships. Moreover, I found that discourses on new forms of organizing for social change contained recurrent references to Deleuzian concepts of networks, fluidity and 'rhizomatic organization'. In accordance with these findings, my research direction was partly based on the assumption that a stream of contemporary activist discourse mobilizes forms of knowledge that were developed during the 1960s and 1970s and which had supported the emergence of novel forms of activism at that time.

On the other hand, I also noted that contemporary discourses placed a particularly strong emphasis on the question of collective organizing, albeit in different forms and with different objectives.²³ For instance, *Basta Mag*, a website and debate platform close to anarcho-communism*, places great emphasis on trade unions and cooperatives, whereas the *Mr Mondialisation* website focuses on actions at individual level such as eco-consumption and alternative lifestyles. Despite these differences, forms of collective organizing such as assemblies, political committees, neighborhood associations, citizens' collectives, web platforms and other forms of organized action are often portrayed as being at least part of the solution to economic, social, and environmental issues. This focus on participative management methods, direct democracy and the self-management of common resources emphasizes collective organizing within alternative utopias, thus revealing how similar utopian values can lead to different forms of political engagement. For while these two streams of activism both express utopian aspirations, imagining and acting for other futures, their actions manifest different forms of engagement, with one engaging in actions as part of a quest for self-realization and inspiration while the other engages in the creation of rules and systems.

²³ This was particularly so in the cases recorded from *Basta Mag* and *Mr Mondialisation*, though collective organization seems to be less of a concern for social enterprises that have no connection to these activist networks, such as *La Ruche* (an alternative local food network).

A more decisive observation was the almost consensual celebration of values from the aesthetic repertoire such as imagination, creativity, experimentations, and a strong belief that the inner world contained in itself resources to build a better world. Further observations revealed many connections between contemporary critiques of neoliberalism and globalized capitalism and core values of the ‘inspired city’, i.e. the higher principles of imagination, creativity and the quest to lead a fulfilling inner life. Indeed, the pursuit of a poetic existence forms the bedrock of this critique of industrial capitalism and its quest for infinite economic growth and endless productivity, viewed as the chief culprit for the current social and environmental crisis. This critique of an alienated contemporary society justifies the implementation of alternative lifestyle and collective initiatives, and concrete utopias (alternative currencies, urban agriculture, alternative modes of consumption and production, collective housing, schools, nursing homes...). As such it greatly exceeds the solely individualistic and aesthetic aspirations traditionally associated with this form of poetic critique. For while the inspired city has indeed been traditionally associated with critiques highlighting the inauthenticity and lack of inspiration of modern capitalist life, condemning a system that minimizes individual possibilities (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2011), it also became clear from my research and experience that the poetic concerns of the inspired city play a role in contemporary politics that goes well beyond the realization of singularity and authenticity. In my view this constitutes a second limitation of the literature which often focuses on the rapprochement made between artistic critiques and neoliberalism, whose common axis is alleged to be the ontological preponderance of the individual over the collective and whose conflicts could supposedly be overcome through an arrangement whereby individuals could reach their full potential within a neoliberal economy (Frère, 2009). This interpretation was strongly at odds with my initial observations of contemporary critiques of capitalism in which emotional self-fulfilment is seen as jeopardized by the current economic, social, and political system and as requiring at least some form of collective basis for its full realization.

Finally, my personal interest and participation in the events of *Nuit Debout* helped me simultaneously to test and refine my initial assumption regarding the existence of a new political grammar (as a discourse justifying actor’s positions) based on the values of the inspired city (as an ensemble of values rooted in philosophical and intellectual work), operating either on its own or within compromises and arrangements with other values.

2.2.3 Engaging with the field

My interest in Nuit Debout and the events surrounding this movement dates from the beginning of the occupation of the Place de la République in March 2016. The different experiments with self-management and self-organizing aroused my interest in this movement, and I was lucky enough to be able to participate in several sessions as I was staying in Paris at the time. During a period of a week in April 2016, I participated in three sessions, primarily in the 'Commission Economie Politique', helped to install the tents, discussed, and listened to participant's talks on alternative currencies, tax heavens and the universal income. Beyond my interest in these topics, there was something about the general atmosphere that captivated my young self, famished for unrestrained human contact, freely expressed joy, freedom, and emotional intimacy with total strangers.

While these observations were informed by a critical approach of traditional ethnographic techniques, such as 'participant observation', it would be misleading to give an impression of structured field observation and rigorously planned interviews. On the contrary, the beginnings of this research project were characterized by an 'artistic' vagueness, a sense that something was going on, that I had to be a part of and that had to be observed, without any sense of rightful path. While types of roles typically range from total participant, participant as observer, observer as participant and total observant, my method of observation and first intentions to participate in Nuit Debout were somewhat related to all these attitudes, plus on that can be described as just 'being there'.

While this research was initially guided by personal enthusiasm and an unfocused, vague, and open approach which made me receptive to explore many types of data, as well as topics and directions, the risk here was to fall into an unstructured and unsystematic approach that would make any findings too personal, biased, and inapplicable to other research fields. My engagement with pragmatic sociology, provided me with a guide for systematic and reflexive analysis of values behind discourses and practices. Indeed, one of pragmatic sociology's foundational principles is the idea that the connection between the researcher and its research subject must be integrated in the analysis itself. Inspired by ethnomethodology's conception of reflexivity, pragmatic sociology does not see the researcher as having a relationship of exteriority with its subject, and instead invites him or her to explore these spontaneous feelings as an aspect that must

be studied (Lemieux, 2018, pp. 10–12). In other words, our own judgements and values are already an object of study in itself and should be considered seriously. Reflecting on my own situated understanding of the phenomena as a result of my position in history (cf 2.4.2) would play an important role in maintaining a reflexive position, simultaneously engaging and distancing oneself from the object of study

Even after leaving the city and regaining my home in Germany, the movement's massive use of internet and social media made it possible to observe the unfolding of events, thanks to the many voices, eyes and ears that reported the different activities (and most importantly, revealing their intentions, beliefs, critiques and hopes). At that time, Nuit Debout's focus on prefiguring new worlds started to guide and inform my historical analysis, leading me to identify several predominant themes and narratives, including the value placed on a sensitive and artistic self, collective creation, radical democracy, and anticapitalistic discourses. These observations enabled me to develop a first research direction, i.e. to focus on the historical convergence between the values of the inspired city and contemporary democratic and anticapitalistic aspirations. My preliminary observations further contributed to my understanding that there are certain forms of compromise, or at least temporary arrangements, between the Nietzschean grammar and democratic and socialist values that facilitate collective forms of engagement in the creation of alternative worlds. This first research direction thus sets out to challenge the prevailing distinction drawn between artistic and social critiques and artistic and democratic aspirations, focusing instead on how activist practices and discourses have been justified by actors by reference to a set of moral values (or political grammar) and investigating how this grammar has been constructed historically – thus following the path paved by pragmatic sociologists (Barthe et al., 2013).

2.3 Data collection and data analysis

2.3.1 From discourses to cities: disclosing values

Pragmatic sociology is a two-stage process that involves both the historical analysis of value formation and the study of how these values play a role in supporting actor's discourses. This thesis thus consists of two different types of analyses: a theoretical engagement with the intellectual theories that participating in the value construction process, and an engagement with

the empirical data produced by Nuit Debout. While I present my findings in separate sections, this process was undertaken conjointly as the findings from the field oriented my theoretical readings and as the latter served to help me abstract the categories of meaning mobilized by actors. This process of back-and-forth between intellectual pieces and participant's discourses is essential in forming grammars that reflect the actor's understanding and intentions, while illustrating the mutual understandability between discourses within intellectual traditions and contemporary movements. This mutual understandability is reflected in the inference of similar meanings from lived experiences and the articulation of this experience through similar objects, concepts, and values. A major part of the thesis is thus concerned with historical analysis of the ideas leading to the development of political grammars derived from Romanticism, while my engagement with the Nuit Debout movement serves both as an object of study for orienting and refining my analysis and as an illustration of the mobilization of these grammars within contemporary discourses. This is in line with pragmatic sociology's idea that "researchers should observe the present before turning to the past, rather than the contrary. But then, they should take another fresh look at the present with the past in mind, asking new questions" (Barthe et al., 2013, p. 182).

Even though the empirical analysis is presented after the historical part (cf. Chapter 5), the confrontation with participant's discourses was the starting point of the enquiry. I conducted a preliminary analysis of 33 second-hand interviews and debates with leaders such as Ruffin, intellectual figures engaged with the movement such as Jacques Rancière and David Graeber, as well as participants from different horizons (teachers, artists, unionists, and political activists), that were recorded by Radio Nuit Debout during the first months of the movement. Pragmatic sociology being concerned with how actors navigate the social world in which conflicting orders of worth (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991) present themselves, recorded interviews provided a setting for observing how actors defended their approach to social change, their actions at Nuit Debout, their beliefs in a better world, against material conditions and against contradictory representations. For example, what values, what visions of the higher good did actors mobilize when declaring that the old world was coming to an end? How did they try to convince others (and themselves) that a new world was already here, while the old world was materially still present outside and even within the Place de la République?

This relates to a notion central in pragmatic sociology, which is the notion of *test* (Lemieux, 2018, pp. 38–41) (which will be further elaborated when discussing the grammatical analysis of actions in 2.3.3). Pragmatic sociology considers the social world as unstable, always in the making

and thus inherently fragile. Observing the moments of tests involve analysing how actors succeed in correctly justifying their positions and worldviews or fail in doing so. While Nuit Debout can be seen as a test in itself, as each action and discourse challenges power and creates situations of conflict in the name of other values, the analysis of interviews with participants from different political backgrounds provided insights in the 'micro-tests' (Lemieux, 2018, p. 41), a look into the moments of justification where contradictory visions of social change are made visible.

When analysing these interviews, I was simultaneously confronted with the diversity of participant's political backgrounds and perspectives, and with the originality of a dominant justification that mobilized aesthetic categories to describe a political experience, thus helping me to focus my analysis on the latter. This informed the historical part of my work, exploring the cities -as ensemble of values- behind different narratives expressed within the interviews. Before moving forward, a more detailed explanation of other pragmatic sociology's concepts seems necessary. Accordingly, the next section first describes two useful concepts derived from ethnomethodology²⁴ that can help us understand how intellectual references and political theories constitute a basis of justification for actors in navigating the social world: the concept of *cities* as models of different forms of value and worth, and the concept of political *grammars*, as a set of discourses mobilized by actors to justify their actions. The sociologist's role in dissecting these influences is thus to trace instances of argumentation that are based on references to values and orders of particular cities (or to and among several cities) and which are articulated according to a specific corpus of prescriptive rules resembling that of a grammar that can be mobilized in the social world to solve conflicts and disputes (Blokker, 2011).

The 'city' (*la cité*) represents a model of greatness. This concept is based on the recognition that for any individual to achieve a status of recognition in the world they need to appeal to higher principles and commonly accepted values (Dosse, 1998, p. 378). Created within theoretical texts, cities are built upon different set of principles of political philosophy based on different assumptions about human nature (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991) and a plurality of modes of apprehending reality aimed at establishing a phenomenology of the world in which we live (Frère,

²⁴ While pragmatic sociology has a considerable source of influences, ethnomethodology remains fundamental to understand its relationship between past and present. Indeed, researchers should not take account of any element external without it being called for within the action that is being analyzed. In other words, actors themselves have to call for the historical analysis, have to refer to it with a degree and clarity that is up to the researcher to determine and interpret.

2009, p. 15). Embracing moral pluralism, pragmatic sociology recognizes competing worldviews based on competing and conflicting orders of worth. Within each of these orders of value and worth, different objects and subjects are perceived differently according to their participation and contribution to the sovereign good of that particular city (the different moral perspectives associated with each city are presented in Table 1.) Within this scheme, the ‘inspired city’ justifies relationships based on inspiration and creativity, the ‘civic city’ focuses on establishing collective organizations, and the ‘industrial city’ justifies itself by referring to what it posits as the higher principles of productivity and performance. These different forms of higher good support the mobilization of correspondingly different ‘objects’ – a term used here in the sense of practices, people and even emotional states rather than objects in the sense of material belongings – as well as different degrees of relative importance attached to different subjects according to their ability to contribute to forms of common good. Given that these models of greatness all compete and conflict with each other and grant different values, any object or subject can both be ‘grand’ in one world and ‘small’ in another (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, p. 164). In the inspired city based on Saint Augustine’s *The City of God*, for example, creative and inspired subjects such as artists who are considered grand or worthy. In the industrial city based on the works of Henri de Saint-Simon, however, greatness is based on the allegedly superior principle of productivity, with the implication that creative and inspired subjects are regarded as “small” people in that they do not contribute effectively to the construction of a regulated and predictable system. Within this Saint-Simonian system, it is the figure of the ‘expert’ who embodies the moral values of efficiency and rationality. (There are other orders of worth such as the ‘domestic city’, which values respect for traditions, and the ‘merchant city’ whose higher order of worth is that of competition for valuable goods. However, these other models do not seem relevant to this analysis of prefigurative politics and the Nuit Debout movement.)

As an approach that sees organizations as sites of compromise between different rationalities, pragmatic sociology is thus useful for identifying competing orders of worth within organizations and how these divergences lead not only to internal conflicts but also to the possibility of different forms of negotiation (Jagd, 2011). Here, for example, summarizing the inspired, civic and industrial orders of worth offers a first clue as to how forms of organizing justified by the inspired city's higher principle of *inspiration* might be opposed to any form of stability and repetition and procedures for rational organization, focusing instead on modes of organizing that take root in the individual body, its affects, emotional attachments, relations of authenticity and states of

inspiration produced through the experience of occupying. Similarly, modes of organizing based on the higher good of forming *collective* bodies are likely to support representative politics and criticize direct action for being autonomous and for disrupting the constitution of a collective force. Table 1 summarizes my first grid of analysis for identifying the different cities at play in the discourses of the participants at Nuit Debout.

While ‘cities’ are built upon theoretical texts and political philosophies, ‘grammars’ are discourses mobilized in the social world, thus approximating to the concept of a political culture (Pereira, 2010, p. 15). As such, grammars can evolve in response to contemporary priorities and enter into agreements through local arrangements or other more stable forms of compromise. In the case of longer-lasting arrangements, as I shall argue, this creates a new grammar (described in Figure 1). For example, the Republican grammar is derived from the civic city insofar as it is focused on establishing collective organizations and advancing their interests; but if this higher principle finds a stable form of arrangement with another principle, such as relations of passion and inspiration of the inspired city, it will thereby create a new grammar based on this compromise. The concept of ‘grammar’ is used in the literature to analyze evolutions within the discourse of actors in particular fields, and especially the formation of novel discourses based on compromises between grammars and even the emergence of new cities, such as the ‘project city’ or the ‘ecological city’. In this sense, the concept of ‘grammar’ can be mobilized to analyze how discourses from participants traditionally considered to be in opposing spheres – or at least from different political, sociological and cultural families – might come to share common values with their roots in shared higher principles (De Bouver, 2016).

	Inspired city	Civic city	Industrial city
Political philosophy	St Augustine	Jean-Jacques Rousseau	Saint-Simon
Sovereign good	Overflowing inspiration, creativity	The primacy of collective bodies	Efficiency, performance, and productivity
Grand	Mysterious, wondrous, creative: the artist	Bringing together and representing the collective	Rationalizing, planning for the organization of the future: the expert
Dignity	Aspiration to create	Defending civic rights, democratic political aspirations	Work
Small	Stability, repetition, predictability	Undemocratic behavior, individual concerns	The inefficient, unproductive, inactive, unemployed, people with disabilities
Objects	Spirit, body	Institutions that stabilize collective bodies	Procedures and plans for organizing production rationally
Evidence	Intuition	Law transposes the collective will	Science, measurability, statistics
Natural relations between beings	Relations of creativity and authenticity	Coming together in collective action, debating	Hierarchy based on rational planning and scientific knowledge, forming a predictable process
Decline	End of the dream	Division, singularities, particularities	Loss of human dignity

Table 1: Own illustration based on Boltanski and Thévenot (1991)

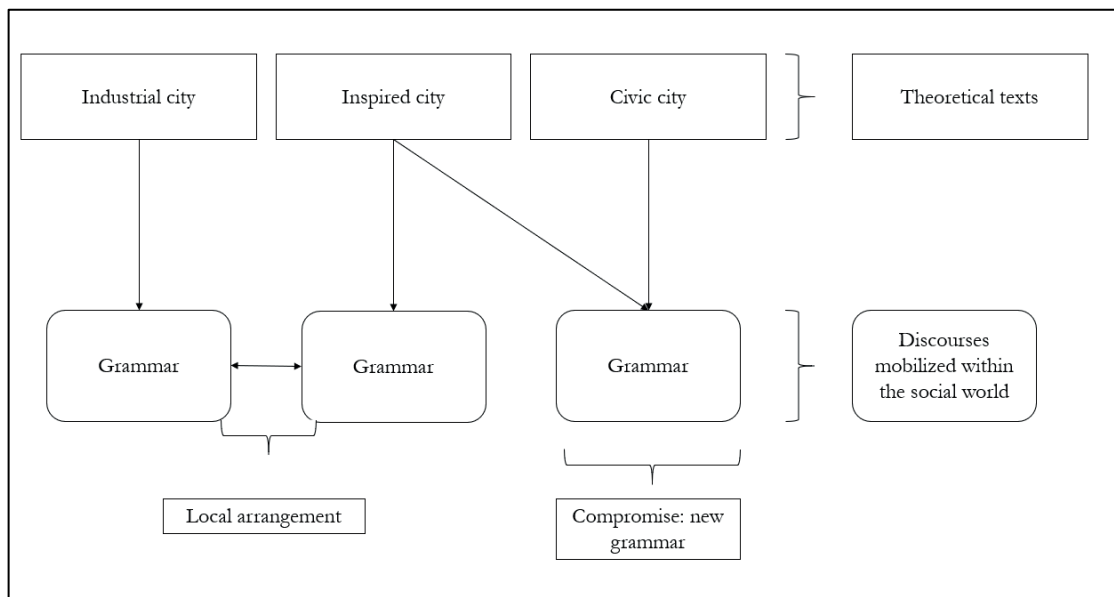


Figure 1: Forms of arrangements between grammars

I used the various orders of worth within the three different cities (inspired, industrial and civic) to analyze participants' hierarchies of values (Cloutier & Langley, 2007), paying attention to common preconceptions and forms of judgement and analyzing the qualitative distinctions and contrasts made in the language used by the participants. The interview transcripts were analyzed using the principle of abductive inference, which assumes a dynamic relationship between empirical and conceptual realms of research rather than viewing these as deriving one from the other (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In this first round of coding, I focused on identifying the different cities at play in the discourse of the actors at Nuit Debout through systematic analysis of orders of worth and objects at play. In pragmatic sociology, objects do not necessarily refer to material objects. For instance, participants mobilizing the order of worth of the inspired city referred to the body and its affects as a means of adding importance to their statements, leading to the emergence of categories such as 'imagination as a battlefield', 'transforming the world through creation' and 'aspiration to collective creation'. By contrast, participants mobilizing the order of worth of the industrial city would justify their statements through objects such as procedures and organized systems, while those mobilizing the order of worth of the civic city would refer to objects such as "democratic procedures" and "representatives". This led me to the conclusion that a dominant political grammar mobilized by participants in the Nuit Debout movement was based on artistic values for justifying political actions. I also observed forms of compromise among grammars

supporting democratic and political participation, as well as a grammar against economic exploitation. My analysis was further informed by previous literature on activist grammars of the far left (Pereira, 2010).

2.3.2 Reconstructing grammars: a historical process

Individuals internalize different cities and their values through historical processes of institutionalization and socialization whereby identical meanings are shared and attributed to certain sets of practices. In this way what once was only an intellectual idealization progressively gives new meaning to former practices and allows for the creation of new practices (Taylor, 2003, p. 311). A pragmatic sociology perspective allows us to consider the intellectual and theoretical references that have served as guides for influencing activists' practices. Reconstructing grammars based on participants' actions and intellectual references allows us to see how these actions may follow a similar rulebook, even if the participants themselves may never have read the intellectual works from which these practices originated (Pereira, 2009b, p. 26).

The first round of analysis previously described was the starting point of the genealogical part of the enquiry, whereby the researcher tries to reconstruct how such values became mobilized within participant's discourses, thus becoming a grammar. Through careful readings of intellectual, philosophical, and political works, I reconstructed how political grammars have been mobilized within the realm of artistic creation, and how these were extended to the realm of politics. Associating such readings with previous studies on the subject provided me with an understanding of the evolution of the inspired city since Saint Augustine's major work of the early fifth century, *The City of God*. On this basis, I was able to reconstruct a Romantic grammar at work in utopian and prefigurative practices by examining the relations between aesthetics, subjectivity, and leftist political ideals engaging primarily with French intellectual theory. France has a long tradition of aesthetic politics that can be traced back to Victor Hugo's romantic poetry as formative of a political and ethical position (Buchanan, 1999).

I used these preliminary categories of meaning to inform the genealogy presented in Chapter 3, interrogating how these preconceptions represent the fruit of particular historic processes and how actors' strategies at ND were informed by a common world of references inherited from previous philosophical, intellectual, and political works. Incrementally making sense of the data,

I engaged in a back-and-forth process between multiple readings of the interview material and the literature on Romantic and post-Romantic artistic and political movements, identifying similar patterns and common understandings that could explain the meaning of categories in the empirical data, such as how themes of imagination and self-creation have progressively become intertwined with political aspirations and radical left-wing tactics. At this stage however, the Romantic grammar constitutes a more or less unified set of rules derived from Romanticism, with imagination as a higher and potentially transformative force, as well the mobilization of inner resources such as creativity and experimentation to counteract the impoverishment of human experienced caused by modernization and capitalism. It was thus necessary to go back to the empirical data and look at how this heritage is de facto mobilized by participants.

2.3.3 Grammars at play: the notion of tests

After the first round of identifying the main cities (values) in participant's discourses (cf. 2.3.1), and tracing their historical construction (2.3.2), the next step was to come back to participant's words and gests to reconstruct how they mobilized these resources inherited from historical traditions. Or, in more concrete terms, how and what values and object of the inspired city are used to justify prefigurative practices.

In this round, while also going back to the interviews, I extended my analysis to other sources of data, focusing not only on actor's discourses but also on organizational practices and on symbolic and aesthetic practices. These include artistic and non-artistic forms of performance understood as representations and models of another reality (Fischer-Lichte, 2019) used as part of a collective world-making strategy, as well as smaller group projects in which the collective can nurture its identity through performance and express its commitment to and sympathy for shared moral values and goals. I decided to focus on material in which the movement talked about itself as a collective entity (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015), thus privileging the main channels through which Nuit Debout created representations of common values through discussions and debates, i.e. *Gazette Debout*, *Radio Debout* and *TV Debout*. This included 99 articles from *Gazette Debout*, the 33 audio interviews from *Radio Debout*, and 2 video interviews from *TV Debout*. In total, 35 interviews were transcribed from *Radio Debout* and *TV Debout*, forming a total of 245 pages. These interviews were particularly useful for investigating forms of local agreements, compromises, and conflicts within and among different grammars since they provided a setting

of discussion in actors supported or refuted each other's judgements. Material was also collected from the movement's major organs, such as commissions, briefs and statements describing their actions in the field and posted on their Facebook pages and websites, in addition to press clippings and graphic Tumblr pages. Artistic creations in the forms of paintings, collages, videos, and photographs were also analysed. Data was collected from April 2016 to November 2018, though the majority of data was produced during the first six months of *Nuit Debout*, since interest and participation in the different Commissions gradually dwindled during and after the summer of 2016. Data was gathered using a computer-based tool, in this case the qualitative data analysis tool NVivo, to help with the data collection and with the coding of narrative text and documentary evidence.

The plural nature of the data collected (from pictorial, to textual, audio and video) integrates a wide range of perspectives (even though this has its limitations, as explained below). The corpus was selected for its ability to answer the research's question regarding the forms of justification mobilized within aesthetic, utopian and symbolic prefigurative practices. This corpus is not standardized, not statistically representative, non-exhaustive, nor homogeneous. The heterogeneity of the data, far from being an obstacle, can be considered as a resource for generating and testing the validity of an analytical framework that will be built progressively from the systematic confrontation of cases and whose final ambition will be to be able to resist the deformation implied by any additional case (Lemieux, 2018, pp. 70–71). In other words, since the actors are involved in different cases and gestures, the researcher must confront the fact that his or her framework of analysis will be called into question by a new case. The data collected does not seek to produce an objective and extensive representation of the movement and of its actions, instead focusing on internal justification. The focus here is to observe the value system supporting and justifying their positions on social change, and are they challenged by other actors with competing value systems. Data was collected and analysed in Nvivo until new data did not produce any novel insights regarding the categories of *through at play*, in this case the mobilization of the Romantic grammar and its sub-grammars, and their relations with other grammars.

The analyse of grammars consisted of the following steps, relying on a grounded theory building process characteristic of inductive methods (Eisenhardt et al., 2016, p. 1114). Although these are here explained in a linear fashion, the thought process is often a jumpy, messy, unruly process characteristic of most creative activities. However, it involved abstracting from concrete

pieces of data and a back-and-forth between the empirical data and intellectual pieces by:

1. Coding small patterns of data to determine the dominant grammars at play in participant's discourses. Here, Boltanski and Thévenot's guide to the cities, as summarized in Table 2, guided my analysis and identification of objects - which can be institutions (political parties, artist collectives, unions), body parts (the heart), material objects (flags, paint, pots and pans) abstract concepts (rationality, the soul), emotions (joy, anger, exaltation, bliss, solidarity)/ identifying subjects (union representatives, writers, friends, comrades)/ and visions of the higher good (state of creativity, fostering democratic rights, defending class interests). This gave me an understanding of how participants mobilize different grammars to engage with different forms of political action at Nuit Debout (aesthetic practices, demonstrations, occupations etc...). My coding for the republican and socialist grammar was influenced by previous literature on the topic (Pereira, 2010). These smaller patterns of data were coding and regrouped into larger ensembles constituting the three main grammars.
2. Producing memos on broader patterns of meaning to generate insights on the differences between samples to identify relationships between and within grammars, paying attention to how objects / subjects and higher values are mobilized against each other. This second round of coding provided me with an understanding of the grammars entered in conflict or compromise with each other. For example, a participant that would state the importance of direction and concrete steps to victory would be contradicted by another participant that would defend a free-flowing and creative approach. These types of conflict evidenced tensions between Republican and Romantic grammars. Moreover, this second round allowed me to distinguish the differences between sub-grammars of the Romantic, that while sharing the same core values of the inspired city, mobilized different references, and engaged in different actions in the name of other values. I particularly paid attention to discrepancies regarding objects and emotions that refer to the same higher value. This allowed me to distinguish between a set of grammars under the Romantic umbrella, one justifying aesthetic utopian practices, others disruptive and critical ones, and a third set mobilizing Romantic values of poetic existence and civic values of collective formation in non-aesthetic activities.

Then, I went back and forth between intellectual and philosophical works and actors' discourses to form the sub-ensemble of the Nietzschean and Alternative grammars, and

writing the historical constitution of these values. This back-and-forth motivated a new historical enquiry and formed the basis of Chapter 4.

3. Engaging in a more abstract round of analysis to interlink my framework on the Romantic imagination with prefigurative politics, by comparing notes on discourses around imagination, creativity and aesthetics, and theoretical readings.

2.3.4 Strengths and limitations

Pragmatic sociology provided the necessary framework to connect macro and micro levels, understanding how history leaves us with resources and constraints, while considering participant's values and discourses as a starting point. If the concept of the cities was a theoretical framework that guided the exploration of the data in the first round of analysis (cf 2.3.1), as described in the following sections, patterns in the data motivated my historical exploration (as an example, romanticism became an object of interest only after the analysis of interviews, and the multiple references to imagination and creativity as productive and transformational forces). Furthermore, grammars and their interactions (2.3.3) were not only developed from participant's own argumentations and justifications observed within situations of debate or conflict, but in turn, they motivated further historical explorations to contextualize different sub-grammars. Namely, the co-existence of non-aesthetic practices and humanistic concerns with romantic values led me to rethink the homogeneous nature of the Romantic grammar, distinguishing sub-categories with distinct historical references. More importantly, the past always appears and speaks different in the present, and the goal is not to reveal a continuity between ideas and discourses, but to reveal the values that guide actions and were constructed partially by intellectual and theoretical ideas.

Nonetheless, this analysis carries several limitations. For example, I limited my analysis to Nuit Debout at the Place de la République in Paris because this was the epicenter of the movement and had the largest participation. As a result, this dissertation does not address variations of Nuit Debout that might have occurred in similar movements conducted in other major cities in France and other European countries. However, the Place de la République was without doubt the center of the movement and constituted the best opportunity for collecting interesting and relevant data

on this issue. In addition, despite undertaking three visits to the field in April 2016, a further limitation was that much of the data was collected online. Such second-hand data is nonetheless valuable in the sense that it does not impose any predefined categories of meaning, thus generating rich data and helping to uncover unexpected evidence (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Second-hand interviews also make for complete and detailed audio transcripts without the need for a mechanistic device that might intimidate the interviewer, thus ensuring the quality of the data collected.

Another major limitation comes from the fact that, while the nature of the data collected is appropriate in that it gives a feeling and sense of the Romantic grammar, its nature might marginalize other grammars. Indeed, online, audio, pictural and visual data was mostly used as a form of expression and activism by the creative and intellectual class. While this social group constituted an important part of the movement's activists, there were other forms of actions and discourses that were not developed in the same forums. Thus, a different analysis could have focused on interviewing participants and activists in demonstrations or observing the unions' meetings at the *Bourse du Travail* and have a better understanding of how the Republican and Socialist grammar justified their actions in this kind of movement. However, as my study focused on utopian, symbolic and aesthetic forms of protest, the type of data collected was conducive to observing how they were supported by the Romantic grammar, and what types of actions were carried in the square.

Furthermore, pragmatic sociology's focus on history as a resource excluded a more ethnographic approach that could have been useful to inform how participants came across such resources. A biographical enquiry into the trajectories of the interviewees or other participants in the movement could have brought into light why some resources became mobilized instead of others (career paths, personal encounters, artistic activity on the side...). Due to time constraints, it was not possible to carry this study.

2.4 Questions of Philosophy of Science

Pragmatic sociology aims to highlight non-objective ways of being in the world that are usually ignored or taken for granted by other social sciences, such as emotional attachments and intimate

relationships between things and people. This sociological approach is thus well equipped for discovering ways of being in the world that do not strictly obey or defer to personal interests, instrumental relation, and social norms. At its core, pragmatic sociology is concerned with what is valued by different individuals and groups, i.e. the alignment of our inner morals, and with how the world is accordingly a place of permanent conflict between different moral orders. This further implies that there is a competition for truth in the sense that truth, rather than being seen as fixed once and for all, is the product of compromises and conflicts between different perspectives resulting from the experience of being in the world, i.e. an inherently *interpretative* experience. This makes pragmatic sociology an appropriate method for conducting research within to a hermeneutical paradigm.

2.4.1 The philosophy of science behind pragmatic sociology: the hermeneutic roots of sociology

The philosophical tradition of hermeneutics emerged in opposition to Cartesian rationalist epistemology that extolled rational control over the self, the individual pursuit of knowledge and an orientation to quantitative and positivist methods. Against this tradition, scholars such as Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) brought back the *Geisteswissenschaftler*, or ‘sciences of mind’, i.e. disciplines that interpret the expression of our inner lives, whether these be historical actions, codified laws, artistic works or literature (Coppin & Nelson, 2017, p. 69). Interpreting human actions not simply as the outcomes of conscious rational thinking but as the products of intense inner processes, the fruit of lived experiences and social constructions, requires increased attention to context when interpreting human discourse, including becoming intimate with authors and the worlds that shape their words. The act of interpreting language and discourse in general depends on the researcher’s own process of interpretation and as such is dependent on one’s lived experiences, historical and social constructions, as well as “an element of intuition” and “irrationality” that occurs when one is confronted with simultaneously unknown but strangely familiar items of data (Coppin & Nelson, 2017, p. 68). Albeit “interpretation is an Art” (Schleiermacher, 1985, p. 76), this does not mean that it is a process that cannot be explained as scientific endeavour. Indeed, this process should not remain unexplained and can be reconstructed and known by others (Ricoeur, 1998).

While some have claimed that social sciences have experienced a ‘hermeneutic turn’ in the

sense that these disciplines have become reflexive about the interpretative and co-constructive nature of human knowledge, at their core all social sciences are hermeneutical particularly those based on qualitative methods (Vultur, 2017). Indeed, as the science of understanding, hermeneutics is concerned with a double interpretation paradigm, i.e. the task of interpreting others' interpretations, in contrast to quantitative methods that only require a single interpretation from the researcher. However, while most social sciences are hermeneutical in the most basic sense, hermeneutics provide a particularly insightful philosophy of science for a study such as this which is concerned with how actors justify their decisions based on a higher purpose. For Charles Taylor, one of the modern founders of this tradition, humans are inherently self-interpretive beings whose interpretations are derived from the purposes humans give themselves and that guide their actions and efforts (Mckenzie-gonzalez, 2015). Any act of thinking, feeling or judgement is deeply motivated by the idea that certain actions, certain ways of life or emotions are incomparably superior to others that might be easier to achieve (Taylor, 1998, p. 42). For example, the overused expression of "being rational" expresses nothing more than the love for rational order above all other things such as leading a rich emotional life, the pursuit of traditions, or equality among men and women.

Hermeneutics concerns itself with the explication of such implied purposes and moral grounds. This constitutes a challenge in modern times when moral beliefs underpinning human actions are more implicit than ever and are dismissed by a form of reductionist naturalism (Taylor, 1998, p. 28). Implicit as they may be, however, these moral grounds nonetheless appear clearly in the way agents make qualitative, normative distinctions operating at the level of language, even when these exist in a non-articulated, tacit background. Visions of different goods are expressed differently not only through language but also in acts, symbols and visual representations (Taylor, 1998, p. 156). These moral grounds are plural since people value different things and can thus enter into conflict with conflicting opinions. This requires taking agents seriously, including taking their explanations into account when interpreting their discourses.

From this it is clear that hermeneutics and pragmatic sociology share many communalities. Both start from the assumption that humans are fundamentally moral and ethical beings who justify their actions on the basis of principles that derive their importance from a series of higher goods and who make these qualitative distinctions apparent in the language they use. Hermeneutics and pragmatic sociology both take the motivations of agents seriously and seek to understand the source of this motivation in morals and judgements. In this regard, Luc Boltanski

has expressed he is in debt to Ricoeur's hermeneutics and how he found in his work an alternative interpretation to Bourdieu's sociology of domination. This alternative interpretation is not suspicious of actors' judgements but rather assumes that people have an understanding of their own motivation even if the intellectual roots of the principles by which they seek to justify their decisions and actions remain inexplicit (Vultur, 2017, p. 163). More importantly, both approaches focus on how mythological, philosophical, and intellectual accounts constitute 'meta-narratives' that affect actors by legitimizing or condoning certain practices, values, and actions. Both approaches are influenced by Hans-Georg Gadamer's legacy of understanding the present as being open to the past and of seeking to understand how bridges from the past to the present are created by studying the continuity and transformation of historic processes. While Charles Taylor articulates such moral justification in a metanarrative of the social imaginary, i.e. as a set of mythical and theoretical representations that provide us with an understanding that makes common practices possible (C. Taylor, 2002), Boltanski and Thévenot use the term "grammar" to refer to a corpus of rules that constitute a frame of reference from which to judge the value of an experience, comprising resources such as intellectual and philosophical works inherited from the past. In contrast to Taylor's concept of the social imaginary, pragmatic sociology and the notion of 'grammar' constitute a method whereby the questions raised by hermeneutics can be answered in a systematic way by qualitatively comparing language derived from major philosophical positions. Pragmatic sociology thus provides a framework of analysis for scholars interested in how deep philosophical assumptions play an important role in everyday life.

In this thesis, the relationship between hermeneutics and pragmatic sociology is understood as one between ontology and methods. On the one hand, hermeneutics provides pragmatic sociology with an ontology, since for hermeneutics interpretation is more than a methodology: it is the true nature of our human experience, as encapsulated by Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* (Vultur, 2017, p. 31). For Heidegger, the process of interpreting cultural artefacts of text is only a particular form of hermeneutics, since all human experience is fundamentally hermeneutical: 'Being' is interpretation in the world, not separated from it, and interpretation is thus ontology. In hermeneutics, reality is the result of our collective processes of interpretation: to be in the world is to interpret this complex reality, and the sum of our interpretation process constitutes this world (Vultur, 2017, p. 200). Hermeneutic ontology thus gives primacy to shared interpretation processes and intersubjective significations as being constitutive of social reality by creating a common world of references, forming a distributed ontology that neutralizes the duality between

holism and individualism.

Pragmatic sociology, meanwhile, provides a methodology for engaging with the question of open meaning that stems from the “hermeneutic contradiction” (Blokker & Brighenti, 2011), i.e. the tensions arising from the fact that human institutions can never fully encapsulate the meaning of human experience and that this meaning is permanently open and subject to questioning and critique. This is particularly relevant for a thesis concerned with the crisis of representative politics and democracy. Pragmatic sociology enables me to engage with social and democratic movements as political communities constructed on the basis of internally justified orders of worth and whose legitimacy can always be challenged by competing orders. These democratic movements seek to undermine other regimes, not only by offering competing rationalities and orders of worth with which to view the world but also by revealing the contingency of any dominant order. In short, this method enable us to conceive of democracy not only in the form of participation in political and representative institutions but also as the activity of challenging instituted meaning and providing a radical critique that opens up new possible ways of interpreting the world (Blokker & Brighenti, 2011). This method thus seems particularly apt for studying how democratic and social movements that seek alternative modes of being use specific orders of worth to justify their actions, to constitute a collective identity and to undermine the dominant order by challenging the contingency of its worth, thus bringing forward new possible interpretations.

2.4.2 Questions of validity in hermeneutics

Considering interpretation not only as method but as a way of being in the world raises questions regarding the validity of the research moment, which constitutes a particular hermeneutic process in which the interpretation process is itself embedded in previously constructed significations. In other words, my consciousness of history is consciousness *within* history, something that Gadamer refers to as *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* (Grondin, 1999, p. 38). In this sense, both researchers and participants obey the same mechanisms of justification based on philosophical principles that have been internalized through historical processes.

While it is impossible for the researcher to be ‘outside of history’ and dismiss the historical construction process altogether, hermeneutics, like most social sciences, welcomes the

researcher's reflexivity rather than seeking to attain neutrality. Instead of searching for a neutral and universal interpretation, the researcher should simultaneously confront their own pre-existing opinions about the significations of the data, questioning the legitimacy, origins and validity of their own interpretation (Gadamer, 1996, p. 288). Interpretation happens in this moment when one confronts one's own opinion with the opinions expressed within a text, not in order to dismiss these opinions but to open oneself to other possible meanings. The final aim is not neutrality but receptivity, i.e. an openness that comes from questioning and confronting the text with one's own pre-formed significations (Gadamer, 1996, p. 290). Refuting the possibility of "neutralism" in the sense of a belief that one can ever judge outside of any moral values (McKenzie-Gonzalez et al., 2015, p. 24), hermeneutics embraces moral pluralism and a plurality of perspectives, recognizing that "it is a form of self-delusion to think that we do not speak from a moral orientation which we take to be right" (Charles Taylor, quoted in Calhoun, 1991, p. 236). Achieving a better understanding of the social and cultural phenomenon at hand thus begins with a form of self-understanding and reflexivity on the part of the researcher regarding our own moral positions (Taylor, 1985, p. 129), including recognizing one's prejudices as the result of being within history (Gadamer, 1996, p. 290).

My understanding of the social phenomenon of ND being limited by historically constructed significations, it was necessary to examine pre-formed opinions that conditioned my enthusiastic reception of Nuit Debout, the positive nature of its struggles and distaste for any attempt of institutionalize what I perceived as a free, beautiful expression of popular sovereignty and of another possible way. With further readings, I came to the understanding that my opinions were constructed through a long history of conflict between the creative, intellectual, artistic class and capitalism. This explained my initial enthusiasm for certain forms of social experimentation, justified both by my pre-conceived values of radical democracy and autonomy as well as those of creativity and inspiration.

Confronting these prejudices allowed me to see how my values were reflected in such discourses, thus putting into question the validity of my initial judgement²⁵ and creating new meaning from my interpretation. Self-reflecting on my position both as a researcher and as a literary, creative individual was providential to distance myself from unexamined ideas regarding

²⁵ 'Validity' here does not denote that a judgement is 'right' but that it supports actors' ultimate objectives of changing power relations.

imagination as a providential force, bureaucracy as the culprit of all evils and the benefits of communal ties that bring back greener (past)ures. A very practical and concrete consequence, was the realization that I had taken perhaps too literally the Schopenhauerian theory on the importance of intuition as an artistic and superior mode of knowing the world (Bowie, 2003, p. 266). For while I continue to support the idea that researchers in social sciences are akin to artists insofar as their cognitive attempts to know the world are inseparable from a creative act (Bayart, 2013), I also fully agree with Bayart's perspective that this art is akin to skilful craftsmanship in which inspiration and creativity, critical in the first phases of research, subsequently need to be matched with the application of rigor, method and systems, particularly in the validation of hypotheses.

However, engaging with personal feelings of enthusiasm, and the sense that "something is going on here", was critical to uncover part of the specificities of the movement. I expected the movement to actualize in some way aspirations for radical democracy, yet I was also confused and attracted to something else that took an unknown form and shape. My focus on social enterprises and their possibilities of concrete utopia was override by what presented itself as a more radical and transformational alternative : a movement that questioned not only our political system, but our collective production of meaning as a society through language, texts, images and music.

In summary, acknowledging a hermeneutical paradigm thus requires consciousness of one's being in history while at the same time recognizing one's capacity and responsibility for the creation of shared significations that are conducive to one particular form of society rather than another.

3 THE ROMANTIC HERITAGE:

ALL POWER TO THE IMAGINATION

*L'art, expression de la Société, exprime, dans son essor le plus élevé, les tendances sociales les plus avancées; il est précurseur et révélateur. Or, pour savoir si l'art remplit dignement son rôle d'initiateur, si l'artiste est bien à l'avant-garde, il est nécessaire de savoir où va l'Humanité, quelle est la destinée de l'Espèce.*²⁶

(Gabriel-Désiré Laverdant quoted by Weisgerber, 1986, p. 19)

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to emphasize the influence of Romanticism in the historical construction of political grammars that assign paramount value to the inner world and thus regard the imagination as a tool capable of constructing an alternative social order to industrial modernity. Engaging with Romanticism as an intellectual tradition unveils the construction of values such as opposition to industrialization, rejection of individualism, and concerns with environmental damage, as well as strategies based on the imagination as a mode of resistance and creation. In delineating this construction of values, this thesis engages with intellectual sources for understanding prefigurative politics aside from anarchism.

This genealogy is not intended as an exhaustive presentation of all theories and authors related to the matter. Rather the rationale for this line of enquiry lies in my problematization of today's

²⁶ “Art, the expression of society, manifests, in its highest soaring, the most advanced social tendencies: it is the forerunner and the revealer. Therefore, to know whether art worthily fulfils its proper mission as initiator, whether the artist is truly of the avant-garde, one must know where Humanity is going, what the destiny of the human race is.” (Translated by Gerald Ritzgerald in Poggioli, 1968, p. 9)

prefigurative movements²⁷ and concomitant exploration of values and ideas from the past that have been mobilized within contemporary activist grammars. My approach is novel in the sense that I consider Romanticism through the prism of “orders of worth” as applied in pragmatic sociology (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991). Taking this perspective, I go beyond the definition of Romanticism as an artistic movement offering a novel aesthetic vision and look instead at Romanticism as a worldview²⁸ and a cultural movement based on a coherent system of values guided by a form of higher good, i.e. the quest for a reconnection with a state of grace without any need for validation by an external authority. I thus see Romanticism as a key moment in the formation of the inspired city. This approach leads to three contributions.

First, this chapter looks at how Romanticism brought about an important shift, moving from a vision of the state of grace as the reflection of a divine presence to a non-transcendental notion of inspiration and imagination. According to Boltanski and Thévenot (1991), these values of artistry, grace and inspiration are rooted in Saint Augustine’s political philosophy as expressed in *The City of God*. While it is undeniable that Saint Augustine revolutionized the vocabulary of inner life, however, his writings do not include certain themes that are at the core of ‘inspired’ greatness, such as an axiological appreciation for ‘creative pursuits’, or the almost religious veneration of the powers of the imagination, of poets and artists and the unconscious, and indeed of everything dark and mysterious (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, p. 201). To account for this gap, this chapter points out that whereas St. Augustine saw the state of grace as a connection with the divine principle, the Romantics shifted the focus to an inner and personal divinity: the imagination. Consequently, this movement assigned an axiological value to objects and figures of artistic creation, making the artist and creator who enters into a relationship with their own imagination and creativity the ultimate figure of greatness.

Second, the prism of pragmatic sociology makes it possible to see Romanticism as a movement carrying out a critique of the values of the industrial city that became the fundamental principles behind social organization from the 19th century onwards, conditioning human

²⁷ In the introduction to his work of 1989, *The Era of the Individual: A Contribution to the History of Subjectivity*, Alain Renaut developed the idea of two modalities of writing the history of philosophy, distinguishing between the “historian” mode of writing history, which presents only an esthetic concern for past theories, and a history of ideas that values its origins in the problematization of the present and that claims an active role in creatively fashioning a novel ‘history’ in light of the identified problems (Renaut, 1989, p. 10).

²⁸ This definition supports a long periodization for Romanticism, ignoring the usual temporal division in order to include pre- and post-Romantic sources and references from before 1830 and after 1850.

activities and social relations. This chapter thus emphasizes how an ecumenical body of ideas aspiring to return to pre-capitalist values such as communitarian living and reconciliation with nature in the name of a sensitive, personal and poetic self constructed a cultural movement against the spirit of capitalism and the rationalization of everyday life. Romanticism focussed either on a return to a pre-capitalist time or invested in a project of forging an alternative civilization to that of industrial and capitalist society, building other visions for a collective future. More specifically, Romanticism in its revolutionary form constitutes an alternative project to industrial capitalism, seeking a renewed relationship between the self and the world through more democratic and egalitarian modes of organization built on emotional affinities and collective solidarities.

Third and finally, this chapter seeks to understand how Romanticism mobilized the resources of the inspired city in order to bring about this alternative civilization, or in other words how imagination and creativity came to be drawn upon as resources for forming other futures. In this projected future, artistic figures embodying principles and values of unleashed imagination and unrepressed creativity were viewed as the front runners or avant-garde capable of actualizing such visions in their work. This chapter reveals how the creative imagination, far from being only an aesthetic theory separate from external reality and political life, became at once the core value and the model for constituting alternative political futures. I will describe three properties of the Romantic imagination that construct imagination as a political tool capable of producing meanings, of bringing another future into the present, and of forming communities from collectively shared meanings. In other words, I show how the Romantic conception of imagination provided a model for materializing alternatives, creating other values and establishing secular, non-transcendent forms of sovereignty built upon artistic principles of inner creativity. The Romantic defense of a culturally constructed and non-deterministic worldview constitutes the bedrock for political modes of action that hold the mind's generative power and the imagination's capacity for disruption as the greatest of weapons. More than just an aesthetic movement, Romanticism established values and modes of struggle that lie at the core of modernity's defense of individual subjectivity, and which remain highly relevant in late modernity.

This chapter starts by elucidating Saint Augustine's role in originating the modern conception of the 'self', thus forming the bedrock for the inspired city by comparing it with the notion of inner life in Late Antiquity. In order to differentiate between quotes that constitute an object of analysis and those that support my argumentation, the objects of analysis will be written in italics

both in this chapter and the next.²⁹

3.2 The birth of the inspired city in St Augustine's state of grace

The inspired city, where worth is dependent on “the attainment of a state of grace, independent of recognition by others” (Jagd, 2011, p. 346), has its origins in St. Augustine's *The City of God* (Thévenot, 1996). Indeed, St. Augustine's work is considered to be the origin of the modern conception of the self, whereby we have come ‘naturally’ to believe that “we have a self just as we have a head, arms, that we have inner depths as we have a heart and a liver, as if it were a crude fact, independent of all interpretation” (Taylor, 1998, p. 185; own translation). Not only do we believe this inner “me” exists but also that it is formed in the depths of our being, thus constituting a simultaneous promise of knowledge and of almost unlimited powers located in the underground of our minds. The best way to understand the radical nature of this stance is to compare the modern conception of the self with the philosophical writings of the Stoics as illustrative of Antiquity's position regarding the matter.

The Stoics have come to be considered a great source of wisdom for contemporaries in recent years, who claim to find useful advice in the writings of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus for leading a successful life and their techniques for attaining happiness (Ferry, 2002; Prod'homme, 2008). This contemporary interest in the Stoics was influenced by Foucault's vision of the late Greek and Roman thinkers.³⁰ Foucault challenged the modern postulate of the existence of an inner self (the heir to Christian subjectivity) by comparing it with another form of subjectivation practiced in Antiquity which he seemed to hold in higher regard (Foucault, 2001a). Foucault was particularly insistent on the importance of the creative and aesthetic relationships that the subject can have within this ethical relation with oneself, preserved from the relationships of hierarchical obedience

²⁹ This method was adapted from Heinich's work on the construction of artistic values (Heinich, 2005, p. 13).

³⁰ The work of Pierre Hadot (1922–2010) on “spiritual exercises” also contributed to the growing popularity of the Stoics, as recounted by Nathalie Sarthou Lajus (2009). Nevertheless, Hadot's interpretation of the Stoics differed from Foucault's interest in questions of aesthetics and the creation of the self, which indeed were criticized by Hadot (Sarthou-Lajus, 2009).

characteristic of pastoral technologies (Foucault, 2015, p. 89).³¹ In this autonomous culture of the self, the formation and transformation of oneself is akin to a “choice of existence”. For Foucault (2015, pp. 154, 155): “*The self is a work of art. It is a work of art that one has to do, and that one has in some way in front of oneself.*” While the purpose of this entire chapter (and of the following, which will deal more specifically with Foucault’s writings) is to demonstrate how such ontological prejudices are inexorably linked to the construction of the modern self as this construct has been influenced by artistic movements throughout modernity, it can already be stated here that the Stoic self, contrary to what Foucault seems to imply in this statement, was far from similar to modern perspectives of creativity and inspiration.

Unlike modern conceptions of the processes of subjectivation and self-construction of a free subject and of self-transformation, the Stoic self was built through a series of techniques that bring individuality close to its death. Three essential differences can be noticed between ancient and modern concepts of the self. Thus, while references to the inner city and the withdrawal of the self found in the works of Marcus Aurelius might be misconstrued as commensurate with contemporary preoccupations about preserving a singular and self-sufficient subject, in reality the ultimate objective of Stoicism remained the location of this self within a transcendent cosmic order within which one only finds happiness by knowing one’s place in the world and in the great order of things (Reydam-Schills, 2015, p. 63). The Stoic self is thus not self-sufficient but rather fits into a network of obligations derived from a higher cosmic order that determines the appropriate behavior to be adopted depending on the context and the situation.³² Another significant difference from modern notions of the self is the Stoic ideal of mastery and detachment (Reydam-Schills, 2015, p. 59), which contrasts starkly with our modern love of tragedy and drama, attention to emotion and sensitivity. Finally, and this is the most important point about the subject of this chapter, the Stoics evinced a mistrust of the imagination irremediably incompatible with our modern sensibility. Imagination was thought of as the reproduction of *phantasma* or false representations of the mind (Nodé-Langlois, 2017), regarded as merely a false production of the soul – as generating shadows that only fools, madmen and Quixotic characters strove for or vainly

³¹ Foucault analyzed the rise of a particular form of power in Hebraic and Christian societies that individualized power through the bestowal of individual care and attention while also paying attention to the salvation of the larger group – as a shepherd looks after sheep (Foucault, 1989, p. 100).

³² Foucault described this network of obligations in detail when discussing the concept of *eros* and *aphrodisia* and the corpus of ethical rules that prescribes certain behaviors to be adopted according to each situation in order to ensure conformity with a certain ideal and maintain social status (Foucault, 2014).

fought against. Rather than paying close attention to these fantasies, the Stoics argued, one should enact a form of self-control by placing reason in charge of verifying whether the projections of the mind are real or imaginary.

The writings of St. Augustine changed the axiological value of the imagination and intuition and revolutionized the relation with interiority. Through the theme of salvation, the Augustinian self already contains something within itself that transcends it. The existence of an interior world is invested with a symbolic meaning heralding truth, as expressed in St. Augustine's words "*Noli foras ipse, in te ipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas*".³³ The ontological status thus ascribed to sensations produced by memory as the place of divine knowledge, which must be recalled and deciphered, contrasts with the ancient mistrust of the imagination's representations. For St. Augustine, the image and the sensation took on a value and role that had no precedent in Antiquity (Lagouanère, 2008). The Augustinian turn towards the self was a shift towards radical reflexivity, initiating a lexical revolution by constituting a vocabulary of intuition, emotion and inwardness which, as Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) have shown, has had a long-lasting impact in modern culture, with the inner life becoming simultaneously a place of grace, mystery and awe. The world of the inspired city, which welcomes inspiration as an inner force that regenerates and purifies the subject, thus has its origins in the writings of Saint Augustine, in which the subject welcomes with benevolence and attention the marks of the divine presence in the mysteries of their inner self.

Radical reflexivity not only allows people to find the divine within themselves, however; it also places humans at the center of a community bound by this common access to divinity and by its collective capacity for decipherment. As noted by Lagouanère (2008), the hermeneutic character of Saint Augustine's decipherment of the self makes it possible to think about the integration of the subject within a wider community, a true community of sensibilities united by this common competency:

The experience of reading, conceived of not as the mere deciphering of letters but the deciphering of oneself by the mediation of stories, is therefore an experience of community that brings together men and women. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the individuality

³³ "Do not wish to go outside, return into yourself. Truth dwells in the inner man." (quoted in Delashmutt, 2009, p. 600)

of each person is respected. Augustine and Alypius stand in different places within their spiritual journeys, and thus it is quite logical that they do not react to the same verse [...] On the other hand, the effectiveness of this decipherment is authorized by the mediation of a human experience: by reading the Scripture, I am myself part of a community of past and present worlds. I decipher myself, as another self deciphers themselves. The act of reading thus postulates the universality of my humanity, since like any man and any woman I can decipher myself thanks to the text as well as share this experience with Augustine and Alypius. Finally, while being an experience of a human community, the act of reading does not abolish the specificity of my person, since reading takes into account my intellectual journey. (Lagouanère, 2008, pp. 14–15, own translation)

In the works of St. Augustine, self-transformation through a text is mediated by one's personal capacity for interpretation and gift of intuition. Since this personal capacity for interpretation is shared by all men and women, it becomes the source for a community of sensibilities. The notion of Augustinian interiority thus constitutes a foundation for establishing a larger collective, a human community in the grip of similar experiences, while at the same time respecting a singularity rooted in the diversity of individual experiences. This moment of medieval Christianity simultaneously articulated individualism and holism through its postulation of a direct personal affiliation with God shared by the Christian fraternity as a whole (Renaut, 1989, p. 76).

Saint Augustine's conception of the self as dynamic interiority was later rivaled by the Cartesian concept and form of being in the world, which exhorted the mind to detach itself from prejudices and old beliefs as the only way to access pure reason (Ong-Van-Cung, 2012).³⁴ In Descartes' disengaged reason, and even more so in later forms of Cartesianism, 'knowledge' is no longer connected to the self or its transformation but to an external method subordinated to a methodical order. Since the Cartesian moment, access to 'truth' has thus no longer been seen as attainable through work on the self and knowledge but has been subordinated exclusively to formal conditions of scientific knowledge. Meditation, in other words, has been replaced by the scientific method (Foucault, 2001a, p. 19). But while the conception of the Cartesian self

³⁴ It is possible to perceive a continuation of the Cartesian critique of the imagination in criticisms made in the name of reason and science targeted at Freudian psychoanalysis and at ideology in Marxist theory, as well as in the consideration of 'prejudices' as an epistemological obstacle to positivist scientific research.

represents a continuity with the Augustinian self in that it associates the human mind with the divine essence, it is obviously not the same self that is involved in the two theories. The Cartesian self proclaims the control of the mind over all other forms of knowledge in a dualistic ontology detached from the body, instituting a being outside the world (Damasio, 2006, pp. 248–250).³⁵ Although this rationalist philosophy and its legacy of the Enlightenment lay at the heart of a civilizational process that has since transformed Western society and the world, a counter-current emerged as early as the 18th century in the form of Romanticism.

3.3 Romanticism: a counter-cultural movement

While St Augustine’s work formed the bedrock for the inspired city by exalting grace and inspiration as manifestations of divine force, it did not in itself include anything that might explain the modern appreciation for creativity and imagination in all its forms. To understand the historical construction of the inspired city, it is necessary to take a careful look at Romanticism.

3.3.1 The Enlightenment and the industrial order of worth

The protean nature of the Romantic intellectual project, which eludes commonly used classifications, may explain the reluctance and apparent discomfort evinced by many intellectuals with regard to engaging with this movement. Indeed some scholars simply decide to abandon the seemingly unrewarding task of such engagement. Lovejoy (1960, p. 234), for example, asserted that the Romantics constitute “the scandal of literary history and criticism”, claiming that it was not even possible to pursue a comprehensive study of the topic since Romanticism is devoid of any “single real entity, or type of entity”, ultimately concluding in a peremptory way that “the word ‘romantic’ has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing” (Lovejoy,

³⁵ I use the expression ‘outside the world’ in the opponent sense of Heidegger’s expression, ‘das-In-der-Welt-sein’, i.e as being in the world (Vultur, 2017, p. 31)

1960, p. 235). Intellectual engagement with Romanticism has been undermined by often contradictory criticisms, seen by some as opposed to the bourgeois revolution and therefore as anti-revolutionary, or on the contrary as heralding the fascistic drifts of the twentieth century (Droz, 1966), and even as somehow belittled by ‘feminine sensibility’.³⁶

The term ‘Romantic’ itself was first used to describe Poussin’s picturesque landscapes in the seventeenth century and later used by Novalis (1772–1881) to designate an artistic movement (Wolf, 1999, p. 11). Rousseau’s *Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* consecrated the modern understanding of the word as denoting a form of emotional sensitivity focused on the contemplation of one’s imagination in a dreamlike state. Already in Rousseau’s work one finds the constitutive elements of Romanticism: the certainty that sensual fulfilment and happiness can only be restored by returning to our ‘natural’ state; the desire for osmosis with nature; and the certainty that this sacred relationship has been degraded by modern civilization (Brix, 1999, p. 191). This amounted to a kind of primitivistic³⁷ aspiration to return to a state of blissful ignorance that was threatened by progress and science (Babbitt, 1960, p. 77). While it is true that it is not easy to identify much common ground in this wide-ranging artistic current, despite its being the first such current to claim a collective identity as an interdisciplinary movement incorporating painting, literature and music spanning several countries with different but common sensitivities, Romanticism did nonetheless include a common aspiration to return to an idealized past purported to have existed before ‘progress’, i.e. before industrial civilization and especially before the Enlightenment.

To understand Romanticism it is thus necessary to understand the historical context in which this movement emerged. I will not dwell here on describing the Enlightenment³⁸ since there exists a wide range of specialized works offering a comprehensive analysis of its historical contextualization (Cassirer, 2009). In this section I will restrict myself only to summarizing the legacy of what Taylor calls the radical *Aufklärer* (Taylor, 1998, p. 501) and their utilitarian and

³⁶ Posterity introduced anachronistic gender connotations to Romanticism, whereas no feminization was originally attributed to the examination of one’s feelings. Judged inconsistent with the notion of control-oriented masculinity, “men of feeling were now ridiculed or emasculated” and the feminization of sensibility subsequently led to the medicalization of emotional states, including their diagnosis as forms of hysteria (Kastan, 2006, p. 473).

³⁷ After Rousseau, Gauguin is the most famous example of a life and oeuvre that sought to resuscitate the primitivistic dream (Goldwater, 1986).

³⁸ Isaiah Berlin summarized the principal doctrines constitutive of the Enlightenment as follows: the relative universality of human nature, universal human goals, and the ability to establish logical propositions and laws on the basis of scientific methods in order to combat prejudices and achieve true happiness (McMahon, 2003, p. 91).

materialist doctrines, i.e. the emergence in the 18th century of a worldview based on autonomous reason that considered reality to be a mere sum of material elements which the human mind is capable mastering in order to achieve the full and complete realization of its needs.³⁹ Enlightenment discourse is characterized by faith in the capacity of reason to enlighten the world through a complete understanding of all its components. This capacity for rationalizing totalistic systems enabled people to think about the economy in a fundamentally new way, considering trade and markets as elements of a total system and thereby providing the intellectual foundation for industrial capitalism as a system founded on utility, rationality and scientific knowledge. The Enlightenment thus put into place “the intellectual foundation and justification for industrial and technological revolutions and advancements, thus for modern capitalism through its scientific-rationalism, objectivism, and progressivism and its applications” (Zafirovski, 2010, p. 265).

This discourse of scientific rationalism, technological progress and industrial capitalism constituted the starting point of Romanticism as a *Weltanschauung* or common vision of the world set against any form of thought that supported technical progress, industrialization and capitalism by rejecting any positive reference to the pre-capitalistic past (Löwy & Sayre, 2018, p. 30). Romanticism was thus a movement in opposition to streams of thought resulting from liberalism, scientism, technocratism and utilitarianism (Sayre & Löwy, 2015, p. 115). In its search for something precious that had been destroyed by what Weber (2020, p. 117) called the ‘disenchantment of the world’ (*Entzauberung der Welt*), which he saw as having been produced by the advent of instrumental rationality, Romanticism turned to pre-capitalistic values, medievalism and other idealized past epochs. It is important to note here, however, that anti-capitalist Romantic criticism was not focussed directly on the market as a system productive of *inequalities* but rather on the civilizational phenomenon that accompanied capitalism and that enabled the market and the economy to become the dominant rationality, i.e. a phenomenon including rationalization, intellectualization, the naturalistic model of science, the strictly rational

³⁹ On this point, Holbach’s work, *System of Nature*, first published in 1770, is a pure product of this mode of thought. Warning against the imagination, which he claims tends to elevate the condition of man above his materiality, Holbach aspires to lighten the burden of human misfortunes through knowledge and the interpretation of physical laws. According to Holbach: “Men will always deceive themselves by abandoning experience to follow imaginary systems. Man is the work of Nature: he exists in Nature: he is submitted to her laws: he cannot deliver himself from them; nor can he step beyond them even in thought. It is in vain his mind would spring forward beyond the visible world, an imperious necessity always compels his return. For a being formed by Nature, and circumscribed by her laws, there exists nothing beyond the great whole of which he forms a part, of which he experiences the influence. The beings which he pictures to himself as above nature, or distinguished from her, are always chimeras formed after that which he has already seen, but of which it is impossible he should ever form any correct idea, either as to the place they occupy, or of their manner of acting. There is not, there can be nothing out of that Nature which includes all beings.” (Holbach, 1868, p. 10)

approach of modern technology to the environment, the spirit of rational calculation, the mechanization of the world, and rationalistic abstraction (Löwy & Sayre, 2018, pp. 44–62). *In this sense one can see in Romanticism a discourse of critique of the core values of the industrial city as a regime of worth formed around the organization of a rational world supported by scientific knowledge and rational calculation in which hierarchical systems are regarded as the higher good.*

The Enlightenment constitutes a starting point for Romanticism on two levels. For while the opposition of Romantics to the Enlightenment spirit of rationality and objectivity is well known (Berlin, 2003, pp. 6–20), it should be remembered that the Romantics were also a product of this very same spirit, since themes of extreme sensualism, individual autonomy and a vision of nature conferring strength and depth to human thought⁴⁰ had already been introduced by the radical Enlightenment. And while Romantics stood in opposition to modernity (Löwy & Sayre, 1992), they were nonetheless also the product of modern ideas. Indeed *they embodied the possibility and quest of another modernity*,⁴¹ exploring alternatives to a rationalized and hierarchical social organization and industrial forms of production and utilitarian relationships, setting themselves against both the state and the market. In the context of immense cultural, economic and scientific transformations, there was a need in European culture for alternative ways of seeing and understanding the world founded upon a different hierarchy of values, hence Romanticism became “the consciousness of the new age” (Saul, 2009, p. 2).

⁴⁰ Holbach’s description of the powers of nature foreshadows the divinization of nature, as shown by the following excerpt: “Therefore, instead of seeking out of the world let him study this Nature, learn her laws, contemplate her energies, observe the immutable rules by which she acts . Let him apply these discoveries to his own felicity, and submit in silence to her precepts, which nothing can alter . Let him give way to be ignorant of the causes of the most impenetrable veil. Let him yield to the decrees of a universal power, which can never be brought into his understanding, nor ever emancipate him from those laws imposed on him by his essence.” (Holbach, 1868, p. 10)

⁴¹ Countering depictions of early Romantics as reactionaries, Kleingeld has developed a reading of ‘Romantic cosmopolitanism’ in Novalis’s work which, unlike prevailing Enlightenment trends, was not based on atomistic individualism and rootlessness but centered instead on the reunification of humanity through love and faith in fraternal union. Interestingly, images of medieval Europe served as an aspirational model for this envisioned cosmopolitan fraternity (Kleingeld, 2008).

3.3.2 Associative relations vs mechanistic bureaucracy

The Romantic critique of the mechanized world, decried as affecting people at the deepest levels and transforming them into heartless, emotionless machines, extended to a critique of the organization of society as a whole that targeted the role of the state in the development of this capitalistic and rational form of organization. The Romantic critique of political institutions was thus twofold: it targeted the fragmentation of society induced by industrialization but was also directed to institutions that artificially maintained a form of unity by mechanical means.

The rise of the Romantic movement in the former Prussian empire is a noteworthy example of such opposition. For while industrialization in Prussia in the 19th century had not reached the levels of England or France, both of which countries were already engaged in the ‘Second Industrial Revolution’, Prussia rapidly became the heart of Romanticism. Although this may seem odd at first glance, Löwy and Sayre remind us that, unlike in France and England where free trade and *laissez faire* economics had rapidly become the prevailing norm, industrialization in Prussia initially took the form of bureaucratic state-controlled capitalism (Löwy & Sayre, 1992, p. 74).⁴² In this regard, one of the most fascinating texts of the Romantic period, *The Oldest Systematic Program of German Idealism*, written in 1796/7 and first discovered among Hegel’s manuscripts in 1917, but whose authorship remains unknown,⁴³ provides us with one of the most radical criticisms of the state:

I want to show that there is no Idea of the State because the State is something mechanical, no more than there is an Idea of a machine. Only an object of freedom can be called an Idea. We must therefore also go beyond the state! For every State must treat human beings as if they were cogs in a machine, and it has no right to do so; therefore it must cease to exist.
(quoted in Fischbach, 2001, p. 37, own translation)

This is also the case in Novalis’ essay of 1799, *Christendom or Europe*, in which medieval Christianity is valued for having played the political role of unification and individualization, infusing the hearts of people with mystery while achieving a union beyond merely political and

⁴² Sayre and Löwy offer a materialistic explanation for the flourishing of German Romanticism that goes beyond typical reflections on the purported Romantic predisposition of the German soul.

⁴³ While Hegel himself could quite possibly have been the author of this essay, the consistency of the argumentation with Schelling’s political thought also makes the latter a likely author (Fischbach, 2001).

legal matters in affective, interpersonal connections (Charles, 1954).

Romanticism thus aspired to a union of souls beyond the mechanical ties and utilitarian relations of modernity. The romantic ideal of a community of ‘blood’ was reflected in the distinctions drawn by Ferdinand Tönnies in his work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, ‘Community and Society’ (Tönnies, 2003), between communities based on affective bonds and communal living that give rise to a community of property and mechanical and artificial unions based on separate individualities. In the latter regime, he argued, the absence of a common foundation for society leads to individual actions based solely on material interests (Rigaux, 2015, pp. 130–134). Like Saint Augustine, Tönnies based the possibility of a community on a common understanding developed and facilitated by shared experiences and sensitivities. This common ground in turn gives rise to the possibility of collective organization based on consensus. As Durkheim observed in his reading of Tönnies:

It is the spontaneous agreement of several consciousnesses who feel and think alike, who are open to each other, who share in common all their impressions, their joys as well as their pains, who in a word vibrate in unison. This harmony does not occur as a result of a prior agreement, a contract previously discussed and worked out on specific points. Rather it is a necessary product of the nature of things, of the state of minds. When conditions are favorable and the germ from which it is born is nurtured, it grows and develops by a kind of spontaneous vegetation. (Durkheim, 2013, own translation)

Another example of this critique can be found in D. H. Lawrence’s novel *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* which, although written after the traditional timeframe associated with nineteenth-century Romanticism, is nevertheless Romantic in the sense that it belongs to the same worldview and produces a similar discourse on reuniting disparate individuals. Lawrence’s novel is one of those works whose nefarious reputation has obscured the author’s voice, overlooking his virulent criticism of technical modernity and industrial capitalism. Lawrence yearned for the pre-capitalistic rural connections that had been broken down by the industrial revolution and sought to establish a new possibility for couples and groups to find alternative geographical, social and historical connections (Topia, 1997, p. 8). These new forms of connections do not negate individual will and personal sensitivity, since Lawrence believed “*It is a curious thing but the collective will of a community really reveals the basis of the individual will*” (Lawrence, 1974, p. 19). In this view the community constitutes a mystical pagan link wherein it is our connections to

others that allow the individual to take shape and to explore their mysterious interiority. Without this friction, indeed, the individual self would remain unknown. There is therefore a dialectical tension between the inner discovery and this aspiration to an ideal of community life comprised of real “*blood ties*”. As Topia says:

In fact the desperate defense of the territory specific to each individual, the refusal to reduce their core of integrity, go hand in hand with the affirmation of a link of allegiance, of a circular form of interaction that, far from destroying the difference between beings, is the network on which this difference is constructed. (Topia, 1997, pp. 9-10, own translation)

This aspiration stands in opposition to the modern shapeless mass of unrelated individuals represented by the working-class suburbs close to Sir Clifford Chatterley’s mine in Lawrence’s novel, who share only the same miserable lives punctuated by moments of capitalistic forms of entertainment. Lawrence did not aspire to a return to the Middle Ages, however, but to the constitution of a new regime that would integrate modern urban life with a sense of cosmic order and hierarchy characteristic of organic and holistic societies. This explains his criticism of democracy as a regime that would condemn individuals to permanent struggle:

But a democracy is bound in the end to be obscene, for it is composed of myriad disunited fragments, each fragment assuming to itself a false wholeness, a false individuality. Modern democracy is made up of millions of frictional parts all asserting their own wholeness. (Lawrence, 1974, p. 123)

Against this mechanic and artificial form of organization, Romanticism introduced the idea of an organic system, a vision of a truly living, regenerated organization founded upon individual and personal commitments. Such trans-individual forms of organization lay at the core of Romanticism’s alternative proposition for modernity. Indeed, although subjectivity was a central element of Romanticism, Sayre and Lowy argue that this focus on individuality and sensitivity needs to be understood in relation to its final aim of integrating particularism within a totality, in other words an ambition of reunification constituting a “trans-individual moment” (Löwy & Sayre, 2018, p. 41). This nostalgia for community in Romanticism is even more fundamental than its subjective and individual aspects, evincing a deep longing for a lost harmonious and even divine unity. However, relations of solidarity, harmony and equality were seen as deriving their value from a renewed relationship between the self and the world. *In other words, it is in the name of a better relation between the self and the world (between self and self, self and others, self and*

nature) that harmony needs to be brought back to the social body. Despite this collectivistic perspective, therefore, and even though the individual was understood as a social being, the highest good for Romanticism remained the inner feelings of the singular individual.

This desire for ‘reunification’ of self and community and nature was reflected in two ways. On the one hand, Romantic artistic production exalted a deeper communion with a grandiose and untouched natural environment as a source of strength and reservoir of mystical energy. In this regard, mysticism goes beyond the exaltation of the subject’s creative powers and is deeply connected to surrender and self-forgetfulness in oneness with nature and the cosmos (Cogeval et al., 2017, p. 19). On the other hand, Romanticism included the aspiration to return to pre-capitalistic times and to a communal society with strong affective bonds. It is crucial to understand, therefore, that the Romantic critique of capitalism was delivered on behalf of both the individual *and* the community at a time when competition was transforming intersubjective relationships and preventing any real contact between human beings who had become hostile to each other, entrenched in feelings of selfishness and individual calculation, ultimately producing a fragmented totality in which isolation prevails within a shapeless and uniform body. This critique is evident in Rousseau’s *Discourse on Inequality* (1755), in which he accuses modernity of having transformed our cooperative nature into selfish relations driven by personal interests, thereby preventing any collective association founded upon the idea of a superior common good.

Infused with this dual ambition, Romanticism comprised both a defense of subjective individuality and a movement for the reconstitution of a collective project. A closer look reveals that these two moral values were particularly entangled in Rousseau’s work, in which a defense of Romantic *rêverie* and the proclamation of a ‘general will’ were both proposed as means of achieving freedom from modern alienation. While Boltanski and Thévenot consider Rousseau’s work to be the philosophical and intellectual source for the civic city, oriented towards the superior good of the constitution of collective entities, Taylor also recognizes Rousseau’s contribution to the vocabulary of inner-life (Taylor, 1998, pp. 550–556). Rousseau not only offers a theory articulating individual peculiarities within a general will but also posits an inner life no longer as a mark of God but as an expression of Nature and the source of all goodness. Characteristic of the Romantic ideal of reunifying the individual within a totality, Rousseau’s conception of collective organization is further representative of Romantic aspirations to organize locally on a small scale and its preference for radical democracy.

Rather than a democratic system mediated by instrumental mechanisms, the author of *Le Contrat Social* advocated for the direct expression of a collective will within small communities that achieve a state of synchronicity through collective discussions. His political ideal is akin to “bands of peasants regulating the affairs of state under an oak tree and always acting wisely” (Rousseau, 2011, p. 179, own translation). The ‘social contract’ thus entails not only the absorption of the individual within a sovereign collective but also a system wherein individuals are attuned to themselves and to others, reflecting the Romantic concern for individual sensitivity and harmonious totality. As Rousseau states:

As long as several men in assembly regard themselves as a single body, they have only a single will which is concerned with their common preservation and general well-being. In this case, all the springs of the State are vigorous and simple and its rules clear and luminous; there are no embroilments or conflicts of interests; the common good is everywhere clearly apparent, and only good sense is needed to perceive it. Peace, unity and equality are the enemies of political subtleties. (Rousseau, 2011, p. 179, translated by G. D. H. Cole)

Once individuals reconnect with their inner voice as an expression of the natural good from which they have long been disconnected by artificial needs, technology, and progress, it is quite natural that they will be able to rule alongside their fellow citizens in a harmonious way. Such communities whose members are naturally bound by a common sensibility speak with one voice, in contrast and in opposition to political subtleties and institutionalized forms of mediation of the general will:

A State so governed needs very few laws; and, as it becomes necessary to issue new ones, the necessity is universally seen. The first man to propose them merely says what all have already felt, and there is no question of factions or intrigues or eloquence in order to secure the passage into law of what every one has already decided to do, as soon as he is sure that the rest will act with him.(Rousseau, 2011, p. 180, translated by G. D. H. Cole)

The inner sense of goodness and justice thus becomes the ultimate source of laws and this shared sensibility guarantees a collective organization in peace, serenity and equality between all members. The inner life is seen as both an individualized characteristic and a common denominator, justifying equality of treatment and equal participation in government affairs.

Standing against a routinized and representative form of democracy, Rousseau posited that in order to be compatible with individual autonomy a collective organization could only be built on the principle of voluntary association. Voluntary association is the constitutive act that allows individuality to merge with a collective (Rousseau, 1839, p. 707); “*Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole*” (quoted in Grčić, 2000, p. 130). This voluntary association is not a matter of the submission of individuality to collectivism but rather a reciprocal relationship between separate individuality and engagement and participation within a collective body, each participant being both a subject and (direct) ruler. Long before Proudhon, Rousseau had thus established free association as a principle of government to relieve human misery without inhibiting individual sensibilities.

In summary, the attribution of utmost value to the inner self as a singular and emotionally intelligent being was held sufficient to motivate the construction of a collectivist society based on affective associations, equality, solidarity and shared life experiences. In its more revolutionary forms, Romanticism evolved into a political project pursuing democratic systems compatible with these forms of human connections. In this way the resources of the inspired city, i.e. divine inspiration and imagination, were mobilized with the aim of bringing about less alienating, authoritarian and bureaucratic systems.

3.3.3 Imagination as a political tool

3.3.3.1 The axiological re-evaluation of an imaginative self

In reaction to the rise of industrial capitalism and scientific rationality, it is argued, subjective inner qualities became resources with which to challenge a prevailing worldview based on mechanistic and quantitative values. However, this account leads to an understanding of Romanticism as a purely subjectivist movement. It is true that the Romantic movement placed great value in the notion of a deep⁴⁴ and sensitive individuality, assigning meaning to an inner

⁴⁴ The Germanic movement *Sturm und Drang* (literally ‘storm and drive’), for example, sublimated passionate feelings and heightened emotions in contrast to the rational behavior imposed by the Enlightenment (Morvan, 2019, p. xliv).

world accessible only through solitude⁴⁵ and melancholic contact with the powerful, lusty, natural environment. Likewise, the longing for a lost way of *being* in the world was mobilized against the increased threat imposed by industrial capitalism on the sensible and sensitive individual who is not a thing and does not behave as such. The interweaving of Romanticism and modernity here is striking, for while the very existence of the Romantic individual with all its particularities was only possible in a modern context that recognized individuality, this individuality was threatened by the prevalence of capitalist relations. On this subject, Sayre and Löwy remind us of the actuality of the Romantic critique:

Capitalism arouses independent individuals to fulfill socio-economic functions, but when these individuals become subjects with full individualities and begin to explore the world of their particular feelings they come into conflict with a world based on quantitative calculations and standardization. And when they claim to free their imaginary fantasy, they come up against the extreme mechanization and flatness of the world created by capitalist relations. (Sayre & Löwy, 2015, own translation)

The individualizing aspirations of Romanticism must thus be understood in reaction to the phenomenon of *reification*, i.e. the loss of human dignity incurred when human relations are reduced to relations between things (Löwy & Sayre, 2018, p. 40) – a reductionism that lies at the very core of the industrial order of worth.

In response to the objectification of individuals, Romantics exalted the soul's emotional potential as being⁴⁶ “wider and vastest than all the destinies that life can offer him” (Kukáks quoted in Löwy & Sayre, 2018, p. 33). Against classical academic criteria, Romanticism constituted a turning point toward a psychological conception of art, forming an aesthetic theory determined by inclinations and individual sensations. Henceforth what mattered was not obedience to institutional criteria defined by legitimate professionals but success in dealing with what had become the ultimate criterion of judgment: the successful expression and conveyance of the author's feelings in their work and the feelings the artist evokes in the viewer (Burke, 2008). This ‘adventure’ envisions no limits, is bound to no rules or dedicated models or mandatory

⁴⁵ Novalis endowed remoteness with the ability to make anything romantic. Whether it be an individual, a mountain or an event, “everything becomes romantic” (quoted in Wolf, 1999, p. 11).

⁴⁶ Romantic painters created striking canvases exalting the subjective and peculiar feelings of a single figure whose solitude is full of emotional solitude. Famous examples include Eugène Delacroix's *Orphan girl at the Cemetery* (1824) and Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818).

references: *The path of the artist becomes a singular path, an inner call to pursue a personal adventure.*⁴⁷

The divine imagination, a spark of genius, was believed to bestow a singular status on the artist as an exceptional and admirable figure separate from the common people. As eloquently expressed by Carl Schmitt in his seminal work on political Romanticism:

Man, “by nature evil”, is always ready to transgress the narrow limits of what is reasonable – in other words the accumulated experience of generations – to create for himself a god as a metaphysical ally, and to subjugate others with the help of this illusion. In aesthetic mysticism, the romantic, who believes himself to be the chosen instrument of a higher power, becomes the artistic genius. As a genius, he finds in himself the only standard of his art. In the mysticism of passion, he declares his lust to be the voice of God. (Schmitt, 1986, p. 26)

As noted by Heinrich, the term ‘artist’, with all the positively charged connotations associated with this status, had come to replace the term ‘artisan’, thus embedding the artistic professions within a state of undetermined creation, undisturbed by any a priori finality (Heinrich, 2005). Obeying only highly subjective appreciation, the artist eludes normative and quantitative forms of evaluation and success.⁴⁸ The artist is the one that cultivates a marginal and bohemian identity. Creating art from a mysterious place of intuition in which “magic transcends technique”, the artist “acts as a medium rather than a teacher” and feels the breath of inspiration as a result of a higher calling (Heinrich, 2005, pp. 19, 20, own translation). While claiming the status of bohemian marginality, however the figure of the artist at the same time became akin to a new form of elite in a society in which creativity and inspiration were considered marks of individual success. This discourse elevated artists to figures of greatness in an order of worth that valued personal creativity, inspiration and imagination above all things (Heinrich, 2005).

This new order of worth was mobilized in order to contest values of rationalization that impoverished the experience of being in the world. Artist figures become ‘knights in shining armor’ on white horses leading a crusade against rationalism, reminiscent of mystical figures from

⁴⁷ Odilon Redon’s career path is particularly significant of this novel idea, drawing the sources of his art from within, emphasizing the dream in its individual and collective component as a major personal inspiration. Notably, Redon’s first lithographic collection in 1875 was entitled *In the Dream* (Gaumnitz, 2011).

⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that the Romantic hero par excellence, Frédéric in Flaubert’s *Education Sentimentale* (Flaubert, 2002) fails miserably in all the professions characteristic of this new modern elite, i.e. as a doctor, lawyer and clerk, ultimately seeking refuge in Romantic illusions.

the Christian, mythological and ancient past, charged with the mission of re-enchanting the world. Painters and novelists came to be regarded as oracles capable of perceiving a world lurking beneath the apparent materiality devoid of spirit. This world could be a scary one, full of shadows darker than the new Western logical world, as Bram Stoker's character Jonathan Harker learns from Count Dracula: "*And yet, unless my senses deceive me, the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own, which mere 'modernity' can not kill*" (Stoker, 2016, p. 54). This mystical dreamlike world, full of magical creatures and objects, was thus summoned in reaction to the positivist spirit of the time. Mysticism could also be used for irony, feeding social satires like E. T. A. Hoffman's fable *Klein Zaches* (1819) in which the ruler, in the name of the Enlightenment, orders the imprisonment of all those who represent "madness", i.e. "all persons of dangerous conviction who turn a deaf ear to the sight of reason and seduce the people" (quoted in Löwy & Sayre, 2018, p. 49, own translation). While Hoffman referred to spirits and fairies, his story is strikingly similar to Foucault's account of the "great confinement" of the insane (Foucault, 1976). Myths could also be invoked so that humanity could "rediscover its faith in the imaginary and the unreal" (Cassou, 1979, p. 50, own translation). In this regard, the pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist movements at the end of the 19th century were particularly representative of the rehabilitation of the importance of the 'dream', which took on a new meaning as the inner life came to be understood as the primal source of creativity. The dream was no longer regarded as an elusive chimera but as "a certain personal and inalienable intimacy that they maintain with their creative imagination" (Cassou, 1979, p. 50). The artist was thereby consecrated as the absolute creator of meaning and symbols in a movement of absolute freedom in which *creation is the soul examining itself*. Painting thus became

a profession of faith, an impulse, a belief that would come to be called "art for art's sake": with Symbolism, aesthetics became the last religion, forming the last link with the world, its forms, its colors and its dramas – even in its stranger forms, neo-mysticism, occultism, spiritualism, Sâr Péladan and other wise men. (Clair et al., 2018, p. 14, own translation)

This interest in mysticism and the occult, mythologies and fairy tales reveals one of the most fascinating and lasting legacies of Romanticism. For beyond this interest in the supernatural and fantastical tales lay a persistent conviction that *the greatest source of unexplained power lies within*. This conviction encapsulates the modern vision of imagination, persisting, as Stephen Spender wrote, even though there has been a reaction against Romanticism:

there has been no return to the idea that the imagination could or should be put at the service of a rationalistic or political view of life. But there has, I think, been a tendency, overlooked by most modern critics, to regard the power of imagination as religious [...] the exaltation of the act of the creative imagination as a visionary or intuitive judging of the values of life in a civilization of fragmented values, has, as a first stage, separated the imagination from current orthodoxies, and brought it back to the idea of religion as imagination in action, creating the world. That ‘art creates values’ was an idea frequently expressed by writers at the beginning of the present century. (Spender, 1963, pp. 37–38)

As Spender rightly pointed out, this infinite confidence in the imagination and its creative abilities led to a cultural movement that redefined values, including a belief in imagination as the source from which the world could be transformed. *In sum, Romanticisms exalts the powers of the imaginations, finding in them the resources to critique and challenge from within the imposed order of things.*

In this axiological appreciation of the imaginative and creative soul, the modern self gained a new dimension in relation to Augustinian interiority. While the Augustinian inner self finds the trace of God engraved in its memory, the Romantic self, though deeply attached to its Christian roots,⁴⁹ now venerated a new divinity: the power of the imagination. The imagination was endowed with a particular meaning now that it was no longer considered a mere reproduction of false images or a means of divine communion but was seen as *capable of producing a reality more real than reality itself*. In the words of William Blake (2000, p 352): “*Imagination is the real and eternal world of which this vegetable universe is but a faint shadow*” and “*The world of imagination is the world of eternity. It is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after death of the vegetative body*” (Blake, 2008, p. 555). Imagination was now seen as creating the world in its own image.

While Romanticism focused on aesthetic poetic notions, however, at its core there was a close relation between the aesthetic value of imagination and the political project outlined above. Imagination thus came to be understood as a divine force capable of bringing about preferable alternative worlds into the present.

⁴⁹ As exemplified in Novalis’s *Christianity or Europe* (Charles, 1954) and in Chateaubriand’s *Génie du Christianisme* (Chateaubriand, 2018).

3.3.3.2 The political functions of the Romantic imagination

The notion of imagination lay at the core of Romanticism, which was not only a movement against modernity but also both embraced and transformed modernity through the concept of imagination. In this sense, while the Enlightenment constituted the starting point for Romanticism, the latter developed the idea of the imagination as a reaction to the Enlightenment's mechanistic and empirical conception of life. This brought forward another conception of modernity, as James Engell (1981, p. 3) has argued, highlighting how the concept of imagination started to develop as early as the 18th century and by the end of the 19th century had replaced all other metaphoric expressions of creation, such as the creative or divine fire, inspiration and intuition: "The understanding of genius poetic power, and originality, of sympathy, individuality and knowledge and even of ethics grew and took lifeblood from the idea of imagination." Imagination was thus conceived of as a limitless power that affected all fields and disciplines, from philosophy to literature to politics, and of course the arts. Offering an alternative explanation beyond a mechanical understanding of the world, the imagination was held to have the capacity to bring together spirit and matter, the inner world and the outer world, ultimately leading to salvation and grace (Engell, 1981, p. 8).

It is no coincidence that the imagination replaced images such as divine fire, associated as it was with Promethean figures, since *the Romantic imagination is akin to the alchemical capacity to transform the material world through inner transformation*. The imagination brings together the inner spirit, this mysterious depth of the inner self, and the outer material and collective world. It thus became not only a way to understand the world but also the place from which it could be transformed: "the place to articulate the condition of possibility for social transformation, whether this entails exploring how the individual is situated in relation to the community, or how existing forms of authority can be challenged" (Kuiken, 2014, p. 7).

In the following section I explore three characteristics of imagination – its autopoietic, collective, and proleptic capacity – that make it a place from which the world can be transformed and which thus form the bedrock for its future application to politics.

3.3.3.2.1 Autopoietic Imagination

Although Romantics did not share a single consistent view of the nature and capabilities of the imagination (Kuiken, 2014, p. 5), the concept of the productive imagination was embraced by pre-Romantics like Rousseau and early Romantics such as Goethe, Shelley and Wordsworth, as well as German Idealists such as Schelling. The poietic capacity of imagination, i.e. the capacity to produce, derives from an anthropological view of the imagination as a natural capacity for *Einbildungskraft*, i.e. the power of forming and producing images (Huppauf & Wulf, 2013, pp. 20–29). In this view the imagination not only comprises the capacity of representing something that is absent but also has the power to restructure existing significations and produce new ones. Romanticism thus broke definitively with Plato's idea of creativity as a matter of reproduction, imitation or copying. Instead creativity was now seen as capable of radical novelty, with ideas emerging out of nothing ('creation *ex nihilo*') and contrasting with everything that had come before. In this sense creativity came to be understood as an non-deterministic act of freedom (Murphy et al., 2010, p. 66).

Breaking from the view of creativity as mere reproduction and imitation brought forth a new appreciation for language and its power to reveal a new world through representation (Breckman, 2013, p. 26). This was the source of the exaltation of the artist's Promethean capacities and the unlimited vitality of the imagination's autopoietic (i.e. self-reproductive) power. In the process of creating and inaugurating radical meaning, words were seen as the weapons of the imagination. The creative capacities of imagination need the intermediary of linguistic capacity because the imagination's ability to produce new relationships between existing ideas, concepts and values, thereby re-organizing and producing novel arrangements, is transmitted through language. In this sense the imagination's productive capacities were held to be virtually limitless, superior to nature in their absence of determinism. Thanks to its capacity to reconfigure meaning by re-arranging language, the imagination in this view is able to create the conditions that make change possible. As the grounds or conditions for the possibility of radical change, this shift in conceptions of the role of language institutes the 'radical inauguration' that breaks with repetition (Kuiken, 2014, p. 171).

This production of the self and the world takes place beyond any determinism and questions all forms of contingency, since things can always be different if they can always be remade into

something else. The productive capacity of the imagination, i.e. the faculty to produce new meaning, is thus a “critical poiesis” in that imagination is self-generated and autonomous, escaping determinist relations (Breckman, 2013, p. 145). The poetic process of going inwards is not aimed at the expression of a form of sentimentalism but at conveying a “vis poetica”. Being a poet meant producing oneself and changing the world in the process. For Romantics, creation meant self-formation, with “agents acting on themselves, becoming something different in the process” (Murphy et al., 2010, p. 57).

Creating its own legitimacy through its autopoietic qualities, the power of the imagination is revealed through its own manifestation in the physical realm. From this perspective, no form of organization is natural, no form of society is permanent, and politics becomes an eternal recurrence of creative forces. Society’s particular forms are deconstructed as society is revealed to be self-created and the connections between individuals are shown to be man-made rather than the result of a transcendental source of authority. Through the imagination, a community can think of itself as self-produced, self-instituted by its own act of creation. And since the subject is not grounded in anything other than collective creative acts, this increases the need for manifesting such acts, including through performances and fiction (Kuiken, 2014). The act that constitutes the sovereign needs to be materialized and rendered visible; the imagination needs to take a visible shape in the present time and space (Kuiken, 2014, p. 161). In other words, *the sovereign is identified by its act of creation*. This belief in and fear of the power of self-creation is embodied in the figure of Prometheus in Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) and in Mary Shelley’s subtitle to *Frankenstein*, “*Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*”. The social system is seen as a never-ending process of creation, an original production always in the making, germinating like seeds as in Novalis’s *Grains of Pollen* in which he wrote “there may be many sterile grains among them, but this is unimportant if only a few of them take root” (Novalis quoted in Lacoue-Labarthe & Nancy, 1988, p. 49).

3.3.3.2.2 *Collective Imagination*

Although the imagination is unique to each individual, it is a collective capacity and a common competency, and as such it became regarded as the place from which communities might be envisaged and formed by harnessing this universal capacity for challenging established regimes

of sovereignty. Since imagination is a shared capacity, it manifests itself both individually and socially: it is an “individual” as well as a “collective”, “psychological” and “institutional” phenomenon with “existential” and “sociological” properties (Murphy, 2016, p. 10). The imagination became a way to think of a collectivity beyond the mere sum of individualities, for by binding individual units it produces something that exceeds them. In this sense, the imagination “not only has a collective dimension as one of its attributes, but also a power or capacity that exceeds the individual” (Kuiken, 2014, p. 6).

In this regard, Kuiken has shown how in Wordsworth’s *Prelude* the imagination is mobilized for making communities through “a politicization of the relationship between images of collectivity and the production of community or democratic sovereignty” (Kuiken, 2014, p. 125). In the *Prelude* the imagination is not understood as a subjective capacity but as a source of power that produces communities through images rather than organization, since our common capacity to share linguistic, emotional and sensitive experiences constitutes a form of non-transcendental and shared sovereignty. Building on this shared capacity that transcends individuality, the poet “interprets its endless, purely associative spectacle to offer access to a different sense of the common” (Kuiken, 2014, p. 139). In other words, one way in which Romantics have shaped our modern times is through their understanding of communities, cities and even nations as what Benedict Anderson famously termed “imagined communities”, reinforcing the connection between imagination and the creation of collective forms (Redfield, 2003).

Here one can see how the Romantic concept of the collective imagination was dependent on its autopoietic capacities, since for the concept of the collective imaginable to become thinkable society must first be viewed as a system that produces itself and institutes its own rules through imagination (Mitchell, 2013). This perspective marked a radical difference in conceptions of how social systems are formed and developed. While for seventeenth-century thinkers social relations were based on reason, eighteenth century Romantics saw social relations as the product of a collective imagination binding all the members of a community (Mitchell, 2013).

3.3.3.2.3 *Proleptic Imagination*

The Romantic imagination has the capacity to represent future phenomena as if they already

existed, i.e. the imagination came to be conceived of as *proleptic* in that its representation of future phenomena was now understood as bringing such phenomena immediately into reality. In other words an imagined thought can become reality solely on account of being imagined, since there is no sharp ontological distinction between what is pictured and reality in this perspective that consecrates the magical omnipotence of the mind (Nathans & Schaefer, 2017). The Romantic imagination in this sense involved a relationship between time and space, being understood as having “the power to bring what is temporally and spatially absent into the present but also the possibility of restructuring existing systems and producing the new” (Huppauß & Wulf, 2013, p. 21). This process was regarded as part of the process of “re-membering”, i.e. of bringing elements together into being that are not in the present time and space (Saul, 2009, p. 106).

This power of bringing the new into the present is further derived from the imagination’s poietic capacity to bring forward new relationships between ideas to produce novel conditions of being. Imagination is performative in the sense that it establishes new structures unforeseen in the present, thereby forming conditions for new possibilities. By breaking with the conditions that produce the present society, the imagination thus becomes a driver and force for historical change. In Shelley’s poetry, for example, imagination is not only the act of producing but the production itself – a process in which cause and effect are indistinguishable and the present and future become one and the same. Imagination creates its own creation of possibility: in creating itself it creates the present containing the future within, simultaneously allowing this future to come into being (Kuiken, 2014, p. 184). The imagination was thus understood as the consciousness of these elements, proleptically expressing these into some form of allegory in the present. Unlike nature, imagination is capable of bringing images of a future that is yet to come and therefore of instituting hope (Kuiken, 2014, p. 113). By following the path of the proleptic imagination, change was thus conceived of in a non-theological way.

3.4 Conclusion

The point here is not to claim that Romanticism brought forward such a radical vision of the imagination ‘out of nowhere’. After all, discourses on the imagination as being capable of bringing the future into the present had been at play long before Romanticism, as for example in

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (Bloom, 2005), while the articulation of the concept of imagination as a subjective faculty is indebted to the political philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) (Mitchell, 2013). My argument here is rather that from this point onwards the imagination was no longer thought of as dangerous or subject to warnings or negation. Unlike in *Macbeth*, tragedy does not ensue from an unwise belief in the proleptic nature of imagination, rather the productive powers of the imagination and its capacity to self-create social systems and bring forward other systems were now viewed with unrestrained enthusiasm.

This point of this chapter has been to show how Romanticism generated values and visions that formed the possibility for a politics of the imagination. In this sense, all political grammars that mobilize the values of the inspired city, including imagination and creativity, as well as all associations produced on the basis of relationships that allow for the expression of individuality, are deeply indebted to the Romantics. Moreover, their vision of social change, seeking both to alter the circumstances that produce existing reality and to produce this new reality in the present through new images and discourses, made possible a form of politics that seeks to establish a new future and to actualize it in the present. While Chapter 5 and 6 deal in detail with how this vision of the imagination connects with prefigurative tactics, the preceding account has hopefully made clear the extent to which contemporary participants experimenting with prefiguration are indebted to a Romantic vision of imagination as autopoietic, collective and proleptic – i.e. as having the capacity to create another form of society that becomes a reality as soon as it is imagined. According to Huppauf and Wulf (2013, p. 30):

Imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) keeps appearing in contexts in which it is claimed by all and sundry as a force conducive to self-empowerment and becoming a subject, from the European Pre-Romantics and the early writings of Marx through to the slogan 'All power to the imagination' of the 1968 student rebellion, which for a brief moment in time broke out of the university. And surely the later works of Foucault also fall into this category, where he speaks of the role played by the imagination in the transformation of the self through an 'aesthetic of existence', 'technologies of the self' and 'self-care'.

The following chapter explores these connections between the order of values of the inspired city and visions of the imagination and the political grammars that have since been mobilized in intellectual and activist discourses within French politics.

4 A HISTORY OF THE ROMANTIC GRAMMARS AND MODES OF ENGAGEMENT

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe the historical formation of contemporary social activist grammars that mobilize objects and values inherited from Romanticism within contemporary political struggles, highlighting the connections between theoretical texts and forms of political engagement. Actors engaged in political struggles inherit forms of judgement through a process of historical construction in which philosophies and intellectual theories are progressively incorporated into activist discourses, thereby creating new practices and/or giving new meaning to existing ones. In this respect the twentieth century was a key period in the historical construction of activist grammars, i.e. a period of evolution in terms of the Romantic standpoint on imagination, imaginative politics, and perspectives on social change. While Romanticism constitutes a starting point for these two grammars, this chapter reveals how they have since developed into discourses justifying different modes of political engagement.

On the one hand, Nietzsche seems to have been the progenitor of a political grammar that first consecrated artistic creativity and the creative powers of the individual. This led to forms of political engagement mobilizing the resources of the inspired city, namely the creative and productive powers of the imagination, in order to justify political struggles conducted in analogy with artistic creation. On the other hand, Charles Fourier's work can be seen as the starting point of an alternative grammar that mobilized a Romantic critique in favour of the construction of a civilization that would constitute an alternative to industrial capitalism. This alternative grammar* seeks to create organizational forms that mediate the creative powers of the imagination, focusing on alternative ways of organizing outside the state. The last part of this chapter describes the 1960s and 1970s as a period in which these two activist grammars were mobilized within political struggles in France, further charting the progressive decline of the alternative grammar.

4.1 The Nietzschean grammar

Previous authors have described how Nietzsche's philosophy was the departure point for modern activist discourses, most notably Irène Pereira, who has compared Nietzsche's philosophy with the tradition of pragmatic anarcho-syndicalism (Pereira, 2009b, p. 131). While Pereira has demonstrated the limits of this comparison, not least on account of its fundamentally anti-democratic elitism, she has also shown how an individualistic, anarchist militant grammar is indebted to Nietzschean philosophy (Pereira, 2010, p. 53). This particular form of anarchism, Pereira argues, finds in its relationship to truth and action the necessary resources to reject a global project of societal transformation and focus instead on sexual and racial identities and the construction of individual alternative ways of life. My intention here is to complement this reading of Nietzsche's influence on contemporary activism by considering his work as the starting point for the interest of libertarian movements in artistic and cultural experimentations that seek to modify our relationships to ourselves and each other and the world. Nietzsche's concept of the truth has influenced perspectives of social transformation to such an extent that, after him, no statement can aspire to the status of unconditional truth and all forms of truth are akin to artistic creation, since Nietzsche endowed art with the capacity to overthrow the dominant order and the values involved in its construction.

4.1.1 The art of the truth

The central point of my argumentation here is that Nietzsche's relation to the truth constitutes an important evolution in regard to the Romantic vision of truth, self, and nature, reflective of the moral reversal between Romanticism and post-Romanticism, i.e. between the belief in a moral order ontologically dependent from humankind and inscribed in nature's moral law and the belief in a moral order seen as good solely on account of having been created as such. Charles Taylor has explained how this moral reversal is rooted in the history of aesthetic ideas. For Romantics, Taylor (1998, p. 677) argues, the expression of an inner-self reflects the perfection of the existing natural moral order, a mystical source of human goodness, while post-Romantic theories based on Schopenhauer's ideas of the amorality of nature associate the expression of interiority with a

source of creative and amoral vital energy.

Nietzsche played an important role in this evolution by disconnecting the imagination from any moral source and endowing it with the capacity to produce all kinds of truths. This argument is in line with the reading of Nietzsche offered by Babich and Cohen (2013), for example, who emphasize how Nietzsche's claim that the imagination is responsible for producing all knowledge, propositions and forms of truth also implies that such a faculty can no longer claim to be unconditional. All knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is not so much an art as it becomes another form of art, i.e. something that is produced as an artistic process (Babich & Cohen, 2013, pp. 59–61). While Nietzsche's vision of the truth as an artistic production is indebted to the Romantics, his philosophy also explored the consequences of our thoughts being creations of our imagination:

If the fundamental concepts of our thoughts are imagined, then every philosophy is likewise – in accordance with the ranking of poetry and imagination – an artistic product; all science is based on fantastical notions. In accordance with the same ranking and in light of the traditional concept of truth, human knowledge proves itself to be illusory knowing. (Babich & Cohen, 2013, p. 61)

Unlike Romantics who viewed works of art as a means to transform the world through the power of the imagination to forge a new language, Nietzsche equated works of art with life, whereby the establishment of truth becomes an artistic process beyond even the field of aesthetics. In sum, for Nietzsche imagination creates a truth that is 'beyond good and evil'.

Confronted with the absence of pre-established values and morals, everything remains to be done and created: the collapse of the old moral order allows the advent of a new morality centered on values independent of any transcendental source. Nietzsche's amoral positions constructed a world in which values did not exist before humanity, though he does not see "less value" in this world on that account. Nietzsche's work embodies not only the collapse of morality, abandoning all forms of prohibitions, but also *constitutes a new morality based on a superior life devoted to the imagination's unlimited powers of creation*. Nietzsche's morality is thus akin to a grandiose explosion, with an unrestrained affirmation of otherness, alterity, creation and vitality proposed as new values. Imagination in this view is no longer a source of truth connected to pre-industrial wisdom and purity or a place for seeking redemption from the modern world; rather it becomes the amoral source of creative energy capable of fashioning the world in multiple ways. Whereas

‘nature’ for the Romantics represented the values of a previous harmonious order abused by modernity, for the post-Romantics nature was akin to a vast reservoir of Dionysian energy potentially empowering us to transmute, transform and imagine a more intense experience of living (Nietzsche, 2013).

There was thus a moral reversal, with imagination no longer conceived as a lost order conducive to human happiness but as a source of all the creative and transformative powers of life. Although Nietzsche did not refer to pre-capitalistic values or a premodern past to justify his moral order, however, he did continue the Romantic project of challenging modernity through championing a creative and sensitive self, deconstructing modern values that support rationality and glorify reason at the expense of a passionate life:

In such a perspective, in accordance with the logic of active nihilism, the goal of the legislative philosopher is the establishment of affirmative values in accordance with the requirements of life and capable of producing its intensification. (Denat & Wotling, 2013, p. 203, own translation)

Decrying the predominance of rationalism as being responsible for a world full of “sad passions”, Nietzsche reversed the order between reason and the emotions, dismissing reason in favor of emotions as the source of our representations, interpretations and structures of life – a process that remains largely below our consciousness (Denat & Wotling, 2013, p. 24). In this perspective the child, the artist and the fool become figures of greatness⁵⁰ who embrace their creative flow without restraint, creating their own truths through a game of illusion. Childhood, in which emotional engagement and imaginative powers reign without limits and where truth and illusion are intertwined, thus becomes the paradigmatic mode for transforming reality through a creative process of overturning established forms of truth and recreating one’s own rules. This power of the child to create new freedom and values is set out in the following passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

⁵⁰ These are figures of greatness within the inspired city (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991, p. 201).

To create new values – that, even the lion cannot yet accomplish: but to create itself freedom for new creating – that can the might of the lion do.

To create itself freedom, and give a holy No even to duty: for that, my brothers, there is need of the lion.

To assume the right to new values - that is the most formidable assumption for a weight-bearing and reverent spirit. Truly, to such a spirit it is a theft, and the work of a beast of prey.

It once loved “You Shall” as its most sacred: now is it forced to find illusion and arbitrariness even in the holiest things, that it may capture freedom from its love: the lion is needed for this capture.

But tell me, my brothers, what the child can do, which even the lion could not do? Why must the predatory lion still become a child?

Innocence is the child, and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelling wheel, a first movement, a sacred Yes.

For the game of creating, my brothers, a sacred “yes” to life is needed: the spirit now wills its own will; the one who had lost the world now attains its own world (Nietzsche, 2010, p. 14).

While this philosophy of suspicion renders it impossible to establish immutable values, creating slippery grounds for any truth claim as any statement can be challenged for lack of transcendental references,⁵¹ one can nonetheless distinguish between a “passive” form of nihilism, i.e. a form of total negation of everything leading to discouragement, and an active form of “creative nihilism” (Denat & Wotling, 2013, p. 199). For even if truth is a fantasy, we still *need* truth as an artistic illusion to make life bearable. The distinction is thus not between truth and

⁵¹ In *Destruction of Reason* (1952), Lukács criticized post-Hegelian philosophy and above all Nietzsche for introducing irrationalism into social and philosophical thought, seeing such irrationalism as hostile to the idea of progress and thus to socialism as a democratic and equalitarian movement. Denying the idea of real social transformation, Nietzsche’s philosophy asserts difference as a feature of being within an order that never fundamentally changes (Thompson, 2011, pp. 57–60).

falsehood, then, but between those created ‘truths’ that hinder and those that multiply life’s potentialities. Nietzsche was not interested in constructing a theory of aesthetics that provided an answer to the questions of ‘What is art?’ or ‘What is beauty?’ but rather in the relationship between art and life and how art can amplify our living experiences and contribute to cultural renewal (Came, 2014). As the construction of illusions and fantasies, art helps fulfil our need to mythologize a meaningless modern society that is not so much a place of suffering as a place of meaningless suffering. Above all else, therefore, humans need to self-consciously create new coherent narratives to give meaning to experience (Gemes & Skykes, 2014).

With Nietzsche, however, the affirmation of life becomes an individual aesthetic posture since for him the truth of the imagination applies to an individual process of self-fashioning consistent with his elitism. The Romantic *vis poetica* (poetic power or genius) is no longer the main mode of transformation: moral positions and emotional states become aesthetic enterprises in the sense that they contribute to this reconnection and reconfiguration of life (Came, 2014, p. 4). While Nietzsche’s autopoietic aspirations reflected the Romantic belief in the transformative and autopoietic powers of the imagination, his writings infused an individualistic dimension to the project of self-creation.

In sum, nihilism institutes social transformation as a creative, affective, and unconscious process in which the artist is given the leading role. Now that God is dead, art becomes the “divinization of existence”, a creative activity that constitutes power and transforms reality; or rather, reality is thought of as an artistic process of destruction and creation under the auspices of Dionysus (Denat & Wotling, 2013, p. 102). Unlike the figure of Apollo, which underlies a constant solar order, the figure of Dionysus embodies an endless cycle of resurrection. Associated with the regenerating powers of nature, the Dionysian spirit represents drunkenness, chaos and intoxication in which life and death dance together in overflowing emotional sensuality outside of any moral and social conventions (Nietzsche, 2013). In the Dionysian world, life is eternal change, a creative and destructive process whose value lies in this constant ebb and flow, “which does not increase or decrease, which does not wear out but is transformed, the totality of which is an invariable greatness, an economy in which there is neither expenditure nor loss, but neither increase nor profit [...] eternally changing, eternally flowing back” (Denat & Wotling, 2013, p. 103, own translation). In this eternal reign, where creation and destruction go unchallenged by any moral virtue, the only conceivable forms of political engagement are isolated acts of terrorism, individual practices on the self, and artistic experimentations

4.1.2 Forms of political engagement

4.1.2.1 Individual Anarchism: working on the self

The rise of anarchical individualism is closely linked with the widespread disillusionment that ensued from the failures of the revolutions of the nineteenth century and their unfulfilled promises, especially the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, leading in turn to the emergence of a radical and uncompromising approach to political change (Manfredonia, 2006). Unlike Romantic aspirations for a new society devoid of modernity's unfairness and violence, this form of anarcho-individualism relishes the prospect of the total destruction of society's institutions. Marriage, religion, morality, justice and family are all values to be destroyed in the name of an individualized form of socialist rebellion. As Manfredonia notes, this new form of anarchism cherishes destruction and the project of otherness as an overarching value, escaping determinism at all costs. It calls for a messianic revolution in which destruction is paradoxically an act of creation, with multiple references to the death of the crumbling old order:

The next anti-proprietary and anti-privileged socialist revolution will be made neither by governments nor by civilized parties [...] the individual, conscious of his rights and master of his person, will be able to overthrow one and the other. (Courderoy quoted in Manfredonia, 2006, p. 35, own translation)

This form of anarchism considers individual terrorist attacks and other isolated violent forms of insurrection as legitimate modes of action for social transformation. Indeed it was this outlook that inspired anarchists to undertake a spate of terrorist attacks in Paris from 1890 to 1913 (Pereira, 2009b, p. 496).

In the wake of the failures of previous revolutions and movements, revolutionary hopes now resided entirely within the individual. Hopes for a different collective future were dismissed in favor of the project of transforming oneself, as illustrated for example in the work of Han Ryner (1861–1938). Similar to Nietzsche in his individualism, Ryner developed a form of anarchism in which the relationship with one's truth is at the heart of social transformation. In *Le Subjectivisme* (1909), for example, he expounded a project of revolution that excluded any real leverage for action besides the inner self and self-fashioning:

Thus understood, discretion presupposes a last and difficult detachment from oneself: it

supposes that our pride and our humility are purged from all vanity; that the observation of our absolute impotence on the outside will no longer require grinding efforts. Indeed, our useful effort will almost always be internal and subjective [my emphasis]. It is only my soul that I can enlighten (Ryner, 1909, p. 47, own translation).

This form of ascetic individualist anarchism consecrates the individual as the only hero, the only limit of the revolution: the group has no more rights, the collectivity outside the individual unit cannot be found. The only possible revolution happens within one's inner self, which will ultimately produce social change, for "*is society not the work of man?*" (Simon, 2003, p. 49 own translation). Ryner wrote several books on the Stoics and their moral exercises, evincing a fascination for their "*noble individualism*", which he compared to that of his contemporaries, the liberal economists (sic) (Ryner, 1892, p. 462), and which he thought conducive to the creation of a gracious society based on such forms of moral artistry.

In a similar fashion, Émile Armand's *Petit Manuel Anarchiste Individualiste* (1911) depicted autonomy as the ultimate aim of the anarchical movement, though in striking contrast with anarcho-communism and anarcho-syndicalism he prioritized the individual's emancipation from the social environment, aspiring first and foremost to free the individual from all its obligations, including those of solidarity, association and mutual aid. Rejecting all forms of overarching collective organization, the only remaining unit of analysis is the individual. According to Armand:

[The anarcho-individualist] *refers to no system that would tie him to the future [...]* *Anarchism bases all its conceptions of life in the individual fact. And that is why he calls himself an individualist anarchist.* (Armand, 1911, own translation)

Dismissing the possibility of collective change, anarcho-individualism aspires to bring about a change in *mentalities*, whereby questions of the self and sexuality precede social issues. Armand's articles in the French anarchist newspaper *L'en Dehors* from 1924 to 1939, for example, addressed themes of free "plural love", while in *La Camaraderie Amoureuse* he shared his radical views on sexuality, criticizing the petit bourgeois vision of love and emotional attachment and offering a vision of shared, friendly and consensual sexual encounters (Manfredonia & Ronsin, 2000). Combating sexual prejudices, including those related to age, and promoting forms of pedophilia, while nonetheless classifying homosexuality as deviant behavior, Armand remained consistent with his views and did not join any association or group in order to advance these

issues, opting instead for “experimentation” between close groups of friends (Manfredonia & Ronsin, 2000). These first experimentations foreshadowed the emergence of what Bookchin has termed “lifestyle anarchism”, meaning a commitment to individual autonomy that dismisses any moral concern for collective actions, exemplifying a libertarian society preoccupied with ego, emotional uniqueness and self-sovereignty understood as personal freedom (Bookchin, 1995).

In sum, Nietzsche’s philosophy is the starting point for modes of political engagement centered on individual violent forms of insurrection and attitudes concerned with the transformation and creation of the self, ultimately dismissing issues of collective responsibility and organization.

The following section focuses on another form of engagement oriented towards the artistic creation of collective mythologies, representations, and significations for social change.

4.1.2.2 Art is life; doing is politics: revolutionary aspirations of the avant-gardes

Before engaging in the question of how the avant-gardes constituted a form of political engagement, it is first necessary to define what is meant by ‘avant-garde’. The term itself is reflective of its origins in the aftermath of the French Revolution in the 1790s, in which period it gained an unquestionable political undertone designating a visionary group who would lead the rest of mankind closer to the utopian future (Călinescu, 1987, p. 101). The Romantic use of this term by the disciples of Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825) emphasized this revolutionary connotation, championing the artist as an avant-gardist figure capable of envisioning another future through the powers of imagination. The messianic undertones imbued in this terminology are highlighted by Călinescu (1987, p. 102), citing the example of Saint-Simon, for whom the artist was the “man of imagination and, as such, he is capable not only of foreseeing the future but also of creating it”. Describing the avant-garde in the heyday of Romanticism, the art critic Gabriel-Désiré Laverdant (1810–1884) further consolidated the Saint-Simonian vision of the artist, exalting the artist’s capacity to simultaneously envision and actualize utopia – a notion close to the Fourierist concept of the utopia of the “phalanx” (Laverdant quoted in Bäckström, 2007, p. 21). From its very beginnings, therefore, the concept of the avant-garde was seen as capable of merging past, present and future, thereby opening up another pathway for humanity by mobilizing

a proleptic, collective and autopoietic view of imagination (cf. Chapter 3).

The avant-gardes fully embraced their responsibility as front runners of society's imagination, recording their revolutionary ambitions in *manifestos*. The Symbolist movement was the first of this kind in 1886, followed by Dadaism, Surrealism and finally Situationism. Heinich notes the performative function of these manifestos as that of creating the group's identity in the production of a discourse of opposition and contestation (Heinich, 2005, p. 172). The choice of the political-military terminology of 'avant-garde' and 'manifesto' evidences the growing politicization of artistic movements in this period. In this regard, while the Romantic project placed art at the service of a political project, from now on art would come to be invested with all revolutionary hopes.

While the term avant-garde generally refers to aesthetic movements of modernity, here I mobilize a narrower understanding of the concept that stems from the Germanic aesthetic tradition and focuses on the revolutionary ambitions of these artistic movements (Bäckström, 2007). Spanning from 1905 to the 1930s and encompassing Dadaism, Italian and Russian Futurism, Surrealism and Expressionism, these movements became synonymous with the term 'revolutionary art', referring not only to their pursuit of common political and revolutionary ambitions of aestheticizing life through art but also of destroying the autonomy of Art as an institution. The revolutionary project of the avant-gardes lay in this re-evaluation of art as 'acts of creativity' rather than merely as 'works of art' (Bäckström, 2007). Here I extend this definition to include Situationism, for example, as a movement that also positioned art as a political endeavor, in this case understanding art as the creation of 'situations' in everyday life. As such, these artistic movements all pursued Nietzsche's aspiration of bringing life and art together, exploring how artistic pursuits might fashion our social and cultural world. This endeavor is encapsulated in the project of the 'Total Work of Art' that lay at the center of the avant-gardist utopia.

4.1.2.3 The 'Total Work of Art'

In an earlier section of this thesis (3.5) I have shown how Nietzschean theories exalted the power of artistic practices to radically transform society. This position opened the door to an unprecedented paradigm. For while the Romantic concept of the artist already saw this figure as

contributing to political projects by summoning up alternative values and perspectives on the future in each work of art, the ambitions of the artist were now oriented towards the direct production of a new *totality* – or *Gesamtkunstwerk* (‘total work of art’). This project of the total work of art epitomizes the extent to which avant-gardist artistic concerns were mobilized in the service of collective revolutionary ambitions reminiscent of Romantic utopianism, albeit reformulated within a new aesthetic paradigm.⁵² The term itself seems to have been forged by a now-forgotten Romantic German philosopher Karl Friedrich Eusebius Trahdorff in his work *Ästhetik oder Lehre von Weltanschauung und Kunst* (1827) to designate the natural abilities of different artistic disciplines to merge into a single spectacle to produce a ‘total work of art’ (Most, 2003, p. 23). This idea of dismantling traditional divisions between different artistic disciplines within a single artistic project reflected a shared desire for a transformative experience that would lead to a reconciliation – in this case no longer between the self and nature but between the spectator and the artwork itself – between the individual and a larger totality (Lista, 2006).

Wagner’s ambition of resurrecting ancient Greek tragedy as the ultimate emotional and collective aesthetic experience was elaborated in the context of revolutionary Romanticism and was influenced by its ideals. While the term ‘total work of art’ itself already reflected Romantic aspirations for merging with an all-encompassing totality (‘of that which is everything’), the Wagnerian project needs to be understood in light of this particular composer’s anti-individualistic positions. Rejecting modern glorifications of the selfish and isolated individual, Wagner mobilized the utopian spirit of 1848 to conceive a form of art that would represent the collective spirit of the ‘people’ (Schefer, 2009). The context in which Wagner wrote *The Artwork of the Future* (1850), two years after the 1848 revolutions, highlights the surprising relationship between

⁵² The revolutionary and utopian ambitions of avant-gardists have been subject to harsh criticism, typically considered a surreal fantasy at best and at worst as a manifestation of almighty delusions. Renato Poggioli, for example, reduces the affinity between politics and the artistic avant-garde to a founding myth of modernity, finding that the “only omnipresent or recurrent political ideology within the avant-garde is the least political or the most antipolitical of all: libertarianism and anarchism”, concluding that the “hypothesis of an alliance between aesthetic radicalism and social radicalism, revolutionary in art and revolutionary in politics, is historically false” (Poggioli, 1981, pp. 95–97). Aspiring to a revolution through ‘art for art’s sake’, avant-gardists became all the more cut off from their targeted audiences as they increasingly locked themselves in hermetic forms of poetic language, following a steep and arduous path that discouraged any neophyte from entering the sacred temple. However, while acknowledging the Promethean syndrome of the avant-gardist project in its exultation of the limitless power of the human imagination as a new demiurge capable of delivering humanity from our biological and historical destiny (Lista, 2006), we must not reduce the avant-garde’s contribution to the renewal of political forms merely to a myth of modernity in the sense of a false truth non-constitutive of reality. The avant-garde’s political engagement was mythological in the sense of producing a compelling tale by constructing new understandings of reality and politics.

Wagner and anarchism.⁵³ The *Gesamtkunstwerk* endeavor transcended aesthetic theory, constituting a revolutionary project that challenged modern individualism by embracing ‘totality’ not only in the sense of being all-encompassing but as a communal project: “the finality of the total work of art is clearly political (it involves moving away from selfishness to communism), and takes the concrete form of a *common* and *collective* work of art” (Schefer, 2009, p. 198, own translation).

The project of the total work of art added another meaning to the Romantic concept of an all-encompassing pantheist energy. For behind Wagner and Mallarmé’s ambitious, gigantic and unfeasible projects lay a novel appreciation for fragmentation – a mobile and mobilizable creation fabricated from new assemblages constitutive of novel forms (Schefer, 2009). In this sense the project of the total work of art reflected novel developments in modalities of artistic epiphany encompassed within the notion of ‘experience’. No longer able to count on the concept of a ‘natural’ harmony, which had been definitively compromised by Schopenhauer and new scientific discoveries, post-Romantic expressionists sought to find in the human sciences the possibility of a cultural construction of reality as an alternative to natural determinism. For expressionists, the spirit, imagination and creativity were seen as natural allies contributing to the construction of a better society, instilling a revived belief in the generative power of the mind (Rubin, 1990, p. 182). In contrast with the Romantic quest for a lost identity that had been compromised by modernity, avant-gardists sought to “go out of oneself” (Nadeau, 1954, p. 305), reconstructing the self within a novel totality in line with new cultural beliefs. This avant-garde project sought experiences that would emancipate the subject from prevailing categories of thought through a new arrangement of components that would in turn lead to an interspatial epiphany – or what Taylor metaphorically termed a “vortex”. The epiphany of the spectator of art was thus no longer seen as being contained in the object itself but in arrangements between different components in space-time:

Similar to a Vortex, the artwork is a cluster; it is a constellation of words or images that creates a space that attracts ideas and energy. It could be said that it concentrates energies that would otherwise be diffused and that it makes them accessible at a moment [...] such is the

⁵³ Marie-Bernadette Fantin-Epstein (2008) notes how a sociological reading of Wagner’s characters allows for novel interpretations of Wagner’s mythology, seeing in Christ’s death wish, for example, the end of a community without love, presenting Christ as a kind of proto-anarchist figure. Wagner’s reading of Proudhon’s *De la Propriété* in 1849 further influenced the composer’s beliefs about private property and modern institutions as a source and manifestation of greed and individualism (Burbidge & Sutton, 1979, p. 343).

nature of Pound's epiphany; it does not occur so much in the work as in the space that the work establishes; not in the words or images or objects invoked, but in between. (Taylor, 1998, p. 729, own translation)

While this project can be easily criticized for its quasi-demiurgic ambitions, seemingly quite easily attributable to a hyperbolic artistic ego, it is important to consider its historic context in the aftermath of the First World War at a point when humanity had arrived at a new threshold of anxiety concerning its future prospects (Logé, 2019). As Logé states in his remarkable essay *Renaissance Sauvage: L'Art de l'Anthropocène*, the total work of art project reflected a quest for a unitary principle by which it might be possible to rebuild an orderly world based on new values. This project must thus be understood and approached as an Ariadne's thread whose interpretation entails an identification and interpretation of both destructive and creative activities in artistic and political practices of the twentieth century. In this post-war world in ruins, the production of a fundamental rupture promised to open up the possibility of a radically new life. Since art was understood to integrate everything, both spiritual and material, including colors, sounds and touch, art seemed to represent the only path to redemption. It is crucial to recognize, therefore, that the 'total work of art' constituted an important transformative project in opposition to scientific, rationalist engagement – seeking a transformation that involved the transformation of the subject itself. The artist was seen as not only altering the material but as simultaneously being transformed in the process – Pygmalion and Galatea at once. In contrast to the industrial project, which aims at achieving control over the world without requiring personal change,⁵⁴ the objective of the avant-gardists' political project was to create a space in which individual and collective transformation would become possible by conducting "experiments" and producing "situations" aimed at breaking the mechanical habits we have developed as a result of the excessive use of disengaged reason in the service of a financial and technological form and stage of capitalism that has built a fantasy world projected on a reality that is no longer experienced directly while at the same time threatening the very habitability of the planet.

In sum, the avant-garde project of producing art capable of revolutionizing the world was

⁵⁴ The figure of the machine-man, such as the character of Clifford in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, embodies this paradox. Clifford manages his factories and mines with an iron fist from his mechanical wheelchair, projecting a hard metallic image of control and success while his inner self remains prostrated in a regressive childlike posture. In this depiction the project of industrial transformation, by abandoning any connection with the sensitive world, creates a human being part-cybernetic robot and part-degenerated mollusc (Topia, 1997, p. 36).

indebted to the Romantic vision of imagination, especially in its later form as the Nietzschean ambition to bring art and life together beyond particular works of art. The ‘total work of art’ project thus mobilized a vision of (proleptic) imagination capable of bringing forward another future through the (autopoietic) self-constitution of society, uniting communities through the shared (collective) imagination and thus producing an experience conducive to cultural renewal. While the term ‘total work of art’ was initially mobilized within the context of Symbolist art and Wagnerian musical compositions and performances, the concept later evolved into a term employed by the avant-garde in pursuing the same objective of bringing about a cultural renewal through political and artistic interventions.

4.1.2.4 Surrealism: cultural renewal and political interventions

Surrealism⁵⁵ represented an unprecedented form of aesthetic political engagement. For the first time⁵⁶ an artistic group sets itself the task of producing a radical cultural renewal not only through novel formal productions but also through non-artistic interventions. Surrealism thus simultaneously involved a detachment from aesthetic and formal concerns and an investment in art’s capacity to generate novel values for western civilization.

In the pursuit of an alternative civilizational path, Surrealism mobilized a Romantic vision of imagination and *reverie* together with a Nietzschean vitalism and appetite for creative destruction. From its early beginnings, this movement condemned the vacuity of western civilization, lamenting the loss of meaningful human connections and reviving the Romantic critique of modernity and its capitalistic mode of existence. Against this capitalist rationality that limits human experience, surrealists invoked the realm of dreams and the mysterious and the exotic as capable of producing different kinds of experiential relationships in a re-enchanted world. Behind this seemingly undisturbed continuity, however, lay a radicalization and detachment first initiated by Nietzsche. Rejecting values central to European civilization, for example, Surrealists

⁵⁵ My reading of Surrealism is indebted to Jean-Luc Almaric’s Masterclass on *Repenser l’imagination aujourd’hui* with the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. <https://enseignements-2018.ehess.fr/2018/ue/2606/>

⁵⁶ Dadaism, which was strongly influenced by Bakunin’s anarchism, carried within itself the hope of rebuilding a new world on the ruins of the past, full of new unexplored meanings (Logé, 2019, p. 53). Duchamp’s *L.H.O.O.Q.*, for example, constituted not only a gesture of desacralization but a proclamation of each individual’s unlimited potential to rebuild the symbolic order. (Duchamp, it should be noted in this regard, was a fervent reader of Nietzsche.)

condemned all forms of nationalism, which they deemed responsible for the Great War (Altman et al., 1948, p. 40), and further aspired to the progressive destruction of Judeo-Christian civilization by engaging in a nihilistic aesthetics of negation (Onfray, 2018, p. 14)

In continuity with the Nietzschean quest to overturn morals, Surrealists aspired to rebuild another civilization based on a new mythology. Unlike the Romantic melancholic spirit that had delighted itself in meditative contemplation of nature and the cosmos, however, the Surrealists wished to evoke and indeed manifested intense enthusiastic feelings of rebellion and total confidence in the success of their Surrealist revolution built upon a “*new myth*”. In the words of Julien Gracq, Surrealism was thus “*the affirmation, more needed than ever, of the unbridled reserve of a formidable optimism*” – an aspiration to “*reinvest man of these powers*” that included “*castigating the impotence of those resigned*” (quoted in Asholt & Siepe, 2007b). This mystical fever is evident in the following words of Raymond Queneau:

Joining a revolutionary movement of any kind implies faith in the possibilities it may have to become a reality.

The immediate reality of the surrealist revolution is not so much to change anything in the physical and apparent order of things as to create a movement in people's minds. The idea of any surrealist revolution is aimed at the deep substance and order of thought [...] It aims to create above all a mysticism of a new kind [...]

Any true follower of the surrealist revolution is bound to think that the surrealist movement is not a movement in the abstract, and especially in a certain poetic abstract, hateful at best, but is actually capable of changing something in the spirits. (Queneau, 1948, p. 44, own translation)

These words on the abstract character of poetry suggest a dramatic shift, indicating that Surrealism was not a revolution of sensibility in the sense of an axiological revelation of imagination's perceptive powers but in the sense that the political nature of Surrealism lays in its ambitions to produce a new mythology in the present space. Instead of connecting with a great cosmic spiritual or natural totality, Surrealists invested *the productive function of the imagination with a capacity for transforming everyday life in a practical way through different experiences*. In his preface to the poetry collection *Le Revolver à Cheveux Blancs*, André Breton (1932) criticized Huysmans' symbolic vision of imagination as a flight from the present and offered a compelling alternative vision of imagination as a means of transforming the present. In Breton's

perspective, the “*transformative energy*” of imagination has the power to become “*mistress of the situation*”, whereby “*the imagination is not a gift but an object of conquest par excellence*”. Once mastered and conquered through different techniques, imagination can release its performative potential, transposing another reality by enacting a different language. For Breton the dream was thus no longer an ‘elsewhere’ hermetically separated from reality but an elsewhere transposable within reality, thereby overcoming the opposition between dream and reality, future and present: “*I believe in the future resolution of these two states, in appearance so contradictory, that are dream and reality, in a sort of absolute reality, of surreality if one may call it so*” (Breton quoted in Matthews, 1986, p. 97). The person who knows how to reconcile dream and reality, fantasy and action, the “*active dreamer*”, was thus a figure in the vanguard of this new revolution (Weisgerber, 1986, p. 787).

Moreover, this dream was no longer the solitary dreamlike state of Rousseau’s peaceful walks but rather spoke the language of unconscious archetypes developed within psychoanalysis. In this regard, for example, Paul Éluard claimed that the Surrealist revolution was responsible for the intrusion of the unconscious into everyday life (Weisgerber, 1986, p. 44). Breton’s vision of Surrealism as a form of automatic expression outside of any control of reason, morality or aesthetics was based on a dialogue with the unconscious without the mediation of logical and verbal reasoning.⁵⁷ Unlike psychoanalysis, however, Surrealists did not treat the unconscious as an object of scientific and medical study but as *constituting a new development in the Romantic*

⁵⁷ Surrealist intentions should not be mistakenly equated with Romanticist irrationalism, however, as the Surrealist project reflected a compromise with the scientific rationality of modernity in a way that had no precedent in early forms of Romanticism. In this sense Surrealism appears close to Gaston Bachelard’s project regarding the epistemology of the sciences and the integration of intuition and experience in the production of knowledge (Alquié, 2015, p. 197). Rather than seeking to suppress rationality and scientific discovery, the Surrealists aspired to expand knowledge beyond the barriers imposed by the limitations of rationalism, thereby uncovering new knowledge and new ways of being. The phenomenology of Bachelard’s concept of the imagination constituted a project of liberation from limited rationality (Bachelard, 1985, 1993), championing a view of science not as an accumulation of absolute knowledge but as a dialogue between reason and experience. This project was consistent with Breton’s assertion that “*the world is dying of closed rationality*” (Breton, 1999, p. 583). Bachelard’s article *Surrationalism* proposes the following rapprochement between these two concepts:⁵⁷

In short, we must restore turbulence and aggressiveness to human reason. In this way, we will contribute to the foundation of a surrationalism that will increase opportunities for thinking. When this surrationalism finds its doctrine it will be able to relate to Surrealism because sensitivity and reason will surrender to each other, to their fluidity. The physical world will be experimented in new ways. We will understand differently and we will feel differently. (quoted in Péquignot, 2008, p. 64 own translation)

Surrealism was thus not a eulogy of irrationality but a quest for forms of knowledge that would restore humanity to the primordial unity that had been undermined by Cartesian dualism and its prioritization of methodical reason. This moral crisis, the Surrealists argued, could only be overcome by seeing irrational values as productive and creative, forming the Surrealist experience in this union between art and science, experience and reason (Dali, 1971, pp. 56–57).

struggle of sensibility, as a sublimated expression of opposition to scientific and industrial rationality. In this context, the joint publication of Aragon and Breton, *The Cinquantenaire de l'hystérie* (1928), celebrated hysteria as a storm of emotions and passions⁵⁸ while firmly condemning its medicalization (Duruzoi, 2004, p. 36). Along the same lines, in his *Lettres aux médecins-chefs des asiles de fous* ('Letter to the doctors in charge of mental asylums', quoted in Nadeau, 1954, pp. 34–35), Artaud exalted madness and denounced confinement in the name of a reason as a crime of society against individual sensitivity. Those judged insane were now seen as the “*individual victim par excellence of the social dictatorship*” and in the name of this individuality Artaud demanded that these victims be released, “*for it is not in the power of the law to imprison all people who think and act*”. The new subjects of greatness were those who possessed the genius of imagination and sensibility, reflective of humankind's archaic condition, including artists, children, women and “primitive” peoples⁵⁹ who were thus seen as carrying humanity's hopes for redemption after the atrocities of the First World War.

The Surrealist group in many respects constituted an unprecedented politicization of avant-gardist activities. Conceptualizing imagination as a collective and generative tool, this movement challenged representations of the artist as a solitary genius, taking up Lautréamont's words that “*poetry will be made by all not by one*” (quoted in Rothenberg & Joris, 1995, p. 41). The surrealists' axiological appreciation for collectivity allowed for increased collective artistic and non-artistic group practices. The numerous collaborations of the Surrealist group marked a turning point in the group's identity, as evidenced by experiments in collective writing such as the *cadavre exquis* as well as surrealist brochures, common exhibitions and journals such as the *Minotaure* (1933–1939) and the *Révolution Surréaliste* (1924–1929) (Nadeau, 1954, pp. 352–355). Surrealists thus built a collective identity enacted through the mobilization of a political vocabulary, instituting themselves as a new form of spontaneous and emotionally engaged a(rt)ctivism.

Nathalie Heinich echoes Compagnon's critique of the unrealistic character of the avant-garde (Compagnon, 1990) that “*wants to change art, believing that the world will follow*” (Heinich,

⁵⁸ Salvador Dali also sublimated women's madness in his photomontage *Phénomène de l'extase* (1933), which includes reproductions of Charcot's work at the Salpêtrière.

⁵⁹ The female mystique embodied absolute and ancient mystery, serving as a symbol of primary emotion without rationality, as evidenced by the many representations of beheaded women's bodies (Max Ernst, *La puberté proche ou les Pléiades*, 1921). The Surrealists were also inspired by the powerful simplicity of Fang masks from Central Africa, finding in this “primitive” art a valuable performative spirituality in a preserved society (Rubin, 1990).

2005, p. 185). From its early beginnings, however, Surrealism proclaimed its aspiration to bring about a political rather than an aesthetic revolution, hence the declaration “*we have nothing to do with literature*” (Aragon & Antonin, 1948 own translation). Uninterested in a revolution of aesthetic criteria for the mere sake of revolutionizing means of expression, the Surrealists claimed art as a tool with which to institute a ‘total’ revolution through a revolution of the spirit. This new form of militancy invested the imaginary realm with the powers to create a political project aimed at reconciling dream and reality, art and politics, spiritual and material commitments, individual experimentation and social revolution. These aims were reflected in Breton’s words at the first international writers’ convention in 1935 (quoted in Sartre, 1988, p. 156): “‘*Transform the world*’, said Marx, ‘*change life*’, said Rimbaud; these two orders are for us one and the same.” In other words, these ambitions were only unrealistic from a perspective that sees art as separate from politics.

This ambition reveals the many connections forged between artistic and poetic logics and socialism in an attempt to mobilize the resources of the inspired city of imagination, enlisting irrationalism and inspiration in a struggle against industrial and above all financial capitalism.⁶⁰ However, this compromise between revolutionary poetics and politics rapidly reached an impasse. Although artistic experiments were conducted alongside calls for unitary action and collective formations, and while certain rapprochements with the French Communist Party (PCF) resulted in productive actions (including a joint protest against the colonial exhibition of 1931), this collaboration soon gave rise to frictions on both sides. On the one hand, the PCF felt undermined by criticisms and attempts to debate and discuss issues that challenged the authority⁶¹ and theoretical unity of the party (Nadeau, 1954, p. 223). On the other hand, the Surrealists could not accept what appeared to them to be any sanctification of western values and its materialism, conformism and unsatisfying modes of labor.⁶² The Surrealists’ quest to break down barriers between art and life and their perception of human activity as a creative and expressive everyday

⁶⁰ The anti-capitalist critique advanced by the Surrealists can be seen as one-sided, focusing on finance and trade while ignoring capitalistic conditions of production that also result in inequalities, with this focus indicating a risk of drifting towards antisemitism (Jappe, 2011).

⁶¹ Breton’s novel *Nadja* (1928) can be read as a critique of the PCF’s undemocratic behavior and the party’s inability to constitute itself as a truly “political” subject (Spiteri, 2006).

⁶² Fourier’s heritage is evident in the Surrealists’ opposition to repetitive, monotonous and alienating work. In addition, Breton and his group were attracted to Fourier’s promise of a revolution that did not involve a dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. the Romantic dream of a unity “*fully feasible on earth*”, beginning with a total social and political revolution (Arantes, 1992, p. 9).

task was fundamentally incompatible with the communist attitude of “glorifying involuntary work” (Breton, 1948, p. 58). More generally, the relationship between Surrealists and institutional politics was thrown into question by the Surrealists’ attitude towards the democratic crisis of the 1930s, displaying obvious discontent in the face of modern representational politics they perceived as “a ventriloquist of ideas and opinions launched by economically powerful groups and classes, incapable of endorsing true revolutionary change”⁶³ (Bru & Martens, 2006, pp. 20–21).

Despite their problematic relations with classical political formations, the Surrealists introduced a metamorphosis of the political, transforming the existing categories for organizing social life and building a social space through artistic activity (Asholt & Siepe, 2007a). This was undoubtedly the case in some of their artwork that challenged totalitarian and fascist ideology⁶⁴ and categories of thought stemming from western rationality in the name of political humanism (Filipovic, 2003; Stansell, 2003). While the utopian project of total artwork opened a new space produced by the association image-text-event, managing to collate dream and reality for a short period of time, ultimately it did not lead to concrete revolutionary action (Spiteri, 2003). In the end the Surrealists engaged mostly in a policy of negativity and contestation, mired in a plurality of internal opinions. According to Robert Short, Surrealism “expressed unmistakably the political views of poets – of idealists impatient beyond all endurance at the failure of the real to emulate the imaginable” (Short, 1966, p. 13).

Understanding the contribution of Surrealists to politics requires a redefinition of the term ‘politics’. On this basis, Spiteri and Lacoss (2003) distinguish between politics as a professional activity with representative aims and politics as the production of categories with which to construct a social space, i.e. the political sphere, in their account of how Surrealism engaged with this political sphere by challenging its construction as a sphere separate from the social. In this sense Surrealism contributed to releasing and harnessing the imaginary and the unconscious alienation of everyday life, shaping a political project based on meanings other than those produced by capitalist modernity and rationalist scientism (i.e. productivity, efficiency, work,

⁶³ In contrast to the frequent focus on the alleged fascist affinities, Bru and Martens highlight how avant-gardes have flourished in times of democratic crisis by challenging representational politics (Bru & Martens, 2006, pp. 19–20).

⁶⁴ This contradicts Jean Clair’s (2003) argument that Surrealism was nothing more than a form of neo-Romantic occultism that led to totalitarianism, with only superficial connections to Marxism and psychoanalysis. Régis Debray’s response to Clair’s work highlights how this form of criticism resulted from a personal anti-Romantic bias rather than a purposeful esthetical and political analysis of the movement (Debray, 2003).

religion, homeland and state). In doing so they encapsulated the avant-gardist conception of politics as a matter of experimenting with alternative presents and futures, “re-articulating historical identities into alternative visions of communal life that attacked full-frontal hegemonic discourses” (Bru & Martens, 2006, pp. 9–10). From this perspective Surrealism stands in perfect continuity with Romanticism’s struggle against cultural categories that supported the unbridled expansion of the industrial city’s values. Rather than understanding Surrealism as ‘avant-garde’, Kirsten Strom sees the movement as a “political culture” – a linguistic adventure oriented towards the construction of discursive and linguistic practices aimed at defining a common worldview against other competing political projects (Strom, 2004). This novel vision of the avant-garde enables us to see the *performative* aspects of artistic and non-artistic production (including manifestos, posters and periodical designs that cannot be equated with art), whereby Surrealism can be understood as a discursive project criticizing the ideological biases of Western culture. Their encounters with neglected non-Western figures and the adjudged insane, for example, challenged historical accounts of western superiority and rationality. Serving as a critique, Surrealism thus constituted a novel synthesis of cultural and political movements that functioned in relation to the larger cultural body by performatively illustrating how seeming ‘universal truths’ were in fact cultural constructs.

In conclusion, the collective identity of this cultural and political movement constituted an aesthetic and ideological shift that foreshadowed the dominant themes and culture-making strategies of the New Social Movements of the 20th century. This led to a reconceptualization of politics and activism, with the focus now on engaging in forms of collective action through communities created by common experiences in times of crisis – a project marked by an uncertain temporality in which the future remains open and undetermined (Stone-Richard, 2003). The Surrealist movement also foreshadowed the difficulties involved in reconciling individualities within a collective, merging critical thinking with theoretical cohesion and navigating between rapprochements and tensions with classical political formations, thereby distilling an image of a positive and refreshed activism that emphasized creative capacities and the production of situations, new values and actions to reshape “the political”. In these ways Surrealism constituted a major influence for future avant-gardes close to revolutionary political movements, such as Guy Debord and the Situationists, integrating a consideration of spatial issues and a critique of everyday life into utopian preoccupations.

4.1.2.5 Debord and the Situationists: performative engagement with spatial politics

While Surrealism operated a critique of the autonomy of the arts, believing in artistic practices extending beyond purely artistic forms, Situationism represented the most ambitious attempt to realize art in life through collective interventions, forms of *détournements*, and the production of ‘situations’ aimed at collectively reinventing what everyday life should be about (Kauffman, 2002). Situationism extended the enterprise of artistic creation beyond works of art through the creation of ‘situations’ in the spatial environment aimed at affecting the behavior of both individuals and the social world. The concept of ‘situations’ in this project designated a person’s material and moral conditions, which were to be understood in relation to concrete experiences in a given space (Marcolini, 2013, p. 51). The concept of situations was thus meant to convey an understanding of the subject’s embeddedness in a multiple configuration of factors produced within the situation itself. A ‘situation’ here is a performed and productive configuration, and the Situationist project *sought to transform a passive experience of spectatorship into active poetic engagement with life*. This revolutionary project aimed to liberate the artistic potential of every individual, mobilizing their creativity in the material, symbolic and discursive production of situations in a given time and space within everyday life (Cochard, 2017). In Situationism the concept of everyday life gained a poetic connotation as part of a grand artistic totality co-produced within a theoretical *dispositif* in which art and life were brought together to produce novel behaviors constitutive of a new material reality.

In Situationism, artistic practice was understood more than ever as extending beyond the work of art and instead as a means of generating situations, experimentation with places, roles, gestures, and words to engage the subject in the co-construction of life itself. Situationism thus represented a culmination of attempts to break down the barriers between art and politics, abolishing differences between spectators and actors in a project reminiscent of the total work of art. In this case, however, the totality was life itself, represented in the fragmented, fleeting and mobile exposition of situations. Interestingly, Guy Debord described the “society of the spectacle” less in terms of theatrical representation than in the form of restless sleep full of bad dreams in which motionless silhouettes passively experience strange dreams without any capacity for action or

intervention.⁶⁵ In his own words (quoted in Marcolini, 2013, p. 117): “*The spectacle is the bad dream of modern society, which finally expresses only its desire to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of his sleep.*” In order to break away from this willing alienation, Situationism found inspiration in the avant-garde theatre of Max Reinhardt and Bertolt Brecht. Advocating the principle that a rupture was needed to break the hypnotic nocturnal spectacle, Brecht intentionally pursued a process of distancing the audience, creating an effect of strangeness whereby the subject no longer adheres to its present situation and therefore ceases to see the surrounding world as natural. This reflected the avant-gardist preoccupations with the construction of theatrical spaces (or situations) in which the spectator becomes an actor and the stage and theatre become a space in which each spectator can experience and test their potential for constructing reality. In this perspective the theatre functioned as a model for constructing reality⁶⁶ (Fischer-Lichte, 2019), or in Debord’s words “everyone becomes an artist, in a sense that artists have never before attained: the construction of their own lives” (quoted in Kauffman, 2002, p. 295). This led to experimentation with modes of protests borrowed from theatrical performances and traditional folklore, such as Raoul Vaneigem’s ‘Carnival Liberation Theory’, in which revolutionary moments were thought of as celebrations of the relationship between the individual and a regenerated society (Claire, 2011, p. 2).

Offering a novel vision of revolutionary action, Debord and the Situationists encouraged actors to “experiment”, testing their potential to construct another reality – a novel material organization outside of capitalism (Marcolini, 2013, p. 121). Through poetic engagement in the creation of situations, they sought to develop alternative organizations to capitalism, constructing

⁶⁵ The theme of sleep as a form of alienation induced by neoliberal capitalism has been addressed in several movies, including Philip Kaufman’s 1978 *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, where humans are silently replaced by a creature from space after falling asleep. The only chance of survival is sleep deprivation, which proves impossible in the long run and induces a silent replacement by creatures with a human appearance but devoid of all humanity.

⁶⁶ Louis Malle addressed the role of art in breaking up the mechanistic and unreal experience produced by modernity and the need for “situationist” artistic performance in his all-time classic movie *My Dinner with André* (1981). Whereas previously a play or even a book had been able to produce this effect, André considers it necessary to move the subject into another space-time in order to overcome his deep numbness, to experience the kind of epiphany that would get him, the subject, out of their experience, disconnected from any intimate truth, keeping him in a fantasy in which he plays the role of father, husband, son and waiter in this “society of spectacle”. In one of the dialogues, André exposes the political tone of this artistic rebellion: “Okay. Yes. We’re bored now. We’re all bored. But has it ever occurred to you, Wally, that the process which creates this boredom that we see in the world now may very well be a self-perpetuating unconscious form of brainwashing created by a world totalitarian government based on money? And that all of this is much more dangerous, really, than one thinks? And that it’s not just a question of individual survival, Wally, but that somebody who’s bored is asleep? And somebody who’s asleep will not say no?”

new situations and combating discursive alienation. Debord applied this theoretical lens to urban spaces, developing non-utilitarian modes of relations in communal modes of engagement aimed at re-imagining another city in the present (Cochard, 2017). Influenced by Nietzschean vitalism, Situationism explored the urban setting with an emphasis on spontaneous life forces, opposition to conformity and a critique of authenticity and of individual liberation (Yeritsian, 2019). These interventions in everyday life were intended to collectively recreate what the city should be about, with the city becoming a playground for creative pursuits, experimentations, hijackings and occupations: “where the white page was, there the ideal city should be”(Kauffman, 2002, p. 294).

Up to this point this chapter has described how the critique of modernity and values of productive imagination have been mobilized within philosophical theories leading to forms of political engagement such as individual anarchism and artistic interventions within everyday life. These forms of engagement are usually found within libertarian politics and forms of lifestyle anarchism that experiment with more authentic forms of life. In the next section I present another form of engagement derived from the works of Charles Fourier which, unlike the Nietzschean grammar, focuses on the project of bringing about an alternative society to industrial capitalism through forms of collective organizing that mediate the productive capacity of the imagination.

4.2 The Alternative grammar

Before engaging with Fourier’s work and explaining how it constitutes the starting point for an alternative political grammar, I briefly present here the historical context of utopian socialism and forms of revolutionary Romanticism. At the risk of confusing the reader, there is a need to go back in time to Romanticism and its project of an alternative civilization to industrial capitalism.

4.2.1 Revolutionary Romanticism and utopian socialism

Romanticism’s conservatism, nationalism and hopes for the restoration of the *Ancien Régime* have often eclipsed the movement’s revolutionary ambitions in historical accounts. However, the contention that there was something inherently conservative in this movement has been challenged by a Marxist engagement that looks beyond the traditional prism of Left vs. Right and

conservative vs. revolutionary (Sayre & Löwy, 2015). Thus, on the one hand, it is possible for writers to reconcile anti-revolutionary positions with a belief that industrialization has led to a great deal of misery, poverty and inequalities, in which case they would ‘politically’ be on the right but ‘socially’ on the left. In *Balzac and French Realism* (Lukács, 1999) for example, Lukács demonstrated how Balzac’s reactionary opinions allowed for a faithful portrayal of capitalism and the corruption of the bourgeois-world that inspired Marx and Engels,⁶⁷ while other more progressive writers like Stendhal, whose worldview remained in the tradition of the Enlightenment rationalist project, offered a much less poignant and complete critique of social transformation in the early 19th century (Swingewood et al., 1972). On the other hand, an anti-capitalist Marxist prism identifies a typology of revolutionary Romanticism characterized as “politically moderate and socially radical” (Sayre & Löwy, 1989, p. 71). This stream of Romanticism rejected the excesses of a totalitarian state but was more radical in aiming for the establishment of an uncompromising socialist revolution.

From the 18th century onwards, authors considered as “pre-Romantics” such as Restive de la Bretonne and Nicolas de Bonneville built upon Rousseau’s ideals of radical equality and direct democracy, championing the collective ownership of the means of production, goods, and land (Sayre & Löwy, 1989). What is of particular interest to this thesis is that these revolutionary ambitions were developed even from this early stage both as an imaginative and practical experiment. While the pre-Romantics François-Noël Babeuf and Nicholas Bonneville developed projects of egalitarian rural communities, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre in his unfinished novel *L’Amazone* (1800) wrote one of the first utopian novels set in an exotic elsewhere in which equality and communion between men, moderate forms of work and shared property were all possible. Thus, while Romanticism reflected a longing for an original paradise, revolutionary Romanticism was set apart by its special relationship between past and future, between now and an ‘elsewhere’. From the rediscovery of past historical experiences (such as Athenian democracy, communal lifestyles in the Middle Ages and revolutionary experiments in the 18th and 19th centuries), it became possible to rethink another future. Far from confining itself to nostalgic

⁶⁷ Although Marxist analyses of Romanticism, such as that offered by Lukács, often show a deep disaffection for the movement, Marx himself was by no means anti-Romantic. On the contrary, his pamphlets on worker’s dehumanization often took the tone of Romantic socialism and he was inspired by Fourier in some of his analysis (Löwy & Sayre, 1992, p. 113). However, with some exceptions such as Rosa Luxembourg and Henri Lefebvre, Marxist tradition has often dismissed Romanticism as mere subjectivism, irrationalism and idealism and an inspiration for imperialist and reactionary aristocracy (Vanoosthuyse, 2018).

feelings for the past, revolutionary Romanticism called for a dialectical synthesis between present and past aimed at creating other futures and alternative possibilities (Marcolini, 2007). This special relationship between past and the present times, between the now and the elsewhere, gave revolutionary Romanticism an inherent utopian dimension that explains the commonly used term ‘utopian socialism’ to designate the first socialists.

Indeed, the concept of ‘elsewhere’ was central to the utopian socialists’ vision of another future. Whether this elsewhere was located in a past in which people lived in harmony with nature, as in forms of pre-capitalistic collectivism, or conceived of as an exotic and faraway place, this alterity to present times was presented as a pragmatic and feasible possibility. In direct opposition to ideologies pursuing stability, the utopian approach sought to destabilize the present through an alternative (Ricoeur, 1984), to explore the possibilities of reality, ultimately building a revolutionary socialist project based on the deinstitutionalization of human relationships, replacing authoritarian, hierarchical and dominant vs dominated relations with cooperative and egalitarian relations within a reunited human community.

Although utopian socialism has been dismissed by historical materialists,⁶⁸ this movement can be credited for having formulated the very concept of socialism itself, contributing to the development of imaginative and concrete experiments which, albeit short-lived, constituted the first real socialist utopias. While their affinities with Romanticist aspirations to harmony are self-evident in their descriptions of future societies, their writings also evidence that they sought to distance themselves from a concept of utopia as mere daydreaming. Rather than inspirational fictions, socialist utopians aspired instead to practical programs supported by a “romantic faith” in human progress (Taylor, 1982, p. 1). This intertwining of utopian and scientific aspirations created a focus on ideal forms of social organization constituted around principles of association, community and cooperation aimed at maximizing the capacity of community members to live alongside one another (ibid). The utopia that became the benchmark for all attempts at conceiving other forms of social organizing was written by Charles Fourier, an 18th century French merchant turned philosopher.

⁶⁸ Although later popularized by Engels’ *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), utopian socialism was first defined by Proudhon in 1846, who rejected it in favour of scientific socialism (Universalis Encyclopaedia, 2015).

4.2.2 Fourier and the Alternative grammar

Fourier, who invented the term ‘socialism’, embodied an unusual combination of Romantic concerns and scientific thinking. While Fourier wrote prior to the 19th century, this thesis defines Romanticism as a worldview that drew on resources from the inspired city in order to construct an alternative to industrial capitalism. In this sense, Fourier’s focus on unleashing the passions, feelings and imagination against reason were cardinal values of Romanticism (Morilhat, 1991, p. 31). He was also Romantic in his opposition to the evils of industrial civilization, including ugly and unhealthy cities leading to poverty, inequality and monotonous labor, hence ‘civilization’ is always a pejorative term in Fourier’s works (Kloslo, 2011, p. 375). Unlike Nietzsche, however, who believed it was the task of the imagination’s creative power to reconstruct the moral order, Fourier aspired to another form of moral order capable of mitigating the evils of modernity, including not only poverty but also ecological damage. Indeed, Fourier has been cited as one of the fathers of eco-socialism (Audier, 2017, p. 95). Recognizing the environmental devastation caused by civilization, he aspired to a socialism that reconciled social progress, including individual liberties and women’s rights, with pre-capitalist values of community and solidarity, recreating a pristine natural environment.

This new form of organizing was not based upon people’s rational faculties, however, but was dependent on an elaborate and grandiose ‘scientific’ theory of human passions and desires. Fourier aspired to a form of social organization in which people could finally follow their natural passions and love instincts in a society in which these emotions were free and unbound. The overarching aim of this project was to free people’s passions from the misery of an oppressive civilization (Ricoeur, 1997, p. 399). In his works, filled with mystical undertones, Fourier claimed that liberating human passions in their greatest diversity was the path to social harmony: “*the happiness on which we have reasoned so much (or rather unreasoned) consists in having the most ardent and the most excessive passions and in being able to satisfy them all*” (quoted in Bruckner, 1975, p. 9, own translation). According to Keith Taylor (1982, p. 103): “if there is a key to Fourier’s thought, and thereby to his complex personality as well, it is undoubtedly to be found in his philosophy of human desires, or ‘passions’ as he preferred to call them.” Remarkably progressive for his times, Fourier wrote a radical critique of the effects of monogamy and of marriage in producing woman’s enslavement, coining the term “feminism” and envisioning an

institutionalized organization of relationships in order to maintain social connections⁶⁹ (Bozon, 2005). Instead of cold, tepid and dispassionate connections, Fourier aspired to ardent and refined passions that would bring individuals together in unhindered voluntary association (Fourier, 1841b, p. 14). For Fourier, passions were no longer the reflection of a natural moral order based on equality and solidarity. Instead, the liberation of individual passions, “*enjoyment without hindrance*”, became a new absolute value in no way subordinated to any other value. Henceforth, “*innumerable pleasures*” would be assured “*to all individuals whatever the inequality of fortunes*” (Fourier, 1841b, p. 19). Equal access to passions was thus preferable for Fourier to perfect material equality.

While this project challenged the pursuit of radical equality as the prime objective, Fourier’s utopia was by no means merely sensorial. Rather he advocated deliberately harnessing individual passions to form the bedrock for collective organizing. The inherent difficulty in understanding Fourier’s work lies in his vast contribution and radicalness for his time. On the one hand, his utopia, the “phalanx”, excluded neither private property nor the existence of a regulatory market, nor differences between social classes and hierarchy, all of which justifies Charles Gide’s labelling of him as the most “bourgeois of socialists” (Guillaume, 2016). On the other hand, Fourier was the first socialist thinker to decouple social progress from industrial progress. Shocked by the rise of poverty, he despised the rationalist and mechanist knowledge upon which industrial growth was organized and sought to re-evaluate our living experience (Beecher, 1993, p. 217). Condemning mercantile relationships and free trade, his “phalanx” was to be based on a collectivistic system of production and common property. This new social organization was to be established through consumer and producer cooperatives, the equal distribution of wages and reduced industrial production. *Fourier thus pursued the project of a society organized entirely on associations of producers and consumers outside of an authoritarian state.*

Fourier’s reflections on how to liberate humanity from the tyranny of work through diverse passions and the pursuit of happiness in the workplace anticipated other ambitions for non-alienated forms of labor. The utopia of the phalanx, built on the idea of a diversity of passions, re-evaluated the idea of work beyond the monotonous repetition of identical tasks. Fourier’s idea of labor involved reduced working hours in which workers could carry out pleasurable and varied

⁶⁹ Michel Bozon recalled Fourier’s influence on the thinking of 1968 thought one year after its republication in 1967 (Bozon, 2005).

tasks in an aesthetic and sensual environment. Building the cornerstone of the work-play-art utopia, Fourier's project proposed a society in which the usual separations between art and life, life and work, would be abolished. Foreshadowing Proudhon's writings, Fourier's utopia was combined with reflections on economic democracy in the workplace, including work based on "*industrial association*" in a society built on a network of co-operatives in which employees would be shareholders in their companies and members of food-and housing cooperatives. Fourier built a theory of social radicalism that would not necessitate the sacrifice of erotic life and individualized passions. His utopian view reconciled erotic and sensorial fulfillment and communal integration, sacrificing ideals of radical equality in pursuit of other modes of assimilation (Beecher, 1993, pp. 267–269). The constitution of collectives within the phalanx was to be ensured by emotional exchanges within the group. Working together and sharing common passions would erase differences in age, sex and social status, while rotations between social groups would allow participants to experiment with the function of execution and command. In sum, Fourier imagined alternative forms of collective organizing that dismissed hierarchy, monotony, boredom and repetition while allowing for individual expression and differences within groups.

Consistent with the ideas of his Romantic predecessors, Fourier proposed that notions of labor, property and modes of association needed to be re-evaluated in the name of a renewed experience between the self and the world, others and nature. Fourier epitomized the shortcomings of utopian socialism, however, in that his critique of industrialization as the culprit to blame for human misery was made without giving any consideration to the sources of economic conflict in private property and capital accumulation (Edge & Igersheim, 2018). Nevertheless, his theory gave rise to novel forms of engagement and real-life utopian attempts at recreating more harmonious, liberated and ecologically sustainable societies.

4.2.3 Forms of political engagement

In Fourier's work one finds a form of compromise between the values of the inspired city and the reorganization of society that has no equivalent in Nietzsche's later philosophy. While Nietzsche shared with Fourier the paramount value of enabling the free expression of a rich and complex

inner self through the liberation of passions that would make life akin to a great opera, in Fourier's work *the expression of such passions was mediated by collective forms of organizing*. In Fourier's work the relationship with the imagination was no longer the Romantic capacity of bringing visions of the future into the present through inspiration, intuition, and a harmonious state of being but rather a utopia that required *planning and collective organizing* to materialize. The forms of political engagement that arose from this approach were in accordance with his interest in forms of social organizing aimed at mitigating civilization's evils and re-establishing a poetic relationship between the individual and the self, others, and nature. In doing so, they established compromises with democratic, anarchist, and socialist aspirations, highlighting how the project of an alternative civilization has always spanned different political sensibilities.

4.2.3.1 Utopia in the workers' movement: the co-operative revolution

Fourier's ideas influenced a new radical consciousness and new revolutionary aspirations among French workers in the years from 1830 to 1848, especially in terms of labor organization (Beecher, 1993, p. 410). Growing concerns about the evils of industrialization fuelled support for utopian socialism as a non-violent form of revolution based on voluntary associations and cooperatives. The nineteenth century saw the development of strong federalist, associative and cooperative movements in France, the United Kingdom and the United States, each constructing organizational models based on Fourier's idea of producers' and consumers' cooperatives as alternatives to exploitative forms of labor (Guarneri, 1991, p. 309; Kloslo, 2011, p. 375). The first French cooperative was launched in 1831 in the jewelry sector, organized according to mutual aid and profit-sharing (Chomel et al., 2013, p. 28), and Fourier's theories spread through newspapers such as *Le Phalanstère* (from 1832) and *La Phalange* (from 1836), supporting the rise of cooperative movements both in France and in the United States. Utopian socialism thus proved to be more than merely an experimental utopia, at least for a selected few, as attested to by the dozens of phalanxes established in the United States that attempted to reconstruct society along cooperative lines and aspired to long-lasting social change through non-violent methods.

This period witnessed several small-scale attempts at non-violent revolution aimed at establishing alternative forms of organizing labor among actors excluded from the bourgeois and capitalist political revolution, including among male and female factory-workers. These forms of

self-management were conducted on the sidelines of the strikes of the 1840s in discourses labeled as utopian that propagated visions of another future (Riot-Sarcey, 1998). Fighting for an extension of the political space to within the factory gates, these movements championed forms of direct social and economic democracy. Unfortunately, these hopes remained unfulfilled and these demands were progressively erased from the political space, with the strikes of the 1830s quickly dismissed as mere acts of vandalism, their claims appearing incomprehensible in the eyes of the ruling class (Riot-Sarcey, 1998). The revolution of 1848, together with its hopes of democratic and social utopias, ended in a bloodbath.

4.2.3.2 Anarchist and socialist utopias

While anarchism as a mode of engagement has other intellectual sources and traditions that are beyond the scope of this thesis, the content of anarchist utopias is not fundamentally different from that of utopian socialism and revolutionary Romanticism. Both aspire to a non-violent revolution moving beyond the authoritarian state to a society organized in voluntary and horizontal modes of association, thriving in a world of fulfilling labor and human relations (Manfredonia, 2006). The outlook of socialists, libertarians and Marxists on the ideal future have all been built on similar representations, images, hopes and dreams (ibid). In this section I present two different engagements with utopia, one in the work of Proudhon and the other in the work of William Morris, to show how the idea of building alternatives in the present outside the state through voluntary forms of association and fulfilling labor spread to anarchism as well as socialism.

4.2.3.2.1 A utopia in the “here and now”: Proudhon

Emerging alongside Romanticism in the second half of the nineteenth century,⁷⁰ anarchism advocated a society that excluded any form of domination, whether that be hierarchy, patriarchy,

⁷⁰ After all, William Godwin (1756–1836), who is often credited for his contribution to anarchist doctrines, was Mary Shelley’s father and the father-in-law of Percy Bysshe Shelley, while his wife Mary Wollstonecraft was a famous early feminist figure whose writings, including her journal and travel writing, had a major impact on Romanticism (Tomaselli, 2016).

oligarchy or monarchy (i.e. any form of rule or *arche*). While Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin championed different versions of anarchism,⁷¹ this body of political ideas offered a common stance on cooperative and egalitarian relationships supporting modes of organization alternative to the capitalist state (Springer, 2018, p. 72). Two of these alternative modes were the cooperative system, involving the equal distribution of assets, and self-management, entailing equal participation in government. Springer notes that while anarchism developed as a movement against the state, it was also opposed to the property regime as a means of acquiring profit without participation in the labor process (Springer, 2018, p. 23), thereby distinguishing it from liberal schools of thought.⁷²

Romanticism and anarchism alike have been labelled as unscientific, unrealistic and oversensitive movements, caricatured as overly aesthetic, instinctive, disorganized and of course utopian forms of youthful rebellion by those seeking to establish more orderly and scientific ideological configurations in pursuit of socialism (McGeough, 2016). Despite being subject to similar criticisms, however, the relationship of anarchism with Romanticism and utopianism is complex, depending on which form of Romanticism and utopianism is at issue. Anarchists such as Kropotkin and Gori who drew on Romantic literature as a source of inspiration for building communities based on natural moralism⁷³ were dismissed as being too Romantic by Proudhon and other anarchists who believed in a more pragmatic and contractual form of anarchism. Notwithstanding their differences, however, these various streams of anarchism all maintained a close relationship with Romanticism in their engagement with affects, experimentation and crafted pathways to utopia as valid tactics for social change.

While certain forms of anarchism explicitly engaged with emotions as motives for political engagement (Jun, 2016), other streams of anarchism that prioritized the cerebral over the physical dismissed these Romantic concerns as being overemotional (McGeough, 2016, p. 5). Proudhon, for example, aspired to a society built upon contractual relations that would constitute a horizontal

⁷¹ See Pereira (2009b) for a more detailed study of the articulation of different grammars by anarchist authors, including the differences between Proudhonian anarchism, Bakunin's libertarian collectivism and Kropotkin's anarcho-communism.

⁷² The term 'anarcho-capitalism', or anarchic capitalism, refers to a critique that decries the bureaucracy that constrains the creativity of the individual but does not include any concomitant criticism of capitalism. The use of the label 'anarchism' can be confusing and should not mask fundamental differences between these two streams of thought (Arvon, 1983).

⁷³ This is the case of anarchism aspiring to form communities on the basis of the idea of moral solidarity (cf. the term 'anarcho-communism' in the Glossary (Appendix 1)).

network of institutions such as popular assemblies, associations and workers' councils, rejecting Romantic and utopian preoccupations (Cohn, 2016). In place of hierarchical and centralized institutions, Proudhon proposed a mode of organizing based on voluntary associations in which the smallest unit (i.e the individual) would retain its rights and its individuality while joining a larger unit, thus excluding total control over the life of the individual. In *Du Principe Fédératif* (1863), Proudhon indicated that “*in this system the contracting parties not only commit themselves commutatively to each other but keep their individuality, obtaining through this alliance more rights, freedoms and authority than they give up*” (quoted in Frère, 2010b, p. 2, own translation). In his first major work, *Qu'est ce que la propriété?*, Proudhon coined the term ‘scientific socialism’, i.e. a “science of society methodically discovered and rigorously applied” (Gurvitch, 1966), manifesting an enthusiasm for industrial systems and progress that contradicted a key stream in Romantic discourse that was deeply hostile to modernity and the values of the industrial city. Moreover, Proudhon manifested a fundamental divergence from the Romantic belief in a unifying and harmonious totality in that his conception of voluntary association was framed in terms contrary to those of Rousseau. Instead of an interiorization of political principles, Proudhon kept open the possibility of conflict between individuals within voluntary associations. He thus proposed a regime of association that ultimately embraced pluralism and antagonism rather than presupposing a Romantic unity (Pereira, 2009b, p. 100).

However, even those streams of anarchism that might be considered anti-utopian and anti-Romantic for rejecting idealism and blueprint versions of the future engaged in forms of utopia ‘in the here and now’. By developing a revolutionary approach of direct action, anarchism engaged with utopia not as a literary fiction or abstract vision but as the creation of institutions based on mutual aid, ethical behaviors and self-organizing, thus redefining the means-ends relationship in utopia (Ruth, 2016). Utopia was thus no longer the end point as in Fourier’s phalanx but became the means to open up alternative futures through novel institutions.

Proudhon developed the notion of revolution as experimentation⁷⁴ based on self-management and micro-credit. Instead of an organized revolution, he aspired to a bloodless revolution leading to a profound transformation of economic and political structures in a fundamental rupture with the capitalist state (Pereira, 2009b, p. 95). Proudhon thus became the leading advocate of a form of associationism-based socialism, rejecting the notion of a vanguard in favor of self-organized and voluntary associations between cooperatives and small enterprises, embracing a vision of revolution as a form of permanent experimentation with utopian ways of organizing.

4.2.3.2.2 *Crafting a better world: William Morris*

The work and thought of William Morris was consistent with earlier beliefs in forms of organizing labor for bringing about a poetic relationship between the self, others and nature. An exceptional figure in many regards, Morris's work can be seen as located at a crossroads of Marxism, Socialism and Romanticism – a combination of exciting medievalist fantasy tales, utopian novels, personal engagement with the English Socialist League, and the creation of the Arts and Crafts movement. His project aimed at re-integrating art and politics to combat the evils of industrialization, by educating the tastes of consumers to appreciate beautifully crafted work and thereby re-orienting both production and consumption. Today Morris would undoubtedly be called a 'social entrepreneur' (Nicholls, 2013), and be deeply admired for his social, entrepreneurial and humanistic (not to mention artistic) endeavors.

I should start by clarifying that Morris did not associate himself with anarchism. As the editor of the Socialist League's newspaper *The Commonweal* until 1890, Morris published his most famous contribution to socialism, the utopian tale *News from Nowhere*, as a serialised novel aimed at counteracting the influence of anarchist perspectives on revolutionary change by advocating

⁷⁴ Proudhon's emphasis on experimentation as a revolutionary path represents an epistemological departure from theoretical knowledge that was crucial in redefining utopia from a pragmatic point of view. Anarchism can thus be defined as "a conception of political action that does not pretend to be based on absolute knowledge of history or nature" that applies to "any political organization organized around the confrontation of opinions of collective experimentations" (Pereira, 2009b, p. 56 own translation). In doing so, anarchism challenges the Leninist conception of revolution and develops a concept of social change that places value on experience in the knowledge formation process. Anarchist theories constitute a critique against Cartesian dualistic rationality, operating a *rapprochement* between the mind, the senses and experience, thereby disclosing its Romantic roots. Anarchist criticisms of theoretical knowledge as being cut off from the heart and the body were also part of the Romantic tradition.

purely voluntary associations and emphasising the need for consensus (Holzman, 1984). Although his perspective of the revolution was definitely one of “*Socialism instead of laissez-faire*” (Morris, 1884), his beliefs in individual responsibilities and capacities, the critical importance he attributed to education, and his dismissal of authoritarian institutions were all closer to anarchist values, while his rejection of industrialism, his pursuit of both sensorial fulfillment and equality and his belief in art’s transcendent abilities further differentiate him from orthodox Marxism. In any case, William Morris’s socialism was deeply influenced by Romantic concerns (Kinna, 2000b; Levitas, 1989), making him the first Romantic Marxist (Löwy & Sayre, 1992, p. 115).

Morris’s vision of communism was expressed in his review of Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, which Morris criticized for its centralized, suburban and mechanistic ambitions:

There are some Socialists who do not think that the problem of the organization of life and necessary labour can be dealt with by a huge national centralization, working by a kind of magic for which no-one feels himself responsible; that on the contrary it will be enough for every citizen to feel himself responsible for its details, and be interested in them; that individual men cannot shuffle off the business of life on the shoulders of some abstraction called the State, but must deal with it in conscious association with each other; that variety of life is as much an aim of true communism as equality of condition, and that nothing but an union of these two will bring about real freedom: that modern nationalities are mere artificial devices for the commercial war that we seek to put an end to, and will disappear with it. And finally, that art, using that word in its widest and due signification, is not a mere adjunct of life which free and happy man can do without, but the necessary expression and indispensable instrument of human happiness (quoted in Levitas, 2011, p. 109).

It is worth specifying here what William Morris meant by art and how art engages with utopia and social change in a way that is different from Nietzsche’s conception. Challenging the contention that artistic aspirations are only for an elite or need to obey an elitist aesthetics, Morris saw “popular art” or what one might today call “craft” as the most elevated form of art (Morris, 1884). In a crusade against the alienated forms of work, poverty and environmental degradation brought about by industrialization, Morris saw the pursuit of art, understood in the broad meaning of the word as a meaningful, beautiful and fulfilling activity, as the path to creating a fair, equal and liberated society. For while humanity since the Middle Ages, according to Morris (1884),

mistakenly “gave up Art for what we thought was light and freedom” through modernity and industrialization, “now Art has something else to appeal to: no less than the hope of the people for the happy life which has not yet been granted to them. There is our hope: the cause of Art is the cause of the people.” For Morris, art, as the collective practice and liberating work of crafting, was the pathway for producing the ideal society. This idea lay at the core of Morris’s utopian novel *News from Nowhere* (1890), which portrayed England in the 22nd century as an ecologically sustainable network of small villages with an economy built mostly on crafts. While Morris dismissed Fourier’s belief that social change could be achieved by way of voluntary agreement as naive, he was deeply impressed by Fourier’s notion of attractive labor and further refined this theory on the basis of his reading of Marx. Morris understood work as having transformative potential if labour is conceived as an artistic pursuit founded on pleasure and creativity (Kinna, 2000a).

Linking Marxism, art and utopia, Morris attributed a utopian function to art related to the possibility of self-transformation through experience and the education of desire and taste in a way conducive to social transformation (Levitas, 1989). For Morris, artistic production embodied a kind of unity of means and ends characteristic of prefiguration and indistinguishable from the concept of unalienated labor, in sharp contrast to merely instrumental activity (Roberts & Freeman-Moir, 2013, p. 10). Conceived as an artistic process, utopia is a crafted phenomenon – a process of collectively producing admirable goods to be used in everyday life that offers a dignified way of sustaining life. In Roberts and Freeman’s (2013, p. 4) words: “Works of art that are not remote from common life, that are widely enjoyed in a community, are signs of a unified and collective life. But they are also marvelous aids in the creation of such life.” For Morris, an alternative form of organization conceived on the model of craftsmanship was capable of re-establishing a poetic relationship between the self, others and nature. Unlike Nietzsche, Morris considered the practice of art as being uplifting only to the extent that it is institutionalized within society, thereby forming the bedrock for an alternative, more just, ecologically sustainable and democratic social system.

4.2.3.3 Revolutionary Romanticism in the 20th century

This next section engages with attempts at renewing a poetic form of life through other forms of

organizing in the 20th century. In doing so it addresses the renewal of the far left in post-war France and how this was built upon a critique of alienation heavily influenced by the Romantic repertoire of ideas and a revolutionary narrative that emphasized how the modern world and technical progress had dehumanized the experience of life. While still engaged with Marxism as a ‘worldview’, this position aspired to a theoretical renewal integrating new actors, horizons, problems and theories beyond Marx, including the ideas of the utopian socialists (Lefebvre, 1948, pp. 14–15). Alienation became a concept for describing a variety of situations and not only the exploitation of labor, as well as for giving voice to political subjects other than the proletariat. In a context in which discontent with modernity extended beyond the scope of material conditions, this stream positioned itself as a continuation of Marx while enlarging the scope of his critique.

Unlike the notion of economic exploitation, which does not call into question the social benefits of progress, the criticism of alienation highlighted how social progress and technical progress can be mutually exclusive. The growing importance of alienation as a central critique from the left must thus be understood in the context of a larger and wider discontent with modernity, not only among poets and artists but also students, small business owners and craftspeople.⁷⁵ In opposition to orthodox Marxism, which saw technical progress as potentially greatly improving the conditions of the working class, this new focus on alienation stressed how the relentless pursuit of technical progress would not lead to the end of exploitation. On the contrary, such technological developments were seen as creating the conditions for other forms of human misery, including loss of meaning, the deterioration of human relationships, the disfigurement of the world and the impoverishment of the human experience. This critique was brought forward as early as 1939⁷⁶ by Henri Lefebvre and his Romantic reading of Marx then later by Cornelius Castoriadis and his concept of autonomy, and finally by André Gorz, who combined a Marxist critique of capitalism and an analysis of labor within a system of political

⁷⁵ The critique of industrialization was central to *Poujadisme* (1953–1962), a political movement capitalizing on the discontentment of small business owners and craftsmen with France’s rapid modernization. Souillac (2007) provides a solid introduction to the history of this movement.

⁷⁶ Emmanuel Mounier, founder of the French literary magazine *Esprit* and the founder of European personalism, articulated a critique of the reification induced by industrial capitalism in the 1930s. Expressing a strong nostalgia for a pre-capitalist religious past, Mounier’s personalism re-evaluated the notions of person and community, which he contrasted with the isolated individual. Some of Mounier’s ideas, such as the creation of situations and institutions based on experience and inner knowledge (Mounier, 1962, p. 85), and the creation of collectives that do not undermine individual autonomy through bureaucratic and centralizing movements (Mounier, 1966, p. 165), heralded evolutions within far-left politics. The *Parti Socialiste Unifié* (PSU) would be strongly influenced by this left-wing Christian stream of thought.

ecology. These authors engaged with the production of non-alienated spaces and alternative ways of organizing to achieve a renewed relation to the self.

4.2.3.3.1 Henri Lefebvre: revolutionary Romanticism

Henri Lefebvre reflected on the phenomenon of alienation from an early age, eventually leading him to Marxism. His vision of alienation (Lefebvre, 1990) revealed his deeply Romantic influences, however, including a longing for a lost original paradise and nostalgia for a state of social osmosis (cf. Chapter 3). Indeed, Lefebvre defined alienation as “*a process of degradation, of the loss of an original human fullness, of an undifferentiated cosmic and natural order, like a double movement of separation and abstraction, of nature and culture, of the social and the human, leading to the specialization of various spheres of activity*” (Trebitsch, 2003, p. 66, own translation). The wider concept of alienation outside of the factory led to a critique of the technocratic mythology responsible for diffusing an ideology of modernity that had ultimately produced a living space unsuited to human needs. Unveiling the ideological and conservative nature of this mythology, Lefebvre stripped technological progress of its utopian properties (Lefebvre, 1967). Instead, his concerns with modern urban design were filled with Romantic ambitions of returning to a once flourishing but now fragmented unity:

It highlighted the growing fragmentation of the city. The fact that it has been an organic unit throughout history. But for quite some time, this organic unit was become undone, fragmented [...] that was the meaning of Unitary Urbanism: unify what had a certain unity, but a lost unity, a disappearing unit. (Lefebvre & Ross, 1997, own translation, my emphasis).

To move beyond technocratic urbanism and the rationalization of modern life, Lefebvre opened up a new conception of political struggles in the production of collective, creative and democratic spaces through experimentation rather than authoritarian planning. *Thus, the creation of new forms of social organizations within urban spaces became the center of a new strategy of resistance.* Lefebvre’s major contribution lay in his articulation of the question of alienation and its relation to space as the object of power struggles between social groups, whereby he theorized the collective appropriation of such spaces (Busquet, 2012). From this point forward, political

struggles became linked to “everyday struggles” in the sense of producing new meanings through new practices within daily activities capable of modulating space. Rimbaud’s poetic formula of “*changez la vie*” was embodied within the urban space and reformulated as the “*right to the city*”. The expression of the right to the city contained an aspiration to revive a certain lost form of communal life threatened by unbridled urbanization. Faced with this fragmentation, Lefebvre wished to reintegrate the singular individual into an urban fabric within a living democracy by championing non-market relationships instituted in common spaces (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 108) and instituting pre-capitalistic forms of rights to use such space (Brancaccio, 2019).

Lefebvre disclosed his affinity with Romanticism in a text of 1957 entitled *Towards a Revolutionary Romanticism* (Lefebvre & Hess, 2011) in which he conducted a critique against the French Communist Party and other classic political organizations whom he accused of ignoring forms of spontaneous change (Lefebvre & Ross, 1997). In the aftermath of the failed Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Lefebvre sought to inaugurate a novel revolutionary Marxist perspective while rejecting historical determinism and its consequent organization under the form of a political vanguard. The institutionalization and deradicalization of political parties, as well as the inability of artistic movements to offer novel insights, led Lefebvre to call for a ‘revolutionary Romanticism’ which, according to him, would differ from the old Romanticism since criticisms of the present were no longer made in the name of an idealized past⁷⁷ but rather “in the name of the possible” (Jappe, 2011). Refuting Marxist determinism, Lefebvre proclaimed revolution as a human attitude “*open to the possible*” (“*en proie au possible*”), seeking new political horizons through a poetically colored lens. In this perspective the imagination is no longer associated with the escapism of the earliest forms of Romanticism but is instead a force for re-investing meaning in time, space and material life. In an article of 1961 entitled *Experimental Utopia for a New Urbanism*, Lefebvre stated the following:

We can name utopia the experimentation of human possibilities with the help of the image and imaginary accompanied by incessant criticism and incessant reference to the problematic given in reality. Experimental utopia goes beyond the usual use of the

⁷⁷ Although “new Romantics” distanced themselves from the idea of an idealized past, images of past societies remained a source of both inspiration and nostalgia. Lefebvre considered the Middle Ages as a golden age for the art of living, for example, while Debord drew intellectual references from the 16th century (Jappe, 2011). For Castoriadis, meanwhile, an idealized Athenian democracy remained the absolute model for his concept of democracy. In other words, the ‘new’ Romantics did not only look towards the future.

hypothesis in the Social Sciences. (Lefebvre, 1961, own translation).

This novel revolutionary Romanticism more than ever considered utopia as a valid political strategy, as the practical alteration of social spaces and the constitution of new forms of collective organizing aimed at taking control over one's condition of existence through the collective self-management of structures responsible for producing political and economic life:

When a group, in the broad sense of the term, that is to say the workers of a company, but also the people of a district or a city, when these people no longer passively accept the conditions of existence, when they no longer remain passive in front of these conditions that are imposed on them; when they try to dominate them, to master them, there is an attempt at self-management. [...] A self-management attempt is a path in perpetual change. An attempt at self-management is something essential and fundamental since it is the mastery of the conditions of existence. It is social relationships that starts with space, the birthplace of self-management; it is neither the economic taken separately, nor the political taken separately. (Lefebvre, *La Nouvelle Critique*, 1979, quoted in Thomé, 2012, p. 55)

4.2.3.3.2 Cornelius Castoriadis: the autonomous society

During the same period, Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort developed a critique of the alienation imposed by bureaucratization and technocratic ideology, creating a radical philosophical and political project based on workers' autonomy. Castoriadis and Lefort exposed the increasing bureaucratization of political parties as an obstacle to the pursuit of revolutionary objectives. This criticism led to the formation of an autonomous communist section, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, which would come to have a significant influence in the creation of another left (Tovar-Restrepo, 2014, p. 14). Centered on worker's struggles, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* built its theoretical reflections on documentation produced by workers themselves, thus constructing a revolutionary theory upon the proletariat's new modes of action and growing aspirations. The originality of the group lay in its critique of a common phenomenon in both Western capitalistic and Soviet societies in which workers were passively dismissed, objectified and alienated by an external decision-making system (Tovar-Restrepo, 2014, p. 16).

Within the thought developed by *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, the Romantic critique of alienation extended beyond a concern for individual dignity, targeting instead the collective capacity for self-determination. This issue opened up a new conception of revolutionary activity in which self-consciously historical actors could recover their capacity for agency. Against the alienation produced by bureaucratization, forms of self-organization and self-government appeared as solutions to achieve autonomy, which would become the center of Castoriadis's philosophical project (Caumières, 2015). This analysis of alienation produced a critique of capitalism in both Western and so-called communist societies. In his seminal work, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Castoriadis 1975, 1987), Castoriadis pointed out how a system conducive to reification paradoxically exploits workers' creative abilities:⁷⁸ “*Capitalism can function only by continuously drawing upon the genuinely human activity of those subject to it, while at the same time dehumanizing them as much as possible*” (Castoriadis, 1987, p. 11).

While his concerns about dehumanized industrial capitalism were aligned with Romantic protests, the originality of his analysis⁷⁹ lay in his elucidation of the way in which, by contributing to the autonomy of the economic sphere in relation to other social spheres, both capitalism and Marxism had become ideologically deterministic, comprising an ensemble of significations claiming to institute once and for all the value and the outcome of human societies in a way that was severely detrimental to humanity as a whole. In this view the economy appears as a set of representations, of imaginary significations subjugating all activities to unlimited growth and progress, putting scientific knowledge and organizational forms at the service of industrial development (Latouche, 2014, pp. 75–79) while at the same time asserting itself as a transcendent extra-human sphere of meaning. According to Castoriadis, communism and capitalism both

⁷⁸ Castoriadis thus drew up a critique of the exploitation of collective creative abilities – a critique we find today at the center of Marxist autonomist analyses (Lazzarato, 1996; Zwick et al., 2008).

⁷⁹ One of the major differences between Habermas and Castoriadis is that Habermas sees technical rationality as an ideology, understanding language as a tool of hegemony. In this view, science and technology comprise a depoliticizing ideology which imposes an institutionalized but unrecognized and unacknowledged political domination in the name of rationality (Fourez, 1974, p. 624). Science and technology have thus become fields that provide legitimization for the domination of rationality, which equates all human ends with rational mastery and control while excluding any truly political questions. However, the nature of technical rationality is quite different for Castoriadis. Whereas it is ideological for Habermas it was a ‘social imaginary’ for Castoriadis. While an ideology seeks to submit and build consensus through a smokescreen, veiling the interests of the capitalist system, as a social imaginary such rationality constrains and limits the possibilities both for the dominated and the dominant. Taking the account given by Habermas, a resolution might be achieved by unveiling the hidden interests behind this ideology, while the account given by Castoriadis demands the creation in full awareness of new meanings to form a new imaginary even without reversing power relations.

reproduce this imaginary of rational organization centered on a reifying pseudo-rationality and an unlimited expansion of rational mastery (Castoriadis, 1998, p. 155). This pseudo-rationality is nothing more than a symbolic activity ignorant of itself, since society remains ignorant to the myths and the imaginaries that govern from the shadows. Capitalist society experiences a particular type of alienation, according to Castoriadis, characterized by the progressive autonomy of institutions that paradoxically proceeds from the disenchantment of the world. In sum, Castoriadis critiqued modern rationality for having failed its original purpose of delivering humans from mysticism and religion by becoming a new religion itself:

Modern pseudo-rationality is one of the historical forms of the imaginary, it is arbitrary in its ultimate ends to the extent that these ends themselves stem from no reason, and it is arbitrary when it posits itself as an end, intending nothing but a formal and empty 'rationalization'. In this aspect of its existence, the modern world is in the throes of a systematic delirium. The most directly and most imminently threatening form of this delirium is the automatization of uncontrolled technical development "in the service" of no definite end (Castoriadis, 1987, p. 110).

The central problem for Castoriadis was that society is in a situation of heteronomy: it has lost sight of the products of its creative activity and does not perceive itself as a self-creation. The political project advanced by Castoriadis thus involved repossessing the productive capacities of the collective imagination: *"The imaginary of which I am speaking is not an image of. It is the unceasing and essentially undetermined (socio-historical and psychical) creation of figures / forms / images, on the basis of which alone there can be a question of 'something'"* (Castoriadis, 1987, p. 4).⁸⁰ This psyche is never completely socialized but always retains a radical character, nurturing the emergent ever-changing imagination.

Castoriadis's 'project of autonomy' was based on recognizing the creative properties of the imagination and making explicit the self-creative character of society. In this sense he engaged with the Romantic notion of a poietic imagination capable of recomposing significations and thus serving as a non-teleological motor of historical transformation, producing the conditions for

⁸⁰ This resonates with the Surrealists' project in that both endeavors found the source of all alteration, all progress and all social change in the unconscious imagination. However, unlike the Surrealists for whom change and radicalism emerged from the exploration of one's own psyche, for Castoriadis the essentially creative character is the social-historic imagination.

radical change. This project gave rise to a new conception of revolutionary activity that sought to establish itself as an autonomous and conscious creative process. Revolutionary practices were thenceforth conceived of as a quest for the creation of the new, i.e. of that which escapes determination. More than ever, revolutionary practices were not thought of as following a scientific model but rather as an artistic creation that also transforms its creators:

Next, what is essential to creation is not “discovery” but constituting the new: art does not discover, it is; and the relationship between what it constitutes and the “real”, an exceedingly complex relationship to be sure, is not a relation of verification. And on the social plane, which is our main interest here, the emergence of new institutions and of new ways of living is not a “discovery” either but an active constitution. (Castoriadis, 1987, p. 86, my emphasis).

This creative ontology impacted the idea of revolutionary activity itself, as *the recognition of society as self-creation places the organizational question at the core of its political project*. As a quest to create institutions capable of autonomously instituting and managing collective activity, revolution is no longer the realization of a utopian plan but the constitution of institutions as new forms of social organization allowing each member to participate directly in the constitution of an alternative society, consolidating collective creative abilities in analogy with collective artistic activity. Any program is therefore provisional, the emphasis being more on the internal dynamics necessary for self-organization (Castoriadis, 1987, p. 57) and ultimately on creating a network of autonomous individuals and organizations. In this perspective, socialism shifts from being the defense of the interests of a particular class to becoming the possibility for the oppressed class to defend its own interests, recovering control over one's life (Caumières, 2015, p. 21).

Accordingly, in order for the oppressed class to gain the means to defend its own interests the socialist revolution can only happen through the creation of organizations fostering collective and individual autonomy and thus establishing direct democracy within a self-managed system. More so than Lefebvre, Castoriadis addressed the challenges of direct democracy and the forms of organization required to make such democracy work. In this sense *his ontology of creation and imagination does not contradict but rather justifies a democratic political project with the question of organization at its core*. Indeed, it requires a way of organizing built around the recognition of society's self-creation, fostering the process of social change in a democratic and inclusive way. Unsurprisingly, Castoriadis aspired to a return to Athenian democracy as a system based on direct democracy, pragmatic knowledge and the rejection of the state as a separate body

of society, three points deemed incompatible with radical democratic ideals (Caumières, 2015, p. 88). Updating this political ideal, self-management thus appeared as the optimal form of organization in that it eliminates hierarchies constitutive of political and economic inequalities (Castoriadis, 1979).

However, the nature of creativity leads to a delicate compromise between its ever-evolving nature and the need for organization capable of achieving permanent change. Indeed, in the *Imaginary Institution of the Society* Castoriadis depicted social change as a process constantly in motion and in which stability is never guaranteed, making it necessary to develop a form of organization with the capacity to encompass this permanent and chaotic change, similar to biological evolution:

This is the situation in biology, where the system is a living system by means of its capacity for 'evolving' both on the ontogenetic and on the phylogenetic level and as a global biosystem (...) The living thing possesses as an intrinsic property not simply its capacity for development but for evolving, for organizing itself in a different way; its organization is this very capacity for transforming an accident or a disturbance into a new organization (Castoriadis, 1987, p. 137).

There is a tension here between the need to consciously organize for change and the proposition of a sort of “natural” unfolding of social change as a spontaneous and slow evolution that does not involve any form of goal-driven instrumental organization. This tension constitutes a challenge and requires a revolutionary organization capable of such compromise. The tensions between Castoriadis and Lefort reflect the fragility of such adjustment. Lefort expressed strong anti-bureaucratic beliefs, opposing any form of stable representation and any form of centralization that might surpass the revolutionary experience. For Castoriadis, by contrast, to regard organization as an evil spell jeopardized the very idea of a socialist revolution, which entails some anticipation and organization (Caumières, 2015, pp. 24–25), although the implementation of radical democracy would then enable an instituting process capable of permanent evolution. Through its ambiguities and its internal conflicts, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* questioned the revolutionary organization, its centralization, spontaneity, unity and representation, foreshadowing today's debates regarding the radical left's horizontal and fluid modes of organizing (Frère, 2010b).

4.2.3.3.3 André Gorz: autonomy and political ecology

Both Castoriadis and Gorz contributed to the concept of autonomy, not in the sense of self-sufficient individuals breaking away from the world's imposed limitations but in the sense of accepting our collective responsibility for setting such limitations. This constituted the starting point for including ecology and nature's limitations within a political project (Gauthier, 2011). Unveiling the mystification behind industrial capitalism and its inherent ideology of progress, the concept of autonomy challenged taken-for-granted assumptions about eternal growth in a world of finite resources (Duverger, 2013). Castoriadis noted how the capacity of the ecology movement for challenging the techno-productive capitalist system contributed to society's autonomy (Castoriadis & Cohn-Bendit, 2014, p. 37).

Ecology was never at the core of Castoriadis' engagement, however, unlike Gorz who is often credited with being the pioneer of modern political ecology (Zin, 2012). In a text published in 1974, *Leur écologie et la nôtre* ('Their ecology and ours'), reproduced a year later in his seminal work *Ecologie et Politique* ('Ecology as Politics') (Gorz, n.d.) Gorz's impressive visionary analysis described how capitalism was adapting to the ecological crisis, charging for eco-services and green projects while the majority of the population would be deprived of access to natural resources. In opposition to this form of green capitalism, the project of political ecology integrates a conception of human needs within a collective system capable of deciding and regulating its authentic needs:

What do we want? A capitalism that accommodates ecological constraints or an economic, social and cultural revolution abolishing capitalism's constraints, and, in doing so, institutes a new mode of being between man and collectivity, environment and nature. (Gorz, 1974, p. 13)

As evident in this quotation, the final objective of political ecology is not the restoration of the Earth's ecosystems but the preservation of a mode of being in the world, a relationship between the self and the collective. In this sense Gorz positioned political ecology within the Romantic perspective of the world as one of disenchantment and alienation (Guillaume, 2019). This Romantic longing for a poetic relationship to the world is the alpha and omega of Gorz's political

project, in which greater consideration for ecological questions and the quest for a non-alienated society go hand in hand. Gorz did reflect on the question of alienated labor, but like Lefebvre he started from the poetic relationship between the self and the world before integrating a social critique of the conditions of work and exploitation within the immaterial economy (Zin, 2012).

The final aim of autonomy for Gorz was thus to re-establish better relations with nature, community, and the self, entailing and leading to the collective invention of techniques, tools and institutions for fostering another relation to the world. Inspired by Illich's reflections on *Tools for Conviviality* (Illich et al., 1973), Gorz was not opposed to technique per se, seeing the potential of non-alienating technologies for fostering autonomy, e.g. through more sustainable forms of production. Integrating ecological concerns and the emancipative social potential of technology, Gorz imagined a future in which shared access to tools and better design would increase social and ecological capital, extending the lifecycle of products through repair and re-use (Oropallo, 2019, p. 161).

In the text *Pourquoi la société salariale a besoin de nouveaux valets*, Gorz pursued Fourier's and William Morris's perspectives on emancipative and creative labor as work that is "*fascinating to the point that it merges with life itself, like for artists*" (Gorz, 2013, pp. 25–26, own translation) while integrating a Marxist analysis of technological gains in productivity leading to a post-work society. His project was not to establish better working conditions, since labor would ultimately lose its integrative and socialization properties, but to reorganize institutions within a post-work society, "developing a culture centered around auto-determined activities" (Gorz, 2013, p. 55). What Gorz meant by this elusive term was that an autonomous society requires institutions that allow each individual and all communities to participate in the reproduction of their own conditions of existence, for example through guaranteed basic income, practices of mutual aid, organized solidarity networks and cooperatives fostering self-production.

In sum, the works of Lefebvre, Castoriadis and Gorz all engaged with the Fourierist ideal of an alternative to modern civilization capable of addressing the need for a collectivistic, democratic and ecologically sustainable society and of making compromises with democratic and collective forms of organizing. The following section analyses May 68 as a moment of co-existence between different political grammars derived from Romanticism, reflecting the plurality of the Left's ambitions. Overall, the section describes the progressive decline of the Socialist and Alternative grammar during the 1970s in favor of a Nietzschean grammar.

4.3 May 68 and the 1970s: leftist grammars of political engagement

This section provides a reading of May 68 as a series of events in which activists mobilized several political grammars, including a Nietzschean grammar active within counter-cultural practices and an Alternative grammar supporting forms of organization alternative to capitalist and statist institutions. The combination of these grammars reflects the left's diverse ambitions and explains the plurality of its modes of engagement, from counter-cultural slogans to self-managed factory occupations. While May 68 did not succeed in sustaining prefigured forms of alternative organizing, it did bring self-management and utopian aspirations to the forefront of the political scene. The 1970s witnessed a rise in factory occupations and collective experiments with alternative organizing, extending the notion of collective self-determination to struggles beyond labor relations such as ecology, urbanism and feminism. By the end of this decade, however, aspirations for radical self-determination were abandoned in favor of other political forms of engagement focused on democratic participation and entrepreneurial action, ultimately abandoning the question of collective organizing.

4.3.1 1968–1975: An Alternative grammar of self-managed revolution

4.3.1.1 The political Romanticism of May 68

The multiplicity of grammars involved in May 68 has led to three key disagreements among those who see these events as having heralded the rise of a form of individualism that for them encapsulates the worst of today's inconsequential narcissism (Ferry & Renaut, 1988; Le Goff, 2006; Onfray, 2018), those who highlight the revolutionary aspirations of the worker's movement in this period (Bantigny, 2018; Vigna, 2007), and those who stress the movement's anti-technocratic and democratic aspirations (Touraine, 1998). Pereira notes how these pluralistic aspirations were reflected in different grammars of engagement, i.e. the individualistic, socialist and modernity grammars respectively, thus explaining the discrepancy in subsequent

interpretations of May 68 (Pereira, 2009a). In this sense, criticism that focuses only on the counter-cultural and individualistic dimensions of these events strips May 68 of its confrontational nature, offering only a limited view that ultimately serves a liberal agenda (Ross, 2008, p. 186) contrary to at least some of the movement's objectives. While concerns for self-fulfillment and individual forms of self-expression comprised some of the aspirations of the youth and the student movement, May 68 also involved a general strike of ten million workers that brought the country to a halt, including a wave of factory occupations in which a socialist grammar demanding better working conditions was combined with anti-technocratic and anti-hierarchical discourse.

What Pereira terms the 'individualistic' grammar of May 68 is equivalent to what this thesis has described as Nietzschean grammar. This grammar constructed the image of May 68 as a counterculture movement fulfilling all the hopes of the creative imagination. The famous slogans of this period, such as 'All power to the imagination!' (*L'imagination au pouvoir!*) and 'Enjoy without hindrance!' (*Jouissez sans entraves!*), reflect a vision of May 68 as "full of utopian hopes, of libertarian and surrealist daydreams" strongly influenced by Situationism (Löwy, 2002). Accounts of the events of May 68 tend to exalt the inherent creativity, desire and liberation of the social body manifested through events in which festivities and music became part of the revolutionary experience, expressing the "*creativity of the collective forces*", a "*spontaneous revolt*", a "*laboratory of ideas [...] where the imagination must prevail, not the sad bureaucracy, from which must be eradicated not only economic exploitation, but the hierarchical root of domination*" (Morin & Lefort, 1968, p. 26). A similar vision is given in Deleuze and Guattari's analysis, for whom May 68 was an event creator of the possible itself: "*The event creates a new existence, it produces a new subjectivity (new relations with the body, with time, sexuality, the immediate surroundings, with culture, work)*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1975). May 1968 constituted a paroxysm of Nietzschean beliefs in the powers of creation and collective imagination in solving a political crisis, or as Deleuze put it succinctly: "*There can only be creative solutions.*" The politics of the imaginary were pushed into a paroxysm in which for the first time a movement claimed its capacity to re-invent and imagine another form of society through poetic actions and occupations (Paris-Clavel, 2018), instituting politics as a creative, imaginative and differentiated action (Le Blanc, 2009).

However, the image of May 68 as libertarian, artistic and 'Nietzschean' should not obscure the extent to which class struggle remained an important paradigm in other forms of engagement such as workers' occupations and strikes. Recent studies on the movement of May 68 have

expanded the scope of analysis beyond the Latin Quarter, considering the events of that year in terms of their national dimensions. Contradicting the common assumption of a spontaneous movement, Kergoat (2018) has shown how the novel forms of struggle that emerged in May 68 were not so much spontaneous as prepared by years of struggles in the shadows, including shifting modalities and changing practices within strike actions. The surge in factory occupations in the period 1963–1967 had heralded a new type of struggle that afforded more space to women’s participation, free speech, strategic collaborations between student unions and workers’ forces, and spontaneous actions outside of trade unions’ leadership (Hatzfeld & Lomba, 2008; Kergoat, 2018). During the strikes and factory occupations that took place a year before 1968, alongside material calls for better working conditions and wages, workers conducted protests against productivism and dehumanizing modes of organization. In the strike at the Rhodiaceta factory in Besançon in 1967, slogans such as ‘*We are humans not robots!*’ reflect how critiques of exploitation were developed alongside Romantic post-materialist concerns about alienation (Bantigny, 2018). In line with this analysis, Brantigny states that May 68 can be understood as a large-scale collective movement, creating and imagining alternatives to social, economic and political alienation through novel forms of social struggle. Concerns for direct democracy and horizontal participation were thus developed in the context of long-term strikes, albeit in a non-uniform and sometimes rudimentary fashion, as for example through the establishment of general assemblies, commissions and action committees that both allowed more space for debates and interactions between strikers and non-strikers as well as direct modes of action. Pereira describes this particular grammar, influenced by Castoriadis’s work on radical democracy, as “modernist” in that it built on the democratic heritage and humanistic concerns of the Enlightenment.

Here I cannot agree with Pereira’s qualification of anti-authoritarian, ecological and radical forms of democracy as “modern”⁸¹. As shown in the previous chapter, this grammar emerged in reaction to an Enlightenment discourse on modernity as the expression of industrial progress, technology and an authoritarian state. Concerns for radical democracy thus cannot be reduced to

⁸¹ Pereira seems to use to refer indistinctly to grammars of modernity or of alternative. Indeed, in another work (Pereira, 2010), she refers to the grammars inspired by Castoriadis and Morin as “alternative”, defining it as a compromise between republican humanism and Nietzschean counter-cultures. In my perspective, this fails how their humanism is rooted in Romanticism’s defense of the person against the perils of scientific and rational progress. Thus, in this thesis the term Alternative grammar is redefined as a sub-grammar of Romanticism, with a compromise with the civic city in terms of forms of organizing.

the modern discourse on democracy as the concomitant of progress and civilization, since these concerns include a counter-cultural and anti-civilizational dimension. Rather than mobilizing a grammar of modernity, the spirit of May 68 had a “very modern anxiety about modernization” (Delannoi, 2010, p. 8) in the sense that it was a critique of the rationality produced by modernity that deprives human existence of meaning beyond instrumental rationality while pursuing the utopian hope of an alternative. On this basis I qualify such discourse as part of what I term the ‘Alternative grammar’.

The Alternative grammar is at play when actors justify their attempts to gain control over forms of human organization by creating novel institutions, spaces and practices in the name of a poetic relation with time, the environment, the self and others. In this sense the movement of May 68 expressed a strong desire for a change of existence (*‘changer la vie’*) that in turn justified a project of global transformation through self-managed organizations. This led to experimentation with self-organized socialism in which contestations could happen (or fail) through autonomous forces promoting radical democracy, direct actions, direct modes of expression and spontaneous strikes (Reeves, 2018, p. 189). Countering bureaucratic and authoritarian forms of organization, factory occupations aimed to prefigure more democratic workspaces oriented towards human fulfillment rather than capitalistic production and the market. For example, a female post-officer recalled how this utopian dimension and these poetic concerns disrupted the established hierarchical and rationalized organization:

During the days and nights of occupation, some of us discovered themselves as singers, poets, and storytellers, but above all we talked for hours, rebuilding the world. Some had turnkey solutions: "advanced democracy" for example, was the PCF's program at the time. The majority were passionate about understanding, interested in things that until then seemed out of reach. The CFDT started talking about self-management. It organized meetings on controlling rates of production, work organization, how to master a highly specialized and divided job in a big box where everyone is cut off from others, and how to stop imposed work rates. Immediately life became organized. Concerns emerged: how to maintain the premises, not degrading them in fact but returning them in good condition to the former owners. Taking possession of one's place of work is a strong moment, the moment when one is no longer an object used to perform a task. We finally existed – we were here at home, in the hierarchy. (Gisèle, 2018, p. 36 own translation).

Utopian hopes for more humane and democratic forms of organization developed alongside a critique of large public and private organizations that had become subservient to an ideology of rationalization. This alliance between democratic ambitions and a distrust of totalitarian and bureaucratic institutions, or what Delannoi (2010, p. 120) terms “anti-institutional Rousseauism”, characterized those forms of engagement that focused on the construction of more flexible, autonomous and decentralized forms of organization. This critique was directed against capitalist as well as state and socialist institutions, since the critique of alienation was extended to all social institutions and mechanisms “*which reduce man to the state of an easily controllable and available object*” (Rubel & Touraine, 1969, p. 85). Unlike anarchists, who supported anti-hierarchical and egalitarian organizations (Porter, 2016a), the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) and the French Communist Party firmly condemned these actions, criticizing utopian desires for self-management, non-quantitative and post-material demands and the general messiness of the events as political immaturity. For many strikers, returning to reality with only the slender advantages negotiated by trade unions was a difficult experience – a source of psychological suffering after losing this alternative reality (Porter, 2016a). Despite its relative failure, however, May 68 marks the entrance of self-management onto the political arena. In this sense it appears to have been more than just a temporary experience or a dreamy parenthesis, rather serving to anchor utopian hopes and place self-management experiments at the heart of a new revolutionary perspective.

4.3.1.2 The project of a self-managed revolutionary Left

The decade following 1968 can be characterized as a period of deep social unrest with a multiplication of anticapitalistic, worker-managed and autonomist actions (Artous, 2008). Witnessing the rise of novel actors (women, homosexuals), and fields of struggle (energy, ecology, urbanism), activists developed new strategies in opposition to capitalism and the state, constructing another left based upon the prefiguration of an alternative future.

Pursuing the aspirations of May 68 for alternative forms of organizing, the discourse of self-management became an ideological referent for a stream of leftist thought that wished to distinguish itself from orthodox Marxism (Hatzfeld, 2003). A project to integrate this growing ideology in the political landscape led to the creation of the Parti Socialiste Unifié (PSU), a

political party combining a Christian leftist heritage with aspirations for a revitalized self-managed civil society. While self-managed socialism was “*a social movement before becoming a doctrine*”, as Rosanvallon (1976, p. 7) observed, the PSU emerged as the party organization embodying the social movement’s aspirations, championing this “*new political culture*” in the electoral arena (Rosanvallon & Viveret, 1977). Engaged in worker-managed, ecologist, feminist, and urban struggles, the PSU embodied another left at the forefront of novel forms of struggle, demonstrations and factory occupations, while criticizing the PCF for overlooking the revolutionary dimension of self-management (Ravenel, 2016, pp. 225, 232). Its project was to create a socialist party actively engaged in social experimentations, supporting workers’ demands but also considering workers as fully fledged actors. This support for grassroots struggles made sense within the new cultural and qualitative political paradigm. Supporting the efforts of activists to develop different forms of organization involves a vision of political struggle in which social change is brought about through shifts in representation, practices and ideological systems (Georgi, 2003b). Self-management was one aspect of a larger cultural project that was opposed to a quantitative approach based solely on economic growth, forming a revolutionary perspective that competed with the PCF and the CGT by building on democratic and worker-management experiments, which in turn radically transformed thought patterns and political and social relations (Hatzfeld, 2003, p. 177).

Despite its ideological distance from the PCF, this political project remained embedded both within revolutionary problematics and the socialist grammar. In the party’s 1977 economic program *For a realist utopia: another economic logic for the Left*, the PSU’s economic commission delineated another left based on intersectional struggles in which class struggle would continue alongside feminist, ecological and urban struggles “*according to methods analogous to those of new workers’ struggles: the practice of fait accompli, which prefigures a new legality and a new power; controlled and revocable assemblies and delegations where a new form of democracy is experimented*” (Mousel, 1977, pp. 11–12 own translation). While this form of utopian socialism seeks to support poetic aspirations to “*live differently*” (Mousel, 1977, p. 13), thus echoing Lefebvre’s concerns for another city, these were embedded within aspirations for the end of capitalism and its ideology: “*There is no self-management in a society which remains globally anti-capitalist*” (ibid, p. 247, own translation). At that time the PSU sought to go beyond the consensus of social democracy, radically rejecting the ideology of growth and progress and seeking an anti-capitalist alternative to the ideology of economic growth, industrial progress, and

the consumer society. This broadened its political project beyond workers' struggles to encompass an environmentalist anti-nuclear project, an emphasis on renewable energies, local agriculture, and the extension of the non-market sector.

The formation of the PSU illustrates the rise of new political actors intertwining cultural and class struggles, such as the Trotskyist formation known as Pablists. In 1969, this dissident stream was excluded from the PCF and formed the *Alliance Marxiste Revolutionnaire* (Marxist Revolutionary Alliance- AMR), championing a libertarian and self-managed radical left. Supporting anti-capitalistic struggles and self-management experiences⁸² while at the same time championing a cultural radicalism close to the NSM (Bérout, 2003), this movement pursued a form of self-managed socialist revolution. This form of revolutionary socialism was oriented towards workers' self-transformation by attacking exploitation and capitalism and industrial modes of production for "reproducing the conditions of the bourgeois dictatorship" and enacting forms of self-organization that prefigured other futures (Bérout, 2003, p. 265 own translation). The AMR was actively engaged in the strikes and occupations at the LIP watch and clock factory in Besançon.

The events that occurred at the LIP factory exemplify the pursuit of May 68 utopias in the workplace, articulating demands for better material conditions, a quest for autonomy and new modes of struggle. In 1968, spontaneous strikes and occupations had taken place in spite of the CGT's opposition, with workers organizing themselves in commissions and experimenting with direct democracy to decide upon the future of the movement (Thomé, 2012, p. 188). After a series of financial difficulties, the LIP company became worker-managed in 1973. Besides the occupation of the factory itself, a new form of activism mobilized a utopian discourse in which another world seemed possible. Their slogan "*C'est possible: on fabrique, on vend, on se paye*" (It's possible: we make it, we sell it, we pay ourselves) became associated in the collective imagination with LIP's utopian struggle (Rouaud, 2008). Experimenting with new tactics such as unregulated sales, cultivating popular support through newspapers and publications, LIP became the center of attention for this other left. On 29 September 1973, the factory workers were joined

⁸² Several self-management experiments took place in the 1970s in which workers engaged with self-management, including in the Pirelli, Pechiney-Noguères and LIP factories. But self-management was also a tendency within NSM, in the abortion centers of the *Mouvement pour la libération de la femme* (Movement for the Liberation of Women-MLF) and the *Mouvement pour la liberté de l'avortement et la contraception* (Movement for Freedom of Abortion and Contraception-MLAC) (Bérout, 2003).

by the PSU, Trotskyist and anarchist forces, as well as activists from the Larzac movement in a non-violent form of protest in which 100,000 people demonstrated peacefully in the streets of Besançon (Raguénès, 2008, p. 178). Despite the economic difficulties it faced and its failure to succeed in imposing self-management in the long term, LIP remains an event emblematic of experiments in self-management.⁸³

Another iconic struggle of the 1970s, and a more successful one than the LIP movement, was the non-violent movement that protested against the expansion of a military base in Larzac in South Western France. What started as a struggle of ‘105 farmers’ became a model of how the occupation of a local space could represent and advance wider power struggles. By mobilizing youth, activists, unions, artists, and workers from the CFDT and LIP, with the participation of emblematic figures such as José Bové, the Larzac struggle foreshadowed the rise of later ecological, anti-globalization and anti-capitalist movements (Martin, 2014). The union between self-management and environmental actions, such as the common demonstration held on 28 August 1973 (the largest demonstration since 1968) and the proliferation of social unrest, occupations and self-management experiments (including several strikes in the banking sector and the occupation of post offices) reveals the lasting impact of 1968 on the French political landscape, as local campaigns and actions and space occupations became tools of political self-determination.⁸⁴

4.3.2 1975–1980: Decline of the revolutionary project

The following section discusses the influence of the Nietzschean grammar and the Alternative grammar in the decline of the revolutionary left. Indeed, there was a noteworthy reversal in French politics at the end of the 1970s that reflected the loss of influence of the revolutionary anti-capitalist project. Although 1968 and 1969 were marked by insurrectionary episodes throughout the world, the events of these years were particularly striking in France on account of their intensity. Within the space of a decade, however, Paris went from being the epicenter of radical

⁸³ For some inspiring photos of the social protests of 1973, see: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jean-paul-margnac/sets/72157594436265379/>

⁸⁴ Another project representative of the junction between self-management and ecological movements is the case of anti-nuclear activism. In 1979, for example, the anti-nuclear ‘Project Alter Breton’ pursued a decentralized, ecological and self-managed approach to energy issues (Thomé, 2012, p. 96).

thought to a country in which Marxist influence was on the decline (Anderson, 1983, p. 32). The intellectual climate in France deteriorated rapidly from the second half of the 1970s, leading to a decline in the production of radical theories and a concomitant decline in protest movements that coincided with the rise of neoliberal ideologies and policies (Keucheyan, 2017, pp. 26–27). This period of “theoretical glaciation” (ibid) corresponded to what Christofferson calls the “anti-totalitarian” moment of the 1970s when an anti-totalitarian consensus brought together French intellectuals from Castoriadis to Foucault as well as new philosophers in a large-scale cultural offensive against Marxism and the PCF, ultimately redirecting the focus from socialist revolutionary politics to questions of human rights (Christofferson, 2014).

In this section I attempt to offer a reading of how these Alternative and Nietzschean grammars played a role in decoupling libertarian socialism from socialism, thereby reinforcing the ties between libertarian thought and liberalism. First, this section examines how the Alternative grammar was progressively decoupled from a socialist grammar in the second half of the 1970s. While in May 68 the objectives of building alternative non-hierarchical and authoritarian forms of organization served a discourse about ways of transferring economic power, the Alternative grammar progressively engaged more and more with a rhetoric of civil society that dismissed and eschewed this revolutionary dimension. Moreover, its opposition to bureaucratic and anti-hierarchical institutions moved closer to a discourse that valued entrepreneurial action in the field of an associative and solidarity economy, reinforcing logics of individual participation to the detriment of economic power, solidarity and collective self-management. Second, this section reveals how a Nietzschean grammar, in the name of values of creativity and imagination, produced a critique of orthodox Marxism and totalitarianism that weakened the PCF while accommodating logics and concepts that served the project of a liberal society. In this way libertarian discourse became compatible with a liberal discourse reducing autonomy to the individual dimension and the liberation of individual modes of being, suppressing any dimension of collective organization. In both cases a critique of bureaucratic and totalitarian logics was used to justify support for novel entrepreneurial and individual actions, thereby contributing to weakening the revolutionary project.

4.3.2.1 The project of an entrepreneurial civil society

Whereas self-management had previously been mobilized within revolutionary projects by the PSU and by libertarian Trotskyists, as well as within political and economic struggles, the late 1970s witnessed a sharp decline in this discourse in favor of aesthetic and individual projects.

In this regard, Frère demonstrates how actors in the SSE increasingly adopted a grammar inspired by Situationism from the 1980s onwards, valuing creativity as a source of economic innovation. This grammar exalted the entrepreneur as a figure of greatness on account of the entrepreneur's seeming ability to harness creativity and inspiration to solve social and economic problems (Frère, 2010a, pp. 288–289). In this case, logics of competition and individual action took precedence over the re-establishment of a humanistic ethos, solidarity relations and self-management, and actors moved away from a grammar of political engagement, instead mobilizing values of the inspired city to justify economic actions.

This artistic critique generated a discourse in which innovative entrepreneurs featured as heroes of the economy,⁸⁵ rehabilitating the left through entrepreneurship and the autonomous production of information (Frère, 2009, p. 240). While maintaining a critique of authoritarian institutions and advocating for new and more flexible and decentralized modes of organization, this critique was now decoupled from the socialist critique, instead highlighting the value of individual creativity within economic production:

They had become experts in the Foucauldian criticism of power, rejecting all forms of authoritarianism, and, conversely, in a humanistic exaltation of the extraordinary possibilities buried within each person, as long as he is given consideration and allowed to express himself.” (Frère, 2009, p. 255, own translation)

It is in this rapprochement between artistic critique and entrepreneurial literature, familiar with economic and liberal problematics, that the former stands out definitively from the dialectic of classes, incorporating autonomist values of individual responsibility and expression within new management techniques (Roussellier, 2002).

⁸⁵ Terry Gilliam's film, *Brazil* (1985) is an excellent illustration of this discourse. Faced with a totalitarian, bureaucratic and authoritarian machine, the character of Sam Lowry sees in the figure of the auto-entrepreneur and mobile and light-hearted adventurer Archibald Tuttle the best hope – besides his own imagination – of escaping from the nightmare in which he finds himself.

This sector of the solidarity economy thus broke away from the critique of industrial capitalism and utopian hopes at the heart of the Alternative grammar and instead proposed that the solution to the problem of the outcasts of modernity was a strong associative and entrepreneurial fabric to compensate for the weaknesses of the state as a social investor (Frère, 2009, p. 26). In this sense it became compatible with the neoliberal discourse on civil society that borrowed from the discourse of autonomy and voluntarism to justify a redistribution of responsibilities to individuals and local communities without engaging in economic redistribution, i.e. a discourse of autonomy that had previously been at the heart of libertarian socialism and anarchism (Frère & Reinecke, 2011). In the words of Frère and Reinecke (2011, p. 113), “the line is fine between social entrepreneurship and micro-capitalism”.

There was a progressive drift in the discourse of self-management towards a Republican grammar, moreover, abandoning revolutionary objectives of control over collective structures in favor of participatory issues. Often conveyed within new social movements, this trend decoupled self-management from its autonomist revolutionary objectives and instead focused on the increasing participation of civil society (Georgi, 2003a, p. 23) and on managing social and economic capital in a context of widespread mass unemployment. This trend, often initiated by former PSU activists, championed another type of politics that focused on participation within the framework of civil society and thus constituted a notable shift from the aspiration of previous proponents of autonomy to gain control over the conditions of living. A representative example of this emerging trend can be found in the *Association pour la démocratie et l'éducation locale et soociale* (ADELS: Association for Democracy and Local and Social Education), which proposed solutions to everyday struggles through increasing local participation, emphasizing the concept of “co-management” (Tétard, 2003). This concept of co-management advocated by ADELS revolved around increasing access to information, increased citizen education, and new forms of representation. This approach emphasized issues of participation while at the same time promoting a kind of autonomous active citizen. By neutralizing the revolutionary perspective of self-management, it embedded certain participatory mechanisms within the framework of a democratic civil society. These social movements manifest a decentralized, ‘realistic’, close-to-everyday-problems approach to politics. However, this approach also contributed to the domestication or taming of social movements within official participatory processes, ultimately constituting a new form of government through participation (Neveu, 2011; Sauvêtre, 2013).

The discourse of self-management, including its translation into the political arena, was

supported by a new liberalism willing to satisfy some of the demands of May 68 through a discourse of participation and decentralization in an attempt to reduce social conflict. A 1973 report commissioned by the Rockefeller Foundation stated that Europe must be subject to a reinforced but flexible form of social control (Magniadas, 2003). The failure of mere adjustments to capitalism to cope with social discontent became evident in 1977 when the *Conseil national du patronat français* (CNPF), which had initially been virulently opposed to any form of self-management, launched an internal revolution integrating what it deemed to be appropriate from the self-management utopia. Drawing on Crozier's sociology of organization and Weber's analyses of bureaucracy, the CNPF called for increasing employee participation in relevant but limited matters. The aim of the project was thus to distort the idea of self-management, now subjected to the idea of profit, henceforth maintaining forms of alienation against which these had fought in the first place. What should be noted here is that some of the organs of diffusion of liberalism in French society at the end of the 1970s welcomed a left that embraced the field of entrepreneurship, dissociating self-management and anti-capitalist ambitions. This was notably so in the case of the journal *Commentaire*, a newspaper created in 1978 to disseminate the liberal thought of Raymond Aron, and which in its inaugural editorial saluted the self-managed left for "breaking the fatal equation of socialism and state control" (Stewart, 2014, p. 208). What should be noted, however, is that liberalism is by no means always receptive to the project of a strong civil society. Stewart shows how liberalism did indeed resurface as a reaction to the radical spirit of 1968 and remained resolutely opposed both to ideas of new civil rights weakening the authority of institutions and to the ideas of radical equality contained in the self-management project. However, the PSU's project of a self-managed society nonetheless appealed to some French liberals who found a common position regarding disengagement from the state.

This is notably the case in Rosanvallon's conception of self-management, which breaks away from the utopian project and thus becomes compatible with liberal discourse on individual and economic responsibility: "*Self-management is therefore neither a distant utopia nor a step backwards, nor is it an anarchic mode of organization but the only realistic and satisfactory way today of conceiving a socialism that integrates freedom and responsibility*" (quoted in Borrits, 2019, p. 284, own translation). In this view the promotion of the associative sector must thus be based on "*the initiative and innovation which has been the strength of the capitalist system*", thus producing a "*non-naïve system which takes charge of the opportunistic behavior of economic agents*" (quoted in Borrits, 2019, p. 108, own translation) by "*activists who see themselves as*

'entrepreneurs for a new society'” (Rosanvallon & Viveret, 1977, p. 113, own translation). Such views reveal the decline of the autonomist ideals of the left of May 68, transferring its aspirations for a revolution outside the state and onto entrepreneurs and private initiative.

In this sense the ‘Second Left’⁸⁶ did not try to think against liberalism or to go beyond it but to think about liberalism in its specificities, ultimately opening the way for what another left might look like once renewed by individualistic and anti-bureaucratic ambitions of entrepreneurial action (Audier, 2015, p. 19). It was in this context that intellectuals, including figures such as André Gorz, saw in liberalism a means of reshaping activism outside of any bureaucracy by making the liberalization of society not only a right-wing project but also a left-wing project through the idea of “neo-socialists” (ibid, p. 212).

The evolution of self-management discourse anticipated the abandonment of a self-managed revolution. Despite some official attempts at promoting self-management in the French political landscape, in the long term it was unable to bring about sustainable change. After several electoral failures, the PSU unsuccessfully sought a rapprochement with the Socialist Party during a 1974 gathering of the non-communist left, thereby initiating the party’s gradual dissolution after Rocard’s departure. In its quest for hegemony among the left, the PS opportunistically co-opted issues of self-management, ecology and feminism to attract the *soixante-huitards*, thus neutralizing the rise of a new political party already compromised by electoral laws favoring a two-party state (Ladrech, 1989). Once in power, however, the Socialist Party sacrificed the heritage of May 68 by opting for a conservative leadership and political ideology, neglecting any radical alternative to advanced capitalism. Shortly afterwards, the CFDT renounced its revolutionary perspective of self-management, while the journal *Autogestion*, which had been renamed *Autogestion et Socialisme* in 1970, ceased publication in 1977 and became *Autogestion*⁸⁷ tout court. In 1980, self-management was no longer seen as a promising political direction, as Rocard and Rosanvallon moved towards the electorally more rewarding terrains of social democracy (Georgi, 2003b).

⁸⁶ The ‘Second Left’ brought together a minority current in French Socialism organized around the PSU and the CFDT. It distinguished itself from the mainstream Socialist party by its position against the state as well as its championing of a self-managed civil society.

⁸⁷ <http://archivesautonomies.org/spip.php?rubrique607#nh1>

4.3.2.2 Aesthetic forms of engagement

The following section elucidates the role of the Nietzschean grammar in the progressive disengagement of the French left from the revolutionary project. While the Nietzschean grammar had supported forms of political engagement in May 68, it later became mobilized within discourses supporting liberal values and economic actions. In this regard, Boltanski and Chiappelo's argument regarding the new spirit of capitalism built on an alliance between liberal and Nietzschean grammar is particularly relevant, showing that the spirit of 68 had been appropriated in order to rebuild a capitalist system based on values of creativity, autonomy and a rejection of bureaucracy and hierarchy (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2011).

Intellectuals close to another left at this time rejected the Leninist conception of revolution in the name of an anti-totalitarian critique, seeing this as an opportunity for elaborating new forms of political engagement. This section aims to briefly describe the modes of political engagement constructed on the basis of a Nietzschean grammar dissociated from a socialist grammar and the question of organization, taking Deleuze and Foucault as examples⁸⁸. These two intellectuals demonstrate how an emphasis on creativity in political struggles, as well as an anti-humanism focused on the experience of the subject, reconstructed forms of engagement outside the issues of organization. Reticular structures, subjective experiences and modes of intervention on the part of the subject upon itself constituted the core of these new modes of political engagement.

⁸⁸ While Christofferson rightly shows that the anti-totalitarian Left provided a theoretical basis for critiquing the PCF, any comparison of Castoriadis with Bernard-Henri Lévy ignores the fact that this revolutionary left also lost its cultural battle while the New Philosophers managed to invest the media and ideological fields. The fact that one movement was built upon the other should not mask the discrepancies in their fundamentally incompatible political projects. While anti-totalitarianism strives for emancipation from trans-historic structures, the Alternative grammar believes in an organization of society that would remain at the service of human goals, forming autonomous institutions that do not transcend human aspirations: in short, they do not believe in the curse of human-led social change. Whereas the anti-bureaucratic critique is central within the Alternative grammar, the New philosophers' intellectual attack is no longer made in the name of another socialist revolutionary project. On the contrary, their arguments discards criticisms of industrialization and the market's commodification and reification. Rather than mounting a defense of human dignity that has compromised by capitalism, they champion a lukewarm version of human rights compatible with a post-social-democratic compromise, emptying the project of its revolutionary perspectives. In this regard, Christofferson recognizes the differences between the positions of Lefort and Castoriadis in acknowledging that Castoriadis never abandoned the idea of a radical revolution constructed on lucidity and autonomy (Christofferson, 2014, pp. 397–398).

4.3.2.2.1 Deleuze: differentialist and pluralist politics

I will not attempt to deliver a comprehensive account of Deleuze's philosophy but simply wish to show here how certain elements of his thought were influenced by the Nietzschean vision of individual creation and how they ultimately might not be up to the task when compared to the nature of advanced capitalism. In what is often considered one of the major works of French philosophy of the 20th century (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980), Deleuze radically changed views of capitalism. The anti-capitalist critique that had hitherto focused on the industrial aspects of capitalism, describing it as a huge voracious metallic locomotive, was radically reframed in the post-industrial context, now delineated as a 'virtual' capitalism constituted through multiple connections, flux and forces acting on the very formation of the subjects' desires (Buydens et al., 2003). From having been an industrial machine that crushed the bodies of workers, financial post-capitalism had since become a network invading the subject in its interiority, connecting it to its perpetually moving flow. The originality of Deleuze's work consists in the fact that instead of resisting this de-territorialization he called for an acceleration of these de-constitutive processes. In other words, overcoming capitalism was no longer envisaged as the feat of a stable, strong and centralized organization, nor as something that could be achieved by returning to a pre-capitalist collective identity. On the contrary, going beyond capitalism was now seen to require an accentuation of these disintegrating trends, fostering large-scale displacements of social forces and people in a mobile, nomadic and fluid movement. Deleuze opposed a return to society as a large organized system with each organ fulfilling its role, rejecting the scientific organization of society as an organized machine whose parts are organs answering different functions, since in his words: "*the body suffers from being organized, from not having another form of organization or no organization at all*" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972, pp. 15–16, own translation).

The organization question in Deleuze is related to his concept of ‘the body without organs’,⁸⁹ a direct criticism of this machine-society, constituting both the form of our alienation as well as offering the means to go beyond it, proportioning a form of unprecedented freedom and realization:

One asks what is the body without organs – but one is already on it, scurrying like vermin, fumbling like a blind man or running like a madman, a traveler in the desert or a nomad of the steppe. On it we sleep, watch, fight, seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we penetrate and we are penetrated: on it we love [...] it is an experiment not only radiophonic, but biological, political, calling on itself censorship and repression. Corpus and Socius, politics and experimentation. They will not let you experiment in peace. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972, p. 186 own translation).

This philosophical position on capitalism impacted the conception of organization itself, giving birth to an apparatus of conceptual resistance organized around lines of fluidity, mobility and displacement, more resembling a gorilla on LSD than a political party machine. For Deleuze, who was strongly influenced by the militant experience of Guattari, the left needed to organize itself according to the notion of “assemblage”, of “constellations of singularities”, constituted of more or less close positions in a constant motion of doing and undoing (Tampio, 2009). Tampio has underlined the influence of this notion of ‘assemblage’ for the analysis of contemporary struggles:

A left assemblage can take the form of a political party, a non-governmental organization, an anti-war rally, a school environmental club, a punk-rock collective, a campaign to legalize gay marriage, or any loose and provisional material and expressive body that works for freedom and equality. Deleuze envisioned the left as a network of intersecting and conflicting assemblages – a garden rather than a tree. (Tampio, 2009, p. 385)

⁸⁹ The expression ‘body without organs’ reflects Surrealist influences in Deleuze’s work as well as his own poetic intentions. Indeed, Deleuze borrowed this expression from the surrealist poet Antonin Artaud, in whose radio play ‘Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu’ the *corps sans organes* is “the corporeal and real materialization of an integral being of poetry” (Artaud, 2004, p. 1019, own translation). The artistic roots of this concept are explained by Artaud’s direct reference to Surrealism: “Man is sick because he is badly constructed. It is necessary to decide to expose him to scrape off this animasculature that itches him mortally, god, and with god his organs. Bind me if you want, but there is nothing more useless than an organ. When you have made him a body without organs you will have delivered him from all his automatic actions and restored him to his true freedom. Then you will teach him to dance backwards as in the delirium of dance halls, and this reverse will be his true place.” (Artaud, 2004, pp. 39–40, own translation). In this excerpt the disintegration of man is understood as a response to industrialism and mechanization.

This concept of “assemblages” brings together what Deleuze called “minority-becomings” (*devenirs-minoritaires*), not in the sense of minorities as numerically outnumbered but as embodying alternative positions generative of differentiated political futures. These minority voices thus constitute an alternative path away from collectively instituted identifications (Silbertin-Blanc, 2018). While reaffirming his belief in Marxism, Deleuze conceived of resistance to capitalism through the creation of minority-becoming, dispersion and fragmentation:

[The idea of a ‘war machine’] *has nothing to do with war but to do with a particular way of occupying, taking up, space-time, or inventing a new space-time: revolutionary movements (people don’t take enough account, for instance, of how the PLO has had to invent a new space-time in the Arab world) but artistic movements too, are war-machines in this sense.* (Deleuze, quoted in Gane, 2003, p. 150)

By comparing forms of resistance with artistic movements capable of opening up another space-time through creative and artistic engagement, Deleuze’s discourse once again demonstrates the hold that ontological prejudices towards creativity and imagination have exercised over philosophical and political discourses on social change. In this regard, Hallward’s reading of Deleuze reveals how his apparently varied and inventive lexicon was fundamentally based on the very simple presumption *that being is creativity* (Hallward, 2006). As Hallward puts it, in Deleuze’s work “Creativity is what it is and it is all that there can be [...] it has to be created. There is no other truth than the creation of the Now” (Hallward, 2006, p. 1). While art was not considered as impactful as philosophical activity, Deleuze like Nietzsche attributed a special role to art’s capacity to accelerate and transform the world beyond recognition, dissolving existing reality in a process that participates directly in the making of things rather than in their representation, coming close to the limits of “infinite speed, the speed of a thought that immediately creates what it thinks” (Hallward, 2006, p. 104). Art does not decorate or represent reality but participates directly in the creation of reality. In Hallward’s words: “Rather than representing something external to itself, a work of art is a machine that generates its own reality and constitutes life-itself” (Hallward, 2006, p. 104). Artistic production was thus thought of as the co-creative process of fashioning life itself through sensorial engagements and ultimately recomposing this reality. Deleuze’s position echoes Magritte’s pursuit of the artistic capable of *Attempting the impossible* (1928). This philosophy of creativity and its power was noticeably

influenced by Nietzsche,⁹⁰ for whom the artist was likened to the absolute creator-destroyer of what is always eternally different:

We claim that there are two ways to appeal to “necessary destructions”: that of the poet, who speaks in the name of a creative power, capable of overturning all orders and representations in order to affirm Difference in the state of permanent revolution which characterizes eternal return; and that of the political who is above all concerned to deny that which differs, so as to conserve and prolong an established historical order. (Deleuze, 1968, p. 75, own translation)

Rejecting the conservative readings of Nietzsche’s that was predominant at the time, Deleuze mobilized Nietzsche’s thinking to formulate a radical theory based on affirmation and differentiation (Dosse, 2014). His interpretation reformulated an understanding of the will to power and of life as the creation and institution of new norms, not as a reaction but as an affirmation. Returning to the idea of truth as a form of illusion, Deleuze envisioned a form of intervention in reality that takes root in the processes of dramatization and fabulation:

How is a people created, through what terrible suffering? When a people is created, it’s through its own resources, but in a way that links up with something in art (Garrel says there’s a mass of terrible suffering in the Louvre too) or links up art to what it lacked. Utopia isn’t the right concept: it’s more a question of a “fabulation” in which a people and art both share. We ought to take up Bergson’s notion of fabulation and give it a political meaning. (Deleuze & Negri, 1990)

Emphasizing the close relationship between fabulation and reality not as distance but as a form of creative story-telling, Deleuze highlighted the transformative potential of fabulation as enabling new beginnings to take place (Stenner, 2018). Utopia as an ‘elsewhere’ was rejected in favor of another form of story-telling functioning as the enabler of otherness. Fabulation creates “a profound fiction at the heart of the real”, a “free indirect discourse” in which fiction is free from a representative function and reconnects with its transformative potential (Deleuze, quoted in Stenner, 2018, p. 176). The emancipative properties of fabulation derive from the realization of another story that opposes the truth of the colonizer, constituting the means with which to

⁹⁰ Nietzsche’s influence on Deleuze’s philosophy of creation can be traced back to one of his doctoral theses, ‘Difference and repetition’ (Williams, 2013).

enable new beginnings in which artistic creativity has a significant place. In sum, Deleuze thought of creation as taking place outside the work of art – a concept deeply indebted to the avant-gardist notion of revolutionary art comprising the creation of the social fabric itself. Minority-becoming, which contains the hope of social emancipation through occupations, inventions of new spaces and new temporalities, was thus modeled on unique, ex-nihilo artistic creation. The minority, indeed, “*has no model, it is a becoming, a process, following unknown paths, it creates itself in its own creation*” (Deleuze & Negri, 1990). *The political subject is constituted not in a process of collective organizing but in a process of creation.* Never had political movements been described in terms so close to the artistic avant-garde. Political activity thereafter engaged with a new set of possible actions resulting from this dramatic repertoire, intensifying struggles in a creative fashion but also rethinking the nature of politics itself as an aesthetic activity (Mackenzie & Porter, 2011, p. 28).

The crucial moment for Deleuze was not the moment constitutive of another organization, however, but that moment when difference is put into practice, whereby that practice of openness constitutes an alternative future (Zourabichvili, 2002). *Deleuze’s ontology of creation did not lead him to a new self-created and self-organized form of sovereignty*, however, for while he recognized creation as a source of new collective arrangements and non-juridical institutions, which would be in a sense “in act”, *Deleuze did not dwell on the collective organization that would allow this creative practice to take shape, to become instituted: instead, he was interested in the creative moment.* This position was clearly stated in an interview with Antonio Negri (Deleuze & Negri, 1990) in which Deleuze stated, “*What I’ve been interested in are collective creations rather than representations*”. However, it could be argued that creation in is never thought of or explained in Deleuze’s work as a collective process in that he seeks above all to “free man from the plane or level that is proper to him in order to make him a creator, adequate to the whole movement of creation” (Hallward, 2006, p. 2). In Deleuze’s work the question of organization and representation disappears at the same time as the organs. In this regard, the idea of fluid and rhizomatic resistance, conceived in terms of lines of flight, dispersion and differentiated possibilities, were all integrated within contemporary capitalism, which “has become Deleuzian in form, in style and in content” (Vandenberghe, 2008, p. 879). Deleuze’s hatred of collectivism and deindividuation anticipated modes of existence of the subject within a decentralized, flexible and fluid society.

It must nevertheless be recognized, however, that with his concept of ‘assemblages’ Deleuze

sought to rethink forms of resistance, reflective of new types of collective struggles. Foucault's work, by contrast, departed definitively from the question of the organization of a collective subject in favor of a self-created subject.

4.3.2.2.2 Foucault and experiential politics

The question of whether Foucault was left-wing or liberal is still under discussion (Behrent, 2009; Christofferson, 2016; Dean & Zamora, 2019; Zamora & Behrent, 2016), which would probably have pleased his taste for ambiguity. Rather than dealing with Foucault's political affiliation, however, I wish to focus here on the forms of political engagement he considered legitimate, highlighting how these forms were derived from his Nietzschean anti-humanism.

Foucault excluded humanism as a justification for political action, seeing preconceived ideas of morality, human nature and justice as products inherent to our own modern culture (Christofferson, 2014, p. 149). Instead, his Nietzschean anti-humanism led him to favor forms of engagement capable of producing the subject not as a mode of domination but as a technique of resistance through the production of other forms of truth. He was thus interested in the question of "what does it mean to be a subject that is not a sovereign subject, not a psychological subject, not an anthropological subject, but one that is produced within a relation of forces, including the forces one practices on oneself?" (Dilts, 2011, p. 140). It was this interest in spaces of freedom in which the subject can partially constitute themselves that led Foucault to neo-liberal⁹¹ accounts of subjectivity in which 'entrepreneurs of the self' can invest in themselves through their consumption choices, and in which the market becomes a site for the subject to express its truth. Foucault's interest in self-constitutive practices further led him to conceive another non-sovereign form of subjectivity modeled on artistic development in which the subject can self-consciously create itself through an ethical relation.

⁹¹ It should nevertheless be borne in mind that Foucault's engagement with liberalism took place in the context of the diffusion of these same ideas within the Second Left (as mentioned earlier) in the emergence of a decentralized libertarian socialism (Audier, 2015, p. 53). Like intellectual figures such as Gorz, Foucault tried to make 'intelligent' use of neoliberalism (ibid, p. 455).

While Foucault's early work⁹² contained a critique of the rationality of the modern world that was full of Romantic undertones, his later work on the 'care of the self' show that he found an answer to the impoverishment of modes of being in an ontology of creativity and the multiplication of singular possibilities. Foucault proposed in ethical relationship to the self based on a practical relationship with the truth, a relation that functions like a productive and creative activity or *tekhnê*. What emerges from Foucault's lengthy and disjointed descriptions of all these ancient techniques is *a modality of knowledge that involves an active subject in the constitution of their own truth, an art which supposes experience, competence and practice* in the constitution of something. Foucault's interest shifted away from its archaeological mission, as understanding of a historically determined practice of the care of the self, the *epimeleia heautou*, and became an intervention in his present. As Judith Revel (2009, p. 140) has observed, the extreme materiality of the terms Foucault employed, such as 'techniques', 'art' and 'production', implies a project centered on *invention* as the inauguration of difference, whereby history can be thought of as "the power of creation", which would work from the inside. This was stated in an interview in which Foucault pointed out how artistic creation, as an apparent process of fabrication, had replaced the project of an objective form of knowledge (Foucault, 2001b, p. 568). The continuity of this approach with Deleuze and Guattari's project explains Foucault's support in the preface to *Anti-Oedipus*, presented as an ethical manual characteristic of this new relationship to the truth, not as a new textbook or a new theoretical frame of reference but as a manual celebrating the subject's

⁹² Few historical works are more evocative of the Romantic criticism of modern rationality than Foucault's *History of Madness* (Foucault, 1976), a puzzling work in many respects, with its style reminiscent of a Gothic novel projected onto a historical study of medieval times in which glimpses of magic and mystical rites ensured both protection and exclusion: "*Des siècles durant, ces étendues appartiendront à l'inhumain. Du XIV au XVII siècle, elles vont attendre et solliciter par d'étranges incantations, une nouvelle incarnation du mal, une autre grimace de la peur, des magies renouvelées de purification et d'exclusion.*" (ibid, p. 13) The theme of the 'sacred' is exalted through his description of the "rites", "sacred circles" and "sacred spaces" around lepers whose existence, though excluded from everyday life, was sublimated by the divine grace paradoxically bestowed upon them by their disease. The first chapters of this book can be read as a journey back to a time when the question of exclusion was governed by the imaginary, the sacred and the magic, as attested to by the beautifully written pages on the correspondence between madness and the aquatic element – the symbolic meaning of water, its mobility and its impermanence, providing the fool with an imaginary journey like Merlin leaving the shores of men towards Avalon. With this work Foucault reminds us of how, before modernity, there was another time, of medieval heroes like Tristan (Foucault, 1976, p. 23), a time before order became the "castle of our conscience" (ibid, p. 22), before the Apollonian "*luminous and adult stability of the spirit*" replaced the dark, humid, chaotic and Dionysian universe (ibid, p. 23). This experience of madness in which the madman was seen as a figure of medieval drama, would be challenged by a critical experience in which madness becomes delineated in the name of 'reason'. Reason has enclosed the Other in its universe of discourse and critical consciousness; hence madness is now "*tied securely, in the midst of things and people. [...] No longer a boat but a hospital*". Foucault (1976, p. 49) expressed some regret about this lost enchanted world, evoking the "*diminution of man*" with some of his most beautiful writing, vibrating with Romantic intonations exalting the powerful truths revealed in the dreams of the insane.

creative abilities, transforming reality through desire – in short as a political art celebrating “*what is positive and multiple, the opposite to uniformity*”

Foucault’s distaste for communism and orthodox Marxism (Garo, 2011, p. 11) was partially motivated by his creative ontology. Marx’s conception of history as the outcome of interrelated and determined events conflicts with any vision that sees history as creating itself from within as an expression of its creative powers. Foucault’s method itself stemmed from this ontology, since if history is above all a creation then it is urgent to revive its creative and imaginative properties. In an interview conducted in 1978, Foucault stated that behind his analysis of concrete problems such as madness and prison was an intended intervention to create a “*new political imaginary*” now that the ability to dream had been impoverished by Marxism (Foucault, 2001c, p. 588). It was therefore in the name of dreaming another society into being and reviving imagination along the same lines as utopian socialists that Foucault condemned Marxism.

Despite this explicit reference to utopian socialism, however, Foucault’s rejection of Marxism was not compensated for by any attempt to rethink a radical project through other forms of collective organization, even in a decentralized mode such as Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of assemblages. Foucault’s focus was rather on individualistic modes of self-fashioning, thus adding a completely different meaning to the notion of autonomy. Aside from the creation of a new creative subject, Foucault envisioned a social organization in which individual possibilities would be multiplied, instituting: “*a positive demand: that of a security which opens the way to richer, more numerous, more diverse and more flexible relations with oneself and with its environment, while ensuring to everyone a real autonomy*” (Foucault, 2001d, p. 1187, own translation). Foucault’s autonomy is not collective self-determination, therefore, but only a form of independence in relation to social constraints – a space for personal choices (Dean & Zamora, 2019, p. 92). Autonomy thus loses all collective dimension in this view, with its role being only to ensure a form of freedom vis-à-vis centralizing organizations and institutions that dispossess their users of individual decision-making power. Foucault’s support for self-management was motivated by his opposition to hierarchy and centralization without any engagement in more radical problematics (Foucault, 2001e).

Moreover, unlike previous authors,⁹³ Foucault definitively departed from the Romantic objective of reconstituting pre-capitalist collectives. Indeed he strongly rejected the fiction of an idealized collective society which had been the *foundational narrative* of Romanticism:

Another attitude [...] consists in maintaining the fiction of the 'good old days' when the social body was alive and warm, families united and individuals autonomous. Those happy times were supposed to have come to an end with the advent of capitalism, the bourgeoisie and industrial society. This, of course, is a historical absurdity. (Foucault, 2001d, p. 1190, own translation)

Foucault's nostalgia for a pre-capitalistic past was thus limited only to the loss of an individual space of truth free from reason⁹⁴ and did not extend to an organic community capable of self-regulation. In short, while revealing the individualizing character of power, Foucault's work never tackled the creation of collectives capable of resisting this form of discipline, whether they be organized spontaneously or horizontally (Myers, 2008). Foucault's refusal to engage in this formation of collectives, I argue, was tied to his rejection of the Romantic narrative regarding the formation of collectives. In this sense I agree with Dean and Villadsen's conclusion as to Foucault's remoteness from Romantic concerns, including his rejection of the utopian socialist narrative of an anti-state eschatology in which the community would ultimately triumph over the state and internal contradictions would be solved in a unified society (Villadsen & Dean, 2012). A problem that arises here, however, is that even though revolutionary Romanticism has often been reluctant to engage in practical organizational issues, without such Romanticism there is no basis upon which to think of other ways of collectively organizing. In summary, the project of individual creation is dangerous in its incapacity to resist the de-politicizing and individualizing effects of modern forms of power not because it is Romantic but because it is *not Romantic enough*.

In short, Foucault pursued the Romantic project in the sense that his work integrated issues that had previously remained on the sidelines of political and scholarly debates, including subjects

⁹³ Even behind Deleuze and Guattari's pluralism there lay an ambition to returning to a non-dualistic monadic entity: "Il faut à chaque fois des correcteurs cérébraux qui défont les dualismes que nous n'arrivons pas voulu faire, par lesquels nous passons. Arriver à la formule magique que nous cherchons tous: PLURALISME=MONISME, en passant par tous les dualismes qui sont l'ennemi tout à fait nécessaire, le meuble que nous ne cessons de déplacer." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 31).

⁹⁴ Although Foucault rejected any idealization of pre-capitalism, he invested individual spaces of truth in a completely idealized way, projecting values and ideals onto the Stoics and the Iranian revolution.

excluded by modern reason and its version of history. This interpretation casts a new light on Foucault's works, which transformed those who were once the protagonists of Gothic novels, such as the insane, the sick and prisoners – or in other words the “abnormal” – and other Frankenstein's monsters into subjects of political struggles, giving them the power to be heard and not only observed, studied and locked up. Nevertheless, Foucault distanced himself from any narrative of an idealized past community, and in doing so he walked away from the question of anti-capitalist collectives, instead turning to a post-Romantic heritage regarding the individual creation of truth – hence the question of deliberation and collective organization is always absent in Foucault's work (Audier, 2015, p. 526). His post-political aspirations consisted of a novel and creative relation to the self that motivated his relations to the New Left, where he found an approach to social change compatible with “micro-resistance” in the form of everyday struggles outside the state (Dean & Zamora, 2019, pp. 71–72). Rather than re-engaging with utopianism, Foucault's vision of politics was compatible with the libertarian stream of the May 68 Left, supporting struggles related to the subject's constitution of the self and celebrating creation as a destabilizing and differentiating activity (ibid, p. 85)

By refusing to consider any pre-determined truth, Foucault engaged in an experiential form of politics based on the subject's experiences. This gives rise to forms of engagement that seek to foster autonomous bottom-up actions in which the intellectual's role is to understand the experiences of the participants and to communicate a narrative produced by the participants themselves (Christofferson, 2014, pp. 149–150). This was the case of the Prison Information Group (GIP), for example, which was born of the desire to give a voice to those within the prison system and to initiate a discussion about their conditions. It is thus the direct experience of the subject, outside of any form of representation and institution, that constitutes a form of legitimate commitment and model of struggle (ibid, p. 156). Furthermore, by dismissing everything that transcends the individual relation to itself and only prioritizing only this openness to multiple desires and possibilities of lifestyle brought Foucault closer to a ‘Californian left’, or “neo-Nietzschean left-wing individualist libertarian” (Audier, 2015, p. 509 own translation), deploying his anarchical thought solely at the level of the individual.

The trajectory of the *Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire* (FHAR), established in 1971 by the experimented activist Mouvement de Libération des Femmes illustrates how new forms of activism at this time drifted away from social critique towards hedonistic, sensorial (and sexual) movements, excluding modes of collective action other than in the form of baroque and

provocative performances (Rummler, 2018). Excluding the question of organization and the question of an imaginary totality structuring collective possibilities, these new movements exalted the individual's capacity to recreate forms of life without any attempt to construct alternative collective structures of socialization.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has delineated two political cultures derived from Romantic values and the Romantic vision of the imagination (summarized below in Table 2), distinguishing between a Nietzschean grammar, which draws on values related to imagination in forms of engagement constructed in the manner of artistic creations, and an Alternative grammar that draws on Fourier's idea of collectively achieving utopia through forms of organization and association outside the state. While both of these cultures arose from the Romantic critique of industrial capitalism and its bureaucratic organizations, sharing a common concern for poetic and aesthetic forms of living, the major difference between the two grammars lies in their position regarding *techniques of organization*. Whereas in the Nietzschean grammar the 'inspired city' provides all the needed resources for bringing about a radical break and another future through imagination, inspiration and desire, the alternative grammar depends on the institution of a different form of *collective* organization by which imagined meanings can become instituted. While the Nietzschean position firmly rejects any institution that might oppress the relationship between the individual and his or her imaginary, the alternative grammar calls for reflection on non-bureaucratic, local and flexible techniques and forms of organization that are more likely to set up a better articulation of this relationship. In other words, the alternative grammar seeks to bring about reflections on how to institute creative power, whereas for the Nietzschean grammar the direct and non-mediated expression of the creative power is sufficient.

Nietzschean Grammar	Alternative Grammar
1820: Shelley, <i>Prometheus Unbound</i>	1754: Rousseau, <i>Discourse on Inequality</i>
1845: Stirner, <i>The Ego and Its Own</i>	1808: Fourier, <i>Theory of the Four Movements</i>
1850: Wagner, <i>The Work of Art of the Future</i>	
1872: Nietzsche, <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i>	
1885: Nietzsche, <i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>	
	1890: Morris, <i>News from Nowhere</i>
1908: Nietzsche, <i>Ecce Homo</i>	
1909: Ryner, <i>Le Subjectivisme</i> ⁹⁵	
1923: Armand, <i>L'initiation individualiste</i>	
1924: Breton, <i>Surrealist Manifesto</i>	
1932: Breton, <i>Le Revolver à Cheveux Blancs</i>	
	1936 : Mounier, <i>Manifeste au service du personnalisme</i>
	1948: Castoriadis and Lefort, <i>Socialism or Barbarism</i>
	1957: Lefebvre, <i>Vers un Romantisme Révolutionnaire</i>
1967: Guy Debord, <i>The Society of the Spectacle</i>	
1968: Deleuze, <i>Difference and Repetition</i>	
	1973: Illich, <i>La Convivialité</i>
	1974: Lefebvre, <i>The Right to the City</i>
	1975: Castoriadis, <i>The Imaginary Institution of Society</i>
	1978, Gorz, <i>Ecologie comme politique</i>
1981: Foucault, <i>Subjectivité et Vérité- Cours du Collège de France</i>	
1985: Bey, <i>Temporary Autonomous Zones</i>	

Table 2: Chronology of Nietzschean and Alternative Grammar

Romanticism was the starting point for two distinctive grammars seek to create an alternative to modern civilization in the name of a poetic relation to the self, to others and the world. The key

⁹⁵ I have included the titles in French in cases where no English translation was available.

difference between the Nietzschean grammar and the Alternative grammar is that while the former endeavors to construct this alternative directly through the resources of the inspired city, the Alternative grammar sees this change as coming about only through an alternative civilizational project built on different forms of collective organization, thus reaching a compromise with the values of the civic city (Figure 1). By contrast, the individualistic, anarchic and avant-gardist political stances derived from Nietzsche's theories think of political engagement as a matter of harnessing the productive capacities of the imagination, which they believe are capable of direct intervention in the material world. In the Nietzschean political grammar, forms of action are understood in relation to the objects of the inspired city – the body, intuition, inspiration, revolt – and feelings and states of inspiration are capable of bringing about social change without any form of mediation (Figure 2). In other words, the subject's entry on to the creative stage is a sufficient condition for the world's transformation. In this form of engagement the most valued forms of action are spontaneous actions, sometimes violent as in the case of individual anarchism, or cultural interventions that seek to overturn dominant significations. In sum, this Nietzschean grammar is about harnessing the capacity of the imagination to produce totally new truths, new experiences of the world and another future without any form of rational instruments mediating this relation.

The forms of engagement that arose from the work and influence of Charles Fourier differed in their approach to social change. This Alternative political grammar saw the need for some form of social organization to re-establish a state of interiority, inspiration and creativity. The state of creativity and inspiration was not seen as being sufficient in itself, since the subject needs to be embedded in a certain form of collective organization for this to be possible, thus the Alternative grammar focuses on modes of organization and forms of knowledge that might enable such organization to be put in place. These forms of engagement seeking an 'alternative' to industrial capitalism are based on a compromise between the values of the inspired city not only with the industrial city but also with the civic city of political participation (see Figure 1). Indeed, reflections on modes of organization have led to several forms of compromise around direct democracy both in politics and in the workplace, including autonomy and self-management. Although these terms have been used at different historical moments, they cover the same desire to establish a mode of organization allowing for another relation between the self and the world, producing non-alienated forms of labor and fostering collective participation in the construction of society. On this last point it should be noted that, unlike the Nietzschean grammar regarding

engagement, the Alternative Grammar requires a form of organization to mediate society's capacity to produce itself. In this view, society can only create itself and thus materialize an imagined future by putting in place structures of collective decision-making, whether these be self-management structures or other forms of radical democracy. This recognition of the productive powers of the imagination leads in turn to self-limitation in the sense of constructing collective rules that to some extent constrain individual actions.

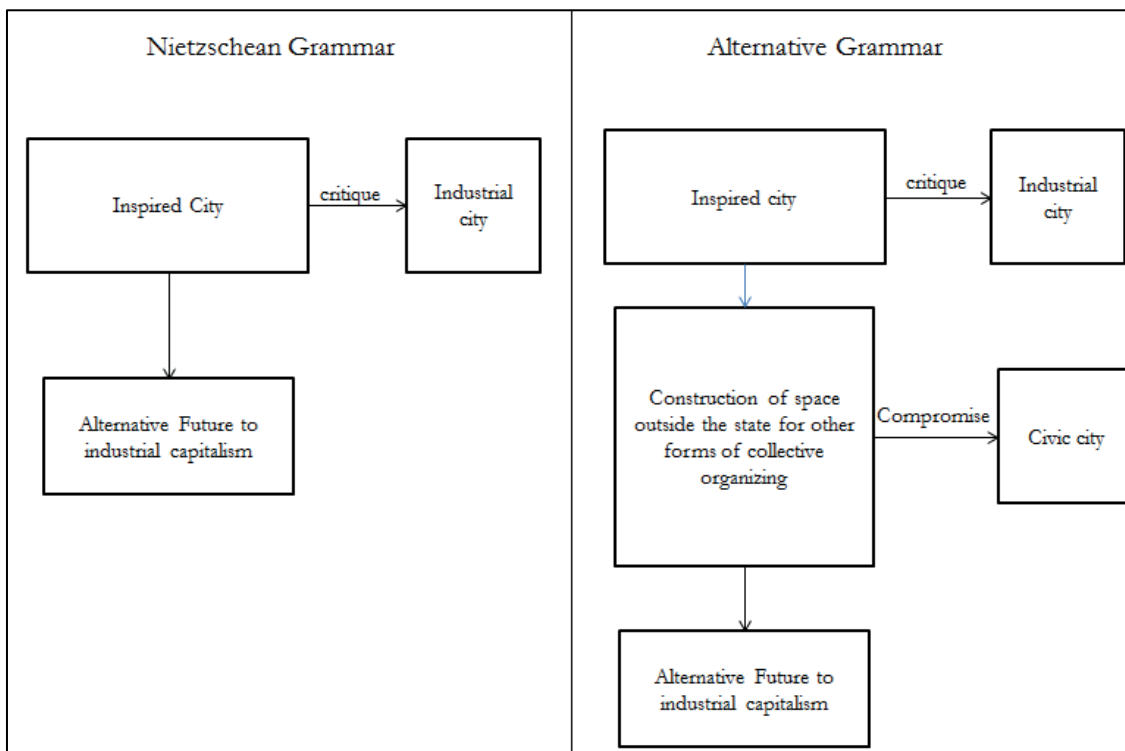


Figure 2: Comparing Nietzschean and Alternative Grammars of Engagement

The distinction I have drawn between the Alternative grammar and the Nietzschean grammar makes it possible to consider the legacy of the Alternative grammar in current political struggles. As I have shown in this chapter, these two grammars have been drawn upon to support liberal and social-democratic logics far removed from the revolutionary promises of May 68. Both grammars share a visceral opposition to all forms of bureaucracy and pyramidal organizational structures, leading them into the field of associative or solidarity-based commitment that values individual will and creativity, and into the experience of the subject and his or her self-constitution. In this way both the Nietzschean and the Alternative grammars have cut themselves off from socialist grammar. However, those who equate this form of self-managing libertarian socialism with

neoliberalism's appropriation of strands of 'self-management' ignore three important aspects.

First, to equate neoliberalism with self-management-oriented socialism would be to ignore the issues and values of collective deliberation, self-management and autonomy as self-determination that lie at the core of the Alternative grammar. Such equivalence and appropriation could only refer to the Nietzschean grammar and its values of creativity and *individual* autonomy. Second, this appropriation would ignore the fact that socialism provoked a 'counter-revolution' on the part of capitalism that has ended up crushing workers' dreams of autonomy and inspiration (Audier, 2017, p. 519). Third, this false equivalence would ignore the reasons why the autonomy project has been recuperated by a capitalist project and drifted outside of politics to individual spheres and minorities adopting different lifestyles,⁹⁶ i.e. primarily because there has been a total disregard of this movement on the part of the French Socialist Party, who have adopted particularly backward-looking positions by excluding these issues from the political arena. The Socialist Party's incapacity to commit to a revolutionary strategy that is incompatible with its governing aspirations within an economic and international system, and the Communist Party's inability to truly mobilize self-managed revolutionary popular aspirations has led to an impasse in terms of the revolutionary hopes of 1968. The *Programme Commun* (Common Program) of 1972, which was agreed upon by the PS, the PCF and the centrist Radical movement of the left, served to enable state and party control over the upsurge of popular bottom-up movements in the post-1968 period, moderating revolutionary aspirations perceived as wild and autonomous. In 1980, for example, Kesselman was able to offer the following assessment:

The left parties continue to pose a challenge to the regime and to retain a strong base [...] yet they remain unable and/or unwilling to mobilize popular discontent beyond opposition to the existing regime in order to initiate fundamental political, economic, and social change. The result is that the left is immobilized, and the right retains power. France remains a weak link of Western capitalism but, for the foreseeable future, one that shows little sign of snapping. (Kesselman, 1980, p. 113)

⁹⁶ A comparison can be made in this respect, albeit only for the purpose of understanding and not with any wish to reinforce the historical parallel, between May 68 and the failed revolutions of 1848 that led to the advent of individualistic anarchism (Manfredonia, 2006). The inability to maintain forms of organization and collective structures that prefigured another world in 1968 led to feelings of despair and depression – an individualized and subjective experience of suffering that reinforced alternative behaviors such as nomadism and hippy lifestyles (Porter, 2016b).

The question of a missing political solution to the utopian hopes of May 68 is still relevant today. After the failure of the PSU, activists from the libertarian left looked for other political configurations to promote the idea of a self-managing, environmentalist and feminist socialism linking material and cultural struggles. Together with activists from the PSU and other revolutionary formations, activists engaged in the Alliance Marxiste Révolutionnaire formed the *Fédération pour une Gauche alternative* (Federation for an Alternative Left) in 1984, standing for a project of a self-managing, libertarian, environmentalist and feminist left. This political formation of an alternative left was followed by others such as the *Alternative Rouge et Verte* (the Red and Green Alternative) in 1989, *Les Alternatifs* (the Alternatives) in 1998 and more recently the *Ensemble!* formation launched in 2013. Moreover, the exploration of prefigurative methods of struggle that had been at the heart of the occupations supported by this other left found a renewal in environmentalist struggles such as that at Notre-Dame-des-Landes. After the victory of the fight for Larzac, the struggle of Notre-Dame-des-Lande⁹⁷ (2014–18) remains the best recent example of an environmentalist campaign interweaving a critique of everyday life with experimentations in novel social practices and logics of self-organization in order to oppose the project of capitalist growth and ‘development’ (Pruvost, 2017). Moreover, the *ZAD de Notre-Dame-des-Landes* constituted a formative experience for many young activists (Jeanneau & Lernoud, 2008) and a model for a later type of social movement, the *Nuit Debout*.

Building on the novel insights derived from this historical analysis, the following chapter engages with how these different Romantic grammars have been mobilized in social movements that seek to prefigure other futures, before moving on to an empirical analysis of the *Nuit Debout* movement. Two main findings are particularly relevant in this analysis: the different forms of political engagement of the two grammars and the question of compromises and critiques with the values of other cities. The chapter will further look into how the Nietzschean, and Alternative grammars have been drawn upon to support different forms of engagement with the notion of utopia (i.e. artistic and direct interventions versus other modes of organizing outside the state), before engaging with the question of compromises with and critiques of other activist grammars,

⁹⁷ The project to construct an airport at Notre-Dame-des-Landes was successfully stopped after four years of self-managed occupation (Big et al., 2018). Similar to the Larzac struggle, the resistance movement at Notre-Dame-des-Landes encompassed environmental and anti-capitalist objectives within occupation strategies, with the space occupied by both environmentalist activists and farmers managing the space together as a common. Notre-Dame-des-Landes has come to be seen as a major symbol of the environmental and socialist struggle in France, an example of successful resistance in the name of freedom, solidarity and the environment.

namely the Republican and Socialist grammars.

5 DISCUSSION: ACTIVIST GRAMMARS AND PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS



Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/07/23/100-jours-1-fresque-1000-messages/>

The current chapter explores how the Romantic critique of the industrial city and aspirations to a poetic, renewed and authentic life was mobilized within participant's discourses to justify prefigurative politics at Nuit Debout, and how it was able to find forms of compromise and arrangements with other political cultures from the radical and far left,⁹⁸ namely the Republican and Socialist grammars. It will first focus on how different grammars support various organizational practices, paying special attention to how Romantic grammars engage with

⁹⁸ Throughout this chapter I will consistently use Ducange's distinction between the far left and the radical left. Thus, the far-left or *extreme gauche* has an anti-institutional approach to social change, whereas the radical left believes changes can happen through elections (Ducange, 2015).

aesthetic politics, as artistic practices leading to another collective imaginary. It distinguishes between aesthetic practices forming utopian spaces in urban settings, crafting spaces for other types of social relations and forms of expression, from aesthetic practices mobilized for a critique of symbols and figures of power through disturbance, transgressions and sometimes destruction. Finally, this chapter analyzes the forms of arrangement, compromise and conflict that arose in the movement, before concluding with a discussion on its legacy.

As summarized in figure 3, there are three main grammars, the Romantic, Republican and Socialist, as well as several sub-grammars born from a compromise between two main grammars. As such, the Nietzschean grammar is a compromise between the Socialist idea of radical revolution and the Romantic values of creativity and imagination, the Alternative grammar is a compromise between the Republican ideals of collective organizing and Romantic anti-modern ideals, and lastly, the Social-Republican brings together the Republican notions of democratic institutions and the Socialist critique of capitalism. While my reading of the Republican and Socialist grammars relies partially on previous research (Pereira, 2010), my analysis of the Romantic grammar and its two different forms, the Nietzschean and the Alternative, constitutes an original contribution.

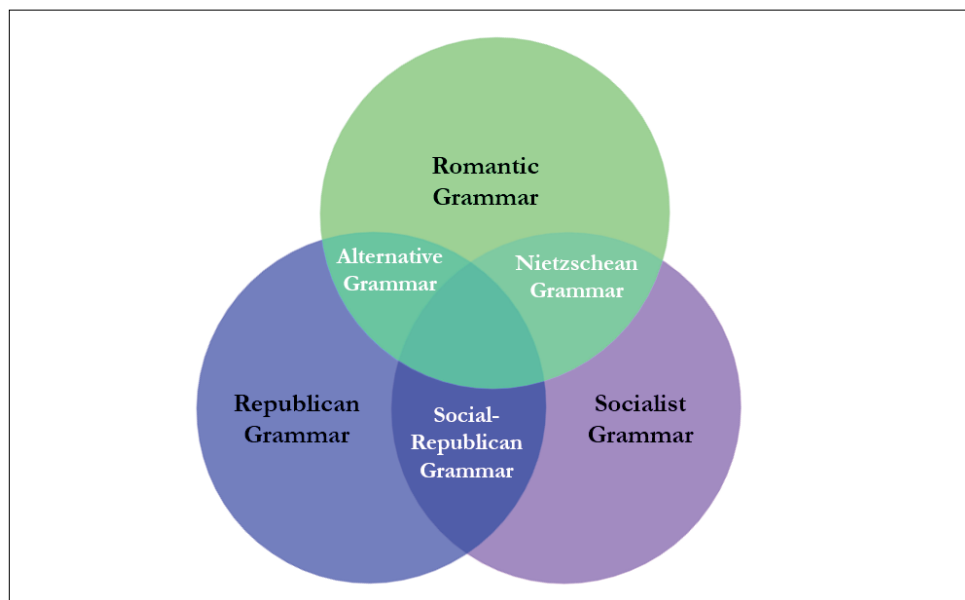





Figure 3: Diagram of the Romantic, Republican and Socialist grammars and their sub-grammars

The following Table (Table 2) summarizes the main organizational practices that have arisen from different political traditions. While the notion of grammar is useful to distinguish between the values behind certain organizational practices, participants can mobilize different form of grammars to defend their positions, depending on the context, their role, and the audience. *Thus, this chapter will focus both on describing these practices and on analyzing how participants talk about them, giving meaning to these different actions*

Grammar	Values	Types of action	Commissions	Examples	
Romantic	<p>Inner life (imagination, creativity, intuition)</p> <p>Poetic relationship between the world, the self and other</p>	Aesthetic politics constitutive of another way of being/doing in the public space	<p>“Architecture Debout”,</p> <p>« Artistes Debout »,</p> <p>« Orchestre Debout »,</p> <p>« Chorale Debout »,</p> <p>« Poésie Debout »,</p> <p>« Cine Debout »</p> <p>« Animation debout »</p>	Temporary constructions, Concerts, carols, operas, exhibits, artistic co-creation, public performances,	
Nietzschean	Radical transformation and revolution though art	Aesthetic politics mobilized for critique of figures and symbols of power in the public space	<p>“Anti-pub”,</p> <p>“Action”,</p> <p>"Convergence des luttes"</p>	Parody, mocking, disguises, street performances, cartoons, aesthetic misappropriations, distortion, reconfiguration	
Alternative	Humanistic and pre-capitalistic values	<p>Autonomous self-management</p> <p>Concrete utopia</p>	<p>"Education Populaire"</p> <p>"Cantine Debout"</p>	Debates, conferences, practices of collective living	



Republican	<p>Democracy</p> <p>Collective rights</p>	<p>Political practices constructing a collective force</p>	<p>“Internationale Debout”, “SDF”, “Avocats Debout”, “Migrants Debout” “Droit au Logement”</p>	<p>Demonstrations, marches, petitions</p>	
Social-Republican	<p>Collective participation in the political system</p>	<p>Collective practices renewing political institutions and modes of representations</p> <p>Radical democracy</p>	<p>“Démocratie sur la place”, “Commission Constituante” “Economie Politique” “Jurys Citoyens”</p>	<p>Grassroots democracy, citizen juries</p>	
Socialist	<p>Class interests</p> <p>Anticapitalism</p>	<p>Actions defending collective interests</p>	<p>“Convergence des luttes”, “Cheminots Debout »</p>	<p>Unions, strikes</p>	

Table 2: Grammars and their organizational practices at Nuit Debout

5.1 The Romantic Grammar

The Romantic grammar is a grammar of counter-modernity that justifies its modes of action on the basis of the values of the ‘inspired city’ (i.e. the inspired, imaginative and poetic self), aspiring to a way and experience of living radically different from that ushered in by industrial capitalism. While one can find a variety of intellectual ideas and movements under this umbrella⁹⁹ (they are united in their shared appreciation for the resources of the inner-life (imagination and intuition) and a quest for the re-establishment of a poetic relationship with the world. As summarized in Table 2 this grammar supports aesthetic forms of political engagement, namely through collective art performances (music, dance, writing, poetry), as well as ephemeral constructions leading to other forms of being in the public space. Under this grammar, a variety of intellectual and political positions constructs a discourse manifesting a subversive temporality, where art expresses a connection between present action and future creation. Improvised and spontaneous musical, dance, and visual performances blend highbrow with popular culture in a suspended temporality, between subversive present and a better future.



⁹⁹ From Morin to Castoriadis, Jacques Rancière, Godard and Che Guevara, the Italian workers’ autonomist movement, Foucault and Deleuze, Agamben, Holloway, Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, Hardt and Negri, the Situationists and Bourdieu, the spirit of May 68⁹⁹, as well as popular insurrectionary movements of communist inspiration such as medieval popular revolts, the revolutions of 1838 and 1848, the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Popular Front movement of 1936.

Source: <https://twitter.com/nuitdebout>

Predominantly found within the “anarchic nebula” (Fougier, 2019, p. 43), a disparate ensemble of loosely organized structures involved in anti-liberal struggles, contemporary activists mobilizing Romantic political grammars organize autonomously and experiment with forms of direct action in the tradition of May 68 (Crettiez & Sommier, 2002, p. 270). This grammar has experienced a revival since the 1990s with the anti-globalization movement and events such as the 2006 youth protest in France against the *Contrat Première Embauche* as well as the occupation of the *Zone à Défendre* (ZAD) of Notre-Dame-des-Landes in 2009, where collective forms of experimenting with alternative and anticapitalistic forms of living were conducted autonomously outside of the state in opposition to the government’s project of building a new airport. For far-left activists it became a rite of passage to visit the ZAD, which had initially been initiated by a mélange of local inhabitants and older and younger activists sharing similar ideals. Together, they created an alternative to industrial rationalist capitalism and its religion of progress, a zone in which artistic and political actions brought forward new possibilities reflecting ideals of the 1970s (Luck, 2008, p. 149). Elements of the anarchic nebula used this struggle to build islands of freedom reflecting their ideology, such as the *Collectif Mauvaise Troupe* and the group *No Borders* (Schüler, 2017, p. 54). The ZAD thus became a place for experimenting with artistic forms of intervention as well as environmentalist and anti-capitalist practices. In both forms of intervention, imagination and creativity are perceived as a collective resource capable of infusing existing or new practices with novel meaning, creating ruptures in everyday life and allowing for the joint construction of another world (Collectif Mauvaise Troupe, 2014). In sum, the ZAD of Notre-Dame-des-Landes constitutes a historical event for the Romantic stream of the far left. Above all, perhaps, it was an opportunity for a transfer of knowledge between an older generation formed in the occupations of the 1970s and a younger generation of activists brought into politics after the protests against the *Contrat première embauche*, united under the slogan ‘*Contre l’aéroport et son monde*’ (‘Against the Airport and its World’) (Barbe, 2016, p. 113). Practices such as horizontality, anonymity of delegates and spokespersons under the mixed first name ‘Camille’ would constitute a common repertoire for activists at Nuit Debout.

This Romantic grammar was the dominant activist grammar in the material produced by Nuit Debout, both in its intellectual references, in participants' discourses and in its internal channels, such as Radio Debout¹⁰⁰, Gazette Debout¹⁰¹ and TV Debout¹⁰². This overrepresentation can be explained, at least in part, by a Weberian sociological analysis of the "typical profile" of the Nuit Debout participant¹⁰³. According to these sources, the typical Nuit Debout activist is a man or woman in his or her thirties, highly educated and unemployed, and a member of a precarious intellectual and creative class, according to a survey carried out on the Place de la République. Members of the creative and intellectual class, whose situation has become more precarious since the disengagement of the French state from the cultural sector, have mobilized intellectual and material resources to actively frame the movement, shaping it to their tastes and image: imagining a creative and festive meeting outside the political and social calendar. Key participants include The *Mauvaise Troupe* collective, the *No Border* collective and members of the *Comité Invisible*. This grammar was also mobilized by artists involved in the movement, including poets, actors, audiovisual artists, filmmakers, researchers, university professors (Eric Fassin) and intellectuals (such as interviewees Edgar Morin, Sophie Wahnich, Jacques Rancière, and Marie José Mondzain), activists working with exclusion and minorities issues, and activists providing medical assistance during demonstrations such as *Street Medic*, participants involved in anti-globalization, ecological, feminist and LGBTQ struggles, and artists' collectives operating political interventions in the same vein as the Situationists such as the *Perou*¹⁰⁴ collective and the *Volte* group of science-fiction writers. Anarchist militant and intellectuals from other occupying movements visiting Nuit Debout, including Occupy Wall Street, referred at least partially to this Romantic grammar. As described in Table 2, Romantic values were dominant, for example, in the discussions of commissions dedicated to projects of artistic revolution and novel aesthetics (Commission on Art Debout, Commission on Architecture, Commission on Visual arts, etc.), and commissions on changing representation through discursive shifts (the Commission on Vocabulary and the Reinvestment of Meaning), struggles for the rights of minorities and socially

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/radiodebout/>

¹⁰¹ <https://gazettedebout.fr/category/vie-de-la-nuit/>

¹⁰² <https://www.youtube.com/c/TVDeboutParis>

¹⁰³ <https://www.politis.fr/articles/2016/05/qui-sont-les-participants-de-nuit-debout-34685/>

¹⁰⁴ <https://perou-paris.org/>

disadvantaged groups (Commission on Feminism, Commission on LGBTQ, Commission on Homeless) and for alternative lifestyle practices (Commission on Drugs and Freedom). Questions such as the construction of imaginary significations, reappropriating spaces through occupation and “*the reinvention of our lifestyles*” were frequently addressed at sessions of the General Assembly (32), where documentaries on occupation experiences like the ZAD and the Zapatistas were screened after discussion sessions.

5.1.2 General characteristics

5.1.2.1 A permanent state of grace and inspiration

The Romantic grammar is characterized first and foremost by its appreciation for the higher good of the inspired city, i.e. a state of grace and inspiration independent of any need for validation from an external authority. Its resources and objects are first and foremost the inner world of the subject and the goal of achieving a connection with a harmonious state of energy, emotional flow, happiness, and grace. The activist experience is thus appreciated by participants in part as an opportunity for connecting with one’s inner self and building a collective power from this energy.

Valuing the state of inspiration and grace as the higher good, the Romantic political grammar focuses on affective experience, perceiving the process of commitment to social and political causes as an emotional experience. The experience of political engagement has been described as “*an intensity of joy*” (18), an experience which allows one “*to give back energy, joy*” (23) in which “*we live something very strong on a daily basis*” (12). While positive feelings like joy are emphasized for sustaining commitment and conducting political actions over the long term, it should be noted that a wider range of emotions are also expressed in such activism, from happiness to feelings of rage, revolt, and anger. In an atmosphere of generalized repression in which power seeks to stifle any possibility of contestation, Nuit Debout was described by many participants as a powerful, revitalizing, intensely emotional experience. Providing an opportunity for the expression of repressed feeling in an otherwise oppressive context, the discussion spaces at Nuit Debout were seen as “*therapeutic*” (23) for the social body. This discourse sees the movement as having generated a particular energy – a living force diffusing a “*magnificent energy*” (26), revitalizing an amorphous society by constituting a power of life in this occupation. Faced with a

decaying society and a moribund world, Nuit Debout has been described as akin to a vital source of energy – “*a life force that plunges us and propels us into the 21st century*” (22).

Participants mobilizing this grammar describe their affective experiences as ones of a poetic intensity in contrast to the everyday world. They seek to break away and reconnect with emotions and horizons against the meaninglessness of the modern world. In other words, political engagement leads to a kind of ‘state of grace’, a dream-like state of never-ending passion, joy, and excitement. Described as a subjective, spiritual and poetic experience akin to an awakening, political engagement produces a novel feeling of awareness and connection to the self, a state of grace on the margins of society:

I mean by that there is breath there is something swelling that fills us, there is breathing, it lifts the chests, it lifts the voices. (27)

I saw this world growing up, standing up, and I was moved – you feel that thrill, you feel (28).

One of the numerous digital newspapers created by participants of Nuit Debout, *Matraque*, reflects and celebrates these festive forms of protest:

"Let's build parties, let's write songs, farandoles, carnivals bursting with jubilation, let's occupy the spaces of the city left in waste, let's picnic on the railroads, let's taste the Mayor's office, let's feast, let's paint the banks, let's shout by day, let's play by night (...) the insurrection that we call for is a spatial puzzle with different facets in the shape of games and joy".



Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/06/14/nuit-debout-la-fete-dans-la-protestation/>



Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/05/28/feuilleton-debout-2-une-femme-gavroche/>

Moreover, by engaging with previously passive and powerless subjects, Nuit Debout was an experience that broke the monotony of the agonizing and nightmarish ‘spectacle’ of the present, raising the individual to new heights like the Romantic poet above the cloudy mists. Instead of an

activity at the periphery of the social space practiced by a few chosen ones, culture and art become collective activities that engage subjects as actors and creators of their own world. If artists do have a role as initiators and guides of the new world, it is not about performing on the square but a matter of being an actor of the fabrication of one's life, one's activity and one's identity, putting an end to passivity and submission. Participants are called to leave their modern society's indolence, to rise and take an active role in producing the conditions of their existence¹⁰⁵. Such is the meaning behind the many collaborative workshops, where professional artists and amateurs come together to co-create poetry (Poésie Debout), write political songs (Chansons Debout¹⁰⁶), and even to write about the new world rising from the ashes. For example, the collective Zanzibar invited participants to "collectively imagining"¹⁰⁷ the first 1000 days after the occupation of the Place de la République. Stories where end of the world meets end of capitalism, consumerism and mass media were then posted on the Facebook page¹⁰⁸.



Participants of Chorale Debout

Source: <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/06/22/chorale-debout-la-revolution-en-chansons/>

While these activists drew upon a wide repertoire of tactics and practices to create a sensorial world where participants can live according to Baudelaire's ideals, « *les parfums, les couleurs et*

¹⁰⁵ Even unanimated objects such as microphones, pans, and sidewalks are called upon to rise and revolt ("microphones debout", "casseroles debout", "trottoire debout").

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUh681B-nNs>

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.zanzibar.zone/2016/03/31/1000-jours-en-mars/>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1000journsenmars/>

les sons se répondent », artistic practices also carry on a critique against the industrial city, as exposed in the next section.

5.1.2.2 The messiness of the creative world

Unsurprisingly, the values of the inspired city come into conflict with the values of the industrial city, since hierarchy, bureaucracy and rationality are three elements that threaten the sensitive self and its inner state of grace. Activists thus seek to avoid these elements at all costs in the process of collective organizing. In terms of epistemology, the Romantic grammar assumes that reason by itself is not capable of knowing the world. Instead, getting in touch with one's inner world, emotions, intuitions and feelings is seen as the way to expand one's understanding of life experience – in contrast and in opposition to a purely rational perspective. There is a strong critique against the rationalization of the modern world. Technology and forms of rational organization that prioritize efficiency over purpose are considered incompatible with the uniqueness of human experience. This critique targets centralized administrations and dehumanizing bureaucratic structures in general. The objects of the industrial city, including rational control over processes such as rules and procedures, are dismissed by the Romantic grammar as part of this “*administration which is expressed mechanically and coldly*” (4).

More generally, this Romantic grammar constitutes a criticism against rationalism. Science and ‘progress’ are seen as threats to the relationship between oneself and the world, nature and others, ultimately reducing any relationships to instrumental relations in a competition between atomized individuals within a “*civilization of the domination of profit, of finance, calculation and anonymity*” (14). Instrumental reason is strongly criticized as a source of the impoverishment of our relation with the world by producing a “*fragmented knowledge*” and a “*one-sided vision, mutilated vision, fanatic vision*” (14) built upon a unilateral and quantitative form of thought that reduces human experience and its wide range of emotional experiences – a science without a conscience.

Architectes Debout

Artistic and creative initiatives can purposefully reinvent the space, allowing for other relationships in the public, urban setting. Ephemeral constructions, such as colored wooden benches¹⁰⁹ with wheels, fight against the official cosmetics of "urban furniture" assigning discussions and meeting in specific spaces. Here, the political posture of standing up needs a seated counterpart, as participants come together to reinvent social, political, and economic systems. Even sitting, participants are still "Debout". Overcoming the initial design of the square, which was not conceived with long lasting public gatherings in mind, commissions such as "Architecture Debout" profess their adherence to Lefebvre's principles as architects and designer create lightweight, temporary structures to overcome hostile weather conditions, offering comfortable settings for the commissions' activities. Alongside reflections on the housing crisis, Architecture Debout's aspires to "*change the vision and the place of the architect in the city*", supporting an "*architecture of tomorrow*"¹¹⁰ no longer an obedient servant of big capital.



Source : <https://www.facebook.com/archidebout/?ref=ts&fref=ts>

¹¹⁰ <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/04/23/du-street-art-sur-les-bancs-de-nuitdebout/>



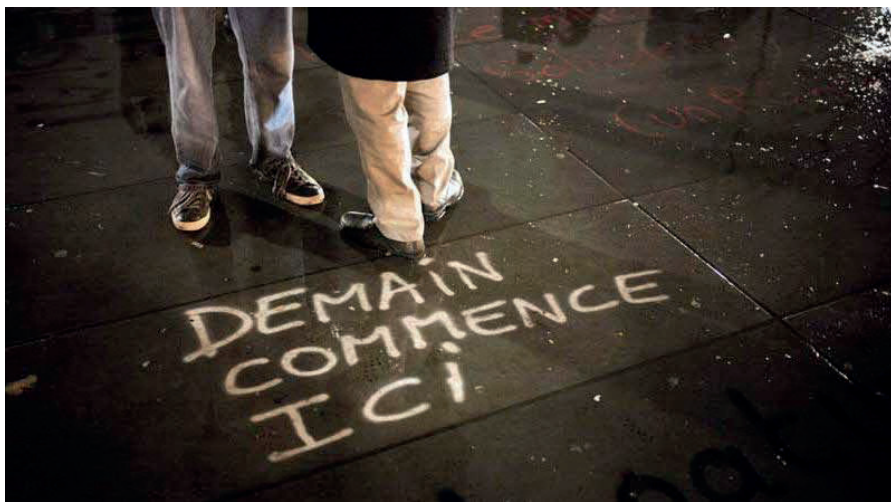
Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/07/23/100-jours-1-fresque-1000-messages/>

Opposed to the logic of rational control, activists mobilizing the Romantic grammar seek a logic of self-organization that leaves space for spontaneous action, making room for *“indeterminacy, not to be controlled, so people cannot be all the time in a logic of control [...] not to make a plan which would be technocratically organized from the top with a management system which would always be the same. No. Here we take care of life!”* (23). Romantic values of indeterminacy and spontaneity are a natural fit for the type of self-managed, spontaneous, and autonomous forms of organization that allow for flexibility, adaptation and permanent change. The space of the Place de la République was divided among different autonomous commissions, each embodying a different repertoire of engagement, engaged in autonomous and unpredictable actions yet still allowing space for occasional coordinated actions.

5.1.2.3 Creating another world through art, culture, and aesthetic experiences

Although Nuit Debout initially emerged as a reaction to the El Khomri labour law, the movement quickly became a much more general movement ‘Against the Labor Law and its World’, just as Notre-Dame-des-Landes had been an occupation ‘Against the airport and its world’ (thus also highlighting the intertextuality among occupation struggle). More than overturning the government's proposal, the Romantic grammar aspires to change society by modifying the conditions leading to particular modes of being, thoughts and relationships. In other words, they

consider societal change as arising through shifts in cultural paradigms and representations constructed within discourses and actions. Viewing the world as a symbolic construction mediated through language, this grammar is mobilized to justify actions that reject dominant imaginaries and thereby enable alternative significations, subjectivities, and collective possibilities to arise. Although the symbolic construction of meaning happens within each individual, significations are collectively shared through an unconscious imaginary. Artistic and cultural practices put forward these novel imaginaries, thus creating the new world within the Place de la République.



"Tomorrow starts here"

Source: <https://gazettedebout.fr/2017/04/05/nuit-debout-aide-a-rompre-solitude/>

Orchestre Debout

One of the most iconic moments was the *Orchestre Debout*, or "Standing Orchestra" performance on April 23rd, where five hundred musicians gathered to perform the "Fourth Movement" of Dvorak's New World Symphony, the "Chorale" of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and the "Slave Chorus" of Verdi's Nabucco. The goal of the initiative was to popularize classical music, but also to rethink the social relationships within the orchestra, and between orchestra and audience. The New World Symphony, with its almost eponymous title, has remained an emblematic moment of the movement. Unlike the orderly setting of a classical music recital, people carried wooden pallets for the stage, and loudly rejoice when the conductor states: "We are going to play the New World Symphony for a new world". Instead of a baton, the conductor executes the movements with his cell phone, as the overexcited crowd exclaims in tune with the resonance of the brass instruments. This experience of classical culture outside the usual salons and concert halls, created a space for relations outside of the usual class separations between workers, musicians, and spectators, united in harmony in this new world.



Source : https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2016/05/01/l-orchestre-debout-celebre-en-musique-le-premier-mois-d-existence-de-nuit-debout_4911555_3224.html

Culture, art, aesthetic, and language are weapons in a struggle against the El Khomri labour and its world, bringing a shift in the collective representations Nuit Debout thus became first and foremost a cultural struggle – a counter-revolutionary movement against TINA's – in accordance with the belief that cultural shifts can constitute the basis of a political revolution. Contradicting any strategic vision of political action, this grammar conceives political engagement as creative of a dislocation that can provide an opening towards an alternative future – towards a new possibility that contrasts with what is established and instituted. In this process, being in a state of creation and social creativity without limits or constraints or destination is paramount. For participants mobilizing this form of Romantic grammar, 'decline' would thus be signified by the end of such a creative state and any outcome resulting in the institutionalization of the movement and thereby putting an end to this "*art of politics, the art of building*" (22). In the words of one of the participants (14): "*Nuit Debout was attractive to me because it was indefinite in time. It's something that continues. It's not just a demonstration that you go home from – it continues day after day.*"

This grammar reveals the influence of Romantic ideas on the radicality of poetic language. Such poetic language, by radically rethinking words and their meanings, is seen as capable of breaking through and disturbing the prevailing sense of stability and 'reality' with its seemingly inevitable continuity. Establishing the "*general dream*", Nuit Debout embodies the Romantic idea that artistic and poetic creation can disrupt a seemingly pre-ordained course of events through a new language introducing new words with novel meanings.



"General dream"

Source: <https://gazettedebout.fr/2017/03/31/un-an-apres-nuit-debout-utilite/>



Source : <https://www.poesiedebout.org/page/14/index.html>

This desired change in significations is seen as entailing a reconstruction of collective meaning through language in a struggle against “*the confiscation of the lexicon*” (27), against the attempts of power to restrict the sense of possibilities. These interventions, reflected in actions such as the Nuit Debout Commission for the “Reinvestment of Meaning and Vocabulary” and “Poetry”, included discussions on a more radical language – a language able to elude the (mis)representations and injunctions of power:

It is absolutely necessary that art and poetry are present everywhere in the places where

we seek to invent, where we debate and where we reflect on the political point of view [...] we tend to use a language in spite of ourselves, like stereotypes and clichés, that is to say concepts heard a thousand times that we no longer question. (8)

This focus illustrates the extent to which the field of struggle is seen as “*an eminently symbolic territory*” (14) rather than a political – in the sense of institutional – territory. Such contemporary activist grammar engages in collective actions and performances as interventions in this symbolic territory, seeking to gain ground in struggles between competing imaginaries. In these struggles the imagination is regarded simultaneously a field of struggle and a tool for creating new collective meanings. For example, the activities conducted in occupying the Place de la République were described by participants as “*attempts to reconstruct new imaginaries*” (12), in order to change our collective history and future.

Opéra Debout

Cultural and artistic performances are ways for the cultural and intellectual class to prefigure a world where visual arts, music, poetry, theatre, and movies are no longer at the margin of society, dismissed as waste of time by the political and ruling class. By displacing creative activities outside of their usual confined spaces, and conducting performances infused with political messages, enrolling both professionals and curious amateurs, these performances construct a city where arts produce spaces for collective emancipation and prefigure other types of social relations. Musical performances create a hybrid event, between a political rally and a music festival. Mixing artistic forms and political messages, troupes enrolling professional artists and enthusiasts such as “Opéra Debout”¹¹¹, perform a political satire in an open theatre. This collaborative performance stages a world where class relations are turned upside down and where culture, free from its traditional setting, takes on an empowering, emancipating, and universal role. Political messages meet artistic expression as class privileges are criticized, and culture for the people, by the people takes the centre stage.

¹¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnjT5FaE9GM>



Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/10/25/opera-debout-engagement/>

Artistic performances also take the role of temporal markers, an opportunity to collectively re-live the milestones of the movement, such as the festivities organized for the first 100 days of occupation, or 100 mars according to the new revolutionary calendar. A 3-day festive program where photos of the sit-ins, marches and occupations are exposed in a temporary gallery wall made of black paper panels, where participants are invited to paint messages of hope, and to participate in political discussions, watch documentary on occupations around the world and listen to round tables on education.



Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/06/12/deja-le-100mars-loccasion-dune-retrospective/>

This section described some of the essential characteristics and practices improvised within this rich, sometimes ambiguous, grammar. Forming spaces for intense emotional experiences, conducting artistic experimentations in opposition to the rationalized, modern world, and creating radical cultural performances infused with alternative meanings constitute its main modes of engagement. While these form a common basis for the Romantic grammar, this thesis has shown how this grammar has two key variations: the Nietzschean and the Alternative Grammar.

5.1.3 The Nietzschean Grammar

The Nietzschean grammar is an activist grammar based upon an appreciation and glorification of art as a mode of radically transforming the world, emphasizing artistic values such as imagination and creativity in its concepts of political engagement and activism. As part of the Romantic grammar, it is characterized by its radical nature in the sense of its total belief in artistic production, a belief in destruction and a strong anti-institutional discourse. This grammar embodies best the contradictions and ambiguities of the romantic spirit, its longing for both a reunification with a grand totality, and a perverse, sadistic and monstrous appetite for destruction (Vivès, 2005) . Rather than a better world is possible, there is a sense that, in that moment, *anything is possible*. Reconstruction, decomposition, and transgression are key, disturbing the official order with parties and celebrations in the ashes of the old world. This appetite for radical destruction through art posits this grammar as a compromise between the Socialist values of revolution and the Romantic vision of art as a transformative force. Categorizing this grammar as a compromise between socialist and artistic values, does not mean that Nietzsche's writings contain in themselves any appetite for socialism or revolution. If anything, the Ariadne's thread to understand his complex thought can be found in this rebellious and aristocratic spirit, vigorously opposed to the rising threads of democracy, the masses and the oppressed (including women and the proletariat) (Renault, 2004, pp. 147–148). However, as described in chapter 4, his ideas on the power of creation, poetic prophetism, and anti-clerical spirit, were mobilized within a surrealist avant-garde that believed in the socialist revolution and the promise of total destruction of old, capitalist structures, making this one of the many (mis)appropriations of Nietzsche's

thought (Tönnies & Duboc, 2007, pp. 12–18).

The Nietzschean grammar is mobilized by actors who consider themselves to be part of an intellectual and literary avant-garde. The 1990s saw the emergence of actors positioned somewhere between political and aesthetic activism, experimenting with occupations and literary interventions in order to create new imaginaries and subjectivities (Suzanne, 2019), including experimenting with the notion of Bey's concept of Temporary Autonomous Zones and influences from a hacker aesthetic. This includes the philosophical and literary journal *TIQQun* founded by Julien Coupat following his meeting with Boltanski and Aganbem in 1999. While this journal was short-lived, several of its writers were supposedly part of the *Comité Invisible*, the Invisible Committee, a group of anonymous authors sharing the idea of a poetic revolution resulting in new forms of life, environmentalist insurrections, occupations and utopias of new communes (Gefen, 2018). According to Gefen, this intellectual left is the heir to a form of Situationism that combines struggles against neoliberalism, notably against spiritual enslavement, with a project of insurrection. Unlike those who deny the legacy of May 1968, this left continues to propagate the Romantic idea of a poetic revolt resulting in a new form of life. In 2007 the Invisible Committee published the literary success *The Coming Insurrection* (The Invisible Committee, 2011). The literary dimension of this Romantic aspiration coexists with political and subversive activity. For example, in 2015 they organized several actions, such as the operation 'Occupy DGSI'¹¹² (*Direction générale de la sécurité de l'intérieur*) against the French security agency. This form of poetic and political intervention, including occupying and transforming spaces to decolonize the imagination, as well as opening up to other subjectivities through interventions in language and playing with modes of organization and a particular Romantic revolutionary aesthetic, could be seen at play both in the ZAD and in the literary and pamphleteer interventions of the *Comité Invisible*. The Occupy movement is thus indebted to the Invisible Committee, which called for an insurrectional occupation of public spaces in response to domination and violence on the part of the state and the police (Claire, 2011, p. 6).

These activists are in a way "artivists" (Gwiazdzinski, 2018, p. 1), a hybrid between an avant-garde and a citizens' group, associating art and space within interdisciplinary initiatives that transform occupied spaces into social laboratories, constituting a form of "neo-Situationism"

¹¹² <http://www.snj.fr/article/loi-renseignement-le-snj-signe-lappel-occupydgsi>

between activism and new artistic practices, diversions and imaginary practices (Gwiazdzinski, 2016). Culture and aesthetics become mediums through which power is questioned, criticized, and even ridiculed, producing a fleeting moment where social hierarchies are turned upside down. Through street art, theatrical occupations, collages and other mediums, symbols and discourses of power are distorted and mocked, reconfiguring meaning through thought provoking action. Unlike mainstream romantic practices, aesthetic politics are here mobilized to produce a critique of institutions and of the general lack of utopian possibilities. While Romantics usually praise themselves for their pacificism, here material destruction and even violence can merge with aesthetic performances, carnivalesque irruptions and festive improvisations that critique capitalism and corporate interests.



Source: <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/05/08/photos-debout-les-cliches-de-daphne-borenstein/>

The discourse through which participants justify their action mobilizes notions of aesthetic engagement, insurrection, and anti-humanism, as described in the following section.

5.1.3.1.1 An aesthetic mode of engagement

Creativity and experimentation are paramount in this form of activist grammar. While the Romantic grammar was engaged in struggles that change cultural representations and offer other possibilities of civilization, contemporary activists mobilizing a Nietzschean grammar see themselves as capable of creating a new world on the model of artistic creation through different

forms of experimentation and direct actions that escape traditional repertoires of engagement. In other words, whereas the Romantic grammar generally engaged in struggles to shift cultural and imaginative representations (which can include non-artistic modes of interventions), this activist grammar sees creation and destruction as the principal and sole mode of intervention.

The discourse of this contemporary stream of Nietzschean Romantic political grammar exalts in the jubilation of creation: “*we are in the creativity*” (23), “*the jubilation of creation*” (27), invoking the “*poetic value*” (12) of experiments that “*redraw a political horizon*” (12), seeing the material world as a beautiful landscape. In the eyes of these participants, Nuit Debout was not just a demonstration protesting against the El Khomri law but a movement that truly created and shaped another alternative, giving form to “*what is invented, what is affirmed, what is being built [...] what is sketched out*” (22). For adherents of the Nietzschean grammar, Nuit Debout was understood as a space imbued with creativity, inventiveness, and collective experimentation reflective of this grammar’s belief in the creative ability of the collective imagination to bring another future into the present, launching their artistic and destructive appetite against institutions and symbols of power.

Colorevolution

Inspired by a similar action in Berlin¹¹³, the #ColoRevolution manifesto issued an online call for coloring the cities, sites of struggle and symbols of power, in a sign of protest against the labor law and its system:

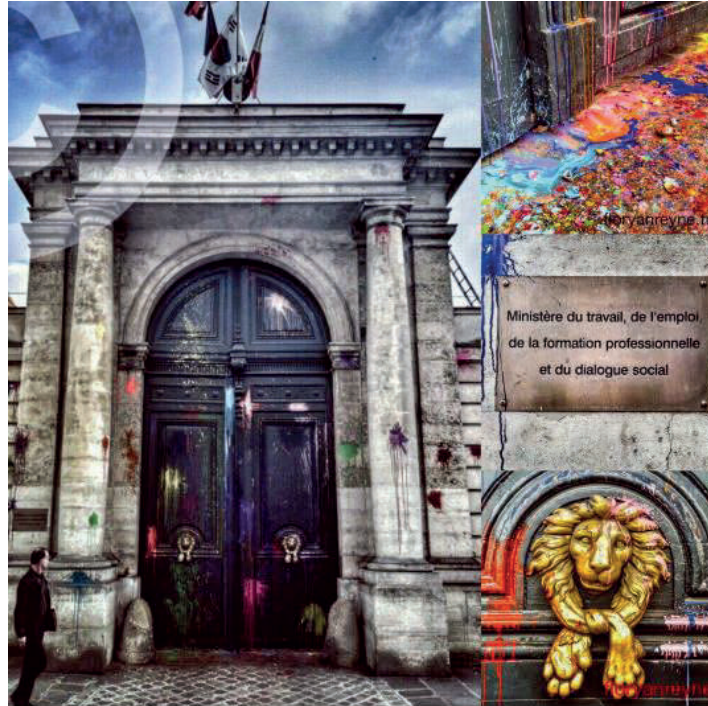
*"The city is grey, dull, aseptic. Repainting it is a way to regain a kind of "power". It's also a way to bring our space back to life, to reclaim it. (...) the city is as grey and dangerous as capitalism. Let's paint it with our colors, those of life, of mess, of the joy of fighting together. Arm yourselves with a can of paint and repaint the streets..."*¹¹⁴

On June 5th, they launch an action against the Ministry of Labor to protest against the current reforms, using art as a sign of protest and hope for change. Colors become the way to protest against the dullness of capitalist life, as well as to call for a different direction, with more life,

¹¹³ (<http://www.thebohmerian.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Environmentally-Friendly-Berlin-Germany-Street-Paint.jpg>)

¹¹⁴ https://docs.google.com/document/d/1niEW-_QhcEqUnBvJzGcjhZPolW588C20ymIC0fs25f0/edit

more hope: a signifier of the lack of utopia in the modern world. Aesthetic forms of protest are a revolt, a form of collective struggle to express opposition, anger, and the desire for a different democracy and society.



Source : https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7v_PVU-TVbrelVOOWMxQjFDMmc/view?pref=2&pli=1&resourcekey=0-FqMCiamAQmdEwlMQOXQX8A

This form of aesthetic politics is not confined within the limits of occupied space. Occupations and sit-ins disturb the status quo of the "outer world", as actions led by the collective "Convergence des lutes" and the Commission "Economie Populaire" against the MEDEF (Mouvement des Entreprises de France- *Movement of the Enterprises of France*). The group arrived in front of the MEDEF headquarters, as a disorganized orchestra marching with casseroles, pots, and pans. Pots and pans, which were also used in other protests at *Nuit Debout*¹¹⁵, are popular instruments associated with housewives and kitchen maids and have traditionally been used to signal popular discontent against bad governance, corruption, and immorality. This goes back to the European tradition of the *charivari*, an organized form of disorder against those that offended the community : a chaotic protest against the immorality of ruling classes (Bonnain-Moerdyk & Moerdyk, 1977). After this loud interruption, activists proceeded to enact a ceremony condemning

¹¹⁵ Such as the action "Casseroles Debout", led by feminist activist Caroline de Haas <https://gazettedebout.wordpress.com/2016/06/19/casseroles-debout-faites-du-bruit-devant-vos-mairies/>

the proximity between corporations' interests and the French state, ultimately proclaiming its dissolution in an enactment of the separation between state and church in 1905¹¹⁶. Corporations have replaced ecclesiastical institutions as enemies of the people, the recipient of popular mockery and carnivalesque interventions.



Source : <https://gazettedebout.wordpress.com/2016/06/19/casseroles-debout-faites-du-bruit-devant-vos-mairies/#more-11786>

Other actions of this type, mostly led by the Commission "Action", include parodies of right-wing marches, infiltrating events such as football games and TV programs, and disturbing business schools' conferences and galas.

5.1.3.1.2 Violent insurrections

The Nietzschean grammar is defined by its strong desire for insurrection and the use of direct and violent forms of action, its antagonistic relation to the state and to capitalist institutions, as well as its radical and revolutionary ambitions. Rather than gradually constructing an alternative, this grammar is about de-institution, preferring non-government to self-government as it aspires, first

¹¹⁶ Similar actions were conducted in other Nuit Debout, such as the one in Albi and Pau: <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/05/17/pour-la-separation-du-medef-et-de-letat/>
<https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/06/07/les-titres-du-jt-de-tvdebout-de-ce-mardi-99-mars/>

and foremost, to minimise the role of government. Activists mobilizing this grammar at Nuit Debout engaged in direct individual forms of action, including spontaneous, sometimes violent and destructive actions. Emphasizing its vision of a wild, unchecked social movement, participants organized an improvised demonstration towards the residence of the Prime Minister in Matignon, leading to some material damage. Reinforcing the idea of a visceral, intuitive action, Alain Damasio,¹¹⁷ another member of this literary avant-garde highly active at Nuit Debout, stated: “We were taken by surprise, the action rose, and we left” (28).



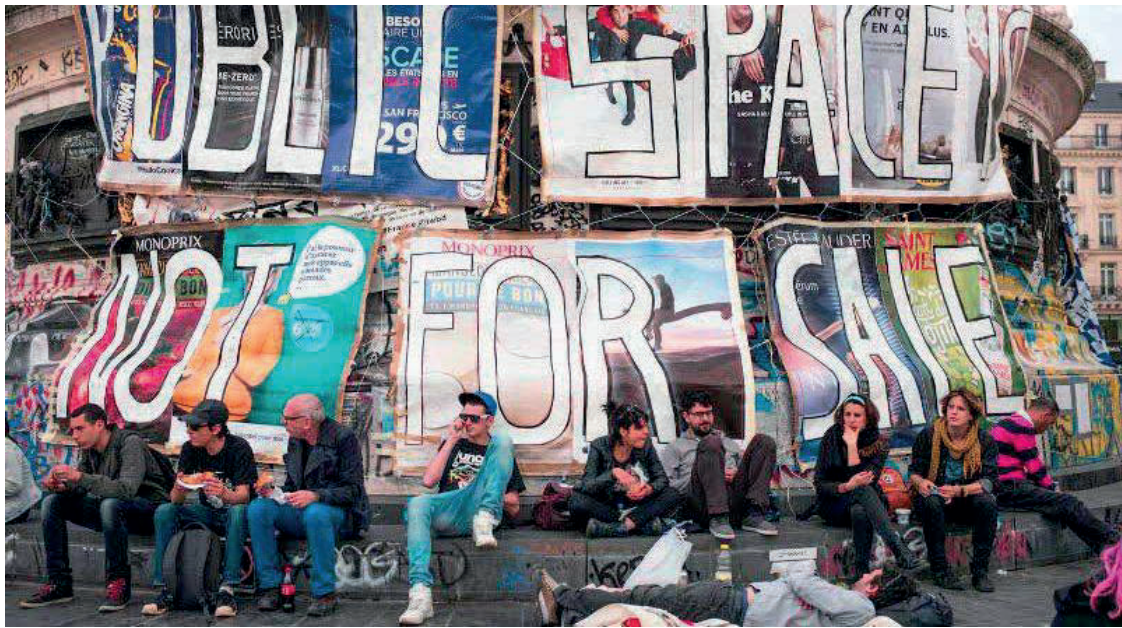
Source : <https://nuit-debout.fr/blog/2016/06/15/slogans-de-la-manif-du-14-juin/>

This activist grammar sees a symbolic potential in destructive and violent forms of action: “*I find it striking that there is no longer a taboo on direct action [...] of the symbolic wild demonstration type here with Valls or elsewhere, the destruction of bank or windows [...] finally, things that symbolically make sense.*” Expressing a desire to initiate a “*spiral of violence so that police violence [...] gets out of hand, goes too far*” (20) by promoting vandalism such as smashing the windows of banks and insurance companies around the Place de la République, this grammar prioritized an approach of insurrectional violence and violent individual actions consistent with the legacy of the anarchism of the Belle Époque and the insurrectionary discourses of the avant-

¹¹⁷ Damasio’s literary works can be read as philosophical fictions building on the work of Foucault (Damasio, 2014) as well as the works of Deleuze and Nietzsche (Damasio, 2015).

garde. In the name of this insurrectionary approach, those mobilizing this grammar are highly critical of the great figures of the Socialist and Republican grammars resistant to this more radical and violent approach. Éric Hazan, a presumed member of the literary collective called the Invisible Committee strongly criticized union representatives for threatening the movement's autonomy, limiting opportunities for individual violence, stating that he saw *"a clear difference between the first rows, the muscular youth of the first rows, and the unions behind, their unfriendly order service. From time to time the CGT's law enforcement agency, we have the impression that they are working hand in hand with the police"* (11). This criticism of the civic city and its representatives extended to parties, unions, *"pre-established slogans"* and *"demonstrations"*: *"They like to control, to control them [...] try to control a crowd in a square. It is not possible, especially when there is no leader, no team leader"* (11). From this perspective, figures of greatness in the Socialist and Republican grammar who represent collective forces were criticized for their desire to exercise control. Rather than forming new types of collectives, this grammar aspires to become ungovernable and uncontrollable, taking delight in the disappearance of traditional forms of political action that have been overtaken by more savage and popular forms of demonstrations, and celebrating *"the resurgence of square movements - the end of the old rotten politics"* (11). As I will elucidate below (cf.5.4), participants active in the collective bodies at Nuit Debout, such as the General Assembly and the various commissions prefiguring other forms of radical democracy, came into conflict with this Nietzschean grammar and its radical approach to violence, as well as its contempt for collective bodies and other forms of institutions.

While material destructions and police confrontations became current events at Nuit Debout, aesthetic politics also mobilize this chaotic appetite to protest against capitalism and consumerism, with symbolic and performative actions like those organized by the Commission "Antipub". Using logics of theatre performance for recreating the process of instituting a collective discourse, this commission invited participants to destroy and tear down advertisement panels located around the Place de la République, and to distort their messages into political manifestos. The posters, forming a "PUBLIC SPACE IS NOT FOR SALE" (in English) transform Nuit Debout simultaneously into a theatre and an open-air museum.



Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/05/17/pour-en-finir-avec-la-democratie-49-3-greve-generale-et-sortie-de-la-vieme-republique/>

Aesthetic forms of engagement that use art and street performances invent other forms of protest based on the sense of humor, mockery, and creativity to deconstruct hierarchies, social codes, relationships with space, and question notions of public order, including in more codified forms of social protests.

5.1.3.1.3 Anti-humanism

Searching for an alternative to universalist politics, the Nietzschean grammar assumes a perspective that one could define as ‘transversal’. In terms of epistemology, transversal politics recognizes the diversity of experiences and thus approaches truth from the point of view of dialogue between different struggles (Yuval-Davis, 1999). Recognizing a plurality of standpoints without setting collective priorities, the Nietzschean grammar accepts a multiplicity of struggles (LGBTQI, Palestine, undocumented immigration, sexism, racism, police violence, etc.). According to one participant at Nuit Debout, for example, “*we accepted the idea of specific knowledges in the struggles – that is to say at the same time they are in a form of convergence, and at the same time they say that there is something of their own that they can claim within this movement*” (29).

The Nietzschean grammar is further characterized by its strong anti-statist position, producing a critique of the state's universalist narrative and highlighting systemic issues of racism and exclusion within public institutions. This discourse is found in groups such as the *Indigènes de la République* (the Indigenous people of the Republic), working through the appropriation of loaded words such as 'indigenous peoples' to contest everyday practices of discrimination (Bassel, 2014). Supporting struggles on minority issues, social discrimination and violence, this grammar mounts a critique of the state's colonial past and its present-day consequences. References to the suburban riots of 2005 and the protests over the Contrat première embauche in 2006 describe those moments as having been crucial in fostering this antagonistic relationship between the youth and the French state.

5.1.4 The Alternative Grammar

The Alternative grammar aspires to another world constructed on humanistic and pre-capitalist values. This grammar constitutes a critique of industrial capitalism, consumer society and modernity in the name of human fulfilment and pre-capitalist values such as solidarity, association, and community, seeking another form of civilization that will overcome the shortcomings of modernity by prioritizing non-material needs. The Alternative grammar constitutes a form of compromise¹¹⁸ between the inspired city and the civic city in that it promotes the constitution of collectives and participation in democratic systems compatible with the Republican values of freedom and fraternity. Its ultimate goal is to empower a strong *self-managed* civil society. Unlike the Romantic and the Nietzschean grammar, aesthetic politics are not the main type of action here. Instead, the Alternative grammar focuses on concrete types of utopias embodying the ideals of the "alternative" nebula: shared gardens, sustainable production systems, Montessori education, as well as on creating forms of communal life close to its

¹¹⁸ Stabilized forms of compromise constitute a new grammar. This is the case for the Alternative and the Social Republican grammar. Unstable forms of agreement are described in pragmatic sociology as "local arrangements" (Cf. Chapter 2).

autonomist, self-management ideals.

Some of the channels of dissemination of this grammar include citizens' movements implementing local alternatives on issues such as global warming and social justice. These movements include *Alternatiba*¹¹⁹ and the *Colibris* movement,¹²⁰ for example, which focus on sustainable living, as well as environmentalist groups such as *Les Amis de la Terre* (Friends of the Earth).¹²¹ The French independent and self-managed press, including *Mondialisation*,¹²² *Kaizen*,¹²³ *Age de Faire*,¹²⁴ and *Revue durable*,¹²⁵ also promote social, economic, and ecological alternatives. This grammar is represented by intellectual figures such as the philosophers Edgar Morin and Patrick Viveret (*Pouvoir citoyen en marche*), as well as other figures from civil society and organizations that actively supported Nuit Debout.¹²⁶

5.1.4.1.1 Humanistic values

While the Alternative grammar supports the Romantic values of self-realization, creativity and the expression of individuality, as well as the poetic life lived with intensity, it is distinct from the Nietzschean grammar in its humanistic perspective, meaning solidarity, love, justice and ethical principles shared by a moral community¹²⁷ This grammar assigns paramount value to the uniqueness of the individual and condemns contemporary social relations in which people are considered and treated as objects, striving to resist and overturn the commodification operated by the modern world “so that the person does not feel like street furniture” (4).

Criticizing capitalism and its forms of organization, the Alternative grammar seeks modes of collective organizing that focus on the person itself in order to “*re-humanize, to rethink things [...] we are not machines, we are not robots*” (4). Accordingly, it supports forms of organizing

¹¹⁹ <https://alternatiba.eu/>

¹²⁰ <https://www.colibris-lemouvement.org/>

¹²¹ <https://www.amisdelaterre.org/>

¹²² <https://mrmondialisation.org/>

¹²³ <https://kaizen-magazine.com/>

¹²⁴ <https://lagedefaire-lejournal.fr/>

¹²⁵ <https://www.larevuedurable.com/fr/>

¹²⁶ <https://reseau.nouvelledonne.fr/comites-locaux/cr-idf/retienslanuit-une-soixantaine-dassociations-et-de-mouvements-citoyens-sassocient-pour-soutenir-nuitdebout/>

¹²⁷ This moral stance corresponds to what Edgar Morin calls “the politics of man” (Morin, 1999).

built around emotional affinities and direct personal connections capable of building strong and vibrant communities. Within these communities it is necessary to consider the individual person and its sensitive emotional needs, providing individualized and human attention. This form of organization prioritizes spaces for personal connections, discussions and encounters that build connections based on human qualities such as “*tolerance and altruism – crucial concepts for considering how to ‘live together’*”¹²⁸. Experiences and emotional encounters are prioritized as modes of creating collectives, rejecting instrumentalized relationships in favor of authentic connections: “*Here people want to do it, they have the affinity to do it, they have a bond, so that’s a fabulous resource and you have to use it to the maximum*” (28).

Since this grammar is based on the needs of the sensitive human being, the forms of development it pursues must take into consideration a qualitative approach to achieving a better life, creating alternatives to industrial and technological logics. Creating alternative, ecological, and sustainable models of development is part of a more general process of re-humanizing the relationship between human beings, the world and daily life, which includes reflections on the enslavement imposed by technology. As stated in the manifesto of the Commission Education Populaire (see below):

*Technology must remain at the service of man. The only form of slavery that can persist is the slavery of technological tools. Move away from the opposition between man connected to machines and man in the state of nature. Technology is useful as a social ecology, with responsible choices to be made to move towards diversity rather than a uniformity of landscapes.*¹²⁹

¹²⁸ <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/09/09/nuit-debout-commun/>

¹²⁹ <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/09/09/nuit-debout-commun/>

Commission Education Populaire

The Commission *Education Populaire*'s project is to promote open, accessible education as an essential component of a democratic society. Participants gather in a corner of the Place de la République, seating down in a circle, while one of the participants opens a thematic discussion¹³⁰: from revolutions in the 20th century, to the role of violence in social movements, to ecological struggles. However, the purpose is not to give a lecture but to have a debate open and accessible to everyone.

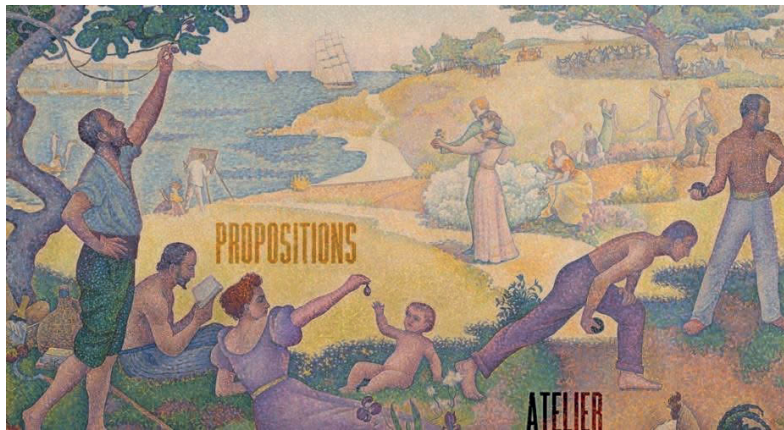


Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2017/03/25/debout-education-populaire-moments-forts/>

As part of the project "What kind of society do we want for tomorrow?", the Commission conducted weekly ateliers on the square where participants conceived their ideal society. After 27 sessions (which makes it one of the more successful, or at least sustainable, actions), the results of these discussions were published online¹³¹. Reflecting Porto Alegre's concrete utopia spirit, their program addresses a variety of topics such as political economy, environmental protection, alternative lifestyles, radical democracy, and alternative currencies, production, consumption, and lifestyles. A manifesto of 30 proposals synthesized the plurality of topics and reflections that had unfolded in Nuit Debout: citizens' assemblies, local participatory budgets, local and environmentally sustainable modes of production, alternative modes of collective property, increasing the minimum wage, the prohibition of tax havens and the socialization of finance.

¹³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRjA419UIZI&t=1s>

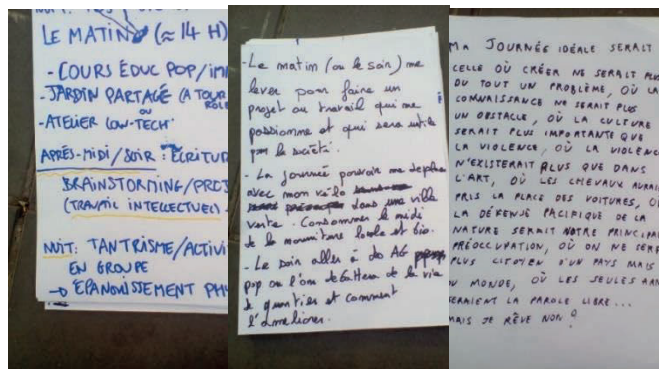
¹³¹ <https://educpopdebout.org/2016/08/17/atelier-debout-educpop-quelle-societe-veut-on-pour-demain-propositions/>



The commission chose a painting by anarchist and pacifist painter Paul Signac, *L'âge d'or n'est pas dans le passé, il est dans l'avenir* (1893-1895) – "The golden age is not in the past, but in the future" – that beautifully illustrates the mobilization of pre-capitalist values in the construction of a better future, where communities thrive in the pursuit of art, pleasurable social relations and educational activities.

Source : <https://educpopdebout.org/2016/08/17/atelier-debout-educpop-quelle-societe-veut-on-pour-demain-propositions/>

These debates reveal forms of compromise at the core of the Alternative Grammar, illustrating many of its inner tensions. Indeed, the range of proposition reveals a tendency towards an individually fulfilling, pre-capitalistic lifestyle, as well as aspirations to renew to democratic system, closer to a social-republican grammar. While participants do consider questions of radical democracy and alternative forms of representation, the primary aspiration remains the recovery of a richer, poetic, and communal experience of life. Here, participants describe their ideal day, between bike-rides, tantra practices, low tech ateliers, and fulfilling forms of work. In this ideal world, horses have replaced cars, as humans and nature co-exist in pacific harmony.



Source : <https://educpopdebout.org/2016/08/17/atelier-debout-educpop-quelle-societe-veut-on-pour-demain-propositions/>

5.1.4.1.2 Strong civil society

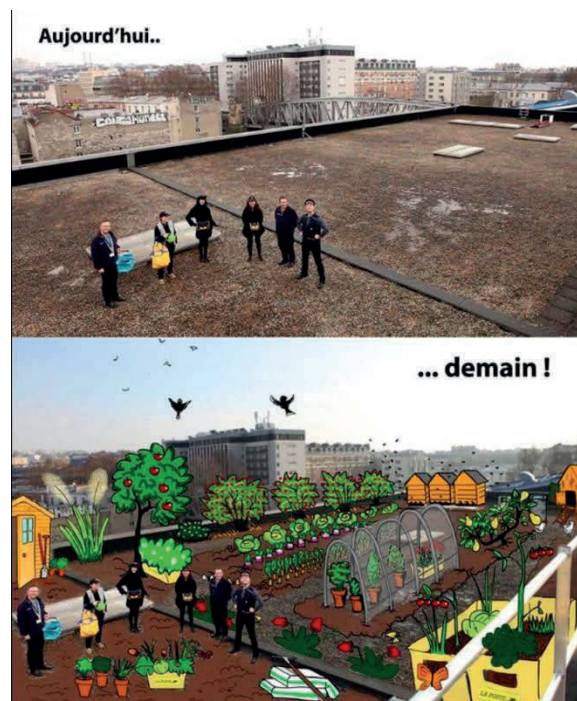
The political culture of the Alternative grammar ultimately seeks forms of organization that reconcile the expression of individuality and Romantic sensibility within a community of self-managed citizens. As such it constitutes a set of compromises with the civic city by including in its discourse objects such as citizens, elected officials and modes of collective representation. A solution to this compromise is sought by activists mobilizing this grammar in new modes of representation, including constitutional councils, citizens' working groups and assemblies, forms of government based on direct democracy, random selection of representatives, and (sometimes) elected officials. The Alternative grammar and the Social Republican grammar thus *find common ground in their desire to build a global alternative from below, going beyond state-centric politics*.

This common ground in turn leads to joint support for novel forms of direct democracy through the creation of new institutions and fairer economic structures within civil society. Promoting concrete, feasible and pragmatic actions “*completely in touch with the field*” (23), this stream of political Romanticism seeks revolution not by taking power but by creating other institutions within civil society that reflect the type of future they wish to achieve. This revolution often happens through institutions close to the world of the solidarity economy¹³² such as producers' associations, cooperation among networks of local shops, liaison trips with producers: “*there is a whole revolution that citizens themselves can start without needing the state*”(14).

This Alternative grammar creates spaces for reflecting on the topic of an idealized future society, leading to participants undertaking various autonomous initiatives at Nuit Debout focused on “*alternatives available to the current system*” often related to ecological, political and socio-economic issues, such as the Popular Education Commission (38). By defending “*the concrete utopias that exist in the field*” (23), it aims to extend these alternative spaces in order to show what another world might look like – a world already prefigured by scattered initiatives. In this regard, utopia is not seen as being produced in an elsewhere but is already to be found within zones of autonomy in the here and now:

¹³² In his reconstitution of the grammar mobilized by actors in the solidarity economy, Frère points out two distinctive characteristics: an emphasis on action in the here and now and on shared competencies. His study reveals how the solidarity economy is a response to the challenges of growing pauperization in late modernity (Frère, 2009, pp. 14, 31).

*These prefigurative emerging realities are reinforced through networking and collaboration at the local level. Thousands of social currencies, consumer associations, self-managed social centers, free and autonomous schools, support groups for undocumented and undocumented refugees, challenge both the capitalist model and the predominant role of the state. This is fertile ground for developing a disobedience movement breaking with the establishment, with the aim of building a new collective sovereignty based on self-determination and the self-management of communities of free men and women.*¹³³



Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2017/03/10/postiers-deviennent-jardiniers/>

While demonstrating the legacy of counter-globalization movements and the Porto Alegre Forums, this long quotation reveals how the future of the struggles initiated in the Place de la République is seen as lying in associations and civil society rather than a political movement or party. Activists prefer to speak of a “*decentralization and displacement to the periphery of the movement marked by a second phase of extension by capillary action to the entire activist and*

¹³³ <https://nuit-debout.fr/blog/2016/07/28/de-la-voie-institutionnelle-a-la-revolution-integrale-gazette-debout/>

cooperative fabric (51). According to this vision, Nuit Debout is defined as a network of activists in which a plurality of individuals sharing similar values collectively engage in a political conflict.¹³⁴

However, unlike the Republican grammar, the Alternative grammar seeks to minimize the role of the state through the notion of a community of citizens. Promoting a strong, self-managed and horizontal civil society, the final aim is not the Republic but the community, i.e. the creation of strong affective social ties and communalities. This presumes the eventual dismantling of the state through the constitution of a network of communities or self-managed municipalities in which autonomy and self-governance are the main principles. It is thus a revolutionary grammar that seeks to start a revolution in the here and now, outside of the state: “*How are we going to act together while separating ourselves from something that is institutional and in which we no longer believe in?*” (23). It seeks other civilizational paths but always outside the state: “*everyone now is trying to reinvent democracy by creating a space outside the structures of the State*” (26). In other words, the role of the State is to encourage citizens’ initiatives, whereas in Social Republicanism bottom-up initiatives serve to *renew* the State. Likewise, despite certain forms of compromise with Socialist grammar, the Alternative grammar rejects the power of unions and is not anti-capitalist, never questioning private property but rather compensating for capitalism's effects. The alternative here is to industrial modernity and to the excesses of private property and capitalism, but also to public power and the state.

In a nutshell, the Romantic grammar aspires to a world where the imaginative, sensitive, and creative self finds its place. Whether in the artistic performances manifesting a new world, in the festive and carnivalesque disturbances, or in the concrete utopian possibilities expressed in the here and now, the Romantic grammar engages with the notion of utopia, performing the possibilities of a better world. While these aspirations are also present in the Republican and Socialist grammar, they mobilize different arguments, values, and organizational practices in the pursuit of a fairer and more equal society

¹³⁴ This is coherent with Diani’s definition of social movements as networks of individuals brought together through a collective identity (Diani, 1992)

5.2 The Republican Grammar

As this work's original contribution lies on the definition and explanation of the Romantic grammars, the sections on the Republican and Socialist grammars have been treated in a more succinct manner, rather for comparison purposes. A more detailed explanation of these grammars can be found in previous literature (Pereira, 2009b, 2010).

The Republican grammar seeks to strengthen democracy and promote collective institutions (Pereira, 2010, p. 30) by increasing political rights and citizens' participation in democratic processes. Unlike the Romantic grammars, it engages with the more traditional repertoire of collective action: demonstrations¹³⁵, petitions and encampments. Other actions include sit-ins and street protests. This section first describes the values and objects of the Republican grammar before examining the compromise with the Socialist grammar in the form of Social Republicanism.



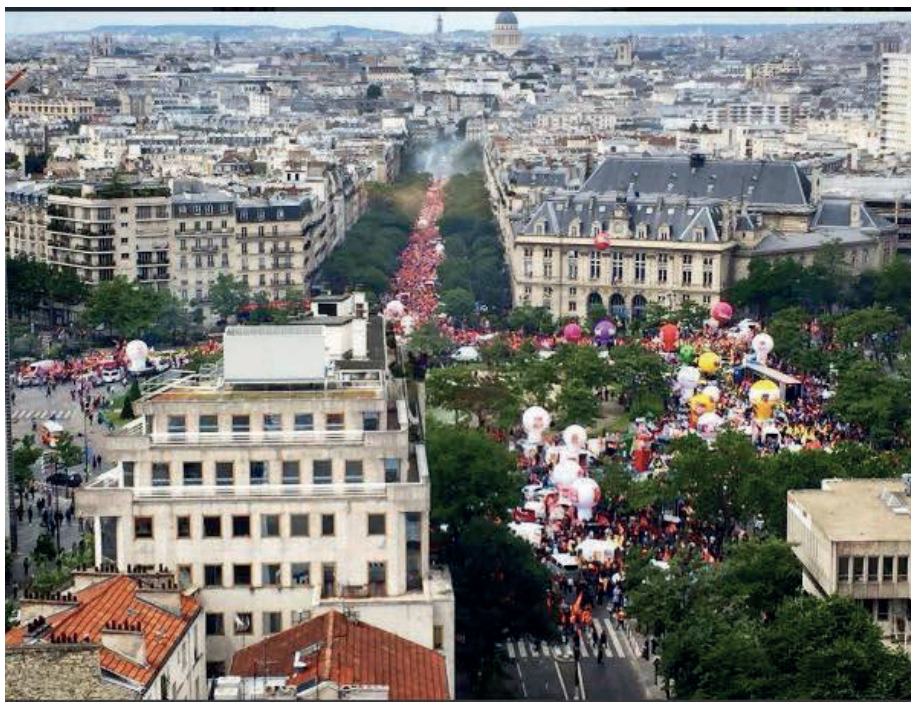
Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/04/24/les-doleances-des-participants-a-nuit-debout/>

Mobilized by actors involved in the early moments of the Nuit Debout movement, namely the protests against the state of emergency (in particular the 'Call of the 58' and the collective

¹³⁵ The massive demonstrations against the labor law provided an opportunity to unite different factions of the movement, such as public servants, students and the creative, intellectual class.

Stop Etat d'Urgence), this grammar was used by activists involved in struggles for socially disadvantaged groups such as illegal immigrants, the homeless, those suffering racially discrimination, and in experts' associations offering advice and mediation between citizens and political institutions on specific topics. This grammar was also mobilized within new political parties incorporating an anti-elite discourse with a focus on direct democracy, as well as more ecological, feminist, and humanistic projects such as *Nouvelle Donne* and the *Parti de Gauche* founded by Mélenchon after his departure from the Socialist Party. While the *Parti de Gauche* assumes a more radical position, closer to a socialist grammar, *Nouvelle Donne* champions themes of participation, citizenship, and ecology. Participants mobilizing the Republican grammar at Nuit Debout were typically part of civil movements (e.g. DAL), or active within commissions defending collective rights such as the Commission on Civil Rights and Human Rights and Democracy.

The Republican grammar is based on values of the civic city, where the higher good is to form organizations championing collective interests. Accordingly, this grammar values figures of greatness capable of defending and enforcing collective rights, in particular representatives and delegates. Nuit Debout was seen as a place for forming a collective force in which different factions could be united under a common struggle, " *converge [...] and to say clearly we are all together*" (9). Praising the "country of democratic revolution" (30), participants mobilizing this grammar described the Place de la République as a "republican space" where citizens can participate once again in the democratic system. The issue of democracy lies at the core of this activist grammar as it seeks to enforce new collective rights through legal actions and demonstrations and by securing new rights for excluded and socially disadvantaged people. It focuses on creating a democratic debate on questions such as participation, political rights, and issues of the general interest, bringing these debates within public institutions. There is an inherent respect for institutions, rules, and procedures in the process of enforcing collective rights, including the relation with the municipality and other public institutions.



Source : <https://gazettedebout.wordpress.com/2016/06/15/manif-du-14-juin-une-maree-humaine-contre-la-loi-travail/>



Source : https://gazettedebout.fr/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/10mai_gallery_1-devant-an.jpg

5.2.1 The Social Republican grammar

The Social Republican grammar is a variation of the Republican grammar and focuses on increasing the participation of citizens both in political and economic systems (Pereira, 2010, p. 33). Here I define the Social Republican grammar as a form of compromise between the Republican and Socialist grammar in that it conducts a critique of commodification and neoliberal globalization that differentiates it from the social liberalism of classic Republican grammar. This critique of neoliberalism leads to a project for the revival of the state's political and economic institutions through civil society organisations, citizens' groups, and other collective organizations, thus bringing it closer to the project of the Alternative grammar. This grammar supports the project of a self-organized democracy, and quest for new forms of representation at Nuit Debout.

Its focus is on promoting citizen participation in political life through the reform of existing institutions, starting within civil society but eventually reforming institutions at national level. This process of reforming democratic institutions is to be achieved through a compromise between the methods of the industrial city (rational methods of organization, scientific methods, and protocols) and the civic city's objectives of political participation and collective organizing. Although these participatory structures may exist outside the state, the Social Republican grammar ultimately aspires to integrate these bottom-up processes within existing institutional mechanisms, unlike the Alternative grammar. The state thus remains central in the Social Republican grammar's vision of social change, which does not aspire to a purely bottom-up, autonomous, and self-managed social movement.

Despite this difference, the convergence between the Alternative and Social Republican grammars was one of the most fruitful arrangements to emerge as part of the Nuit Debout movement, supporting the creation of alternative institutions for promoting citizens' participation within economic and political systems and championing the emergence of a "*new citizen policy, made by citizens of all backgrounds. Tools are available (popular consultation, citizen juries, referendum)*"¹³⁶. Overall, this form of compromise had a greater influence on the Nuit Debout

¹³⁶ <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/07/29/constitution-citoyenne-nuit-debout/>

movement than the main Republican grammar. The compromise was mobilized within civil society associations such as the *Jurys Citoyens* (Citizens' Juries) who actively promoted their own intervention group and commission, the *Ars Industrialis* group, the Constitution Commission working on collectively writing another constitution, as well as commissions reflecting on solutions for more equal and distributive economic systems (Commission on ESS, Commission on Basic Income, Commission on Monetary Creation and Democracy). The Social Republican grammar values technical progress and promotes information and communications technology insofar as these contribute to collective engagements in political and economic systems, as in the form of collaborative writing software, apps for implementing a sharing economy and social networks focused on citizens' actions (for example the initiative Hackathon Debout¹³⁷, where hackers and designers met for several days to invent new democratic tools)

5.2.1.1 Critique of economic institutions

Unlike in classic Republican grammar, Social Republicans heavily criticize neoliberal globalization for its repeated attacks on the general interest. The state is criticized supporting private sector's interests, exemplified by industrial scandals, the prosecution of whistle-blowers and increased tolerance of tax havens. Similarly, the Social Republican grammar blames the capitalist system and private interests for acting against public interest and the common good, condemning this "*anticivic behavior*" (17) incompatible with notions of political and economic democracy. Unlike the Socialist grammar, however, it does not challenge notions of private property.

¹³⁷ <https://www.mindmeister.com/fr/721715693/hackathondebout-vue-d-ensemble>



"Nuit Debout against fiscal impunity"

Source : <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1691643254450726&type=3>

The distinguishing mark of Social Republicanism is its search for political but also economic participation by opposing the “*destruction of political democracy but also of economic democracy*” (17), seeking more sustainable modes of organizing economic production. This grammar notably used Nuit Debout as a space for discussion on alternative and more sustainable economic models, conducting discussions on the circular sharing economy and more generally modes of production that consider long-term societal interests.

5.2.1.2 New forms of collective representation

The Social Republican grammar is akin to the Alternative grammar in its appreciation of the capacity of civil society to contribute to the decision-making process. The latter is seen as a potentially useful tool for social progress and a global vision of the common good: “*It is this mixture of collective intelligence and empathy [...] which would be really great for working out what can be the common good*” (9). Ordinary citizens are described as a source of expertise insofar as they achieve forms of objectivity through scientific methods and practices, i.e. as “*citizens who have become sufficiently knowledgeable*” (9). This relationship to knowledge can be defined as a form of pragmatism (Pereira, 2009b, p. 697), i.e. a relationship to knowledge opposed to the dualism between practice and scientific knowledge, and a constructive relationship between practice and theory. Rejecting the overarching power of experts disconnected from real life issues,

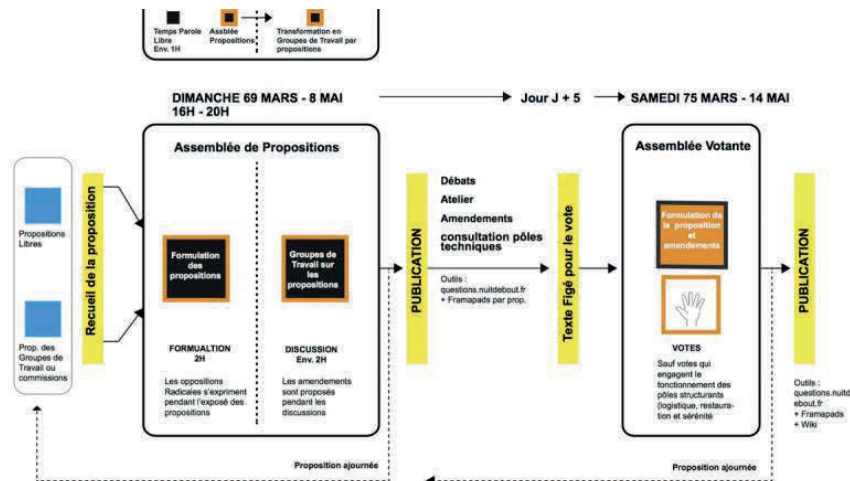
this grammar highlights the potential of an empowered, objective, and knowledgeable civil society.

The Social Republican mobilizes objects from the industrial city such as research protocols and scientific methods to create new modes of collective representation. Aspiring to a form of objectivity in knowledge creation, mobilizing methods such as seminars, scientific methods, forms of expertise, and scientific knowledge it aims to “*rethink public power*” (17) and “*rearm the public space*”(17) with new methods that promote political and economic participation. This grammar is thus far from anti-institutional, further mobilizing tools from the industrial city to legitimize the participation of non-expert citizens in democratic decisions, using “*citizens’ political tools to put the citizens in the front line*” (7).

The Commission "Democracy Debout" launched many of the democratic innovations in the square, namely a voting procedure to legitimate the group's decisions within a horizontal process. Propositions emerging from the Thematic Commissions' debates would be presented in front of the General Assembly and submitted to a vote.



Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/08/01/bilan-commissions-nuit-debout-logistique/>



This figure summarizes the voting procedure imagined by the Commission “*Démocratie Debout*”.

Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/05/07/un-processus-de-vote-pour-faire-de-nuit-debout-une-reelle-democratie-participative/>

The question of tensions within this grammar would require a study on its own but suffice to say that these contradictory aspirations did not allow the movement to choose. The voting procedure was never adopted, and after a while participant's motivation declined, in part due to the lack of concrete achievements.

In a nutshell, the Social Republican grammar seeks to promote and strengthen citizens' participation in decision-making process by developing forms of collective expertise and intelligence, through innovative democratic mechanisms

5.3 The Socialist Grammar

This grammar supports actions reversing power relations and fighting for collective interests and work conditions, in a perspective of class struggles: strikes of public transportation, economic blockages in the oil refineries ¹³⁸, as well as actions similar to the Republican grammar (demonstrations, use of leaflets and print media), and even occupations. Although the Socialist grammar was responsible for initiating the *Nuit Debout* movement, this grammar was the least

¹³⁸ <https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/economie-social/loi-travail-six-raffineries-sur-huit-sont-en-greve-selon-la-cgt-1463982595>

active within the discourse at Nuit Debout. This grammar was mobilized by revolutionary activists close to trade unions like the CGT and anarcho-syndicalism, members of the working class, activist journalists like François Ruffin and members of the radical left such as the Revolutionary Communist League (Alain Krivine). Common historical references include the socialist heritage, figures such as Jean Jaurès, and the popular front movement of 1936. May 68 is understood from this perspective as having been a historic strike and thus part of the workers' movement. Their priority vis-à-vis Nuit Debout was to create a common movement within the far and radical left, bringing together Nuit Debout and union struggles. They were active in commissions such as the Commission on General Strike, Action and the *Convergence des Luites*, which merged on April 25 to form the Commission *Luites Debout* (Farbiaz, 2016 p. 51).



Source : <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/france/20160426-greve-sncf-conflit-harmonisation-public-prive>

Other examples include the blockages of distribution platforms, or the collective action in a shopping mall¹³⁹ to protest against Sunday labor where 150 people marched on one of Europe's largest shopping malls Europe chanting slogans such as "Work, consume and shut up" or "All together, all together, general strike". This grammar's ultimate purpose is to unite the working class against capitalism and to achieve victory in the class conflict.

¹³⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rs4YoOE0Nlk>

5.3.1.1 Anti-capitalist discourse

The Socialist grammar is built on an anti-capitalist discourse of defeating the capitalist system and defending workers' interests against the private sector, denouncing income inequalities, and constructing forms of international solidarity. This grammar is generally involved in struggles against "*the exploitation of man by man*" (3). Participants mobilizing his grammar were involved in struggles to defend collective interests threatened by the labor law. In this struggle they mobilize tools and objects for protecting employment rights such as collective conventions and branch agreements.

5.3.1.2 Ideological relationship of class struggles

While direct action is valued within the Socialist movement, especially in the case of anarcho-syndicalism, this grammar has an ideological relationship marked by a theory of class conflict that conditions decision-making processes and types of engagement. Unlike the Romantic grammar's spontaneous conception of political action, the Socialist grammar has a strategic relationship to the movement's direction and purpose. Opposed to an understanding of struggles as merely cultural and symbolic, socialists engage in strategic and instrumental actions with the purpose of winning battles in the political field "*not only to defend rights but to conquer new ones*" (5).

5.3.1.3 Constituting a collective force

Like the Republican grammar, the Socialist grammar values the higher good of the civic city, i.e. the construction of a collective force. A status of greatness is achieved within this grammar when one supports and represents the group's interests: "*It is always an element that speaks for the others, the most combative element which creates progress, a lot of things for the rest of the group*" (5). This priority stands in opposition to the widespread desire for anonymity on the part of Nuit Debout's activists. Activists who mobilize a Socialist grammar attach value to tools and objects that can help create and reinforce collective struggles, emphasizing the "*need for a political instrument for the working class*" (1). Trade unions and political parties are valued as

levers and instruments for collective action – “*an instrument on which they could act*” (19). In the name of this highest good, strategies threatening the value and capacity of collective objects are criticized: “*he wants to try to divide us [...] they pit people against each other*” (3). From the perspective of this grammar, a state of decline would be evidenced by division, internal dissension and the loss of solidarities, or in other words a “*weaker class consciousness*” (6) in which collective struggle is no longer possible.

Socialist activists participate in events that allow for the constitution of collective forces by creating spaces of struggle for workers (including, for example, students' unions), or by creating connections between labor forces, students and the Nuit Debout. For example, on May 17th, a workers' assembly was organized to unite social and medical workers, fostering collective action regarding their interests.



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Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/06/29/la-bourse-du-travail-assiegee-ou-est-la-liberte-de-manifester/>

Within the framework of this grammar, Nuit Debout is seen as an event that promoted a strategic rapprochement between the various components of the far left to constitute a collective force: “*it motivates, it federates, it is the convergence of struggles*” (5). There was thus a desire to unite unions and Nuit Debout, “*a unitary 1st May -Nuit Debout-union because I think that there we have two ingredients that join together but who sometimes look at each other like with suspicion*”

¹⁴⁰ This picture does not refer to the workers' assembly, as I could not find any photos of the event, but to another meeting also organized at the Bourse du Travail regarding the direction of the Nuit Debout movement.

(19).

To sum up, the Socialist grammar defends collective interests through confrontational, collective action supporting the working class against capitalism's interests. The next section addresses how, despite several arrangements, these grammars 'conflicting worldview did not allow for a sustainable compromise at Nuit Debout.

5.4 Forms of local arrangements

The previous section introduced the different political grammars in the Nuit Debout movement, exploring how conflicting values conditioned views on social change and political engagement. This section describes some forms of compromise by which these grammars have found agreement on shared values, justifying forms of collective action such as the construction of utopian spaces and the prefiguration of other futures. Particular attention is paid to the role of the Romantic grammar and imaginative politics in the creation of these compromises. Conflicting perspectives make for fragile arrangements, however, and tensions and conflicts arose at Nuit Debout both among and within grammars, threatening the stability and direction of the social movement through divisions over cultural and more instrumental forms of struggles.

5.4.1 Arrangements between the Romantic grammar, the (Social) Republican grammar and the Socialist grammar

5.4.1.1 Arrangement – The possibility of a utopia: The old world is dead, long live the new world!

In addition to sharing a common opposition to the Socialist Party government and more broadly to the liberal policies of previous governments, the different grammars of the radical and far left also agree on the possibility of an alternative to the existing political and economic system. In this regard, the Socialist, Romantic and Republican grammars share a common view of the need to construct this alternative through more or less collective form of actions, as illustrated by two documentaries reflecting the movement's ambitions for constructing another world: *Demain* (Dion & Laurent, 2015) and *Merci Patron!* ('Thank you, boss!') (Ruffin, 2015). *Merci Patron!* was directed by Francois Ruffin, the editor-in-chief of the Journal *Fakir* and one of the initiators

of Nuit Debout. Through a satiric tone, it criticized the LVMH luxury goods conglomerate for outsourcing jobs to foreign labour, while the utopian documentary *Demain's* showed how communities can imagine other political, economic, educational and production systems in today's world. While the first mobilizes a class discourse characteristic of the Socialist grammar, the latter focuses on the Alternative grammar's notion of concrete utopia: different justifications are brought together to promote forms of collective action for creating an alternative for the future, going beyond emotions of resignation and indignation.

If, as stated in Chapter 1, prefiguration is also a reflexive discourse on opening possibilities for a different future in the now, this discourse on a better alternative seemed to unite the various political sensibilities of autonomists, neo-Marxists, anarchists and socialists at Nuit Debout (Kokoreff, 2016, p. 168). Indeed, the three grammars manifest the same desire for hope, fighting feelings of hopelessness through concrete actions for an alternative future. For the Romantic grammar, occupations challenge the neoliberal right and the Socialist Party's affirmation that there is no alternative to alternative :

The police as well as all the government parties are basically in favor of the neoliberal policies which are implemented, so in fact there is not really, to use the expression of Francois Hollande, "there is no alternative". When he says there is no alternative, he is saying there is no alternative except on the right [but] the game is not over, and things can still happen [...] the idea that we can have surprises, we can still see things happening that we had not yet seen coming [...] a twist at the end of the programmed story. (10)

The idea is to reopen all possibilities, to reopen all futures, to fight against Thatcher's 'there is no alternative'. That is to say to fight against the completely propagandist and totalitarian idea that only one future is available to us. (28)

Criticizing the dismissal of utopia as hopeful, naïve, and unrealistic, Nuit Debout changes this discourse contradicting a right-wing conservative ideology. For participants mobilizing a Romantic grammar, institutions prefiguring another future within Nuit Debout creates the possibility for a societal debate around politics and democracy: "*it has existed, it exists, and we have been capable of talking to each other among extremely different people who do not usually share the same opinions*" (7). Nuit Debout is seen as a reminder that "*tomorrow everything is possible*" (27), offering a space in which it is possible to imagine a different society.

This desire for a different future is also championed within the Social Republican grammar, for which Nuit Debout and civil society more generally support novel forms of political and economic government. For the president of the *Ars Industrialis* association, Bernard Stiegler, the Nuit Debout movement was a source of “*real possibilities*” allowing the “*production of new possibilities, sources of hope also, because what is striking today is that it is all the same domination of despair*” (16). Antoine, of the Citizens’ Jury association, recalled how power undermines utopia, criticizing the media for caricaturing the possibility of other forms of government and another constitutional project as “*eccentric*” (7).

Finally, this compromise was validated within the Socialist grammar as the Romantic and Socialist grammars came together to defend radical forms of direct action that open up new possibilities outside of the status quo:

There is something worse than lower living standards and that is the feeling of helplessness – the feeling that we no longer have our common destiny in hand. And I think the big problem is how we can give back to people the feeling that they can do something with their life but also change the destiny of their city, their country [we must] find the paths that give people the feeling of being able to get out of this helplessness.
(19)

5.4.1.2 Decline: conflict between instrumental and cultural struggles

While all grammars pursued the idea of another possible world, they ultimately failed to reach an agreement as to how to get there. While the Republican and Socialist grammars emphasize directions, milestones and achievements, the Romantic grammar’s conception of politics as being analogous to artistic creation refuses to plan and prefers to let the creative flow take its course:

Do these questions really matter? Is it not a movement that is being built and always asking itself where it is going and what its destination is. It seems that questions such as these divert us from the process of being, of all that is being built, all the discussions all the committees all the meetings [...] What is important is the path not the destination. (13)

There is thus a conflict between cultural and instrumental views regarding political struggles. While promoting the constitution of an anti-capitalist leftist electoral force to defeat the extreme

right, the Socialist grammar is confronted with a culturalist perspective which sees the movement as a social and cultural revolution. This Socialist grammar criticizes the horizontality of popular gatherings and occupation strategies that only “*give crappy political solutions*” as well as of anti-institutional approaches: “*we cannot reject central government political perspectives, even if the parties have betrayed us we cannot reject them*” (6). Rejecting the positive preconceptions on creativity and indeterminacy, for the Socialist grammar “*we must try to make leaps and not just let maturation operate. If we hadn’t attempted a leap there would never have been an invasion of the Place de la République because it was all the same – a decision to say we are giving it a go*” (19). In this sense the voluntarist aspects of political action oppose the spontaneous actions valued by the Romantic grammar and seek to constitute a strategic counter-hegemonic force.

This compromise further fails when values of creativity, imagination and aesthetic revolution replace the project of defending collective interests. Dismissing the Republican values of collective participation within democratic systems, theatrical performances and symbolic interventions can overshadow or undermine other forms of collective engagement. Indeed, the production of a permanent and endless creative performance requires a high level of emotional and affective involvement that is difficult to sustain in ordinary life. The rhythm of permanent creation produces grandiose ambitions, extending to all debates and all subjects, yet it does not create the conditions for an efficient and orderly process of decision-making. Aspirations to a permanent state of inspiration and creativity can gain precedence over questions of collective organization.

Values of democratic organization risk being dismissed, moreover, in favor of individual expression, whereby democracy becomes nothing more than a collective representation of individual creative capacities. The Romantic grammar provides the resources to imagine an ideal democracy but contains in itself very few resources for achieving this project in social life. Its pitfall is to act as if imagination and creativity are self-sufficient – as if the liberation of creative potential is enough to bring forward an ideal democracy. The focus of this grammar on the inner world and on re-establishing creative relationships and inventing new forms of existence tends to eclipse the question of collective identities and societal transformation. What matters is the “*aesthetic gaze on the world [...] to read books which are not made for you, if you want to transform into an artist, poet, esthete*” (19), which can easily end up overshadowing strategic issues of practically creating another world. Seeing the revolution first and foremost as a new and individual experience of existence diverts from the focus on the material conditions required to

bring about the ideal world. This has given rise to a conflict of political cultures between the culturalist left and the anti-capitalist strategic left that has been described as a matter of “*overthrowing capitalism versus imagining the ideal democracy*” (37), with internal disputes breaking out into the open. In this case, the aesthetic revolution aimed at overthrowing a symbolic violence that limits the potentialities of existence came into conflict with a Socialist grammar focused on building a collective force capable of shifting power relations. In other words, the Socialist project of the *grève générale* (general strike) stands in opposition to the Romantic resistance of the *rêve général* (general dream)



Source : <https://www.grazia.fr/news-et-societe/news/nuir-debout-les-reunions-non-mixtes-de-la-commission-feministe-divisent-813300>

5.4.2 Arrangement between Romantic and Republican grammars

5.4.2.1 Arrangement: Constructing alternative democratic systems outside the State

The compromise between the Romantic and the Republican grammar is based on a shared critique of the current democratic system, and a common belief on alternative democratic systems. Institutions such as the General Assembly constituted a compromise between (i) Republican ideals of political participation, (ii) Romantic imaginary politics, and (iii) anarchical values of autonomy and direct action. These institutions reflected an appeal to historical examples of direct democracy, “*resuscitating what existed in ancient cities such as Athens, or the Roman forum*” (16) – a desire for direct participation in political discussions that is no longer possible. The purpose of these alternative institutions was not to create an intermediary structure between the

citizenry and the state, however; rather they were intended as an external autonomous zone outside of the influence of the state.



"This is not a democracy"

Source : ¹ <https://nuitdebout-blog.tumblr.com/post/145160050516/futurgratos>

This compromise between the Romantic and Republican grammars with regards to the issue of direct democracy is built on their common belief in civil society and self-government. Both grammars share a similar trust in collective intelligence and the collective capacity to participate in the decision-making process, thus supporting a consensus on direct democracy. The occupation of the Place de la République was intended to demonstrate the possibility of practising democracy outside of the hierarchy of the state, thereby offering a participative and horizontal model based on collective intelligence, creating an empowered civil society outside the state: Through the occupation of a space where “*citizens take back politics and the public space*” (14), this occupation brought together experimentations, imaginary interventions, and democratic values. Imaginary politics were mobilized to produce a performance in which an alternative, horizontal and inclusive form of democracy became possible, staging a new narrative, performing the capacities of representation, and recreating the meaningfulness of democracy.

5.4.2.2 Decline of this compromise: conflict between organizing democracy vs aesthetic insurrection

This compromise between the Romantic and Republican grammars is weakened by internal dissensions within the Romantic grammar, between an Alternative grammar that seeks large-scale social change and thus seriously considers the question of democratic organization, and the

Romantic and Nietzschean understanding of revolution as an unregulated and aesthetic process. The latter are against any compromise with the industrial city's values of efficiency and systems, and its ideological relations to knowledge and hierarchical structures. This conflict informs how arrangements between the Romantic and the Republican grammar are inherently fragile. Such arrangement works with the Alternative grammar, which is already in itself a compromise with the civic city, while the Romantic grammar refuses any compromise with the industrial city and its values of organization, technique, and method:

I don't have the culture of the word democracy because it is so closely linked to the idea of elections and parliamentarianism. [...] The 6th Republic is not worth it. All this is a joke. It's not worth getting tired. It's better to stay and watch TV[...] no provisional government, and above all no constitution and no elections of course. (11)



"Our dreams do not fit in your ballot box"

Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/11/25/nuite-debout-fatigue-democratique/>

This is even more the case in the Nietzschean grammar, where arguments about democracy become subsumed by libertarian ideals of individual autonomy and freedom. While the Alternative grammar supports the idea of a possible collective representation and seeks to organize forms of direct democracy, the Nietzschean radical approach rejects the Republican values of political participation, representation, and compromise: “*true democracy is truly the burial of any democratic idea*” (16). Any compromise with the values of the industrial city is impossible, hence institutions, specialists, political professionals and other structures for organizing collective democracy are rejected in favour of individual transformation.

The Nietzschean radical approach likewise rejects democratic experiments in favor of forms

of insurrection. Rather than supporting new forms of organization, these activists want to sustain the movement through an inner emotional state, organizing through emotions such as revolt and anger:

Anger is natural. It's elementary [...] we find ways to organize or people in fact cannot in fact they are not detached from their emotions [...] Whenever we have the impression that a revolt is taking place, there are somewhat reformist structures which take over. There is a desire to constitutionalize things, to formalize things, and we give up, which is really subversive. We write notebooks of grievances, we create a constitution which will give way to new organizations with new representations, new elected representatives, new people in power and I see no revolutionary perspective in that [...] I am still going to be disappointed (31).

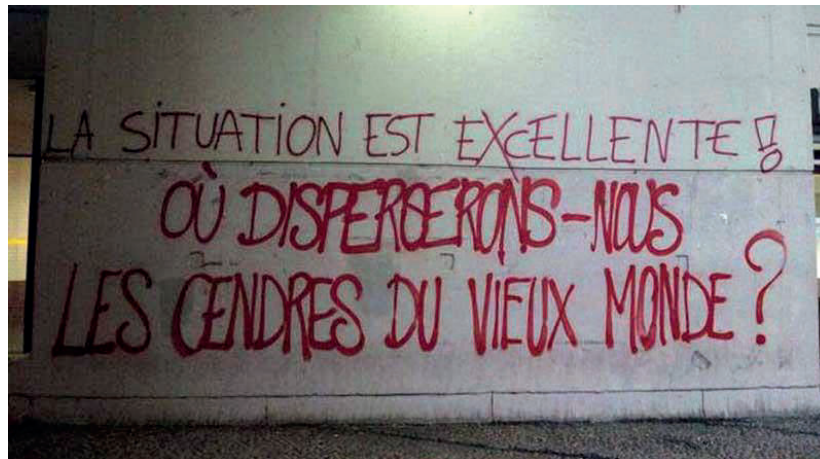
Unlike the Alternative grammar, which compromises with Republican values such as democratic participation in the name of bringing about global change from below, thereby seeking solutions in direct democracy, the Nietzschean grammar does not aspire to another form of government but to be ungovernable.

5.4.3 Arrangement between the Romantic and Socialist grammars

5.4.3.1 Arrangement: radicalism and anti-institutionalism

The Romantic and Socialist grammars were able to work together against the institutionalism of the Republican grammar through the shared desire to build an anti-institutional force and by coming up with radical measures that make it possible to rethink society in a fundamental way. These two grammars thus find an initial arrangement in their anti-institutionalism. This can be seen in the project to create a united radical that opposes a Republican grammar seen as “*chauvinistic nationalist electoral institutionalist*” (6). They find mutual compromises by criticizing the legitimacy of a Republican grammar that is seen as falsely democratic and as having lost its legitimacy. In addition, both the Romantic and Socialist grammars agree on the need for radical global transformation, in contrast with Republican reformism and citizens’ movements. The desire for a radical transformation and the affirmation of transformative violence brings these two grammars together. As happened in the arrangement of May 68, these two grammars come

together when demands for wages and better working conditions require a fundamental rethinking of the conditions supporting society. They are capable of harnessing the greatest freedom to rethink and to imagine without limitations, rejecting the existing institutional framework and finding the need for radical change and new social structures.



"The situation is excellent! Where shall we scatter the ashes of the old world ?"

Source : <https://gazettedebout.fr/2016/07/07/loi-travail-passe-force-voici-attend/>

5.4.3.2 Decline: conflict between oppositional and participative struggles

This arrangement was undermined by internal dissension between a radical stream represented by the collective *Convergence des Luittes*, who was responsible for initiating the Nuit Debout movement, and a second stream accused of abandoning the collective oppositional struggle in favor of a narrative of political participation. The latter were accused of diffusing an image of an inclusive and pacified movement, a democratic, safe, and ultimately innocuous cocoon, thereby abandoning a confrontational position against the state and representational politics.

This conflict broke into the open on 20 April 2006, twenty-two days after the beginning of the occupation of the Place de la République at a meeting held by the collective *Convergence des Luittes* with two of its most influential members, the economist Frédéric Lordon and the editor of *Fakir*, François Ruffin. The stated objective of this meeting, entitled 'Nuit Debout: the next step?', emphasized the common offensive against the neoliberal, racist and violent state, consolidating the focus on bringing together the anarchist left and trade unionists. During this meeting, a public offensive was led by a stream of participants producing narrative of inclusivity, defending civic engagement for the sake of political participation. The target of this criticism was Nuit Debout's

Media Center, which had taken hold of the movement's Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr and YouTube accounts on April 1st. This dissension revealed a conflict between a side of the movement engaged in power struggles capitalism and representative democracy and part of the Nuit Debout movement engaged in a positive and ultimately harmless narrative. These two streams held each other responsible for the failure of the Nuit Debout movement.

On the one hand, the *Convergence des Luttes* pointed out that the all-inclusive discourse of this narrative excluded a more radical conception of collective struggles in favor of a harmless narrative compatible with commercial interests. Exposing the agency responsible for Community management, digital strategy and branding behind the Media Center, the *Convergence des Luttes* issued a statement accusing the agency of deliberately excluding radical forms of struggles, further accusing these “*entrepreneurs of digital struggles 2.0*”¹⁴¹ of making a commercial profit from the movement's success: “*Their inclusive pseudo-communication is the exclusion of certain modes of action, the negation of social antagonisms that motivate our struggles*”. Violence and political reality, including more combative modes of action such as strikes and blockades, were being ignored by this group, it was argued, in favor of aesthetic modes of engagement focused on getting media attention. Such dissension highlights the conflict between the Socialist grammar and a Romantic grammar that had lost its radical nature in attempting to craft a positive and sellable story compatible with capitalist communicative strategies on digital storytelling (Salmon, 2008), thereby decoupling its values of creativity and imagination from revolutionary aspirations.

On the other hand, the Media Center criticized the Socialist grammar for its ideological position, mobilizing a Nietzschean discourse of transversal politics and perspectival and contingent truth in defending its vision of an inclusive movement focused on individual changes. The focus of this group on culturalist politics, was also in conflict with the Socialist grammar's more oppositional and ideological view of politics:

However, the core of this conflict is less related to a critique of the transversal horizontal approach to politics than to the accusation that the all-inclusive rhetoric of this approach is used to cancel more radical oppositional struggles against representational democracy. The Socialist anti-capitalist and radical grammar thus conflicted with a grammar that regarded Nuit Debout as electoral opportunity, seeking to create a common candidacy for the 2017 elections, renewing

¹⁴¹ <https://tendanceclaire.org/contenu/autre/Leur%20combine,%20nos%20luttes.pdf>

representational politics. This critique also targeted an Alternative grammar close to a Republican grammar of political participation, without calling into question the democratic nature of the political system, thus breaking ties with the grammars of the far left.

5.5 Conclusion

Nuit Debout ultimately did not succeed in overturning the El Khomri law. Internal dissensions within the movement and a lack of overall direction, combined with the return of winter, gradually discouraged participants from showing up. The question that arises is to what extent this social movement has contributed to overthrowing the ‘world’ that this labor law represents.

By providing the resources necessary for the prefiguration of another world, I argue, Nuit Debout materialized an alternative capable of uniting those to the left of the governing Socialist Party, albeit temporarily, in joint opposition to the neoliberal, disciplinarian and violent world in shared hopes of collectively creating a fairer, more democratic, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable world. In short, Nuit Debout showed how the radical and far-left could be united in a common project of bringing about an alternative future.

Despite not leading to the emergence of any electoral force such as the Spanish party Podemos that emerged from the 15-M movement, Nuit Debout was a crucial event in bringing together new political forces. At a time when the radical left had recently suffered its worst-ever results in the presidential and parliamentary elections, and with the PCF subsisting only in an aging electorate or in local bastions (Ducange, 2015), Nuit Debout fostered the rise of new political parties in opposition both to neoliberal capitalism and the governing Socialist Party. These new parties include *La France Insoumise* (‘Insubordinate/Rebellious France’), founded in February 2016 by Jean-Luc Mélenchon with the project of strengthening connections between political parties and civil society associations, reaching out to a young intellectual and precarious constituency with a program that combined eco-socialism, anti-elite discourse, and novel forms of representation such as those experimented during Nuit Debout. Interestingly, one of its ten emblematic propositions was to create a constituent assembly for writing a constitution for a Sixth Republic. In the presidential elections of 2017 and the subsequent parliamentary elections, *La France Insoumise* achieved the most votes for a radical left party, ahead of both the Socialist Party and the French

Communist Party (Escalona, 2017). François Ruffin¹⁴² was elected a member of parliament for FI, together with other former participants of Nuit Debout who see a continuity between the two movements.¹⁴³

The recent success of participatory lists in the local elections of 2020 further reveals how concerns with new modes of representation and environmentalist-social alternatives have increasingly become a key part of French politics. The *Printemps Marseillais* collective is one of the largest alliances, bringing together the FI, the PS and the PCF and several political organizations and citizens' collectives under a collective assembly.¹⁴⁴ Whereas only one participatory list won in the elections of 2014, in 2020 there were 66 members elected in this way.¹⁴⁵ Demands for new forms of representation are also at the core of other grassroots protest movements, such as the yellow vests,¹⁴⁶ who have been supported by radical leftist parties such as *La France Insoumise* (Gérard, 2019; Noiriel, 2018).

While Nuit Debout failed in the eyes of many participants to create an insurrectionary movement capable of burning the old world to ashes or of forming a sustainable convergence of struggles, it succeeded in advancing a compromise between grammars of new alternatives and political and citizen participation, crafting a new world in spaces which, like municipalities, allow a certain latitude in relation to state politics. The radical nature of poetic insurgencies, even if they are never completely translatable within institutional politics, can thus nevertheless constitute a first step in imagining other alternatives for the future of the left. In 2019 the activist journal *Fakir* launched an issue on 'Changing Imaginaries', while in 2020 the magazine *Socialter* released a special issue on 'The awakening of the imaginaries' edited by Damasio and evidencing the persistence of imaginary politics and their attempts to overturn existing imaginaries in order to construct alternatives. The final chapter addresses the strategic nature of these symbolic

¹⁴² Active in the movement of the gilets jaunes, Ruffin directed a second documentary on the topic (Ruffin & Perret, 2019).

¹⁴³ <https://gazettedebout.fr/2017/03/24/nuit-debout-futur/>

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.bastamag.net/elections-municipales-2020-listes-citoyennes-union-de-la-gauche-EELV-France-insoumise-PCF-PS-Generations>

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.actioncommune.fr/les-listes-participatives/>

¹⁴⁶ Participants in the *gilets jaunes* movement generally have a socio-cultural profile and demands that are very different from those of the precarious intellectual youth at Nuit Debout. However, in addition to financial demands, the movement shares similar calls for dignity that they feel has been undermined by a state-theological system (Noiriel, 2018), as well as posing a challenge to representative democracy by demanding new modes of representation (Grunberg, 2019). Furthermore, although to a much lesser extent, artistic groups have also been involved in the yellow vests movement, creating several video productions that bring together previous occupations and the 2019 protests (Suzanne, 2019, p. 93).

interventions and imaginary politics, discussing what lies beyond their beautiful artistic blur.

6 CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to provide an answer to Graeber's following question: "Why is it that, even when there is next to no other constituency for revolutionary politics in a capitalist society, the one group most likely to be sympathetic to its project consists of artists, musicians, writers, and others involved in some form of non-alienated production?" (Graeber, 2002). Hopefully, it has succeeded in rendering the following statement by Graeber quite self-explanatory: "Surely there must be a link between the actual experience of first imagining things and then bringing them into being, individually or collectively, and the ability to envision social alternatives – particularly, the possibility of a society itself premised on less alienated forms of creativity" (Graeber, 2002). After all, religion¹⁴⁷ and art are the only ideologies that truly take seriously the idea of co-creating the world, i.e. the collective production of another reality in accordance with higher ideals, with the crucial difference being that Romanticism conceives of the imagination as the place where this co-creation can take place (Chapter 3). That Graeber should have declared, fourteen years later at *Nuit Debout*, that the goal of prefigurative movements was to overturn neoliberalism, understood as a cultural system colonizing the imaginary, should thus come neither as a surprise nor as self-evident but rather be understood as the product of a historical process of value construction (Chapter 4) mobilized within different grammars of engagement (Chapter 5).

Departing from previous ethnographies of decision-making that link prefigurative practices to an anarchist heritage in which radical democracy and horizontality become values for organizing outside of the state, this study has focused instead on how prefigurative tactics constitute a part of the politics of the imaginary, as a repertoire of political engagement. This final chapter highlights this work's two main contributions to our understanding of imaginary and aesthetic politics and their connection with prefiguration.

¹⁴⁷ In his most recent book, written during the COVID-19 pandemic, originally titled *Ritorniamo a sognare*, Pope Francis made the following statement: "Humanity's mission is to change, to build, to master Creation, in the positive sense of creating from it and with it. Thus, what is to come does not depend on an invisible mechanism, a destiny in which humanity remains passive, spectator. No: we are actors, we are - if I may put it this way - co-creators. When the Lord told us to go forward and multiply, to master the earth, he meant: "Be the creators of your future" (Francis, 2020, p. 15 own translation).

6.1 Contribution 1: Prefigurative politics and the romantic imagination

6.1.1 Convoking the past, imagining the present, manifesting the future

As Maeckelbergh (2012) has stated: “Each occupation has a personality all its own, grown out of the specific histories of the place and people and the interactions they have when they come together”. While occupations and prefigurative politics are part of a global struggle for the radical transformation of institutions, and while responding to a set of common practices, they are nonetheless influenced by local historical traditions, whether these be struggles against racial discrimination, anarcho-syndicalism, or indigenous epistemologies. In this regard, what gave the Nuit Debout movement its unique flavour was the particular influence of various new movements that emerged from struggles in which aesthetics, anti-capitalism and spatial occupations are all intertwined. These stem from a long tradition of aesthetic politics that have become pivotal in a country and culture in which literature holds a privileged place and whose avant-gardes have been instrumental in the bringing together art and politics.

By recounting the history of modes of engagement characteristic of the Romantic grammar this study uncovers the relationship between philosophical theories about the limitless power of creation, imagination, and certain forms of political activism such as symbolic and aesthetic forms of prefiguration. Indeed, previous studies have rarely addressed the question of how historical traditions have blurred the boundaries between art and politics, even though such studies often mention spectacles and performances and discuss the creative and artistic qualities involved in the process of prefiguration. While Hakim Bey and his temporary autonomous zones are often invoked as an influence on this new “artivism” (Suzanne, 2019) the aesthetics of pirate, temporary and mobile zones do not quite overlap with the aspirations of prefigurative politics to overturn dominant imaginaries. Unlike temporary pirate zones, sustained occupations constitute an intervention in a dominant culture that aspires to overturn cultural domination, ultimately leaving the margins and its situation of exteriority to claim a central role. In this sense such tactics mobilize resources from previous cultural movements, especially Surrealism and Situationism (Strom, 2004). Those two movements had aspired to create novel cultural paradigms through artistic interventions such as performances, artworks, and experiments.

In order to address the gap in the literature regarding the relation between imagination and new social movements, I described how artistic movements at the origins of practices such as hijacking, interventionist slogans and the creation of symbols and myths, were also protagonists in generating the very idea that artistic creation is above all the creation of situations, i.e. the production of civilizational alternatives in a separate space-time of its own. A belief that artistic creation is capable of breaking outside the work of art and into the production of everyday life through experimentations in urban settings. By opening a new space produced by associations of images-texts-events, the latter aspire to merge dream with reality for a short period of time, contributing to a temporary release from the imaginary and unconscious alienation of everyday life and ultimately reshaping meanings in a non-capitalistic direction. All these tactics form useful resources for activist that try to manifest another future into the present, collectively producing alternative meaning, or challenging current meaning production through these aesthetic forms.

Although this study's focus was on *Nuit Debout*, its implications are by no means limited to the French context. As pointed out in the introduction, several studies on prefigurative politics, particularly in occupation movements, report similar practices, suggesting that the common roots of all these movements reside in more specific ideological systems than in anarchism's anti-authoritarian and horizontal struggles. Indeed, when Demirhisar speaks of creative hijackings involving participants' imagination in Gezi Park (Demirhisar, 2017), she does not link such practices to Surrealist hijackings or Situationism and its creation of situations. For while, as she herself says, this creativity is mobilized for democratic and not aesthetic ends, it is nonetheless built on principles inherent to revolutionary art - the transcendence of the artwork in life itself within a transformative space, and the transformation of participants and the world through collective creation (cf. Chapter 4). In a similar fashion, when Graeber defines the constitutive blocks of the prefigurative politics (Graeber, 2002), taking the No Border¹⁴⁸ Committee as an example, with its experimentations with creative encampments, street art, festive performances, orchestras and dressed-up demonstrations, he refers to similar actions "reinventing daily life" and enabling people to experience other non-alienated existences.

This study has contributed to getting a better understanding of the historical roots of these movements, that provided resources for social movements engaged in a global struggle against

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.noborder.org/>

neoliberalism. In doing so, it tackled a cultural heritage that has largely gone unnoticed, not least – or perhaps above all – by researchers actively involved in prefigurative struggles. In doing so, the thesis contributes to our understanding of the historical construction of prefigurative tactics as transformative, creative and imaginative occupations (Gutiérrez Aguilar et al., 2016; Maeckelbergh, 2016; Millar, 2012; Yates, 2015), combining forms of resistance with cultural and aesthetic performances (Claire, 2011; Demirhisar, 2017; Göle, 2013; Juris, 2008; Werbner et al., 2014). This thesis thus brings to light a vision of prefiguration in the form of interventions in everyday life that modify urban space in a performative sense with the aim of influencing another social imaginary. In this sense, while there is a non-symbolic prefiguration that aims at the production of new spaces and institutions that materially enable an exit from capitalism, this dissertation has addressed symbolic prefigurative actions rooted in the history of the avant-gardes and aimed at diffusing alternative cultural significations. This symbolic prefiguration mobilizes cultural strategies in order to shift linguistic horizons, creating ruptures conducive to new imaginaries. In other words, it focuses on the *non-material conditions for social change*. This type of prefiguration is therefore a political strategy closer to the cultural strategies elaborated by the avant-gardes than to the anarchist struggle and its history of workers' movements.

Furthermore, through unpacking this historical heritage, *this thesis contributes to a better understanding of prefiguration as a symbolic and aesthetic act mobilizing the romantic vision of imagination, whose productive and transformative nature becomes a natural ally to reverse power structures*. Chapter 3 retraced how Romanticism established imagination as an absolute resource replacing the concept of grace. This formed the starting point for a political tradition in which imagination takes the lead role in the establishment of novel social relations. While imagination is naturally at the center of aesthetic theories as a guarantee of the artist's genius and constantly renewed inspiration, it also becomes a political tool mobilized within struggles for a different future. In this way a political tradition has been formed upon this higher value, rethinking political struggles at a discursive and symbolic level in which imagination is the key tool capable of radical social transformation. I will give a brief summary of the key features of romantic imagination, and how it connects to prefigurative tactics.

Firstly, the Romantic imagination is inherently *productive*, capable of bringing forward new significations through symbolic reconfiguration. This concept of the imagination as capable of radical creation accounts for why the experience of prefiguration at Nuit Debout was imbued with values of experimentation and creativity – notions that are central to the artist's poietic function

of recreating another reality. Prefiguration becomes a poietic experience in the sense that participants give new meaning to worn-out words through creative distortions and staged aesthetic interventions. These actions create a breach in the continuity of everyday life, a rupture conducive to a new experience in which the unexpected can emerge. In doing so, participants engage with artistic activity beyond artwork, or to put it in Situationist terms, the production of life is itself the artwork. In a space in which participants generate a rupture with everyday life, new practices contribute to reconfiguring the meaning of democracy, citizenship, and assembly, but also the meaning and role of libraries, canteens, and other components of social life. In addition to practices that embody ideals of horizontality and struggle against forms of domination, these symbolic actions shift the meaning inherent in our daily experience, opening new collective horizons. These can take the form of aesthetic interventions designed to transform the public space, collective creations, or democratic performances whose objective remains the creation of new meaning and therefore new subjectivities. Interestingly, this poietic activity is carried out with the full awareness of a group capable of self-instituting outside of determination, conscious of its autopoietic activity. In other words, this autopoietic activity, embodied in symbolic performances, whether aesthetic or democratic, contributes to instil a consciousness of society's capacity for self-creation. Beyond questioning any particular socio-political or economic model, these forms of prefiguration emphasize the contingency of *all* possible models since they are born from the sovereign's self-sufficient creative powers. This opens up the possibility of erecting a temporary, sovereign force based on its own creative activities, including those of naming, instituting, voting, and deciding on the various subjects that make up the fabric of living together. It is therefore not only an attempt to create new institutions on the basis of on-the-ground experiences but also to act out the experience of the instituted, in the sense of a conscious performance, of what it means to create meaning through an institution, and to create this meaning in a democratic and conflictual way.

Secondly, the Romantic imagination is not only an anthropological, individual characteristic but also collective, shared and constituted as much as it is constitutive of a group: it is a social imagination. Coherent with its autopoietic capacities, this psychic totality allows the group to constitute itself but also to reconstitute itself differently: social relations are thus the product of this social imagination. In other words, the existence of a personal imagination connected to an all-encompassing psychic totality is a *sine qua non* condition for making sense of prefiguration as an act of collectively instituting new meaning. Cultural and symbolic prefigurative politics,

including occupying spaces that capture oppositional imaginations in resistance to the neoliberal imagination, can only make sense if understood in terms of this Romantic idea of a shared, autopoietic imaginary totality. Beyond a revival of hope and a present actualization of ethical values, occupation aims to change global institutions by creating significations capable of influencing a common imaginary within a cultural struggle. Through performances, fictions, symbolic creations, and experiments appealing to collective creativity, prefigurative politics at Nuit Debout sought to reinforce the coherence of a group constituted through images, representations and sensory experiences, reinforcing its ideological coherence with the shared aim of overturning the imposition of a restrictive sense of possibilities. On other words, some parts of Nuit Debout can really be seen as a collective work-of-art or a collective performance, as co-created aesthetic projects form the different parts of the utopian fresco.

Thirdly, the Romantic imagination is proleptic in the sense that it can anticipate a reality that is not yet present, nullifying the space between what is imagined and reality. Consistent with its productive nature, such anticipation intertwines cause and effect. Indeed, the productive imagination is capable of creating images that are both cause and effect: the imagination is what creates a flying horse as well as the flying horse itself. This explains why prefiguration is a phenomenon that has been treated in the literature both as cause (i.e. the creation of hope and future realization) and as effect (i.e. the actualization of a future that is already here). Indeed, the collision between cause and effect makes it difficult to distinguish between present and future temporalities. When prefiguration is considered from the point of view of creating new conditions or creating change in the present, we are thus confronted not only with a lack of distinction between temporalities but also with the question of causality. Arising from the imagination's nature, the rupture produced by the prefigured situation is necessarily an image of the future, while the cause of the change is also the creation of the future itself. Prefiguration is thus understood as both cause and effect, including by participants themselves, mobilizing both functions either by implementing actions designed to change the symbolic and strategic balance of power in the advent of a new world (cause) or in the institution of a new world and collective subject born from the ashes of the old world, thus revealing the lack of space between what is imagined and reality (effect).

To sum up, the strategic purpose of prefiguration and its relationship between present and future change can be one of reversing the collective and social imaginary through its capacity to embody the future in a given space. Through its study of the Romantic imagination, this thesis

thus contributes to a non-exegetical vision of the relationship between future and present temporalities within prefigurative politics, as these strengthen present capacities to reverse social imaginaries and create new conditions for other social relations. The performance of creative capabilities reinforces collective abilities for democracy – in the sense of deciding one's own rules – by empowering the collective capacity to create new institutions. My account thus re-evaluates symbolic, performative prefigurative practices beyond the manifestation of dissent (Murray, 2014), as a tactic for performing democracy.

6.1.2 The democratic project of aesthetic politics

In 2014, Chantal Mouffe described what she saw as the reason for why the Occupy movement was not as active in France as in other countries:

Many young people who in their countries would have been found in Occupy camps, or remained sceptical about political involvement, felt that there was a place for their demands in the program of the *Front de gauche* and participated with great enthusiasm in Mélenchon's campaign for a 'citizen's revolution'. (Mouffe, 2014, p. 25)

In this essay Mouffe thus concluded that French people largely believed their demands could be expressed within existing channels for expression. Mouffe's resolute optimism and faith in current institutions may have led her to overlook some of the tendencies that had emerged since 2007 and the publication of *The Coming Insurrection*. More importantly, however, she did point out a critical aspect of the success of political Romanticism: the belief in a possibility that does not yet exist and cannot be expressed through current institutions. Accordingly, in this section I explore the connections between Romanticism, imagination, and the value of prefiguring utopia for democracy and social change. By explicating how poetics can contribute to open up our sense of possibilities, this discussion seeks to contribute to past research that has strived to promote utopia as a valid method (Levitas, 2000) and a valid objective for social movements (Amsler, 2016; Dinerstein & Deneulin, 2012).

Imaginative politics create spaces for performing the essence of democracy, understood as the creation of collective meaning and the confrontation of a plurality of perspectives. In this sense, while collective institutions such as the General Assembly have a functional purpose (i.e.

that of deciding on a collective strategy) they also have a symbolic one, giving new meaning to democracy. While institutionalized politics appears to have emptied the term of much of its meaningful content, participants at Nuit Debout recreated ritual spaces, investing them with other significations and above all, exposing democracy as a creative process. The politics of the imagination and its ritualistic performances create spaces in which it is possible to conduct a discourse on democracy as a conflictual process over the creation of meaning. In doing so, these actions redefine democracy as a process that questions instituted significations and in which it is always possible to create new meanings. Democracy once again thus becomes a permanent openness, a perpetually unstable and never-ending discussion over society's future. ***These types of prefiguration can be understood as the performance of a self-constituting group – a performance of democracy as the collective destruction and creation of meaning.*** My argument here is that Romantic politics can contribute to utopia through both symbolic and organizational types of prefiguration (as represented in Figure 3). These two strategies correspond to a double movement of de-institution and constitution that is essential in order to go beyond utopia as mere daydreaming or wishful thinking:

- Symbolic forms of prefiguration correspond to an *instituting moment* whereby a new self-created subject emerges, reveal the heteronomy of previous significations, unveiling how human-made significations of pseudo-rationality, technocratic mythology and modern ideology have gained an autonomous existence and now govern a largely oblivious society. This leads to performative, symbolic, aesthetic, and discursive tactics aimed at empowering society's capacity for self-creation.
- Organizational forms of prefiguration correspond to an *instituted moment* where the self-created subject decides upon their own rules and organizes a collective experimentation of human possibilities through everyday struggles with urban spaces, collective living arrangements, self-organizing and direct democracy. This leads to the creation of democratic spaces and institutions that allow each member to participate directly in the constitution of another society through the constitution of common rules.

While instituted actions are essential to go beyond purely aesthetic engagement, instituting performances serve a similar function to a theatre, producing a space filled with romantic passion and intensity, creating a place in which meanings and procedures of worldly life no longer take hold. This distance makes it possible to implement other forms of actions and forms of organizing.

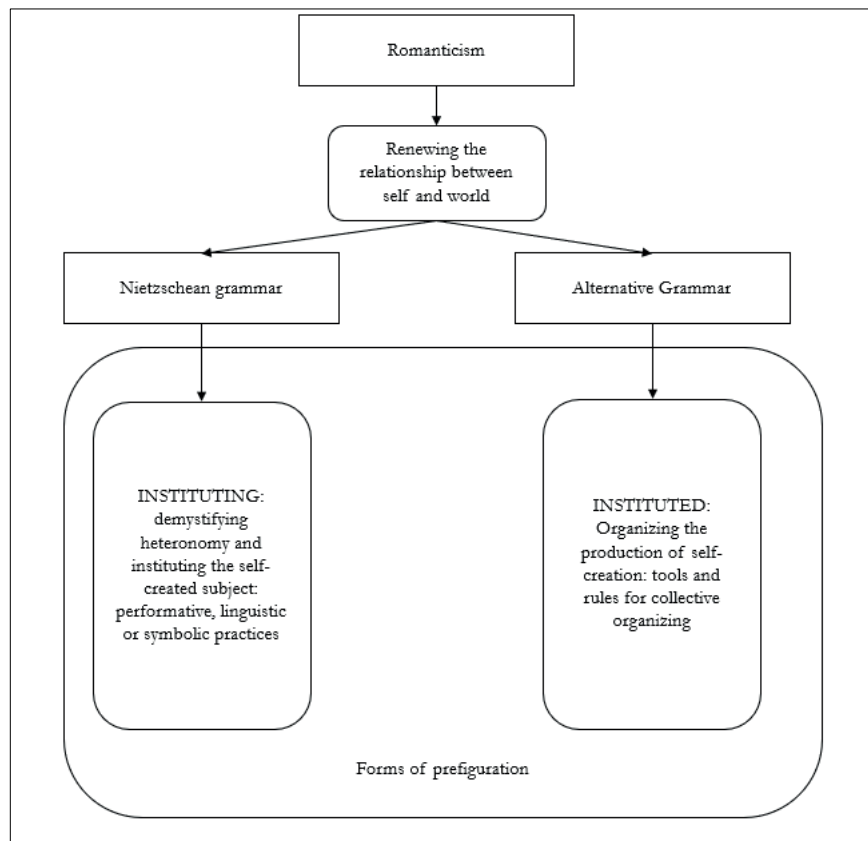


Figure 3: The engagement of Romantic grammar(s) with prefiguration

Performing the process of a self-instituting society leads to a novel relationship between present and future temporalities within prefiguration. *This utopia is not only productive of hope but, through the performance of a self-created subject, regenerates, reinforces, and nurtures the process of giving form.* In the same way as the spectator of a loveless and unhappy marriage is reminded of the idea and the existence of beauty, love, and truth through a play, so too the spectator at *Nuit Debout* is reminded of the social’s capacity to create itself, taking ownership and control over this process. This performance empowers the group to give form to society through a shared experience that ultimately shapes the individual. At *Nuit Debout*, prefiguring other worlds was not so much about proleptically anticipating a desired future as about generating a performance of world-building: the co-construction of a space where human beings can consciously create, reinvent and permanently transform the prevailing type of human organization – a space in which this “capacity of giving form” (Gutiérrez Aguilar et al., 2016, p. 82) is made possible. In other words, the group’s capacity to create, shape and produce other forms of co-

existence was deployed in a specific time and space.

While prefiguration was formed on the anarchic principle of non-distinction between ends and means and on the Christian terminology of anticipation through a state of grace, its avant-gardist roots help explain the materialization of a theatrical performance whose value does not lie only in ethical achievement or the production of hope for the future but above all in the recognition of human creative capacities to alter society at large by diffusing other significations created in such spaces. These types of prefiguration correspond to the argument advanced by Dolan (2005, p. 38) that:

in order to pretend to enact an ideal future, a culture has to move farther and farther away from the real into a kind of performance, in which the utterance, in this case, doesn't necessarily make it so but inspires perhaps other more local ways of "doings" that sketch out the potential in those feignings. (Dolan, 2005, p. 38)

I believe this form of prefigurative tactics to reinforce society's capacity for autonomy, or in other terms, radical democracy. The utopia of *Nuit Debout* corresponds to the definition of autonomy as a process by which society is able to maintain a reflexive relationship with its creative abilities, avoiding alienation and recognizing its ability to self-institute. In this sense the concept of autonomy developed by Castoriadis is just another name for the direct democracy project (Castoriadis quoted in Latouche, 2014, p. 63). *In other words, this utopia participates in autonomy in the sense of contributing to radical democracy by explicating the socio-historical capacity for recreating itself differently.* Considering societies as a cultural phenomenon, the Nuit Debout movement contributed to a revolutionary project aspiring to change the psychosocial organization of Western society, that is to say in its dominant imaginary (Castoriadis, 2011, p. 244). By criticizing significations instituting technology the cult of science and the ideology of unlimited growth central to the development of the modern Western imaginary (Castoriadis, 1987, p. 75), Nuit Debout dispossesses this imaginary of its extra-human powers and collectively seeks to form other significations, implementing this process as a reflective, conscious and deliberate practice. Going beyond a Christian terminology of a prophetic future proleptically envisioned in the present, this approach reinforces the understanding of prefiguration as a decolonizing process (Dinerstein, 2015, p. 18), regenerating our political imaginaries and empowering creative abilities. In this sense it is possible to view prefiguration as a process interlinking creation and institution to express a self-created sovereign subject, based on the conviction that the only hope for a

different future relies on the empowerment of this subject in the present.

The next section addresses this study's contribution to Romanticism as a political culture, and what that lens can bring to the study of social movements.

6.2 Contribution 2: Romanticism as a political culture

This section addresses this study's second important contribution, regarding Romanticism as a rich, radical, and utopian political culture. More specifically, it addresses the two main misconceptions about political Romanticism, i.e overlooking its utopian dimension, and reducing this culture to an aestheticized and amoral perspective, while addressing its limitations as a mode of political engagement in the last section.

6.2.1 Engaging with Romanticism as political utopianism

My argument here is that one cannot understand the role of political Romanticism without seriously considering the value of utopia and the particular ways in which Romanticism engages with the construction of alternative futures. The utopian dimension and its revolutionary potential have been overlooked by seminal studies on the subject, including Schmitt's *Political Romanticism* (1919). According to Schmitt, Romanticism replaced God's omnipotence not with the powers of the state but the powers of the subject and its inner experiences (Schmitt, 1986, p. 16). I would contend, however, that the subject's inner experience is only all-powerful in the sense that it becomes the place for the powers of the imagination. *It is imagination and not the subject's ego that is the ultimate metaphysical authority.*¹⁴⁹ It is in the imagination, with its independence from the constraints of external reality, that there lies what Schmitt identifies as essential traits of Romanticism, i.e. its quest for independence from predictable causality and thus a permanent

¹⁴⁹ This explains Romanticism's glorification of art rather than the rational capacity of the subject as a mode for creating reality.

sense of open possibilities. However, Schmitt's focus on the ego instead of the imagination as the site for the constant production and actualization of radical alternatives prevents him from seeing the revolutionary potential of political Romanticism in the production of utopia as a place for opening collective possibilities.

This sense of open possibilities is inextricably connected with the independence of the imagination from reality's constraints. It is in this sense that political Romanticism can be inefficient, since it inevitably faces difficulties in limiting, instituting, and leaving the state of inspiration – as explained in the last section. Nevertheless, ***it is in this appreciation for open possibilities that political Romanticism is fundamentally a form of utopianism, mobilizing the imagination's power for crafting another possibility to what it is.*** Herein lies not only the weaknesses but also the potentiality of this strand of political Romanticism – a potentiality overlooked in Schmitt's harsh criticism, which ignores the connections between poetics and utopia, between fiction and attempts to transform reality towards another possibility. For example, Schmitt reduces Novalis' *Spirit of Christianity* as a merely poetic and a-historical essay:

In its content, mood, and cadence, the essay is a fairy tale. It is not an intellectual achievement, but rather a beautiful poetic fantasy. It belongs with Rousseau's description of the state of nature in the *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality*. (Schmitt, 1986, p. 128)

In doing so, however, he misconstrues the purpose and scope of the concept of an 'elsewhere', which does not represent mere fantasy but also the possibility of otherness that is essential to utopia. Schmitt further ignored how Novalis' vision of medieval Christianity was mobilized to champion a future for a Europe built upon fraternity and cosmopolitanism (Kleingeld, 2008). For Schmitt as for many of its detractors, Romanticism poeticizes instead of acting on the world. In this view, the aesthetic experience is misunderstood as the end rather than the means to an end beyond the field of aesthetics. This is in part because, as mentioned above, Schmitt placed too much focus on the emotional aspect of imagination rather than on its productive nature. Only by considering the productive nature of imagination, which is one of the few features shared by all the different streams of Romanticism, can one grasp the revolutionary potential of this stream.

Furthermore, by defining Romanticism as a discourse that mobilizes resources from the inspired city in a critique of the industrial city, this thesis contributes to the understanding of Romanticism as an oppositional and counter-cultural movement (Löwy & Sayre, 1992; Sayre & Löwy, 2015). This not only allows for a better grasp of its coherence as an intellectual project but

also sheds lights on its potential revolutionary and collective dimension. This approach stands in sharp contrast to perspectives that critique Romanticism as being a self-centered, subjective, and individualized stance. Schmitt (1986, p. 18), for example, perceives the essence of Romanticism in the subject's posture towards the world. But while the relation between the self and the world indeed lies at the core of Romanticism, his argumentation fails to take into account the extent to which this quest for a more fulfilling subjective relation emerged historically in reaction to industrialism, capitalism, and modernity, instead reducing political Romanticism to just another form of opposition to rationalism along with other mystical-religious, historical, and philosophical counter movements. According to this view, Romanticism served to provide an emotional and aestheticized response characterized by lyric production with its roots in a fantasized view of nature (Schmitt, 1986, pp. 53–57). However, such dismissal of the oppositional nature of Romanticism, focussed only on what Romanticism is against, not only reflects an idealist perspective that ignores the impacts of industrialization, modernization and urbanization but also reduces it to an aesthetic, self-centered and amoral attitude, thereby overlooking the extent to which a poetic relation between the self and the world motivates the creation of an alternative and 'better' world. *This thesis addresses these limitations by providing a complementary interpretation that distinguishes two basic sub-sections in Romantic political grammars: a Nietzschean grammar and an Alternative grammar.*

Romanticism, as this thesis has shown, has served as the starting point for two distinct political cultures: a Nietzschean grammar that emphasizes imagination and creativity, and an Alternative grammar focused on organizing outside and beyond the state and industrial capitalism. Romanticism forms the starting point for understanding the values that have led to these two political cultures which, while distinct, are mutually opposed to an industrial order of thought, hierarchical and technological solutions, and the values of rationalism - a criticism that is not shared by the Republican or the Socialist grammars. Indeed, the Romantic critique of rationalism goes hand in hand with opposition to the idea that society can be understood and organized as a set of purely material elements. This critique is fundamental in Romanticism's distaste for systems of thought that aim at total and rational control of society, including the state and industrial capitalist system, instead aiming for an opening up of possibilities. Another central characteristic of the Romantic grammar identified here is the political value attributed to imagination in the production of future possibilities. This attribute distinguishes it from anarchist grammars characterized by organized opposition to the state in which primacy is given to individual action

and autonomy in horizontal forms of organization.

This distinction further contributes to previous research that has hitherto only considered the aesthetic and amoral aspects of political Romanticism embedded in the Nietzschean grammar (Pereira, 2010) in which art becomes the absolute purpose and everything is reduced to aesthetics. In this view, “The romantic, therefore, is a paradigm of the coquette, who flirts with reality and transcends its limits by translating all experiences into the domain of the aesthetic” (Oakes, 1986, p. xxxiv). In its impotence to bring about change, political Romanticism resorts to prioritizing aestheticized modes of engagement, focusing on cultivating the self a work of art – in short, indulging in emotionally satisfactory experiences without reflecting on “what should be done” and “what should be instead of what is”. In Oakes’s words (1986, pp. xxx, xxxi): “The romantic attitude makes politics impossible because the poeticization of politics nullifies the conditions under which choices between alternative conceptions of right and wrong, of justice and injustice, can be made.” This is a project that strives for our lives to be governed according to aesthetic principles, escaping moral conventions, obligations, and responsibilities – an attitude that reflects its nihilistic beliefs. Chapter 4 has described how seeing the world as an aesthetic relation between the subject and its own truth to the detriment of an objective, external and transcendental moral order is precisely a consequence of Nietzsche’s thought. Romanticism is thus the starting point of a Nietzschean grammar that epitomizes the powers of the Romantic imagination. While the Romantic grammar is characterized by the political role it ascribes to the imagination, the Nietzschean grammar, in the tradition of the avant-gardes, mobilizes the imagination in cultural, artistic, and sometimes destructive interventions.

Refuting the reduction of Romanticism to an amoral aesthetic politics, Chapter 4 also described how Romanticism was originally attached to an external moral order manifested in Nature, justifying the ‘return’ to a higher form of living based on equality, harmonious relations, and shared, collective property. This created the bedrock for forms of self-managed, utopian communities that ever since Charles Fourier have constituted forms of engagement within the Alternative grammar. This grammar entails a deeper engagement with politics since it is based on choice and the active pursuit of a better alternative, with its moral position founded on humanistic values in opposition to industrial capitalism. Moreover, while Schmitt inarguably grasped how this movement puts the subjective experience at its core, he omitted to explain that it nonetheless tries to solve the tension between subjectivism and collectivism, creating forms of organizing that integrate sensitive and aesthetic experiences with ideals such as equality, cooperation and

fulfilling work. On the contrary, Schmitt (1986, p. 65) saw these as irreconcilable aims, since in his view “The incorporation of the subject into community and history meant that the self as creator of the world was dethroned”. This is clear from his reading of Rousseau, whom he regards as the father of both individualism and of Romanticism without giving due consideration to how Rousseau’s writings served as the bedrock for collectivistic values, direct democracy, and collective will. Consequently, he further overlooked all subsequent attempts at conciliating poetic experiences of living with collectivistic and democratic values, such as those of William Morris and Charles Fourier. To bridge this gap, my study explores the historicity of an Alternative project aimed at creating another form of human organization in which the inner self is fully restored and where individual passions and fulfilment are made possible by a renewed bond with a preserved nature and a revitalized, vibrant civil society. This project is perfectly encapsulated in the Alternative grammar, which seeks an affective, organic, and non-mechanic community outside the state in which individuals are brought together by affective experiences resulting from a shared life that reflects pre-capitalist values. In highlighting the correspondence with the Romantic grammar, this thesis gave a theoretical coherence to the "alternative" nebula, that had been previously considered for its proximity with humanism (Pereira, 2010), without considering what it is an alternative to: modern, industrial capitalism. In this regard, the defense of the person against the perils of scientific and rational project, as well as ecological concerns, are perfectly coherent with Romanticism, rather than a compromise with modern republican values.

This distinction between two Romantic grammars, a Nietzschean and an Alternative grammar, has proved essential to my aim of making sense of the events of May 68 and the decades that followed. Navigating between conflicting interpretations and the gaps between authors’ intentions and subsequent misappropriations of its heritage was deeply challenging. In my initial investigations there appeared to be an irreconcilable difference in accounts of May 68 between those who hold the hedonism of that movement responsible for civilizational decline (Ferry & Renault, 1988) and for contributing to the decline of the French Communist Party (Christofferson, 2014) and those who instead focus on workers’ struggles and the collaborations achieved from a socialist perspective (Bantigny, 2018; Kergoat, 2018; Löwy, 2002; Pereira, 2009a). There seemed to be a different possible conclusion to be drawn depending on each source. This opposition was instrumental in my decision to differentiate between an Alternative Grammar and a second stream of political Romanticism. The Alternative Grammar found in self-management the means to reconcile the desire for revolutionary Marxist change with the Romantic aspirations of recovering

the relationship between the self and the world by developing tools, institutions, and modes of organization that make it possible to plan a civilizational change compatible with other modes of existence. In the second stream, by contrast, the objects and values of the inspired city constitute the sole mode of intervention, as deployed in May 68 in the Situationist interventions in Boulevard Saint Germain.

The decade after 1968, the so-called “utopian years” (Delannoi, 2010) appeared to be a period in which ecological, social and economic struggles all combined, with an Alternative and Socialist grammar jointly championing a revolution in everyday life along with material changes and greater equality of conditions. By taking a pragmatic sociology approach I was therefore able to understand the progressive autonomy of the inspired city in terms of socialist values. In this way I was further able to discern how another activist grammar progressively dismissed social concerns by focusing on questions of individual modes of action, seeing social change as dependent only on the creativity of new social entrepreneurs. Within this stream the factors of creativity, autonomy and desire are regarded as sufficient to bring about a shift in conditions, hence the very notion of an alternative civilizational project vanishes, turning into a Nietzschean militant grammar of minority and differentiated struggles. Although the latter trend has attracted more attention, perhaps rightly, it is important to remember how past struggles also championed the idea of autonomy and self-management, seeking alternative futures by reconciling the values of political participation and economic rights with desires for alternative forms of life. In this sense, the site of Notre-Dame-des-Landes provided a valuable environment by bringing together younger and older activists, as well as mixing artistic misuses and occupations focused on alternative organizing. In this regard, these political groups contributed to shaping the later Nuit Debout movement as an intervention of the radical imagination, to the detriment of more traditional forms of engagement.

Understanding Romanticism as a political culture required looking at the relations with other political cultures, namely the Republican and Socialist families, highlighting how these various political cultures collaborated and conflicted with one another in counter-cultural actions. In this regard, Chapter 5 analyzed the relationship between the political cultures that emerged from Romanticism, considering the different forms of compromise and conflict between Romantic, Socialist and Republican grammars. While these two latter grammars foster modes of engagement derived from a classical and instrumental repertoire, including demonstrations, strikes and petitions, the Nietzschean, Alternative and Social Republican grammars have a greater

involvement in prefigurative actions (see Table 3).

	Nietzschean grammar	Alternative grammar	Social Republican grammar	Socialist and Republican grammars
Highest values	Freedom, creativity, individual emancipation	Humanistic values, non-alienated modes of being	Democratic participation	Universal emancipation, social rights
Type of collective	Spontaneous action, plurality, diversity, networks, minorities	Self-governed, self-managed and self-organized collectives	New forms of representation	Hierarchically organized action
Type of activism at Nuit Debout	Symbolic / Aesthetic prefiguration	Organizational prefiguration	Organizational prefiguration	Political parties, unions, strikes

Table 3: Grammars and types of engagement at Nuit Debout

Although the utopian conviction that another world is possible was shared by all of the political cultures engaged in Nuit Debout, those participants mobilizing a Romantic and a Social-Republican grammar were more likely to justify and carry out actions prefiguring this other world within the square. However, my investigation has also revealed that prefiguration is not understood in the same ways by Nietzschean and Alternative grammars. Rather there are two forms of engagement with the notion of prefiguration: a Nietzschean grammar, influenced by the avant-garde, undertakes actions of cultural and symbolic prefiguration, while an Alternative

grammar partakes in collective utopias and forms of collective organizing, supported by a Social Republican grammar. The struggle against “the labor law and its world” at Nuit Debout was thus carried out through an occupation that mixed artistic and symbolic interventions with enactments of novel institutions aimed at giving rise to other forms of political representation. While the Nietzschean grammar sees prefiguration as having an impact on the discursive space, the Alternative grammar believes in propagating prefigured institutions within a network of initiatives. In the first case, on-site and online actions are seen as affecting a symbolic balance of power, while in the latter case actions initiated in the square were seen as needing to be sustained within a strong civil society. This difference gave rise to conflicts, notably between the critique of democratic institutions and constitutive initiatives supported by the Alternative and Republican grammars, and conversely, a critique targeted at symbolic prefiguration actions investing the discursive field without considering asymmetrical power relations.

6.2.2 The downfall of aesthetic politics

The much-needed re-evaluation of Romanticism as a political culture should not prevent us from discussing and criticizing the influence of preconceived ideas about the imagination among those engaged in prefigurative politics. Understanding the influence of past prejudices entails analyzing not just what such prejudices produce and enable but also what they prevent. One of the recurrent concerns in previous literature is that prefigurative politics might not be political at all in the sense that they have failed to change society’s broader structures and power relations, instead focusing on group dynamics, the individual sense of belonging and emotional experience. According to this critical take, prefigurative politics are *creative* only in the limited sense that they are the self-expression of emotional states in the here and now, while they are *utopian* in that they fail to connect means to ends in striving to achieve consequential results (Smucker, 2014). In this sense they ultimately construct a refuge from the logics of capitalist brutality, preserving the group’s lifeworld, which ultimately amount to a project of private liberation rather than one of broader political engagement: “In other words, dreaming about how the world might possibly someday be is not the same as political struggle—even when the dreams are punctuated with dramatic ‘prefigurative’ public spectacles” (Smucker, 2014, p. 75). Despite enthusiasm on the part of participants and academics, the excessive focus on the experience of participation and internal relations between participants, instead of concentrating on the material effects of activist practices,

paradoxically leads to a declining turnout due to the lack of durable results (Murray, 2014).

More generally, horizontal, participative and prefigurative politics have been criticized for their inability to decide, to commit to a solution, plan, or roadmap, instead calling for a return to hierarchical institutionalized politics. While successively activating imagination and creativity, prefigurative approaches seem to have failed in instituting new democratic and collective institutions or in reducing injustice, exploitation, and inequalities on a larger scale. This had led to criticisms of naiveté, lack of sustainable organization, indecision, and weakness. Through this lens, occupation protests appears as childish emotional forms of temper, i.e. as spontaneous and abrupt emotional moments doomed to be fleeting, as there is a call for the return of hierarchies and communist ideas in the name of bringing about material change in social structures (Dean, 2012; Žižek, 2012b). In this sense, Hardt and Negri's recent book on *Assemblies* is particularly representative of the impasse at which horizontal politics have currently arrived. A decade or more ago, the emphasis of their work was placed on the capacity of the multitude to produce democratic institutions through its communicative and collaborative properties (Hardt & Negri, 2005). Surprisingly (or not), their recent work focuses on lack of leadership as the main weakness of protest movements (Hardt & Negri, 2017). However, their proposed solution for a horizontal but efficient form of leadership capable of operationalizing concrete proposals for change is that the "entrepreneur for the multitude", which is essentially a resurrection of the ideals of entrepreneurs for society, oriented towards the counter-production of society outside of neoliberal terrain (MacFarlane, 2019). This resurrection of Second Left/Third Way ideas and entrepreneurial rhetoric illustrates the difficulty social movements face in forging a novel path between institutionalized politics and neoliberal ideals.

While many critics blame horizontal politics and anarchism as the culprit for the inefficiency of square and occupation movements, some of this disappointment might be inherent to political Romanticism. This aspect was already pointed out in Carl Schmitt's seminal work. While Schmitt's work needs to be understood in the historical context in which it was written, namely the political crisis of post-war Germany and Schmitt's own conservative and sometimes distorted vision of Romanticism (Roques, 2009), it remains relevant in that it synthesizes many of the criticisms generally made about today's Romantic political cultures, including occupation and prefigurative politics. Thus, in his critique of political Romanticism Schmitt quoted Schlegel as an example of how political romanticism is fundamentally incoherent, incapable of commitment, decisions, and of holding a definitive position on any subject, which he saw as being a

consequence of the reduction of politics to aesthetics which aspires “to live off politics rather than for politics” (Oakes, 1986, p. xxv). The aestheticization of politics leads to an inability to decide between what is right and wrong, evaluating every experience according to its potential to provide an emotional aesthetic in the sense of a non-conformist way of living. As Oakes has stated (1986, xxvi): “The product of an action is not a result that can be evaluated according to moral standards, but rather an emotional experience that can be judged only in aesthetic and emotive terms.” Emotive ethics and ethics of passivity are thus inextricably connected. Furthermore, Schmitt (1986, p. 65) goes on to describe how the need to keep possibilities open at all times is an essential element of political Romanticism, which he sees as a consequence of its rejection of a mechanistic and causal view of reality, and which is inextricably linked to his critique of the passivity of political Romanticism. Indeed, many square movements have chosen a spontaneous form of organization that keeps all possibilities open at all times, since spontaneity is born from such possibility (Schmitt, 1986, p. 115), thereby ultimately becoming afflicted with irresolution and inability to decide. The focus of political Romanticism on living every moment as an aesthetic experience outside of any objective moral or political order makes it almost impossible, moreover, to differentiate between friend and foe, a crucial factor in the inability of political Romanticism to differentiate between their own project and a competing, rival project, on the basis that discriminating between “*oppositions and differences, good and evil, friend and enemy, Christ and Antichrist, can become aesthetic contrasts and means of intrigue in a novel, and they can be aesthetically incorporated into the total effect of a work of art*” (Schmitt, 1986, p. 16).

Rather than looking at the ethics of anarchism, therefore, this thesis has mobilized political Romanticism in order to provide a historical explanation of these movements’ moral appreciation for open possibilities, the creation of affective and emotional spaces, as well as their irresolution and inability to commit to any one side. In this regard, my study has contributed to unveil the reliance on assumptions that keep intact the idea of a productive political imagination – an idea that has significant limitations when artistic values are at risk of being unchecked and divinized. The risk here is that prefigurative politics are carried out only with the aim of reconnecting with a creative inspiring state, with this final objective eclipsing any desire for political decision-making, i.e. of poetics erasing politics and reducing imaginary politics to a “sublime elevation abode definition and decision” (Schmitt, 1986, p. 162). The aspired-to state of creativity, whose decline is represented by institutionalization and routine, becomes a form of justification that prevents any institutionalization of the movement, and any collective decision-making that

presupposes a sense of determination. After all, “when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline” (Shelley, quoted in Brinkley & Hanley, 1992, p. 243).

While the notion of productive imagination can deconstruct society’s production by explicating and highlighting its self-created nature, it becomes problematic when imagination itself becomes the finality of creation, i.e. when imagination takes on a transcendental value guiding social creation. This reveals the problematic nature of a movement built upon imagination’s capabilities, not only because the capacity of the imagination to foster a collective force must be constantly reiterated (as it is built on nothing other than its own creative powers) but also because the act of creation seeks to institute imagination as sovereign. And when all power goes to the imagination, what then is left of politics? In this case, imagination ceases to be merely a tool for revealing the contingency of a form of sovereignty through its production of fictions and performances but becomes instead a transcendental value, heteronomous in the sense meant by Castoriadis, i.e. escaping all human control. In this case, the imagination represents the source and *raison d’être* for a given social organization, in this case one of non-organization, spontaneity and indeterminacy no longer subordinate to democratic and collective interests. In doing so, this conception naturalizes imagination, transforming it into a source of sovereignty that lies beyond humanity. Such quasi-religious veneration of imagination, art and creativity confines it to a role that is no longer connected to our collective capacity to act differently but becomes its own finality – a state in which creativity is self-sufficient, just as a rational system itself generates rationality outside of any service to a collective and political project. By fighting against the disenchantment of the world, re-enchantment through imagination risks cutting the actors off from stabilizing tools conducive to their autonomy, trapping them in what has now replaced religion as myth, i.e. a religion of art as an absolute and unlimited creative force which is incompatible with democracy in that democratic organization presupposes certain limitations. In such an outcome, there is nothing to be done or decided since being in contact with the source of supreme power is enough to bring about a new order, with ‘art’ thus replacing the Romantic conception and veneration of ‘nature’ as the ultimate grantor of a preserved social and moral order.

6.3 Future directions and concluding remarks

I would like to conclude this dissertation with a few words on possible directions that I have been unable to address in the scope of this investigation, but which could be tackled in the future. The first is an issue that was raised in this dissertation but could not be addressed due to time constraints. For while this thesis has elucidated how various activist grammars are involved in square movements, future sociological investigations could examine the social conditions for mastering the grammars of political engagement. While my sample was too small to allow for generalizations, it would be interesting to conduct interviews and address questions such as professional status and levels of integration within institutions of civic and political life and more generally the various kinds of capital that would incline actors to master one or another grammar. For example, it may fairly be presumed that actors who mobilize the Nietzschean grammar, which values an anti-institutional and revolutionary approach, typically do not occupy dominant positions, even though many are often linked to academic and artistic worlds. By contrast, actors mobilizing a Republican grammar were often aiming for collaborative or institutional political careers, considering Nuit Debout as a platform to ensure visibility through a network that would allow them to attain more important positions.

The second important direction that emerged from this project was the constitution of a more hegemonic bloc based on environmental issues and concerns. Indeed, we can fairly assume that the growing seriousness of imminent ecological issues and their impacts at individual and global level will provide ever more grounds for the constitution of compromises and further rapprochement among different political sensibilities and cultures. However, these compromises and arrangements will inevitably also involve tensions and conflicts. On this point it would be interesting to conduct a study of the different ecological grammars of the left, distinguishing among Romantic ecologies whose commitment is motivated by poetic motives and the quest for to recover the relationship between the inner and outer world, a Republican ecology based on democratic control of natural resources, and an ecology motivated by technocratic concerns, focused on geo-engineering projects. Moreover, ecological discourses might be built upon compromises between several grammars, such as Ecosocialism (Löwy, 2015), which attempts a Marxist critique rid of productivism, bureaucratic and rationalism considered harmful for humanity's living prospects to champion a novel civilizational paradigm. This form of eco-

socialism mobilizes a synthesis of artistic and scientific critiques of capitalism, giving rise to a socialist and ecological commitment (Löwy, 2020).

To conclude, the Romantic soul believes above all else in a lost, white paradise and in the possibility of its return. Even a study on Romanticism finds itself unable to rule on its capacities to produce the desired utopia. The only certainty of finding this lost happiness lies in art's ability to convey the experience of pure emotion, encounters within a paradise untouched by reason, logic, or speech. This is why, as a last resort as well as in conclusion, I leave my readers with the words of Levitas (2005, p. 4) quoted in a passage from McEwan's novel *Saturday* (McEwan, 2006, p. 171):

... The rare moments when musicians together touch something sweeter than they've ever found before in rehearsals or performance, beyond the merely collaborative or technically proficient, when their expression becomes as easy and graceful as friendship or love. This is when they give a glimpse of what we might be, of our best selves, and of an impossible world in which you give everything you have to others but lose nothing of yourself. Out in the real world there exist detailed plans, visionary projects for peaceable realms, all conflicts resolved, happiness for everyone – mirages for which people are prepared to die and kill. Christ's kingdom on earth, the workers' paradise, the ideal Islamic state. But only in music, and on rare occasions, does the curtain actually lift on this dream of community, and it's tantalizingly conjured, before fading away with the last note.

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8 APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY

Alternative grammar: The Alternative grammar is at play when actors justify their attempts to gain control over forms of human organizing (creating novel institutions, spaces, practices) in the name of a poetic relation with time, the environment, the self and others. Unlike the Nietzschean grammar, the Alternative grammar aspires to another world constructed upon humanistic and pre-capitalist values. It constitutes a critique of industrial capitalism, consumer society and modernity in the name of human fulfillment and pre-capitalist values such as solidarity, association and community, seeking another form of civilization that will overcome the shortcomings of modernity by considering non-material needs. The Alternative grammar constitutes a form of compromise between the inspired city and the civic city in that it promotes the constitution of collectives and a more meaningful participation in democratic systems compatible with the Republican values of freedom and fraternity. Unlike the Republican grammar, however, the ultimate goal remains the institution of a strong and self-managed civil society.

Anarchism: A political philosophy that seeks to overturn and demystifying the conditions for *archie* in society, hostile to all systems of domination (hierarchies, patriarchies, monarchies, oligarchies, etc.). The particularity of anarchism is that it considers both the state and capitalism to be dominating structures and believes in the individual's autonomy and responsibility to form collective actions. The privileged mode for collective identity and action in the anarchist grammar are the collaborative and associationist relationships formed within the workplace. The concept of prefigurative politics is central to anarchism's revolutionary strategy, as it seeks to develop modes of organizing alternative to the state and capitalism, foreshadowing another society founded upon natural moral tendencies of solidarity, mutual aid and reciprocity.

Anarcho-communism: This particular form of anarchism was theorized by Joseph Déjacque, William Morris and Pyotr Kropotkin and revived forms of radical ideals of a communist utopia based on moral ideals of solidarity in which all men and woman would be free and equal. Its collective subject is not the proletariat but humanity as a whole.

Anarcho-individualism: Proponents of anarcho-individualism are influenced by libertarians such as John Stuart Mill and John Locke, but also Han Ryner and Max Stirner. They engage

primarily in forms of individualistic action or terrorism.

Anarcho-communalism: I use this term to reflect the evolution of anarchism in modern politics, where it meets the notion of the Common, therefore distinguishing it from anarcho-communism. Anarcho-communalism recaptures the meaning of communalism as a theory of government in which autonomous local communities govern themselves (Bookchin, 2006), and the theories of the Common (Dardot & Laval, 2015; Negri & Hardt, 2014), as the self-government and self-constitution of a subject in order to create a collective, environmentally sustainable society.

Autonomy: Although autonomy is a central concept in anarchism, definitions of autonomy vary from one stream of anarchism to another. Anarcho-individualism expresses a concern primarily with individualized versions of autonomy, understood as personal liberty, self-sufficiency and self-sovereignty. More collective forms of anarchism understand autonomy as a form of collective self-determination. Autonomy can thus mean autonomy of the social body, as is the case in Proudhonian collectivism. In the 20th century, autonomy emerged as a radical democracy at the political and economic level in the works of revolutionary Romantics such as Henri Lefebvre and Cornelius Castoriadis, and autonomy from political and economic neoliberal structures, as evidenced in the Zapatista movement.

Avant-Garde: While Romance-language speaking countries tend to see the *vanguardia* or vanguard as aesthetic movements of modernity, emphasizing their plurality, variety of forms and dynamism, the Germanic understanding of the concept is more restrictive and does not assume a linear continuity between Romanticism and avant-gardism (Bäckström, 2007). The Germanic definition rather focuses on the historicity of the epoch and highlights the avant-garde's rupture with the modernist conception of art. Becoming synonymous with 'revolutionary art', the movements spanning from 1905 to the 1930s that included Dadaism, Italian and Russian Futurism, Surrealism and Expressionism supported the common political and revolutionary ambitions of not only aestheticizing life through art but of destroying the autonomy of Art as an institution. The revolutionary project of the avant-gardes consists in this re-evaluation of art not as works of art but as acts of creativity. This latter concept is used in this research, since it encapsulates the contribution of the avant-garde to revolutionary politics. While there is definitely a difference in nature between William Morris's Romantic enterprise of using works of art in everyday life and the avant-garde's project of reenchanting life through creative estranged acts, they both participate in the same Romantic worldview in their opposition to a form of modernity

they hold responsible for the automatic and industrial reproduction of everyday life.

Communist Grammar: Communist grammar derives from the works of Marx and Lenin. It is influenced by a political economy reading of class struggles, an instrumental differentiation between means and ends, and a rationalist outlook on social change.

Far left: At the general level, the far left are those that consider themselves to be to the left of the French Socialist Party. This thesis uses Ducange and Sommelier's distinction between far left and radical left: the far left, or *extreme gauche*, has a consistently anti-institutional approach to social change, whereas the far left believes changes can happen through elections (Ducange, 2015).

Grammar: Grammar here denotes an ensemble of rules articulating, constituting, and supporting different models of 'greatness' established within different 'cities' in actor's discourses. New grammars emerge when higher purposes find a form of compromise or when a new and higher value appears. In this thesis I engage with activist grammars, which can be considered as expressions of political cultures.

Libertarian: The word libertarian has often been used interchangeably with the word anarchist. However, the pronouncement created by Déjacque to express his opposition to Proudhon's conservative and patriarchal morals:

Fair-minded anarchist, liberal and not LIBERTAIRE, you want free trade for cotton and candles, and you advocate systems that protect man against woman, in the circulation of human passions; you cry out against the high barons of capital, and you want to rebuild the high barony of the male over the female vassal (Déjacque, 1857).

This pronouncement claims radicalism in regard to the rights of minorities, the equality of the sexes, and the liberation of desires, which is part of Fourier's conception of socialism. While Fourier's works were written before this expression itself, Fourier imagined socialism as a liberation movement, breaking with conservative morals on marriage and women's reproductive role in sharp contrast to the conservative convictions of an anarchist like Proudhon. Although the term is used interchangeably by Proudhon and Bakunin, the second half of the 20th century differentiated between the two currents: "the term 'anarchist' was reserved for those advocating the abolition of the state, capitalism and religions, while the adjective 'libertarian' was applied to all alternative and anti-authoritarian militant experiences" (Luck, 2008, p. 9). These new forms of protest, which characterized the struggles of May 68, have since resurfaced with the anti-

globalization movement. Instead of viewing libertarians as a coherent group, one should rather speak of ‘movements of movements’ or nebulae that bring together groups favoring direct action and a flat hierarchical mode of organizing. We could then say that anarchism is part of a history that has its roots in workers’ movements, whereas the libertarian movement favors the invention of problematics related to the reinvention of daily life and is thus part of the legacy of May 68.

Lifestyle anarchism: A tendency towards actions focused on preoccupations of the ego, incarnated in various lifestyles and New Age considerations, self-assertive actions and uniqueness rather than collective action and institutions (Bookchin, 1995).

Nietzschean Grammar: This political grammar is connected to an individualistic worldview in which the individual pre-exists the collective, inducing a preference for individualistic and aesthetic forms of action such as lifestyle problematics, countercultural and alternative modes of life. At the same time this grammar builds on a postmodernist perspective in valuing diversity, plurality, minorities and networks.

New Social Movements: The emergence of a new political subject and novel problematics related to minority, gender, the environment, and organized in a reticular and organic fashion.

Prefiguration: Prefiguration is a strategy deployed in political, social and economic struggles to implement in the here and now the changes that a group is trying to achieve. As a manifestation of an idealized future it has strong links to utopianism. In this thesis I define prefiguration as a historical form of utopianism oriented towards the realization of utopia in the here and now. While prefiguration has a wide range of possible applications, from fair housing to shared urban gardens, it seeks to create alternative practices, spaces and institutions embodying alternative values such as equality between the sexes, basic income, and racial equality democracy, collaboration and sharing.

Revolutionary Romanticism: Revolutionary Romanticism is distinct from Romanticism in its specific temporal relationship to the future. While Romanticism longs to re-establish an idealized version of the past, Revolutionary Romanticism projects a better future based on a rediscovered long-lost connection to forms of political communities, be that Athenian democracy, medieval communities or proto-communist experimentations, forms of organizing based on collective autonomy*, equality and creativity that stand in opposition to bureaucratic and rational organizing. In other words, Revolutionary Romanticism rethinks a future collective organization through this connection with communities from the past.

Romanticism: This thesis considers Romanticism as a political and cultural movement (Löwy & Sayre, 1992) defined as a common worldview opposed to industrial capitalistic society in the name of values from the past. While Romanticism is a protestation movement, its reactions are multiple and plural, ranging from conservative positions, a fatalist outlook, and revolutionary and utopian aspirations. Despite these differences, Romanticism consciously regrets and seeks to restore a form of lost paradise – a state of osmosis and fusion between nature and culture, the social and the political, the individual and the collective. This forms the starting point of a critique of the disenchantment and alienation produced by the extension of rationalization, quantitative logics, and the scientific organization of industrial capitalism. It protests this cultural hegemony by bolstering a poetic relationship to life, championing the powers of a rich and sensitive inner life as capable of producing other ways of being in the world.

Self-management: Utopian socialism and later anarchism both theorized and established communities that collectively manage their assets and production. Through utopian and concrete experimentations in the 20th century, self-management became a political doctrine, characterized by the ambition to master one's conditions of existence. Self-management is at the core of a new leftist project represented in France by Michel Rocard and the PSU.

Social and Solidarity Economy: The SSE derives from a tradition of voluntary association, social cooperatives and mutualist traditions. Its project revolves around the democratization of the market to avoid exclusion, economically empowering civil society. It can include initiatives such as micro-credits, alternative and local forms of consumption and production, renewable energies, fair trade and ethical finance. It is also mobilized within discourses of the 'Big Society', aiming to constitute a third way between socialism and capitalism, transferring the state's prerogatives to individual actions such as social enterprises or public-private partnerships.

APPENDIX 2: CHRONOLOGY OF ROMANTICISM AND REVOLUTIONARY ROMANTICISM

(Appendix to Chapter 3)

Romanticism	Revolutionary Romanticism
	1754: Rousseau, <i>Discourse on Inequality</i>
	1762: Rousseau, <i>The Social Contract</i>
	1796: Coleridge, <i>Religious Musings</i>
1782: Rousseau, <i>Reveries of the Solitary Walker</i>	
1789: Wordsworth and Coleridge, <i>Lyrical Ballads</i>	
	1800: Bernardin, <i>L'Amazone</i>
1802: Chateaubriand, <i>Génie du Christianisme</i>	
	1808: Fourier, <i>Théorie des Quatre Mouvements</i>
1818: Shelley, <i>Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus</i>	
1820: Shelley, <i>Prometheus Unbound</i>	
1831:	
Hugo, <i>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</i>	
Balzac, <i>Le Chef d'Oeuvre Inconnu</i>	
1834: Balzac, <i>La Recherche de l'Absolu</i>	
1836:	
Gautier, <i>La Morte Amoureuse</i>	
Musset, <i>Confessions of a Child of the Century</i>	
1844: Dumas, <i>The Count of Monte Cristo</i>	
1868: Rossetti, <i>Body's Beauty</i>	
	1874: Hugo, <i>Ninety-Three</i>
1896: Morris, <i>The Well at the World's End</i>	
	1897: Kropotkin, <i>The Anarchist Morality</i>
1897: Stoker, <i>Dracula</i>	
	1894: Tolstoy, <i>The Kingdom of God is Within You</i>

APPENDIX 3: CHRONOLOGY OF FORMS OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

(Appendix to Chapter 4)

Major political events	Forms of Political Engagement
	1959: Formation of ADELS
	1960: Creation of the PSU
	1964: Creation of the CFDT Formation of GAM
1967: Strikes at Rhodiaceta factories	
1968: May and June: General Strike	
	1970: Formation of MLF Formation of FHAR
	1971: Beginning of the Larzac movement Formation of the GIP
1972: Pierre Overney's funeral Common Program of the Left	
	1973: Rassemblement des paysans travailleurs
1974: Michel Rocard leaves the PSU	1974: Beginning of the LIP movement
1975: Comité Communiste de l'Autonomie	

1977:

Rocard's discourse on the "two cultures"

1978:

Strikes against nuclear energy in Brittany

1980:

Major strike in Plogoff against the nuclear station

1978:

Creation of Emploi et Solidarité

1990:

Formation of DAL

1990:

Collective Noborder

Action Climat at Notre-Dame-des-Landes

1992:

Collectif Anti-Pub

2006:

CPE, Occupation at the EHESS

2007:

The invisible Committee, The Coming
Insurrection

2009:

Occupation of Notre-Dame-des-Landes

2011

Publication of "l'Age de Faire"

2014

Constellations

APPENDIX 4: INTERNET SOURCES

(appendix to Chapter 5)

Reference number	Name	Source	Type of data	Link
1	Extrait #106 Mars : Dans la manif : Fabian militant belge	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
2	Extrait #106 Mars : Dans la manif : « marie Charlotte » et Gérard de Street Medic	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
3	Extrait #106 Mars : Dockers de Rouen	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
3	Extrait #102 Mars : Stéphane et Guillaume, sans domiciles fixes	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
4	Extrait #96 Mars : Reportage au meeting organisé par le journal Fakir au Havre	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
5	Extrait #86 Mars : Alain Krivine, homme politique	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
6	Extrait #83 Mars : Sophie Wahnich, historienne spécialiste de la Révolution Française	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
7	Extrait #83 Mars : Breaking News with Bernard Kouchner	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits

8	Extrait #81 Mars : jean-Pierre Siméon, poète	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
9	Extrait #79 Mars : Jacques Testart, biologiste	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
10	Extrait #79 Mars : Eric Fassin, professeur de sciences politiques	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
11	Extrait #79 Mars : Eris Hazan, écrivain et éditeur	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
12	Extrait #74 Mars : Constellations, trajectoires révolutionnaires du jeune 21 ^{ème} siècle	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
13	Extrait #68 Mars : Fik's Niavo, rappeur militant	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
14	Extrait #65 Mars : Edgar Morin, Philosophe	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
15	Extrait #62 Mars : Michel Serres, philosophe	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
16	Extrait #62 Mars : Jacques Rancière, philosophe	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
17	Extrait #57 Mars : Bernard Stiegler, philosophe	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
18	Extrait #46 Mars : Carmen Castillo, documentariste	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits

19	Extrait #50 Mars : Francois Ruffin, journaliste	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
20	Extrait #46 Mars : Francois Cusset, historien des idées	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
21	Extrait #46 Mars – Yanis Varoufakis ex-ministre	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
22	Extrait #45 Mars : Sébastien, Thierry, Réinventer Calais	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
23	Extrait #44 Mars : Gilles Clément, jardinier	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
24	Extrait #43 Mars : Léna, gardienne de la paix	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
25	Extrait #42 Mars : CRS& Occupants	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
26	Extrait #41 Mars : David Graeber, anthropologue	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
27	Extrait #40 Mars : Marie José Mondzain, philosophe	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
28	Extrait #40 Mars : Alain Damasio et Norbert Merjagnan, auteurs	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
29	Extrait #40 Mars : Nacira Guénif Souilamas, sociologue	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits

30	Extrait #37 Mars : Jean-Marie Eyraud, Droit au Logement	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
31	Extrait #38 Mars : Mohammed et Salim, migrants	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
32	Extrait #37 Mars- Rodoplhe Burger, musicien	Radio Debout	Audio Transcription	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits
33	Extrait #83 Mars Breaking News with Bernard Kouchner	Radio Debout	Audio Transcript	https://soundcloud.com/radio-debout/sets/extraits

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