RELATIONS BETWEEN STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS IN FRANCE

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To speak about the students in France, of their struggles, their psychology, and the relations among them and the professors, the society, and the notions of science, we must speak first of May 168.

Before May '68, when Iwas myself a student at the University of Paris, every student felt oppressed, frustrated, rebellious, but alone. (The rate of suicides among students was very high.) We were very brainwashed; many of us thought that just "knowledge" was important, politics was a dirty thing. We were romantics and rebels, but most of us didn't have any idea of the structure of the society; most of us were not able to distinguish between our enemies and our friends. The riots of May '68 began for "nothing".

In the Cite Universitaire, some girls were accusedfor having been in the boy's building. Some students were arrested by the police after a meeting. To obtain the liberation of these students, some demonstrations took place. Nobody was aware of what would happen and the movement grew very suddenly.

Al I that had been denied, quelled and repressed until that time, exploded. The workers at first fought against the repression of the student demonstrators but soon they saw the struggle as their own. There was a general strike for 2 months all over France: no gas, no buses, no taxis, no trains, no planes, nothing... but Life, Solidarity and Fraternity: "Workers-students-peasants: Unite!" The peasants gave free food to the workers, the workers came to the Universities to have heated discussions with the students, the students went to the factories to help picket lines. Everywhere in the streets, people were talking together about the issue of the revolution, the issue of life, the issue of everything. We thought we were alone and we found ourselves in a brotherhood millions strong.

It was an intense experience for all of our generation; justice, communication, hope of a New World and even a glimpse of how beautiful it could be.

Among all the people united together, there were of course many liberal professors at the University. And many of them were very courageous, physically and morally. But as we wanted everything, as we wanted to destroy everything, to change everything, these liberal personalities sometimes couldn't follow the movement completely. Afterwards, the 'leaders' of the workers (workers were the main force) stopped the struggle, telling the people they must be happy with the little things the government had been obliged to give them: the salaries were higher, Universities were given more freedom.

Perhaps the force against us wastoo big? We had to accept our defeat with anger; everything would be just as before. We came back to our studies, but without enthusiasm.

In France there is no tuition at the University. Anyone with a high school diploma has the privilege of enrolling at the University in his district. To enter the University of Paris, the best University (in the system), you need only live in Paris. But usually the best students (in the system) don't attend the University. Instead they go to the "Grandes Ecoles". These are elitistinstitutions, where you must pass a quite difficult exam to enter. Among them are: Ecole Polytechnique (which is a military institute), Ecoles Normales Superieures, Ecole des Ponts, Des Mines, etc... The diplomas obtained in this kind of institution are well appreciated in the capitalist job market because, apart from basicscientific instruction, more or less good, you learn there above all, the love of work and the respect of order and the hierarchy. (With a diploma from Ecole Polytechnique, a 24 year old can find a job paying $1300 a month, which is a lot for France. The oldest University professors don't earn more.)

So the situation of the University of Paris is a paradox: The professors are the most brilliant (in the system) scientists in France, and the students the least brilliant (in the system). This is not exactly true, because now many young people who could enter these Grandes Ecoles, prefer to go to the University even though they will have a more difficult time getting a job afterwards. This is because they hate the Grandes Ecoles as institutions. However, the majority of the students in Paris want to obtain a Master's degree in order to teach in high schools or to find any kind of job. There is plenty of unemployment, and it is very difficult ta get jobs; therefore, the students aren1t "very idealistic. They don't care too much about "Science", "Knowledge", "Research", "Creativity". They are usually very clever and creative, but some do not go into science because they doubt the usefulness of science in a capitalist country.

If the organization of the Universities in France has not changed too much after '58, the students have changed a lot; before they were polite, awed, and alone: "Good morning, Monsieur le Professeur." If They failed an exam: "Thank you, Monsieur le Professeur." Now manytimes it is the professors who are afraid of the students. Sometimes they do not understand the destructive aspect of the youth in France because of course they themselves are more or less "established" in the society. I think it is really difficult for a professor to be liberal. Some students laugh openly at the self styled erudition and knowledge of their teachers. The professors cannot understand that some students break the furniture in the Universities, especially the steel legs of the chairs and tables, which can be helpful as weapcns against the police in demonstrations. Similarly the faucets of the sinks all disappear, ta be thrown at the police; the building is new (2 years old) but not one faucet of a sink remains. Many things are broken, sometimes by the police and sometimes by the students who use whatever They can for ammunition.

In France, it has always been very popular to write on the wall: in the streets. In '58 the students began writing on the walls inside buildings and now there is no one place left without graffiti inside the Universities. This created an ongoing conflict with the University administration; the conflict has [illegible] in the following ironie situation:

About once a month the administration paints the walls to get rid of the slogans and paintings. However, after a moment of melancholy, the students enthusiastically begin the cycle again on the fresh walls: early in the morning some student will paint on the new immaculate wall in red: "Hello! They have painted it again".

During and after '68, these slogans, among many others, appeare(cn the walls of schools and Universities:

"Profs, vous nous faites Vieillir"
(Professors, you make us get old)

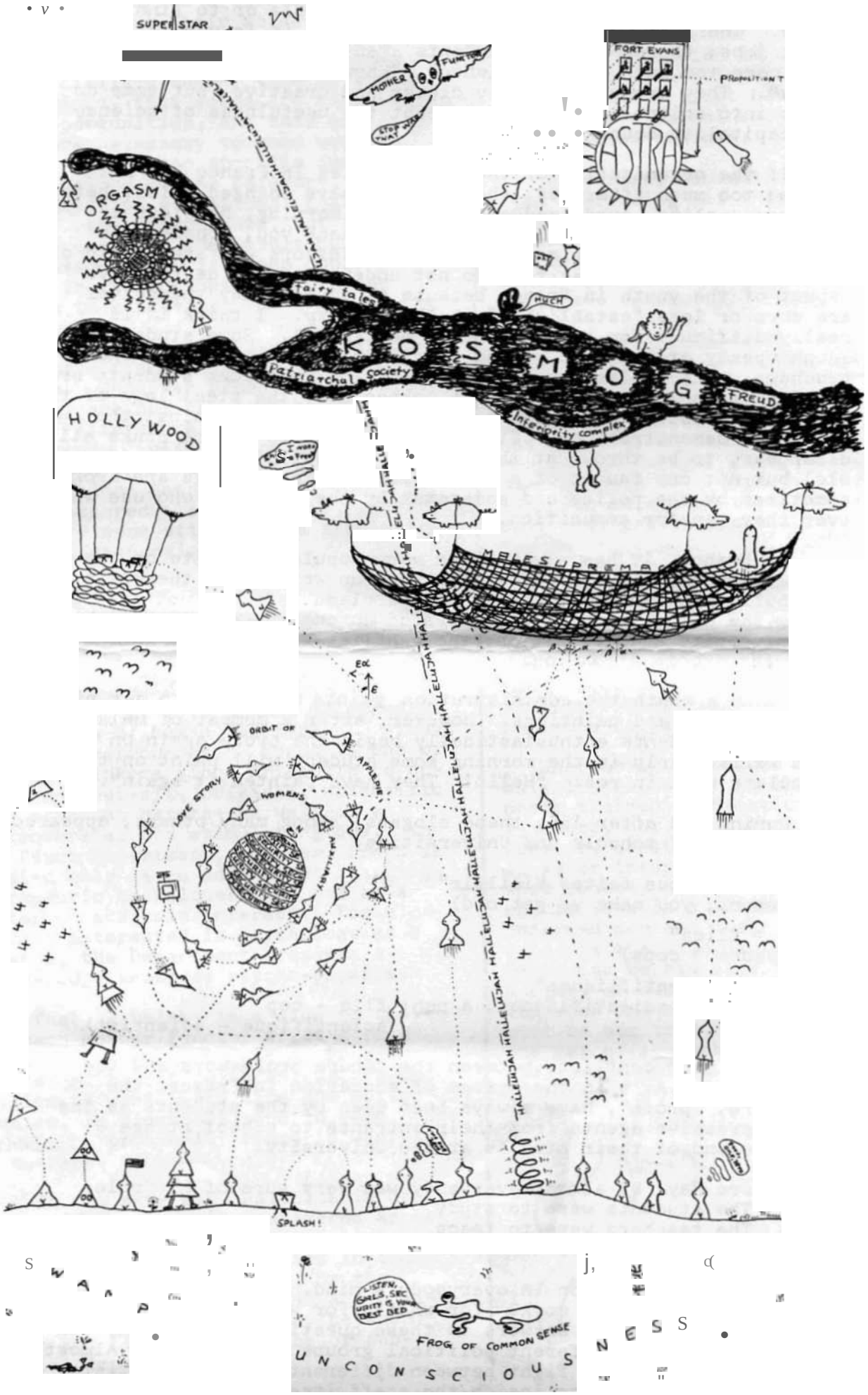
"Profs = flics"
(Professors = cops)

"A bas les scientifliques"
(Dawn with the scientifliques, a pun: flic - cop
scientifique - scientist),

There were many conflicts between the tenure professors and the students and T.A.'s. In the system of education in France, the professors, "profs", have always been seen by the students as the first repressive agents from their entrance to schoel at age 6 until the end of their studies at the University.

Before May '58 almost everybody was very sure of his role:
The students were to study
The teachers were to teach
The workers were to work.

Now, there was confusion in everybody's mind. But, why do we have to study, to teach, to wcrk? For what? For whom? And who are our allies? The different answers to these questions create many conflicts between the different political groups of students. Almost everyday there is some fight between different kinds of leftists. Also there are conflicts inside the staff itself, until now without physical fights. The math department of Paris, like many others, broke into 3 parts. In the same building, there are 3 different

ON BECOMING A WOMAN MATHEMATICIAN

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