The concept of “repertoire of collective actions” or “contentious repertoire”, introduced by Charles Tilly (Tilly 1977), is meant to describe and explain why actors use some particular ways of action to make claims – and not others – in a given place and time. Most of the scholars who have been working in this research field have concentrated on long time evolution of contentious repertoires and performances. The main debates were about the chronology of this evolution (Offerlé 2008, Péchu 2006, Sewell 1990, Tilly 1986, Traugott 1995) – when do the repertoire change – and, behind this controversy, about the factors of these transformations. Two methods were then used, exclusively or at the same time. The first consisted in Protest Event Analysis (PEA), that is, big catalogues of contentious performances, in order to capture the main changes of repertoire and to connect them with changes in social structure. The second was what Tilly referred to as “storytelling” (Tilly 2008: 5): describing and interpreting the variations in contentious performances through a large collection of sources about mobilizations in delimited places (Tilly 1986). In both cases the focus was kept on long time changes and macro-structural factors.

Since the 1990s, however, a progressive narrowing of the focus took place in the sociology of contentious repertoires, in order to give more precise accounts of the evolution of particular ways of action within a repertoire. This trend was active especially in France, with monographs of demonstration (Fillieule 1997), petition (Contamin 2001), squat (Péchu 2006) or hunger strike (Siméant 1993, 1998: 277-355, 2009) for instance, but also in the United States (Traugott, 1995). It implied a larger attention to what is at stake at the level of the actors of social movements. What are the cultural and symbolic significations the actors attribute to the contentious performances they carry out? What kind of personal resources and social skills are involved in the use of such or such way of action? How do conflictual relations between the different groups involved constrain activists' performances? Asking such questions is not giving up the structural explanation of the evolution of repertoires, but showing through what mediations and tactical adaptations the macro-structural factors of change become effective. Nevertheless, focusing on actors to understand the dynamics of the use of repertoires implies other unexplored potentialities. In particular, vast monographs of particular performances don't go far enough in analysing how actors appropriate a way of action, that is, not only how a contentious performance change in long term, but how actors learn how to play it and introduce small variations in it. This kind of questions may seem very

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micro-sociological. But they may tell us a lot about the conditions of regularity and variation of repertoires.

The point of this paper is to show in what extent these questions can be addressed through ethnographical method, that is, “any type of inquiry relying on a personal and long-time insertion of the sociologist into the group he studies” (Schwartz 2011: 338). It is based on a part of my dissertation research involving an ethnographical investigation about *assemblées générales* (AG) in French student movements since 2006, in two higher education establishments in Paris. *Assemblées générales* (general meetings) are meetings including debates and votes about the movement, theoretically opened to any student of the establishment. I will first make a review of the evolution of questioning and methods in contentious repertoire analysis and a presentation of my position in the ethnographical investigation I am carrying out, in order to expose then the interests, techniques and limits of this work. I will highlight two facets of the use of repertoires ethnographical method allows to perceive: the dimension of socialization, that is, how participants learn in practice how to play a contentious performance, and the role of competition and conflicts between subgroups of participants in the variations of a performance, which appears to the sociologist as long as (s)he is included in one of these subgroups.

I. New perspectives about repertoires require new methods: from repertoires to performances

The notion and metaphor of “repertoire” is supposed to account for the regularity of the ways of making collective claims in a given period of history, as well as their heterogeneity in space and time. Like musicians and actors, activists make claim by adapting performances they draw from “standardized, limited repertoires” (Tilly 2008: xiii). The notion is meant to express a paradox: why do claim makers use a limited number of techniques rather than inventing others which might better fit their goals? The answer implied by the metaphor is that there is an autonomy and a stability of claim-making practices, which make it easier to act in the patterns they define than in others. Given the rather loose use of this metaphor by numerous scholars (Fillieule 2010: 81, Offerlé 2008), Tilly intended to specify the meaning of this concept in his last work, *Contentious Performances*. First, he made a distinction between performances and repertoires, “two related theatrical metaphors” (Tilly 2008: 14) made to understand ways of making claims. Performances are all the different claim-making forms that compose a repertoire: “Presentation of a petition, taking of a hostage, or mounting of a demonstration” (*ibid*.). Indeed, the notion of repertoire implies that “a given claimant have more than one way to make collective claims” (*ibid*.), that is, know different performances,
that coherently cluster into the repertoire of a given period\(^1\). Hence, *assemblées générales* are a performance used in the French worker movement since at least the end of the 19\(^{th}\) century (Perrot 1974: 427-428). They have been part of the French contentious repertoire since then. But students never picked it in the contentious repertoire before 1968: previously, they gathered in meetings reserved to members of a particular student union or youth organisation. So, the tactical repertoire of French students changed at this time, through the introduction of a new performance, which has been constantly used since then.

In *Contentious Performances*, Tilly delineates the main characteristics of a repertoire. We will stress four of them. “In particular times and space, performances cluster into a limited number of recurrent, well-defined types” (Tilly 2008: 60). The limitation of available performances is not so much due to technical constraints as to cultural ones: we can notice that actors never resort to some combinations of actions they are technically able to use. “For a given set of actors and issues, those performances change relatively little from one round of action to the next” (*ibid.*), but what happens in one claim-making campaign or movement has effects on what happens in the next one. An evidence of the existence of repertoires is that they give rise to shared definitions of them: participants “[give] names to them, [refer] to previous actions of the same kind, [give] each other instructions, [adopt] divisions of labor that require prior consultation or experience, [anticipate] each other's actions, and/or [terminate] actions more or less simultaneously” (*ibid.*).

These terminological distinctions are not useless rigid classifications. They allow to formulate an important shift in the object of contentious repertoires analysis, from the evolution of global contentious repertoires to an attention to performances themselves. The use of the notion of repertoires raises two questions: how do repertoires change? And how do performances change within them? Obviously, Tilly first addressed the former. He tried to establish when and why global changes of contentious repertoires could be observed. For that purpose, he and other scholars resorted to two main methods or a combination of them, one quantitative, the other qualitative. The qualitative one was inspired by traditional history: large collection of sources about mobilizations were analysed through interpretative narratives of the dynamics of change in repertoires.

\(^1\) Moreover, different social groups, limited by particular resources and constraints, use different repertoires in the same period of time. Fillieule suggested to save the expression of “contentious repertoire” to the set of performances used in a given period and country, and to refer to particular groups’ specific repertoires as “tactical repertoires” (Fillieule 2010: 82). Hence, workers, feminist groups, employers and students have their tactical repertoire, constrained by the available repertoire in the country and period of time they live in.
Relying on both methods, Tilly claimed that a shift in repertoires took place in the first half of the 19th century, in particular in France and in Great Britain (Tilly 1986, 1995, 2008). Before this turning point, the contentious performances took the shape of *charivaris* and serenades, food seizures and attacks on persons and properties, mutinies... Then, claimants had recourse to the set of performances we still know: strikes, demonstrations, electoral meetings and campaigns... The first repertoire was directed on local targets and involving local groups (Tilly said it was “parochial”); its performances were differentiated among groups, situations and localities (it was “particular”); it implied both “direct action with respect to nearby objects of claims and action mediated by (...) powerful people with respect to distant object of claims” (it was “bifurcated”) (Tilly 2008: 43).

Instead, the second is national (“cosmopolitan”), “autonomous” with regard to the means of action used by activists – never used by other actors – and its performances could easily be transferred from an arena to another (it is “modular”) (Tilly, 1986, 1995: 363, 2008: 44).

All along his different works, Tilly correlated this evolution with three main factors, which are very slow macro-structural transformations. Emergence of capitalism developed communications and migrations, increasing standardisation of collective action. Urbanisation and the diffusion of mass-media created a public space, making the costs of mobilization decrease and imposing the legitimacy of people's claim-making. In the third place, the construction of the nation-state nationalized the forms, actors and targets of contention.

The chronology Tilly suggested was soon criticized by other scholars. But what was at stake in these controversies was mostly the kind of factors that should be stressed to explain the evolution of repertoires (Fillieule 2010: 87). Sewell saw the big change in the French repertoire not at the beginning of the 19th century, but at the end of the 18th (Sewell 1990). Obviously, Tilly's chronology tended to reduce the weight of crisis in the explanation, since it was disconnecting the change of French repertoire from the big event of the 1789 Revolution. To the contrary, Sewell's one showed “Why the French Revolution made a difference”, to quote the subtitle of his paper. Similarly, some scholars reconstituted the history of some particular performances, like barricades (Traugott 1995) and squat (Péchu 2006), and demonstrated that they disrupted Tilly's chronology.

A trend in sociology of mobilization thus emerged, with studies focusing on particular performances, and the internal dynamics of their own evolution. This shift from repertoires to particular performances allowed to highlight different facets of these dynamics. Authors emphasized the role of the strategical and tactical choices of actors. They paid attention to interactions between actors, for instance, activists and the police (Fillieule 1997), and among the mobilized groups themselves. They analysed activists' learnings and knowledges involved in the

In Contentious Performances, Tilly took into account this shift in analysis from repertoires to performances. The point of his book is to detect the role of changing performances in the most global evolution of repertoires, because it's the level at which historical change actualise in people's practices: “learning occurs at all four levels [mere actions, interactions, performances and repertoires], but pride of place goes to the level of performances” (Tilly 2008: 17).

“Most of all, participants in contentious politics learn how to match performances with local circumstances, to play their own part within those performances, and to modify performances in the light of their effects. As a result, performances vary and change in partial independence of repertoires.” (Tilly 2008: 18)

This displacement of the object of study implies methodological changes. Tilly recognized that PEA, a very useful tool to capture large changes, was not sufficient to explore the dynamics of change in performances:

“How can we capture such a complex process over thousands of externally described episode?
This book makes the attempt to emphasizing history.” (Tilly 2008: 29)

As a result, he suggested the use of a mixed and complex quantitative and qualitative method, “by hewing to a middle ground between Thompson's supple literary narratives and the stiff numbers of classified even counts” (Tilly 2008: 65). Tilly thus tried to connect macro and micro levels. He didn't give up the explanatory force of macro-structural changes in the study of repertoires. But he showed that the attention to performances allows to capture the mediations through which slow structural trends become effective, at the level of actors, and translate in concrete constraints to them (Tilly 2008: 79, 105, 115).

However, despite of this narrowing of the focus on performances, the emergence of new interrogations about them and the diversification of methods used to observe them, claimed use of ethnographical method in this research field remains rare. Christophe Broqua made an ethnographical study of Act Up Paris and analysed the principal performance used by this group, “zap” (Broqua 2006). Without his personal participation to zaps and his long investigation on the
association, he would not have been able to expose the complex mobilization as well as fabric of emotions, and in particular of anger, it implies (Broqua 2006, Broqua and Fillieule 2009). Thanks to ethnographical investigations, Sommier and Siméant made thorough descriptions of the socially shaped use of bodies implied in hunger strike (Siméant 1993, 1998, 2009) and in the French union stewards' actions (Sommier 1993a, 1993b).

Two aspects of Siméant's works will retain our attention. First, she managed to reconstruct how immigrants learnt how to perform hunger strike: not through a transmission between immigrant strikers, but more often through the experience of the use of bodies in jail. Only long proximity with strikers allows to obtain materials about the networks and places which informed their learning. Then, she identified the different interests and constraints experienced by different subgroups which were allies in the strikes, in particular by the strikers and the activists who supported them. Such analysis breaks the usual façade of the mobilized group as united by a single interest – the success of the campaign. But only a long immersion into these groups permits to detect the potential hidden conflicts or divergences between subgroups with different positions.

Consequently, I will argue that ethnographical method in contentious repertoires analysis allows to open two black boxes of this research field: socialization on the one hand, and small variations, generated by the divergences between subgroups in a mobilization, on the other hand. Indeed, Tilly continuously affirms “the learned, yet improvisational character” (Tilly 2008: 14) of performances, which the theatrical metaphor is supposed to account for. Yet, the analysis of performances rarely go deeply enough to describe how people learn how to play a performance – that is, the socialization in practice – and what makes them improvise in a way instead of another. Actually, Tilly usually deals with the small variations and innovations actors continually introduce in performances by reducing them to either chance or rational choice – choosing the so-called objective better means to the end. Yet, “culture constrains strategy” (Polletta 2002: 3), and if it is the case in Tilly's analysis of repertoires and performances, it should also be true at the level of small variations. These neglected objects of contentious repertoires analysis are not secondary. Indeed, they allow to understand how performances become performances – that is, how actors appropriate them, both learning and altering them, which is the condition of their regularity. I will develop the two of them after presenting the ethnographical investigation on which they are based.

II. Ethnographical method: choosing tools and positions in the field

As claimed in a recent review of methodological and analytical perspectives in sociology of mobilizations (Combes et al. 2011), due to the traditions of research and to its lower cost,
ethnographical method has as much become a routine in France as it fails to be taken for granted in the United States. As a result, the restatements of the conditions of ethnographical method and of its validity matter. It implies three main rules: “familiarity with people, reflexivity or auto-analysis and long term” (Combes et al. 2011: 14, Beaud and Weber 2003). Given this short definition, any sociological investigation which relies on these principles could be said to be ethnographical: “Ethnography consists in an epistemological rather than in the application of a specific (…) technique of investigation” (Bargel 2009: 49). It may be based on having them fill in a survey (Soutrenon 2005), making moves from quantitative to ethnographical data to refine categories (Weber 1995), interviewing people (Beaud 1996) or, of course, practising participant observation. With regard to the latter, methods can experience continuous variations from hidden to open observation, with diverse balance between observation and active participation, and different relations of the researcher to the field – the immersion may be anterior to the decision to observe, or the sociologist can enter an unfamiliar environment (Soulez 2007: 128-130).

I first entered the world of student activism at the end of the year 2006, that is, a few months after a major social movement in France and in particular in French universities, opposing the governmental project of creating a labour contract specific to young people – the *Contrat première Embauche* (CPE). Because of academic constraints, I did not participate in this movement, which I strongly regretted. This was not without relations with two concomitant decisions: from an academic point of view, studying student movements, and in particular their organisational repertoire (Clemens 1993), characterized in 2006 by the massive participation to *assemblées générales* (Crettiez and Sommier 2006: 304), and in my personal life, getting involved in a student union. Then, my first investigation about student movements took place in 2006-2007, for my Master’s thesis. Since there was not any student movement during that academic year, I studied the 2006 movement through interviews and the collection of archives. I selected two establishments to study. One was the École normale supérieure (ENS) of Paris: I found it easier to choose this one because I was myself a student there and already knew some of the activists. In the aftermath of the 2006 movement, some people had created a union affiliated with a national federation, SUD-Étudiant. As a result, my first interviews of student activists were with members of that union. If the interactions were based on academic interests to me, they saw it as a recruitment interviews: they introduced me to the activities of the union during the social movements, in an obvious attempt to convince me to join, which I progressively did. From that time on, I have been studying *assemblées générales* in social movements, being besides a member of SUD-Étudiant, and as such an active participant to social movements and their AG.

Hence, I have been in the position of the sociologist whose field goes from rather unknown
to familiar, through the process of investigation, which can be characterized as “a form of socialization” (Combes et al. 2011: 19). The particularity here is that I was not socialized to the world of student activism as a researcher with motivations external to the field only, but also as a “genuine”, so to speak, activist. That does not make any difference with regard to the intensity of interactions with actors in comparison with other very participant investigations. As Christophe Broqua put it, analysing his ethnographical investigation in Act Up Paris:

“Lorsque l’objet de recherche est une mobilisation collective, l’engagement ethnographique a toutes les chances de prendre la forme d’un engagement militant, mais cela peut n’être ici qu’une figure particulière de l’« anthropologie impliquée » (...), supposant à la fois engagement ethnographique dans l’action et distanciation (éventuellement critique) dans l’analyse.” (Broqua 2009: 111)

What makes a difference are the doubts the situation might create about the investigator's interests:

“La question [que l'observateur participant] inspire presque inévitablement est celle de son rapport à la cause étudiée : son adhésion politique ou idéologique au mouvement, sa participation aux actions militantes, et finalement la hiérarchie de ses intérêts entre recherche et militantisme.” (Ibid..)

The conversion to the actors' perception schemes is part of the investigation through participant observation. But how can you stay neutral, distant and critical when you then analyse what they do? Moreover, where Broqua experienced a sympathy toward Act Up, I am strongly convinced by the cause and way of organizing of French student movements, and in particular by the positions of my union, with regard to the positions of other organizations involved in them, allies and rivals. The solutions I found to these problems take place at three levels : the choice of the fieldsites, the attitude in the analysis, and the hierarchy of the academic and militant interests.

The first solution I found was to observe student mobilizations not in only one establishment, but in several, and in at least one where I was not personally involved. When I made the investigation for my thesis of the Master second year, in 2008-2009, there was a movement in the universities against a series of reforms in higher education. I had then the opportunity to add participant observation to my set of tools. However, I first decided not to observe the mobilization at ENS, because that was the place where I was personally involved in the movement, as a unionist, and where I had non-academic interests in the action. Thus, I resolved to follow the mobilization as a researcher in another site: Censier, one of the campuses of Paris 3, and to participate in it as an activist at ENS. In Censier, the investigation consisted in attending the AG, from the top of the amphitheatre, where the students who never or rarely make public speeches sit, in conducting in-depth interviews with participants, and in collecting as much information as I could through informal talks, mailing lists, leaflets and so on. However, I soon realized that the position I had as a
much more active participant at ENS made me see different things: for instance, I could observe many informal interactions which taught me a lot about the dynamics of AG. That is why I finally chose to have a double fieldsite: one where observation prevailed over participation, and the other, where I was an activist as well as a researcher, where participation prevailed over observation.

I adopted the same combination for my dissertation research. I am now a member of SUD-Étudiant in another establishment, Paris 1 University. My fieldsites are Censier and one of the campuses at Paris 1, the Pierre Mendès France (PMF) centre. This solution allows me to experiment different positions depending on the fieldsite. Then I can use the tool of comparison, in particular to control the information I get in the establishment where I am the most involved. That is one of the condition Schwartz mentioned to ensure reliability of ethnographical method:

“[L'ethnographie] doit s'astreindre à considérer son objet sur une longue période de temps, en diversifiant les contextes, en combinant plusieurs types de données, en multipliant les occasions de comparaison. Le principe de variation des situations dans le temps limite les risques d'arbitraire.” (Schwartz 2011: 357)

This variation of the position in the different fieldsites does not exempt me from answering the question of the hierarchy of the academic and activist interests. This question exists at the level of the analysis: in what extent my personal opinions as a militant influence my sociological interpretations? Broqua's answer seems sufficient to me: involvement and participation, including experiencing personal interests, feelings and opinions, is not exclusive from distance in analysis, every time I write. Having my own opinions when I am acting does not imply that I cannot understand other ones, connect mines to my own social position, and theirs to their position. Different interests and schemes of perceptions are accessible in particular through interviews with varied actors. The difficulties that could be encountered in making them accepting my interview requests because, as an identified member of SUD-Étudiant, I am a rival or an adversary in the course of action, is a different matter that I will address later in this paper. But the question of the hierarchy of interests does not only exist at the level of the analysis, but in many concrete contexts in the field. How do I act when militant interests seem to lead me to actions that might deserve my academic interests?

Here again, I chose to have a different answer for each place. In Censier and in interviews, I never influence the course of action by my participation, even when militant interests would lead me to do so. In Paris 1 and the internal life of my union, that is, everywhere I am also acting as an activist, I often wondered how to behave. But eventually I never prevented myself from acting as my militant sense told me: from giving my opinion, from involving in some conflict, from influencing the decision, from writing texts about AG and how they should be, and so on. The only
cases when academic motivations prevailed over militant ones were not cases of limitation of my participation, but cases when I did something I would not have done as an activist, for instance attending a meeting which I expected to be boring.

Why did I maintain my political commitment? First, because I wanted to— as an activist. Then, because it would be very difficult to observe student social movements if the most committed activists would not be sure that I strongly share the goals of the movements. In fact, as a Ph.D. student, I am part of the group who is supposed to be mobilized during student movements. Actually, tensions are very high during such movements between those who support them and the others. Even when they knew I was an activist and not only a researcher, I encountered some suspicions about my commitment to the strike: since I was observing the movement, I had not totally downed tools. These doubts suggest the difficulties I would meet with if I would stay exterior to the movements. Lastly, I progressively got convinced that each time I act as an activist instead of limiting my activity in order not to influence the process of action, from an academic point of view, I learn more about student activists' schemes of perception and action, and about what I have been socialized to do as such.

Consequently, the places of my ethnographical investigation are the following ones. I am studying AG in student movements since 2006 in Censier and PMF. Four student movements happened since then: against CPE (2006), against reforms in higher education (2007, 2009), and against a retirement reform (2010). In Censier, my materials are archives and interviews for the 2006 and 2007 movements, and also data drawn from participant observation for the 2009 and 2010 mobilizations. In Paris 1, I use archives and interviews for 2006, 2007 and 2009 movements, and made active participant observation in 2010. Moreover, following the principle I just mentioned, I accepted to become a member of SUD-Étudiant's “secrétariat fédéral”\(^2\) — that is, its national instance, from December 2009 to March 2011. In this context, I also had the opportunity to make a participant observation of how the national level of student organizations prepared the 2010 movement, interacted in it, and what use of the call to AG they made, in particular through observations of internal and inter-organization meetings.

III. Studying the socialization in practice

The first unexplored aspect of performances ethnographical method allows to study is the\(^2\) I found myself in a similar position than Lucie Bargel's one, when she accepted to become part of the region-wide direction of one of the youth organization she studied (Bargel 2009).
dimension of socialization. People learn how to contest, and this learning implies new activities, identities, new skills and perceptions schemes. In short, they are socialized to contention. However, the question of how they learn it had stayed a black box in contentious repertoires analysis. Nevertheless, asking this question permits to address an important question about performances and repertoires. Is the regularity of their use by claimants due to an explicit transmission among actors, or to submission of actors to the same constraints – same constraints implying same ways of actions (Siméant 1998, 2009) ? Siméant showed that there was not any transmission between previous and new illegal immigrants using hunger strike. That pleads in favour of the idea that the recourse to hunger strike is only recurrent among people with very scarce means because it is convenient to the constraints they meet with. However, immigrants practising hunger strike actually experienced processes of learning, habituation to corporal suffering and potentially its contentious use, in particular in jail. Siméant got the materials to prove it through long-time proximity with strikers.

Indeed, ethnographical method seems to be the best way to get access to socialization “in practices” (Bargel 2009: 321). It has become a commonplace that activism implies some processes of learning and secondary socialization (Berger and Luckmann 1966), some skills and knowledge that compose a specific capital, militant capital\(^3\), which implies, between other skills, knowing how to perform some particular repertoires (Mathieu 2007: 77). However, whereas the possible transfers of skills from other spheres to the militant one – and inversely – have been largely developed, the analysis rarely deals with the restitution of the process of militant socialization itself : “Who teaches to whom ? How ? And what is learned ?” (Bargel 2009, ibid.). Actually, many scholars who study socialization in politics or activism concentrate on socialization as a result: they enumerate the skills actors do possess, and deduce from the social places they used to attend and from the people they met where and by whom they were socialized. Quantitative methods can offer this kind of results. Instead, Lucie Bargel resorted to ethnographical method to study political socialization in the youth organization (Bargel 2009). Thus, she was able to study socialization not only as a result but “as a process” and “in progress” (Bargel 2009: 321).

Indeed, ethnographical method, and in particular participant observation, fits theses goals, not only because it allows to observe socialization in progress, but because the sociologist actually experiment the process, getting thus insights on some realities which may never appear in activists' discourse. After Loïc Wacquant, we can refer to it, in this case, as “initiatory immersion, and even moral and sensual conversion to the cosmos under investigation, construed as a technique of

\(^3\) “(...) incorporé sous forme de techniques, de dispositions à agir, intervenir, ou tout simplement obéir, il recouvre un ensemble de savoirs et de savoir-faire mobilisables lors des actions collectives, des luttes inter ou intra-partisanes, mais aussi exportables, convertibles dans d'autres univers, et ainsi susceptibles de faciliter certaines « reconversions »” (Matonti and Poupeau 2004: 8).
observation and analysis that (...) makes it possible for the sociologist to appropriate in and through practice the cognitive, aesthetic, ethical, and conative schemata that those who inhabit that cosmos engage in their (...) deeds” (Wacquant 2004: vii-viii). I will specify here what specific information I got through ethnographical method about socialization to contentious performances, in this case assemblées générales.

The observer of recent French student movements actually do not need ethnographical method to make hypothesis about where student activists learnt how to perform their tactical repertoire. (S)he only has to look at the chronology of these movements. Since 2006, the movements in French universities have succeeded at a very rapid rhythm. There was one mobilization every year or every two years: in 2006, 2007, 2009 and 2010. Thus, students had many occasion to experiment their tactical repertoire, and in particular their organizational repertoire – the type of organizational forms they use. Moreover, students who mobilized in 2006 could have experienced other mobilizations: in 2003, several French universities knew student mobilizations against the reform of degrees in higher education, unifying the European higher education system into three homogeneous levels. Furthermore, students who have just entered the University in 2006 had had the opportunity to participate to a movement in high schools in 2005, opposing a reform implemented by the Minister of Education François Fillon. During this high school movements, the organizational repertoire was the same that it is in student movements since the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s (Côme and Morder 2009, Gobille 2008, Hatzfeld 2005, Legois, Monchablon and Morder 2006, Morder 2003/2004, Tilly 1986: 540): general meetings in every establishment, enforcement of the AG's decisions by a more restraint committee, called “comité d'action”, “de lutte”, “de grève” or “de mobilisation”, and nation-, region- and/or city-wide organization of the movement by coordinations, assembling delegates from each AG or committee.

As a result, students activists get a socialization to their tactical repertoire during the successive mobilizations. For some of them, they are also socialized between and during the movements inside of organizations, student unions and/or youth organizations. Hence, there is very few learning about how to perform AG which comes from improvisation as such, contrary to Tilly's formulations. In most of the universities, there are more experienced student activists who know a set of ready-made solutions to most of the problems that can be encountered when you organize an AG, and who transmit it to other students. In this context, the question of how claimants learn how to perform AG is almost the same than the question of from whom they learn it.

I will highlight four main characteristics of this socialization which ethnographical method
allow to appreciate: it is informal, concealed by ideology, involving emotions and affects and consisting in techniques of the body (Mauss 1934). Is is informal because formation of less experienced activists by more experienced ones do not take place through interactions explicitly dedicated to it. Student activists are trained on the job, so to speak. They learn how to participate to an AG or how to organize it when others incite them to carry out some tasks, through imitation, and through informal discussions when others give them advices or tell anecdotes about AG. That gives them tips about how to make public speeches and about the different tasks that need to be done in AG (moderating, note taking...). As this inculcation is informal, it can happen almost any time. That is it can only be captured through long-time – and not punctual – observation of activists. Moreover, as the processes of learning are informal and sometimes tacit, and since all these knowledges have become taken for granted habits to many students, activists rarely mention them extensively in interviews. That is why participant observation is convenient to seize them (Bargel 2009: 51). Furthermore, ethnographical method allows to perceive that informal formation prevails even when explicit formations do exist. Indeed, organization archives are full of congress texts, handouts and militant press articles which explain to their members how to speak in public or how an AG should be organized. Besides, unions and youth organizations offer moments of explicit formations to public speech to their members. However, even if consulting these archives can give precious insights about the different organizations' positions, familiarity with activists and direct observation of these moments of formation reveal the priority of informal socialization. For instance, I participated in February 2010 to a formation to public speeches in AG, organized by SUD-Étudiant in Paris. Participants had to play short scenes that can happen in AG, while other participants played their opponents (students opposing the movement, teachers, members of rivals organizations...). Actually, they did not take the exercise seriously, and preferred to caricature the opponents instead of really practising their ability to public speech. Hence, the explicit formation failed – to the opinion of all the present people. But through the jokes they made, participants had the occasion to reinforce, and to inculcate to the few novices who were here, the collective perception and evaluation schemes they share: knowledges about who are their opponents in AG and what they dislike so much in them.

The second reason why ethnographical method is peculiarly convenient to capture socialization to contentious performances is that it gives access to “unofficial practices” (Schwartz 2011: 338). Unofficial and tacit do not necessarily mean “voluntarily hidden”. Socialization in mobilizations is partly unofficial because what is learnt tends to be taken for granted by activists while they get more and more used to it. But the apprenticeship which is required to be able to take an active part in AG also stays unofficial because it contradicts the explicit ideology which goes
with them: anyone can participate, can make public speeches in them and express him/herself through voting. Then, activists are not very willing to reveal that active participation supposes a long training – whereas most of the students remain part of the passive audience of activists' speeches if they do not get caught in the socializing process. The process of learning a performance is hard to detect because it contradicts the common democratic believes of many social movements.

In the third part, ethnographical method helps to seize the process of socialization because the latter goes through emotions. Such social realities are very hard to capture if one do not know well the people one observe, or if one have not personally experienced some of them. Emotions were useful to me at two points. First, the feeling of unease can be a powerful symptom of a process of secondary socialization in progress. That suggests that the role the activist is trying to play do not fit yet his/her previous identity, that something specific to the sphere of contention has to be learnt – that alignments between personal and collective identity are still required (Bargel 2009: 404-411). Then, socialization operates through “significant others” (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Given that it does not go through explicit formation, emotional attachment plays a great part in the determination of who socializes who. Newcomers learn from people they admire, imitate, to which they identify and listen. But detecting such relationships between activists implies a long familiarity with them. First, because people do not willingly talk about them in interviews, and if they do, it is partly useless to the investigator if (s)he does not know the names they quote. In this use of emotions, we can join Wacquant’s notations about “the necessity of a sociology no only of the body, in the sense of object, but also from the body, that is, deploying the body as tool of inquiry and vector of knowledge” (Wacquant 2004: viii). That is even more the case when we deal with socialization involving techniques of the body.

I will not detail here every category of knowledge and skill student activists learn about how to perform AG, but only what regards techniques of the body⁴, since that is one of the facet of socialization that requires the most ethnographical method to be captured. Indeed, performing AG, and in particular practising the most central of the activity they involve, that is, public speech, requires a physical adaptation. Public speeches in AG cannot only rely on oratory skills students acquire at the University. It implies speaking in front of several hundreds of students, often chatting, sometimes applauding, screaming or booing. Moreover, a lot of orators succeed to each other. To have a chance to be listened, activists have to conquer the audience's attention. Such performances impose to speak load, but also to express – to play – some qualities: self-confidence, authority and

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⁴ We use this phrase introduced by Mauss to refer to uses of corporal attitudes which are meant to be efficient and which are socially transmitted, which then intricate social symbols and physical abilities – that is, “physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of acts” (Mauss 1934).
strength, conformity in behaviour and clothes to militant codes, likeability..., which go through several techniques of the body: how to stand, how to hold the microphone, and so on.

But the techniques of the body do not involve only physical behaviour: they also relate to the relations participant have with the space where the AG take place. AG can be organized in universities halls or square, or even in gymnasium when attendance justifies it. But most of the time they take place in amphitheatres. To behave in such places implies a game with their symbolic dimensions: to start with, to conquer the access to the platform, desk and blackboard, a position usually reserved to teachers, and to take advantage of the authority which is etched on it. As a rule, the control of space implied by the mastered performance of AG involves from the most active participants to move more than others – to go from one group to another in order to diffuse and exchange information or to incite some groups to express approbation or discontent –, to control the space around the platform, and to be able to detect in the audience the repartition of the different groups, since activists from the same organization, for instance, usually sit together. We see here that ethnographical method gives access to concrete, material and often unexplored dimensions of contention. Indeed, sociologists sometimes forget that mobilizations take place somewhere, and that the spatial configurations constrain and inform social processes as well as they are their product (Combes et al. 2011: 21-22, Fillieule 2010: 96).

The benefits of ethnographical method to study the apprenticeship of contentious performances are thus obvious. However, it raises the question of the form of evidence. The sociologist learns how performances are learnt by learning them by him/herself. But all the materials, and even the majority of the materials, cannot come only from his/her personal experience. If they do, they run the risk to stay very singular and subjective. What is the status of the sociologist's own experience in the set of evidence? To me, the materials produced through personal experiments have mostly the status of insights and clues. For the researcher, they are indications about where to look after other materials: observation of other actors, informal discussions or interviews with them. I will give two examples of that method. That is because I experienced the huge anxiety that precedes the first AG of a mobilization – will students answer to the call to mobilization? – that I got attentive to the external manifestations of such anxiety in other people – singing in order to encourage each other, for instance. Being a woman, I have also experienced how much it takes to expose oneself to the public sphere of AG depending on gender. Then, I have developed a series of questions in interviews about public exposure and public speeches in AG, and obtained very enlightening answers by women. I also tried to capture through observation of the physical attitudes of orators, the virile style of speech in AG, which makes it so
difficult for women to appropriate the role. Of course, when the sociologist does not have any other evidence than personal experience of something (s)he wants to highlight, this kind of materials stays legitimate. But they are more often useful as insights and invitations to accumulate other type of evidence.

Moreover, ethnographical method can include control by quantitative data. Then, the constitution of these data relies on questions and categories drawn from qualitative investigation. Hence, I do use quantitative data. But I did not need to establish the regularity of the students' use of AG through PEA : all the historical works about student movements have well established its recurrence since 1968. By contrast, I felt the need to compare the trajectories of the activists I met in the field with those of other student activists. That is why I made participants of the 2011 congresses of the main left-wing student unions fill in a questionnaire. The elaboration of the questionnaire relied on the problematic of socialization, and was consequently focused on the delegates' trajectories and their implication in the different movements in which they had participated. Moreover, it was enriched by the previous knowledge of the field : the categories were as close as possible to the activists' ones.

Hence, ethnographical method allows to analyse unexplored facets of the process of learning contentious performances. The latter are appropriated by students mostly through interactions with their peers, or more precisely with the seasoned ones. As a result, the perception, evaluation and action schemes which inform socialization and practice of students in mobilizations are transmitted by the groups they belong to. I will now delineate how immersion in the milieu permits me to belong to such a group, and the added value of this position.

IV. Being part of a subgroup: understanding the logic of small variations in contentious performances

One could decide to analyse the student AG from an exterior point of view, by just attending a substantial number of them. Such observer would certainly note the little variations actors introduce in their performances. Every actor do not play the same part, and not in the same manner. Moreover, depending on the universities and the movements, actors do not have recourse to exactly the same rules. Usually, from two to four people occupy the platform and accomplish the tasks of moderating, note taking and giving the floor to people who want to talk. These people do not always have the right to participate to the debates and votes ; sometimes, the participants oblige them to remain neutral. Also, people have several ways to express approbation or discontent. In some universities they are allowed to applaud, to scream, to boo. In some other places, they are
incited to use a sign language with their hands. Sometimes, the assembly have to designate some delegates to make a specific task, or to represent the group in a coordination. Depending on the establishments, delegates do not receive the same type of mandate. Student activists have recourse to subtle distinctions used in constitutional law and political theory about democracy: they distinguish between imperative mandate – which imposes to delegates to intervene in coordinations only in accordance with explicit decisions of the AG they represent –, free mandate – which lets the delegates responsible for the decisions they make –, and semi-imperative mandate, a kind of compromise between the two latter. Student fiercely debate about theses types of mandates, and eventually choose different ones depending on the places.

These small variations pertain to what Tilly refers to as improvisation, in his theatrical metaphors. The metaphor is accurate as long as it emphasizes that the existence of a given repertoire do not prevent actors from appropriating and making vary the ways they perform it. But as such, it fails to account for the logic through which actors introduce these variations. This point may seems very secondary in comparison with the explanation of global transformations of repertoires through history. Yet, activists sometimes attach enormous importance to these variations, and to the controversies which relate to them. My point here is that ethnographical method allows to understand these small variations – whereas an exterior observer would only notice them. First because this method incites to take seriously what matters to actors, hence to comprehend their evaluation schemes, and secondly because one can understand the stakes of these variations when one gets into the subgroups that compose a mobilized group and sustain rivalries between each other.

As Lucie Bargel showed it in her study of the main French youth organizations, newcomers are socialized not by the entire organization, but by the subgroup which recruits them, the people they first meet, and thus, they are immediately integrated into such a subgroup (Bargel 2009: 413-490). In the case of French organizations, these subgroups are their different factions. In a mobilization, or in general in student activism, the subgroups which socialize newcomers are the different unions and political organizations represented in the establishment, as well as more informal groups based on affinities. The more they are active in movements, the more students become part of one of this group, and the social capital they thus get provides them even more resources to increase their involvement. These subgroups are allies but also rivals – just party factions : they may have strategical disagreements, divergent interests in the mobilization, and rivalries in order to get the hegemony on the mobilization, and to become its legitimate leader or representative. Then, while they are socialized by a subgroup, activists also acquire the specific
perception, evaluation and action schemes of this subgroup, and learn how to participate to the internal battles. The AG are one of the main arena of these conflicts: there, all the groups involved take part in the collective discussion about the strategy, actions and claims of the movement. But the manner of performing the AG is also a controversial issue, and most of the groups have their specific positions about how the AG should be shaped. That is why understanding the small variations introduced in the basic pattern of the AG implies to take into account the rivalries and the balance of power between the opposing groups.

Ethnographical method, as long as it implies immersion in the milieu under investigation, provides to the researcher opportunities to enrol in one of these subgroups. As I said, in one of my fieldsites, I chose to accept this enrolment. Thus, I was initiated to the stakes, targets, possible tactics and weapons that can be used in the struggles between the different groups in and about AG. A lot of these conflicts may stay hidden to an exterior observer, and do stay unclear, if not pointless, to many students who attend the AG. However, they profoundly shape the AG, since they are behind the adoption of most of the rules and style of meetings. Thus, I succeeded in understanding that the different manners of organizing an AG can vary on two axis: on the first one, AG can tolerate a more or less level of delegation of tasks to different individuals or groups; on the second one, the AG can be more or less formalized, that is, implementing more or less rules that govern the debates and votes. I also learnt what are the groups who defend what position, and what kind of justification they use. In such a context, for student activists, promoting a certain way to perform AG is at the same time acting in concordance with what they believe in, and defending the positions of the subgroup they belong to. Indeed, all the seasoned activists know that each rule or style that is imposed in an AG is equivalent to a political victory of the group who is renowned for arguing in its favour.

Here, we follow the perspectives opened in a recent article by Olivier Fillieule about contentious repertoires analysis (Fillieule 2010). He made a list of unexplored dimensions in this field, and highlighted in particular the necessity to pay attention to the role of internal conflicts between the mobilized groups, in order to understand the dynamics of performances: “the tactical choices must also be connected to practical competition and to the irreducible heterogeneity of resources and knowledge, but also of objectives, within the contentious groups” (Fillieule 2010: 96). These perspectives require an in-depth exploration of the tensions between subgroups, and being part of one of them may be very helpful in this matter. Indeed, one of the main use of AG, as many performances (Fillieule 2010: 97), is to manifest the existence, cohesion and solidarity of the mobilized group: the mass of students gather in an amphitheatre, giving the impression of forming a
whole; the assembly is declared sovereign and the decisions made are asserted as the common will of the group. It then implies a long familiarity with the different parts of this group to understand the conflicts behind this façade.

Taking into account the divergences of interests and resources of the possibly opposing groups implies also an attention to the role of social relationships of race, class and gender in the dynamics of a performance. For instance, women and men do not necessarily have the same interests in the AG, given the virile style of public speeches in them. Women, or men supporting them, may impose transformations in the style of speeches, or in the rules governing the access to speaking, in order to give more space to women. Here again, being an active participant in the mobilizations I study provides me a lot of insights about how my own social properties function as resources, or constraints, in AG, how they shape my interests in them, and how they may influence the part I might play there. Hence, the involvement of the researcher in the field, and the consequent effects (s)he may produce on other participants because of his/her own social identities, are not obstacles to neutrality (s)he should constantly try to avoid. They might be experimental tools in order to capture from the inside the weight of such determinations in the social interactions (s)he studies.

But the choice to get into a subgroup could involve an important limit. It gives to the researcher a matchless knowledge of one of the subgroup. But if the internal conflicts turn to be too intense, does not it close the access to other groups? Obviously, the sociologist should not restrain his/her investigation to the perception schemes of one of the subgroups. (S)he should try, for instance, to get familiar with other groups through observations and interviews. However, knowing the instigator's belonging to a rival group, would members of other groups accept interviews?

Lucie Bargel met with this obstacle: she became a part of the majority faction of the Mouvement des Jeunes Socialistes, and it partly deprived her from intensive contacts with members of the minorities, even if she eventually considered that the richness of her involvement in one of the subgroups made it worthwhile all the same (Bargel 2009). I was afraid of encountering the same difficulty, and I feared that people who had happened to be my personal adversaries in the course of action would not want to talk to me.

Actually, it was hardly the case, even if it occurred a couple of times. People which I have been in conflict with accepted to be interviewed, and was stupefyingly sincere in their answers. One may interpret this in several ways. First, the researcher often apprehends obstacles in the investigation which reveal to be excessive, and which teach more about his/her pre-notions about
the field than about the latter. Then, long-time immersion in the field generates a trust from the people you observe, which is stronger than disagreements: the investigator is viewed as belonging to the same world, and an adversary remains less hostile than a total foreigner. Lastly, we can relate that trust to the comings and goings between the researcher's position and the activist's one. As a sociologist, I had to try to comprehend the positions and interests of every subgroup. But, as an activist, this knowledge also influenced my practice. Getting used to take into account the other groups' viewpoint, I tend to embody the “unitarian” side of my own group. Indeed, the subgroups themselves involve different positions. In particular, some people are considered as more “sectarian” and others as more “unitarian” – in short, there are bad and good cops in the relationships to other groups. Then, activists from other organizations usually prefer to negotiate with me rather than with more “sectarians” members of my union. Consequently, they were also willing to talk with me for sociological interviews.

Johanna Siméant justified the approach in terms of repertoires in the sociology of social movements by the fact that it allowed to “analyse the mobilizations from the viewpoint of what people do, from their practices” (Siméant 1998: 69). In this matter, ethnographical method opens a large set of perspectives, because a lot of what people actually do when they protest remains to be described. Through this method, the processes through which people learn how to play contentious performances can be revealed. It might bring to light the use of emotions, of space and of the techniques of the body actors make. It may make us attentive to the internal conflicts and divergences within the movements. It permits to describe the different parts activists might play in a given performance, and how their social identities shape them. Hence, whereas nowadays the reference to repertoires in the sociology of mobilization might sometimes appear as a useless commonplace, the recent shift in analysis from repertoires to performances allows renewed uses of the notion, and ethnographical method seems to be the ideal tool to go with this trend.

5 The section « Quand le chercheur résiste à son terrain » of the Journée d'études doctorales of the Centre européen de Sociologie et de Science politique, the 3rd May 2011, explored this theme (Alviso-Marino and Poirier 2011, Daho 2011).
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