

1968–2008: The Inheritance of Utopia

The present volume is the product of a conference that took place in Athens in June 2008 entitled the “Utopian Years”, timed to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of the 1968 movements. The main idea behind the conference was to provide a forum both for reflecting on the events of that time and their implications for current and future theoretical endeavours. Accordingly, apart from the history of the movements itself, it sought to trace the intellectual repercussions of this political, social and cultural phenomenon, including the role of intellectuals in its making and a new generation of thinkers, ‘produced’ by ’68 itself. Major breakthroughs triggered by the very utopian and radical master narratives of the Sixties, ranging from anthropology to literary theory, transformed the intellectual map. Social theory was popularised and the linguistic turn offered food for thought, contributing towards the abolition of structuralist rigidities. The partial re-elaboration of older theories and the emergence of new ones would later fall under

the all-encompassing term ‘postmodernism’,¹ although for some the latter was a rather negative product, namely the intellectual offspring of the ‘defeat’ of ’68 and the end of *metanarratives*.²

The Sixties’ polysemic trope resulted in the transformation of the cultural and intellectual landscape, through a synergy of critical thinking, discourses and practices of contestation.³ And synergy is a key term as we can see in Luisa Passerini’s contribution to the current volume. As the starting point and major impetus behind theoretical elaborations and conceptualisations was the reconsideration of the actual role of intellectuals themselves, the figure of the intellectual ‘prophet’ who was entitled to speak in the name of all gave way to the ‘intellectual expert’,⁴ while claims to a higher order of sci-

Introduction

entifism and authenticity were placed under harsher scrutiny, as Kostas Gavroglu demonstrates in his article on science. The larger questions about the role of the university also underwent a profound transformation, leading to major academic-institutional changes. There, hitherto fixed ideas were contested or re-elaborated and the very nature of the transmission of knowledge was put into question. It is not a coincidence that universities that stressed social science – Nanterre, Trento, the London School of Economics – all became the epicentres of agitation.

The year 1968, often seen as a historical accelerator, brought to the fore social actors and movements that challenged old theories and ideologies, which is schematically seen as the clash between Old and New Left. Instrumental in shaping the new actors' imaginary was the diffusion of romantic utopias, often based on the ambivalence between radical humanism and structuralism. The utopias of the 1960s were canalised into various domains during the 1970s, ranging from gay rights, ecology and pacifism to counter-culture and academia. Part of the same process was the theoretical elaboration of the protagonists' lived experience, which resulted, among others, in the rethinking of intellectuality and the further development of critical theory.

Among other things, post-'68 thinkers attempted to reconcile 'structure' and 'agency', since the overwhelming presence of social actors could not be interpreted through the old schemata, which argued for the 'dissolution of the subject'. Seraphim Seferiades' article in the present volume scrutinises the sociological term of 'contentious politics' and its variants that emerged from the so-called social movement approach, by focusing on the mechanisms of protest action and its antinomies, including the one on 'structure versus action' that emerged in the 1960s. Jacques Lacan's reaction to '68, for example, summarised in his astonishment at the fact that the structures "went out in the streets", was typical of this tension. Lacan is the protagonist of a post-'68 filmed episode, shown during the conference, in which an enraged student verbally challenges him during a lecture and ultimately throws a glass of water at him, defying his position of authority. The power relation that is involved in this moment is evident and Lacan's condescending reaction raises several questions on who exercises symbolic rather than physical violence. This confrontation summarises in the best possible way the tense relation between activism and intellectuality in social movements. This complex encounter also points to the issue of positionality: to what extent are academics adequately equipped to understand and participate in social action? Is it possible, or even desirable? And, conversely, how do activists consider their role and how do they view theory in general? Both questions are partly tackled and analysed by Seraphim Seferiades in his current contribution.

One of the issues that the present volume questions are the linkages between past and present in terms of cultural politics, activism and critical theory both in Europe and the United States. And the main question that arises is: when did '68 end, meaning how far do its effects stretch? What ever happened to the utopian surplus of the 1960s? Moreover, what do we mean by contentious politics and anti-war campaigning today and to what an extent are they part of the '60s "impossible heritage", to quote the famous term of Jean-Pierre Le Goff.⁵ Do the messages from the Sixties still sound iconoclastic under present conditions? Roland Barthes has argued that the semiotic dynamic of myths is not static or rigid and that reconstructions are always open to more versions: traditions are reinterpreted, past slogans too, according to new contexts, circumstances and de-

mands. According to this line of thinking, commodified symbols can still generate unexpected responses. How true is this and to what an extent does, for example, the Ten Years After song "I'd Love to Change the World", used in the promotional campaign of one of the major mobile phone companies in Greece or an image of a '68 riot used to advertise the new Volkswagen Golf in Spain (Figure 1) still carry the conceptual baggage and subversive signifiers of that time?



One also has to deal with the subjects of history, the protagonists of the 1960s. The role of memory and emotions in reconsidering the movement is of paramount importance and emerges, both directly and indirectly, in Thomas Gallant and Marilyn Young's articles. In addition, they both deal with the way in which we look at the past from the viewpoint of the present. Gallant catalogues the different ways in which the movement was conceptualised, focusing on the schools of thought that label the movement revolutionary and especially the ones who judge that it was not. The question that arises from both his and Young's articles has to do with motivation for action: was the draft in the end so important a factor in forcing people to take to the streets in the US in the 1960s? Accordingly, 'measuring the distance' is an important part of their contribution. Young looks specifically at the differences and similarities of past and present anti-war activism. Her article focuses on the changing tropes of the resistance against the war, including the introduction of new technologies. This connects with recent mobilising tendencies, be it in the US concerning the war in Iraq, in Greece during the December 2008 urban riots or in Iran after the June 2009 presidential election. The common thread between these heterogeneous movements, which constitute a radical departure from earlier days, is the use of technology: blogs,

Facebook and Twitter do not just provide alternative information channels but create networks that galvanise and synchronise political activism among this generation of ‘digital natives’.

On a different level, Jürgen Habermas, as Angeliki Koufou mentions in her article, maintained that the project of modernity would only be completed with the parallel development of the three spheres of science, morality and art.⁶ The uneven developments that took place in all three fields, including conflicts and ruptures, is at the core of her and Kostas Gavroglu’s contributions to this volume. Gavroglu’s point is that after ’68 contestation affected not only the social but also the scientific realm. The supposed neutrality of science was put in doubt. Especially the connection between science and the military conglomerations during the Vietnam War with the participation of important US academic institutions in war research – Columbia University being the most vivid example – made it clear that nothing was innocent in terms of technological progress. In his view, contingency is a key factor in terms of the development of science and the creation of the framework for research. He proposes it as an alternative historiographical category that undermines the idea of neutrality, not just for the development of social sciences, where it is already a given, but also for the specific evolution of ‘hard’ science. The conditions of development and not just the use – good or bad – of science is the issue here, and Gavroglu points to some filmic representations of a dystopian future which encapsulated this problématique.

Koufou, on the other hand, makes a complex reading of Habermas’s Enlightenment-driven critique of the cultural and artistic movements of the 1960s as anarchic and therefore disastrous for the project of modernity. Habermas’s ambivalence towards the 60s, to a large extent typical of the uneasy stance of Frankfurt School exponents towards the students, is also highlighted by Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, and was violently manifested in his debates with Herbert Marcuse. The latter represented not only Freudomarxism, in short the conviction that the orgasm could function as the mechanism that sets off revolutions, but also believed sincerely in the revolutionary potential of students, alongside migrants and racial minorities. Habermas, on the other hand, argued that the students’ intransigence constituted leftwing fascism. In terms of artistic expression, as Koufou shows, he identified ‘postmodern’ art with their disconnecting utopias from the emancipatory goals of humanity as laid out by the Enlightenment. Accordingly, the fragmentary tendency of the Sixties to rebuff any normative totality was rejected as problematic. This attitude is reminiscent of Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut’s criticism of what they called the “philosophers of 1968”, including Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Bourdieu and Althusser, whom they accused of decisive anti-humanism in their provocative work *La Pensée 68*.⁷

It is ’68’s complex intellectual legacy that interests Luisa Passerini in her article too. She sums up, we could say, all possible aspects of that legacy. This includes the development of social movement theories, the theorisation of feminism, postcolonial critique and theorisation of empire and the further development of critical theory. Passerini maps out the manifold intellectual consequences of 1960/70s activism on historical theory, the emergence of labour, radical and oral history and the ‘discovery’ of subjectivity, which sought to give voice to the suppressed subject. She argues that many changes in the intellectual and cultural landscape induced by ’68 were actually a product of a complex mixture of “defeat” and “victory” and uses the typical example of cultural studies as indicative of this schisophrenic trend: politicising the academy, while at the

same time partly leading to the withdrawal from direct political action. Passerini also comments on the political side of events, drawing attention to the connections between 1968 and 1989 in Eastern Europe, whereby 1968 is regarded as the beginning of a long journey of underground contestation that became fruitful only in '89, its numerical inversion. In a provocative counter-factual epilogue Passerini discusses Claus Offe's questioning of what would have happened had '68 not taken place.

Kostis Kornetis's article focuses on the periodisation of the 1960s movements – which should be planned along the lines of intellectual developments and not decades, according to Passerini – and the interconnectedness among its various manifestations across the globe. Regarding the territoriality and temporality of the '68 movements, the article connects with what Passerini calls the long '68. Rather than emulation or re-enactment, Kornetis argues, this was a series of 'cultural transfers' that provided the (missing) link between protest movements; anti-authoritarian clashes and liberation struggles were facilitated by the globalising tendencies that were brought about by new technologies, in particular television, that led to new forms of communication. As Thomas Gallant mentions in terms of the American movement, "Che, Communist China, and revolutionary movements elsewhere in the world were the guiding lights for fomenting revolution in America". Fascination with Third World independence movements had exactly the same impact in Europe, one could add, even in places like Greece, Spain or Portugal. At the same time, anti-authoritarianism and anti-imperialism in their various manifestations were the common elements linking the contestation in the communist East, be it in Prague, Warsaw or Belgrade, with the capitalist West.

Rudi Dutschke's *thirdworldism*, singled out in Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth's article, connects organically with all the above. The charismatic West German student leader considered the national liberation movements of the Third World as the new revolutionary agents. As the two authors demonstrate, from his perspective these movements were displacing the focus of Cold War confrontations from East–West to North–South. Particularly the theories of Frantz Fanon and Che Guevara equipped Dutschke with techniques "to create revolutionary consciousness that he considered transferable to the situation in West Germany". Here, Klimke and Scharloth stress the importance of performativity, demonstrating how symbolic actions have the potential to undermine social reality and how theories about rule breaking or direct action were implemented from 1966 onwards in the West German student movement. The main idea was to provoke a hostile response from the authorities in order to raise consciousness along the lines of an anti-authoritarian and anti-imperialist critique of modern society, exemplified in the case of Dutschke. Next to this bottom-up approach, the latest revelations about the Stasi's involvement in the assassination attempt on the latter in April 1968 but also the killing of Benno Ohnesorg at the Shah protest a year earlier opens up a new perspective in terms of governmental triggering of violent reactions on behalf of the protest movements.

Athena Syriatou's contribution is probably the only article in the volume that looks at things from top down and not vice versa, as it covers the ways in which the 'establishment' responded to the crisis that was produced by the post-war massification of education. She takes us through the educational achievements of Britain under Wilson's Labour government, which aspired to chal-

lenge the rigid class stratification of British society and liberalise the content of instruction. The spirit of the 60s was translated into ‘comprehensive’ schools, plain glass universities instead of red brick ones and above all the creation of the Open University in 1969. And this connects to a great chapter of post-’68 developments in terms of institutional reforms, bringing to mind the short-lived experiment of ‘alternative education’ of the University of Vincennes in neighbouring France. At the same time she demonstrates how difficult it was for the UK to move from an elitist paradigm to a more ‘democratic’ system. The narrative, which starts in the 1960s, ranges through several developments up to the present, including the Thatcher years, which were marked by systematic attempts to cancel many of the achievements of the previous governments, while at the same time introducing market principles to education. Syriatou concludes by stressing the importance of those people who strove for “a way for humans to find a way to freedom through education”, which she considers one of the most long-lasting legacies of the 1960s.

Last, but not least, Nikos Papadogiannis’s article adopts the idea of the ‘extended decade’ as the author covers the follow-up movements to the anti-dictatorship one in the mid- and late 1970s. The article analyses the complex ways in which the Greek Left ‘communicated’ with what was happening abroad but also with the very legacy of 1968, dubbed in Greece as “May ’68”, as the all-encompassing condenser of all movements of the time. Papadogiannis examines the various connotations of ’68 in the language and practices of different politicised youth groups – and not solely in ‘moments’ of revolt; more importantly, he looks at ‘1968’ as part of the ‘indigenous’ concepts of his subjects, and not as an analytical category of historiography, and tries to unpack it. Additionally, he draws our attention to the multiplicity of the experiences of militancy and the conceptualisation of action among radical groupings. The diversity of Marxisant cultures and experience is highlighted here just like in the book *Le Siècle des communismes*,⁸ underlining the tension between the Old (Stalinist) and New (Eurocommunist) Left and thus connecting with one of the core dichotomies around ’68. Moreover, Papadogiannis shows how a growing permissiveness and a sort of belated revolution in terms of new socialites and experimentations in everyday life led even supposedly apolitical magazines to seek a connection with the new trends of the time such as feminism.

The past in question

Some of the aforementioned issues became dramatically real when, during the *Historein* conference, a group of leftist students, who planned to occupy the University of Athens central building, interrupted its proceedings, declaring their antithesis to academic mumble-jumble and their faith in movement dynamics and street politics. It proved difficult to convince them that the conference was on the history of activism as their reaction was one of outright dismissal. Ultimately they agreed not to interrupt the conference provided that they could come into the room and read their demands, which focused on the student–police clashes of the previous year that resulted in the trial of several students. Afterwards they left the room and painted the slogan “Long live May 2068” on the walls of the University’s façade. As Antonis Liakos has pointed out, the slogan was a clear indication that for the protesters the best historical events are yet to come or

that history has not happened yet.⁹ Other slogans that were thrown about were “History is being written in the streets” and “You don’t do history, you practice necrophilia”. The main argument put forward here by the student activists dealt with the incompatibility between the theoretical subject matter of social movement research and their practical, activist side. The fact that this was a conference on ‘68 did not modify in the eyes of the students the fact that it was part of an official system of knowledge production, which they opposed.

The *histoire-problème* here is to what extent or in what way does the historical past become transformed into an element that is important for the outlook or the quest for an identity of a movement. Can the abovementioned rejection be interpreted as a total absence of a revolutionary tradition that produces a *tabula rasa* movement? How do historical projections by analysts, including juxtapositions, comparisons and the drawing of parallels with earlier movements play in all of this? The mobilisation of the past proves to be of paramount importance for most movements. Placing one’s self in a longstanding revolutionary tradition has been a typical feature in leftwing social movements ever since the French Revolution and all subsequent symbolic and semiotic references to its legacy. The role of rituals is crucial since traditions are not mere texts that are somehow used or mobilised, but also involve a performative praxis:¹⁰ for example, the use of barricades in May ’68 was, apart from anything else, a clear evocation of the 1848 revolution and the 1871 Commune. In her contribution, Angeliki Koufou reminds us that the same happened with the neo-avant-garde artists of the 1960s and the various connections to the ‘unorthodox’ artistic tendencies of the beginning of the twentieth century, including Dadaism and Surrealism’s rejection of the logocentric paradigm of interpreting the world. This is why Raymond Williams argues that often the content of the movements is “more ideological than utopian, in that it links back to the past rather than envisioning a not-yet-existent future”.¹¹ And this is where the main contradiction lies when the usage of the past becomes such an integral part of movements that profess radical social change.

If we look at the December 2008 events in Greece that followed – the three-week long riots that took place after the fatal shooting of the 15-year-old school pupil Alexis Grigoropoulos by a policeman in the centre of Athens, partly emulated by young people in other European cities, we can see a conscious attempt to overcome that very contradiction. Activists to a great extent tried to avoid identification with past events, even though this tendency was not a coherent one. The main attitude was one of indifference, very similar to the *Historein* episode. Here, the politically contestatory event seems indifferent to the historical precedent.¹² Accordingly, one of the major slogans to be found in leaflets during the December events read: “We are an image coming from the future”. This of course cannot but bring to mind the slogan “The future is now” of May ’68,¹³ underlining the *hic et nunc* attitude that characterises social movements, which is an element mentioned by Kornetis in his contribution on the temporal and territorial element of the 1968 movements.¹⁴ The conviction that the moment cannot be postponed and that theoretical explorations are redundant can also be found in the recent student movement in Italy, the so-called *onda anomala* (anomalous wave), which has declared that “Il nostro tempo è qui e comincia adesso” (our time is here and it starts now), again cutting the bridges with the past and stressing the ‘here and now’ conviction almost verbatim.

However, how truthful is the idea of the here and now if we look at social movements with the benefit of hindsight? Nikos Papadogiannis correctly draws attention to the fact that often the '68 movements have been interpreted as products of 'singular moments'. The conclusion that comes out of the papers of the volume is that rather than being instantaneous, these movements were either products or matrixes of wider developments. The processes within which movements unfold are larger and more complex, a fact that leads to flexible periodisations such as 'the long Sixties'. Analyses of the specific historical moment, such as a Paris-centred view of '68, for example, very often lead to a disregarding of the larger picture. An additional reason for the fact that we should rather focus on larger temporal sequences, despite the protagonists' insistence on the singularity and the uniqueness of the moment, is the fact that often there is little connection between the motives and the outcomes of social action, the formulation of ideas and their practical implementation.¹⁵

“Fuck 68. Fight now”

Despite the stated indifference, the rejection of influences and the study of the history of activism as necrophilia, the past is present also in recent movements. Especially in the case of the December events in Greece, an appropriation of the past was reflected in a number of slogans and graffiti



on the walls. At the same time that a giant slogan at the central Klafthmonos Square declared “Fuck May 68. Fight now” (Figure 2), thus articulating in the most vocal way the rejection of its legacy – probably connected to the plethora of events that the fortieth anniversary had produced – with slogans including “Sous les pavés, la plage” and “Imagination au pouvoir” were written in central streets of Athens and other Greek cities. Actually, the fact that these slogans were written in French and English demonstrates an attempt at a tacit communication with movements and people abroad, underlining an extrovert, outward-looking attitude. Protesters wrote the graffiti ‘No God, No Master!’, again a slogan that comes from the past and “Attention. The police are addressing you via the 8 o’clock news”, a direct reference to the French '68,

indicating the growing suspicion of the movement regarding the role of the media. A slogan seen in Thessaloniki, “Manson Family: Kill your Parents”, on the other hand, departs from the above as it refers to one of the darkest pages of the American 1960s, that is the violent murders that took place in Los Angeles in 1969 by Charles Manson’s notorious commune. The slogan indicates an unbreachable generational rift and a complete rejection of the family structure. It also connects in a way to the Italian *Sessantotto*’s idea of a generation that “chooses to be orphans”.¹⁶ Even though the latter was formulated in a much less violent way, the Oedipian subject matter was similar, despite the fact that the parents’ generation was often not linked to totalitarianism but rather to anti-fascist struggles.

Even more importantly, an unintended reverberation is something to be found in the Greek uprising. In one of the most publicised manifestos that circulated during December, we read that “we used to be invisible”.¹⁷ This brings to mind Nanni Balestrini’s emblematic autobiographic novel *Gli invisibili* (The invisibles),¹⁸ about the 1970s evolution of the extraparliamentary leftist movement in Italy and the embrace of so-called dynamic forms of struggle. “We don’t ask for much, we want it all!”, again echoes ’68’s “Lo vogliamo tutto” (We want it all). Slogans like “what does not get modified gets destroyed” are also part of this spirit, which might not involve the praxis of a conscious reference to the past but it nevertheless evokes it, reverberating one of the most widespread Luxemburgian dilemmas of the global ’68: modification or demolition.¹⁹ In the end, what we see here is “a curious mixture between the [acute] remembrance of the past and the search for the future”.²⁰ Do the events have a relation with the past that is not yet recognised? Maybe yes, as they explicitly recalled it in the mode of direct or indirect citation, even this time filled by the presence of the ‘now’. So, the past is not necessarily present in the form of the knowledge of history, but in the form of a cultural memory that flashes up at specific moments. Intentional or unintentional, conscious or subconscious, the similarities point to some kind of *longue durée* or circularity in poetics and frames.

Many analysts stressed the fact that this culture of protest and civil disobedience in Greece has its roots in the 1970s, that is the post-dictatorship period that was marked by the Polytechnic uprising against the Colonels’ dictatorship in 1973. This has led several people to believe that there exists a ‘cycle of protest’, in Sidney Tarrow’s tradition, arguing that nothing has changed in this particular milieu ever since the 1970s. Papadogiannis’ article in the present volume highlights several characteristics of this so-called *metapolitefsi* culture, including its discourse, action and relation to the ’68 past, especially through the famous 1978/9 occupations, to a large extent deconstructing the idea of a static and never-changing anti-authoritarian subculture.

For some people, nevertheless, in the anti-conformist, anti-establishment, revolutionary spirit of the December events lies the legacy of ’68, just like the anti-globalisation movement, or the global justice movement, as Gallant notes in his article. And here performativity plays a key role – to single out a term that is used in terms of the German paradigm by Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth and can be applied to different contexts. Here, it is interesting to note that the killing of Grigoropoulos was a “critical event”, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s phrase, just like the killing of 26-year old Benno Ohnesorg by a policeman in West Berlin in 1967 that led to the emergence of the German ’68. Parallels were also drawn between the emergence of a number of terrorist organisations that claimed

to be the continuation of the December protests with Italy's "years of the lead" in the 1970s, pointing to the emergence of a protracted period of political violence with no clear end in sight.

Last, but not least, the past was present through the constant juxtaposition of December with the 1960s movements. According to the common attitude, if '68 was "a revolt with a utopian vision", 2008, just like 2005 in the *banlieues* of Paris, was "just an outburst with no pretence to vision".²¹ According to this argumentation, identical to the one of Slavoj Žižek on the uprising in the French suburbs, there were no particular demands made by the protesters, "there was only an insistence on *recognition*, based on a vague, unarticulated *ressentiment*".²² The great debate that emerged evolved around the terms 'revolt' and 'uprising', mainly putting in question whether this was a social movement or not. Seraphim Seferiades' analysis of the 'how' question in terms of contentious politics, shows that the question of "what is (and what is not)" a protest movement dates back to the 1960s, as does the question – extremely valid in the current circumstances – whether social movements emerge out of rational calculation or whether they are the product of cultural residues and expressive impulses. And here I would add that an interesting question evolves around the question on who is actually a member of a movement and who is not? As historian Richard Vinen remarked in terms of the Sixties, there exists an attitude that "anyone who ever smoked a spliff or read Hermann Hesse is a 68er",²³ and this is yet another problem that deserves attention. Finally, people who have indeed experienced the '68 movements tend to utter a growing disbelief towards the latest kinds of movements, interestingly articulating a discourse that reveals a nostalgia for the past in terms of social protest, a sort of a *belle époque* that is somehow irretrievable. Once again the recent Greek experience is revealing.

Reappraisals

As the 1968 events themselves had generated a series of debates on "generations", exemplified by the famous saying "never trust anyone above 30", the multiplicity of this experience becomes particularly pertinent. An interesting reflection of the generational component of 1968ers – but not regarding their predecessors, rather their successors – is to be found in recent books produced by the children of people who were involved in the various movements of the "long Sixties" in one form or another. Virginie Linhart, for example, discusses her father's silence in *Le jour où mon père s'est tu*.²⁴ What we get in this book is an attempt to explain a prolonged silence on the part of the parents concerning these events, which can be juxtaposed with the logorrhoea that followed May '68s 'right to speech' demand. Anna Negri discusses how she feels in terms of inheriting her father's sentimental burden, including the sense of guilt.²⁵ A bit earlier, Julie Gavras, in *La Faute à Fidel!* (2006), was making a free cinematic adaptation of Domitilla Calamai's treatise on the difficult coming of age in a hyper-revolutionary family, infusing many elements of her own autobiography.²⁶ Simon Brook's documentary *Génération 68* (2008) is yet another attempt of a son to recount his parents' story.

What is the relevance of the 1960s utopias for the present? Anti-authoritarianism, anti-colonialism and pacifism are still the main demands of a number of movements around the globe. In this sense, the unfulfilled promise of '68 still requires its realisation. Moreover, even though

the conditions have changed in socioeconomic terms as nothing at the present global economic crisis is remotely reminiscent of the optimism and wellbeing of the *Trente glorieuses* – that “golden age” according to Hobsbawm,²⁷ the intellectual politics of the Sixties are still pertinent. The influence of *penseurs maudits* like Toni Negri, who through his book on *Empire* shaped an entire generation of millennium activists that mobilised around the anti-globalisation movement, is indicative of their continuous relevance.²⁸ Notwithstanding the fact that the past proves hard to escape, however, current contestations are not a 1960s or 1970s simulacrum; rather than a proximity or affinity, it is a temporal and semantic distance from any predecessors that shape the character of the movements in terms of political opportunities, action repertoires and mobilising structures.

But how did the memory on '68 change and evolve? How were its 'afterlives', to borrow Kristin Ross's term,²⁹ defined by the kind of meaning people attributed to them? Activists of the time followed divergent itineraries and made different choices in its aftermath, often dictated by “personal and circumstantial contingencies”.³⁰ Interestingly, while in the 1970s there was a general conviction that the revolution was still possible, the 1980s inaugurated a period in which the Sixties started being re-evaluated in negative terms. Neo-individualism and neo-consumerism began to be seen as byproducts of the '68 revolts, while the movements themselves were often labelled a lifestyle phenomenon without clear political characteristics. Luisa Passerini shows that this tendency of demonising '68 runs parallel to the one of sacralisation; the 1960s were seen either as the model decade or as the disastrous source of all our present discontent, as it was recently encapsulated by French President Nicolas Sarkozy's 2007 electoral campaign or as it can be discerned in polemic books such as De Groot's *The Sixties Unplugged*.³¹ To this tension between the heroic and the anti-heroic we could add a third tendency, promoted by protagonist Daniel Cohn-Bendit and his recent *Forget 68*,³² where he does not put in doubt the significance of '68 but argues that we should somehow get over it. What is interesting about the present volume is that it reflects various generational backgrounds, including participants and non-participants, people who experienced the events first-hand and others born after they were over.

What is common and what is different between the contributions in the current volume? Its approaches range from the responses of the establishment to grassroots organisations, and from ideology to philosophical treatises on art. Apart from this, there are several elements that permeate the papers, including the conviction that '68 was a rupture, a caesura in all fields, be it in the theoretical and artistic realm or in the sociopolitical one. Another element is the practical cancellation of the binary opposition between local needs and global prerogatives. The takes on '68 in the volume differ in terms of approach as some are looking at specific national contexts whereas others adopt an exclusively comparative, transnational or global approach. These two tendencies that, instead of being antagonistic, as was seen until now in the research that has taken place in the field, prove to be by and large complementary. The case studies discussed here, including Greece, the UK, West Germany and the United States, link neatly with the global trends as they emerge from the articles with a broader or a more theoretical scope. Accordingly, one thing this volume reveals are the various connections, the many '68s, the synergies, the open as well as the subterranean impact of this moment on the history not only of different sociopolitical contexts but also of diverging fields of knowledge.

Finally, another axis has to do with culture versus politics in their various manifestations. This opposition is becoming redundant in terms of analysing the '68 experience, as is manifest from all papers. Culture and politics go hand-in-hand, as do centre and periphery, ideology and everyday life, public and private, East and West, Marx and Coca-Cola. What results from this volume, and not only, is that we are safely moving away from the categorisations and the classifications of the time, without, however, compromising the accuracy of the events which are meticulously historicised and placed within their context. We can therefore argue that in contrast to previous anniversary reappraisals of '68, which were mainly articulated in terms of whether it was a victory or a defeat, or even more specifically a cultural triumph and a political setback, we are heading towards a more sober and less emotionally driven viewpoint of its historical consequences that attempts to assess this complex phenomenon in its entirety. Still, one has to admit that the way we scrutinise '68 now, to adopt Passerini's counterfactual premise, would not have been the same without the analytical tools that its own intellectual offspring provided us.

Kostis Kornetis

NOTES

- 1 Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited. The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern*, Durham and London: Duke UP, 2004.
- 2 Steven Best, Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, New York: Guilford Press, 1991.
- 3 Bernard Brillant, *Les clercs de 68*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003.
- 4 André Glucksmann, *Les Maîtres-penseurs*, Paris: Grasset, 1977.
- 5 Jean-Pierre Le Goff, *Mai 68, L' "Héritage impossible"*, Paris: La Découverte, 2002.
- 6 Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity", *New German Critique* 22 (1981): 3–24.
- 7 Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *La Pensée 68. Essai sur l'anti-humanisme contemporain*, Paris: Gallimard, 1985; Alain Renaut, *L'Ère de l'individu. Contribution à une histoire de la subjectivité*, Paris: Gallimard, 1989.
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- 17 The entire quote goes "we used to be shadows. Shadows in what you use to call everyday life. Invisible".
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