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Memories of 1968

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Peter Lang

SARAH WATERS

Introduction: 1968 in Memory and Place

1. A contested memory

Forty years after the events denoted by the term '1968', the memorialisation of this 'first global rebellion'[1] reached a climax in 2008. All around the world, on television and radio, in the print media, exhibitions, public debates, literature readings and film showings, the experiences of '1968' were dissected, discussed and probed for their continuing relevance or remaining toxicity.[2] While it was unclear what this collective production of increasingly nostalgic reflections was supposed to achieve, the debates ignited by the anniversary signalled that '1968' continues to be a currency in public debates across the world. The cause of this surprising longevity is the tension between two forces of memory that are oddly out of synch: historicisation ('objective') and memorialisation ('subjective').[3]

On the one hand, there have been widespread efforts, across different national cultures, to historicise '1968', to locate it within a recent past and to assign it a definitive and objective meaning. 1968 is now often seen as

1 Wolfgang Kraushaar, *1968 als Mythos, Chiffre und Zäsur* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition 2000), 19.

2 In the United Kingdom, the BBC turned the 40th anniversary of '1968' into a test case of modern popular remembrance, merging the images and sounds of global events with the experiences of the viewers and listeners on interactive websites.

3 For the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, whose work has helped to define a field of 'memory studies', history and memory were opposing forces: whilst memory was grounded in lived experience, as a kind of past within the present, history, as an objective study of the past, took over when memory died out. See Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997)

sufficiently distant to be summoned up as an object of history, one that is open to objective historical enquiry and research.[4] There may be disagreements about the interpretation of the era (Mark Kurlansky describes the global event as 'the year that rocked the world', while Gerard DeGroot doubts that the dominant narrative about 1968 reflects the historical truth),[5] but many observers argue that the proper place of the 'ideas of 68' is now in the history books, preferably within a broader post-war context. Many younger historians in different countries have set out to challenge the 'myth' of 1968 propagated by former activists by subjecting this period to serious historical scrutiny. Some of the most innovative recent research has sought to open up 1968 to new historical assessment, accessing new archives and sources and situating the events within a broader chronological context or *longue durée*. Thus, recent comparative studies use a wide historical lens, taking 1968 as a symbol for a far larger moment in time. For Arthur Marwick, in *The Sixties*, this period saw its first stirrings in 1958, accelerating during the period from 1964 to 1969, before concluding in 1974, whereas for Gerd-Rainer Horn in *The Spirit of '68*, the student movement stretched across the two decades between 1956 and 1976.[6] Other comparative studies have used innovative historical methods in their quest to locate the origins and consequences of the 1968 years. For instance, Ronald Fraser's classic

4 See for instance the programmatically titled studies David Farber, *The Sixties. From Memory to History* (Chapel Hill / London: University of Carolina Press, 1994); and Ingrid Gilcher-Holthey (ed.), *1968 vom Ereignis zum Gegenstand der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998).

5 Mark Kurlansky, *1968. The Year that Rocked the World* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004); Gerard DeGroot, *1968 Unplugged* (London: Macmillan, 2008).

6 Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68. Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). In France, new historical research on 1968 includes Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand, Robert Frank and Marie-Françoise Lévy (eds), *Les années 68. Le temps de la contestation* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 2000). See also the recent collaborative volume by French historians, Philippe Artières and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel (eds), *68 Une histoire collective [1962–1981]* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008).

study of the student movement in six different countries drew on 230 interviews with former participants in order to produce an international oral history of the period.[7]

Other forces have sought to historicise 1968, not in the interests of objective academic research, but as an exercise in a much more contemporary cause, that of vested political interests. In political debates across the world, '1968' is often treated as finished history, as a closed chapter in the trajectory of post-war societies. Here, it has often been a question of consigning 1968 to the past, of severing its links with the present and of stemming any repercussions for the future. In Germany, this happened in 2005 when the red-green coalition government of Gerhard Schröder and Joschka Fischer imploded, thus ending the German 68ers' 'long march through the institutions'. In France, Nicolas Sarkozy described the era and its protagonists as a spent force during his election campaign in 2007 and urged the French people to close the chapter on the 'events'. In the United States the sixties were officially over when Hillary Clinton lost the race for the nomination of the Democratic Party, thus ending the dominance of the baby-boomer generation.[8] No matter whether '1968' is repressed, re-evaluated, reintegrated or redeemed, it is now seen by the political majority in most countries as safely in the past and as no longer contagious.

At the same time, '1968' is still very much part of our recent past. It is the cherished or reviled object of memory, hotly contested by people who have living memories of or a vested interest in the era. Some feel that its utopian promise has not been fulfilled, while others believe that one must get rid of the utopian ideas to return to moral certainties that existed before. Recent debates have contributed to a 'memorialisation' of 1968 which

7 Ronald Fraser et al. *1968. A Student Generation in Revolt* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988). Other comparative histories of 1968 include Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert and Detlef Junker (eds), *1968: The World Transformed* (Washington: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (eds), *1968 in Europe. A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) and Jeremy Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

8 Joe Queenan, *Balsamic Dreams* (New York: Picador 2001), 11.

places precedence on the lived experience of these events, through a vast plethora of personal testimonies, autobiographies and partisan accounts. Former activists may wish to re-live their days of glory or atone for what they now perceive as the sins of their youth. In any event, '1968' is alive in many people's memory, though these memories differ widely. '1968' has become a site for what Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove and Georg Grote have defined as *memory contests*, where former activists and observers are often pitted against one another and different interpretations of the movement itself clash: 'Memory contests are highly dynamic public engagements with the past that are triggered by an event that is perceived as a massive disturbance of a community's self-understanding.'[9] Thus, in France, reformed gauchistes such as André Glucksmann and Bernard Kouchner renounced the 'excesses' of their youth, criticised the radicalism of the student movement and threw their support behind Sarkozy's right-wing majority (in Kouchner's case by joining his government as Minister for Foreign Affairs), while former activist Daniel Bensaïd continued to support 1968's radical leftist legacy and remained, until his recent death, a key figure within the Trotskyist left.[10]

Although in Europe former activists in different countries have pitted their own versions of 1968 against those of others, in Mexico, the memories of former student leaders are evoked to challenge state silence and repression in relation to the events of that year. Here 1968 is remembered primarily for the massacre at Tlatelolco Square on 2 October 1968 when troops opened fire on students gathered at a demonstration. In the face of the government's refusal to acknowledge or to accept responsibility for these events, journalists, writers and film-makers have sought to vindicate the memories of the students, to demand truth and justice and to confront state-led repression.[11]

9 Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, Georg Grote (eds), *German Memory Contests. The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990* (Rochester: Camden House 2006), 2.

10 See Daniel Bensaïd's chapter in this volume.

11 See chapters by Brewster and Fenoglio in this volume.

Such testimonies, whether objectifying and historicising or reviving personal memories, have shaped and reshaped the events to such an extent that many of today's notions of what 1968 was all about have to be seen as constructs of subsequent interpretations. Thus in the European context, Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth emphasise the importance of 'myth-making' in our understanding of what 1968 was about: 'in almost all European countries, the actual historical events have been transformed by subsequent narratives illustrating a vast array of nostalgia, condemnation, and myth-making.[12] Similarly, Kristin Ross has noted that the meaning of 1968 in France has now been overtaken by its subsequent representations or 'afterlives'.[13]

Over the past twenty years, the theme of 'memory' has been the object of a new vogue within the academic field with a vast production of literature across various academic disciplines, including history, cultural studies, literary studies and the social sciences. According to the authors of one recent volume, 'memories, identities and heritage have become the new holy trinity for contemporary academic research.'[14] On the one hand, there are studies which link memory to identity and to the search for forms of tradition, community and belonging in the present day. Here 'memory' concerns a quest to retrieve a shared past that can reaffirm social bonds and restore cultural affinities at a time of rapid change and internationalisation. Thus Pierre Nora's seminal work, *Les Lieux de mémoires* was prompted by a sense of loss at the disappearance of collective repositories of memory and at the decline of a unified model of identity: 'People talk so much about memory because it no longer exists.' As identity has become more fragmented and differentiated, Nora believed it was essential to reconstruct the foundations of Frenchness through a diversity of fragments from the past, such

12 Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (eds), *1968 in Europe. A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 7.

13 Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

14 S. Blowen, M. Demossier and J. Picard (eds), *Recollections of France. Memories, Identities and Heritage in Contemporary France* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000), 1.

as monuments, rituals, customs, physical objects, historic sites: 'The rapid disappearance of our national memory today calls for an inventory of the places in which it has been selectively embodied.'[15]

On the other hand, there are studies that link memory to the legacy of traumatic experiences within national or international history and their impact on social and cultural experience in the present day. Here the theme of memory signifies the individual or collective effort to come to terms with painful experiences from the past and to find a place for them within collective memory. Thus, much of the literature within memory studies has focused on the historical experience of the Second World War and the Holocaust, examining their legacy and significance within the public and private sphere. These events have produced a veritable 'memory industry' in contemporary scholarship which re-interprets, examines and locates the traumas of this period.[16]

Earlier theoretical work that can help to inform our approach to the memory of 1968 is that of the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs who introduced the notion of a 'social framework of memory' (*cadre social de la mémoire*). Halbwachs stressed how strongly social processes influence not only an individual's memory but a community's shared memory of the past. The memories we have and the form they take are strongly influenced by the present and by the social context that we inhabit. Memory is constructed in time and space but always by social groups. It is the social group to which an individual belongs that determines what is memorable and what our memory brings to mind in the present: 'In a word, memory is impossible outside the frameworks which men living in society use to fix and locate their memories'.[17] Given that memory is always imbricated in social and historical processes, is a transnational memory

15 Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire* vol. 1. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 23 and back-cover of the new paperback edition.

16 In the American context, see for instance Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999) and Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry* (London: Verso, 2000).

17 Maurice Halbwachs, *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), 79.

of 1968 possible? Can a memory of 1968 exist outside the parameters of a nationally defined social context?

2. 1968 and memory studies

1968 has hardly suffered from a lack of attention from scholars over the past forty years, but it is only recently that this has been analysed from the perspective of memory. For instance, a number of recent studies within specific national contexts have set out to reconsider the political, social or cultural significance of 1968 and to examine the way in which it is represented within different spheres of public and private life. These studies are concerned less with the events themselves, with their historical reality, than with the way in which they are framed, narrated and interpreted within different national cultures. Their aim is not to seek the effects of 1968 on subsequent developments, but rather to explore how societies choose to remember 1968 and how they manipulate this memory for political and cultural purposes. In her study of representations of the French May in fiction and film, Margaret Atack refers to a shift from a history to a memory of 1968 and to a growing interest in 'the frame of May as text, and its framing texts, within which it is seen and without which it would be invisible'.[18] Here 1968 becomes a symbolically charged moment that can be imbued with a diverse set of potential meanings, one which is continuously open to interpretation and which has repercussions in the present. We will now turn to look at recent influential studies on the memory of 1968 in the context of France, Italy and Germany respectively.

In her compelling account, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, Kristin Ross inveighs against a dominant public discourse in France, which, in her view, has served only to liquidate, erase and render obscure the history of May

18 Margaret Atack, *May 68 in French Fiction and Film. Rethinking Society, Rethinking Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 2.

1968. This 'official story' has reduced the greatest general strike in French history to a benign and sympathetic revolt led by 'youth', a non-violent cultural transformation, which has accompanied the transition to today's liberal capitalist society:

> The official story that has been encoded, celebrated publicly in any number of mass media spectacles or commentaries, and handed down to us today, is one of a family or generational drama, stripped of any violence, asperity, or overt political dimensions – a benign transformation of customs and lifestyles that necessarily accompanied France's modernization from an authoritarian bourgeois state to a new liberal, modern financier bourgeoisie.[19]

This official story, constructed by sociologists and penitent ex-student leaders, has, according to Ross, circumscribed the events, reducing them to a particular social group (students), to a specific moment in time (the month of May) and to a given place (the Latin Quarter in Paris). Ross's purpose is therefore to retrieve and reaffirm the profound political and historical significance of the 1968 events in France. She argues that the importance of this period lies in the political possibilities that it opened up – for a brief moment in time, students and workers were able to escape from the usual social categories that bound them to a particular role in society and to rediscover the authentic and dynamic experience of politics and this was about 'a shattering of social identities that allowed politics to take place'.[20] May 1968, Ross suggests, was profoundly political, but this was not about a seizure of power but a radical egalitarianism which broke with existing institutions.

Just as Kristin Ross has challenged the 'official story' of 1968 in France, so Luisa Passerini in Italy has contested a conventional history of 1968, one that in her view ignores the role of personal experience and individual subjectivity. A pioneer in the study of the history of individual subjectivity, Passerini's *Autobiography of a Generation. Italy, 1968* sought to reconstruct a 'collective autobiography' of a post-war generation for whom 1968 signified

19 Kristin Ross, op. cit., 5–6.
20 Ibid, 3.

a period of profound political emancipation and a decisive cultural shift. This book combines Passerini's own personal reflections on 1968, the life histories of a generation of activists who took part in student protest in Turin and the author's analysis of this material. Here 'memory' takes the form, not of recordable or objective facts, but of fleeting personal recollections that may drift from the conscious to the unconscious and move across different points in time. Unlike conventional history, this account gives precedence to the complexity, contradictions and ambiguities of individual subjectivity and analyses the relationship between the individual and collective societal change:

> Memory narrates with the vivid tones of actual experience. But what interests me is neither the liveliness of the accounts nor their faithfulness to reality, both of which would make these stories a secondary source for a good social history of Italy after 1945. Rather, what attracts me is memory's insistence on creating history itself, which is much less and perhaps somewhat more than a social history.

Passerini's purpose is to restore 1968 to the present not as an object of history but as a period that profoundly marked the individual lives of an entire post-war generation and forever changed the course of their lives. For her, 1968 was a defining moment in the construction of a collective self, through which the individual sought 'to create him or herself subjectively and to make a unique and inimitable contribution to a shared subjectivity'.[21]

In the German context, the prominent political scientist Wolfgang Kraushaar has also challenged a dominant public discourse on 1968 which, in his view, has romanticised and over-simplified these events. He argues that this public discourse tends to treat 1968 as a foundational myth by contending that West Germany only became a liberal and tolerant society after the rebellion of German students from 1967 to 1969.[22] Kraushaar suggests that the memory of 1968 has become not less but more complex as individual experiences constantly challenge the historical and closed version

21 Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation. Italy, 1968*, trans. Lisa Erdberg (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 60, 23, 68.

22 Wolfgang Kraushaar, *1968 als Mythos, Chiffre und Zäsur* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2000).

of these events. Every time historicisation tries to 'fix' a moment in time, individual experiences rebel against this 'impertinence', so that it is even more difficult to find a neutral/objective standpoint. [23] However, Kraushaar argues, our views of '1968' are constantly changing anyway, partly because while 68 gave the impetus for change, very little of the change happened in the way it was intended, and partly because every anniversary generates a surge of new interpretations which are dependent on the broader socio-political context.

Expanding on the tension between historicisation and memorialisation, Kraushaar touches upon several aspects that further complicate the issue: firstly, the sensationalist/partisan press which drives a wedge between individual and collective memory; and secondly, the attempts to represent '1968' in fiction and film. The latter can be very impressive (see for instance, the re-enactment of the 1967 demonstration in West Berlin in *The Baader-Meinhof Complex*, 2008), but compete with and overlie memories and historical evidence. Kraushaar argues for the precedence of historical facts over memory, given that ex-activists, chroniclers, participants, writers, journalists, and psychologists have created a 'myth of 68' that is difficult to disentangle and looks more like a collage. However, neither those who were present, nor the objective historian can claim a monopoly on the interpretation of the era. In fact, we could argue that it is one of the legacies of 68 that we have learned to question the impartiality of any authority and their motives.

The above studies make a number of important contributions to our understanding of the 'memory' of 1968. Firstly, this memory is highly contested – each of the authors, in his or her own way, challenges a prevalent or orthodox discourse on 1968 and seeks to open this up to competing narratives and interpretations. Here, it is not so much a question of constructing memories of 1968, but rather of contesting established ones and

23 One recent example of this process is the debates surrounding the killing of the German student Benno Ohnesorg who was killed by a policeman in West Berlin on 2 June 1967. This event, more than anything else, was the catalyst for the politicisation and radicalisation of West German youth. See 'The gunshot that hoaxed a generation', in: *The Economist*, 28 May 2009.

of challenging the dominant narratives which have held a monopoly over its memory. In the case of 1968, 'memory' is therefore invoked in order to produce alternative representations, dissenting narratives and countervailing experiences of these events. Secondly, each of the authors argues for greater interpretive complexity in our understanding of 1968. Memory needs to negotiate the difficult terrain between personal experience and objective history, between the dominant narratives of past events and what are often 'silent' voices. Whilst it is impossible to reconstruct 'the thing as it was', each of the authors calls for a pluralist and diversified interpretation of 1968 that incorporates different methodological approaches and divergent personal experiences.

Nonetheless, the memory of 1968 in each of these studies is restricted to the national cultural experience and is severed from its wider international context. By delineating and reinterpreting the historical experience of 1968, these authors seek to arrive at a closer understanding of the nature of a given national culture, of its limitations and future possibilities. The memory of 1968 is therefore seen to reflect processes of post-war historical change and modernisation or to mirror the political and intellectual preoccupations of a specific culture. This memory is often mobilised in the service of a broader quest to redefine national historical experience or to locate the threads of a common national identity. Thus, in Germany, 1968 is remembered and understood in relation to the earlier historical experience of the Nazi regime, whereas in France, many see May '68 as a unique and quintessentially French experience.[24] Yet the 1968 events were themselves profoundly international, transcending any given national context and interacting with other movements throughout the world. A whole set of recent studies attest to the international character of 1968, to the way in which the events in one country were inseparable in their logic and development from events occurring elsewhere. Indeed this protest movement 'transcended national borders in its attempt to realize an alternative society

24 See chapters by Kraushaar and Gordon in this volume.

and world order.'[25] Given the international dimension of 1968, how can we isolate representations of these events within a specific national context? Why have these events been reinscribed within national boundaries and harnessed towards the interests of national culture alone?

In this volume, our aim is to open up the memory of 1968 to a more diverse international perspective and therefore to help stimulate further comparative research on representations of 1968 across contemporary societies. How is 1968 narrated, framed, interpreted in different countries across the world? To what extent is there a shared collective memory of 1968 and can this memory cross national boundaries? How does the way 1968 is remembered differ in countries such as France, Germany, Italy, USA, Mexico and China? Is a transnational cultural memory of 1968 possible? The volume draws on selected papers from an international conference held at the University of Leeds on 17 and 18 April 2008 that was organised by a group of lecturers within the School of Modern Languages and Cultures at Leeds. As academics working on different national contexts (France, Germany, Italy) and within different disciplines (politics, literature and film) we nonetheless shared a fascination for 1968 and the way in which these events are conceptualised differently in different places. Our aims in organising the conference were twofold. Firstly, to juxtapose and compare representations of 1968 in different national contexts both within and outside Western Europe and secondly, to bring together specialists on 1968 from across a range of different scholarly disciplines (literature, history, film, politics, cultural studies). In producing an edited volume of selected papers, it is not our intention to define an 'international memory' of 1968 which in any case would be an impossible task to fulfil. Rather, by juxtaposing representations of 1968 from across a range of national cultures, we hope to contribute to a more complex and nuanced memory of 1968, one that provides a more authentic and dynamic representation of the international character of the events themselves.

25 Klimke and Scharloth (eds), op. cit., 1. For recent comparative studies on 1968 that emphasise its transnational dimension, see list of works in footnotes 6 and 7.

3. Processes of remembering

In comparing the way that 1968 is remembered across different national cultures, one clear line of demarcation separates public or official memories of 1968, which are typically constructed or endorsed by established institutions, political leaders or economic elites, and private memories or counter-memories that challenge and subvert this public memory and open it up to countervailing representations of the period. Whilst this line of demarcation masks deeper, more complex divisions and fault lines within each category, it does help elucidate some of the key processes by which 1968 is remembered in different places.

Public memories

State repression

The key means by which 1968 was apprehended by the established order in the aftermath of the events was through systematic repression and counter-offensive measures. In a westernised context, this repression often took the form of police brutality against students, a prohibition of leftist groupings, an eviction of strikers and an arrest of student leaders. These counter-offensives were endorsed by a public discourse that sought to discredit, circumscribe and stifle the events and to reassert a narrative of order, authority and stability. By June 1968, the French government had outlawed all the far-left organisations (*groupuscules*) involved in the movement. In West Germany, a 1972 measure (employment ban) prohibited state employees from belonging to any organisation pursuing 'anti-constitutional aims'. In Italy, the massive bomb blast in Milan in December 1969 which killed 17 people was initially blamed by the government on anarchists, although it was in fact the work of the extreme right.

Yet, it is in countries with non-democratic authoritarian regimes that this repression reached particularly violent extremes. Thus in Mexico, the government's brutal repression of the student movement was followed by a systematic denial of all wrongdoing and the construction of an 'official story' that cast the massacre as an instance of self-defence in the face of student provocation. The case of 1968 in China presents a complex and difficult picture as here 1968 was experienced not as a libertarian student movement, but as a state-led 'cultural revolution' with its own repressive ideology. Remembering 1968 in the immediate aftermath of the Cultural Revolution therefore involved exposing the violence and brutalities of this period, accessing previously hidden archives, and vindicating the 'truth' of what occurred. Whilst official discourse since the late 1970s denounced the movement as a 'national catastrophe', recent debates on the internet have challenged this point of view, rehabilitating the movement and defending or even glorifying the role of Mao Tse Tung.[26] Studies published elsewhere have examined the case of the former communist countries of Eastern Europe and the way in which following brutal state repression, a distorted public memory of the events was constructed. Thus in the case of Romania, Corina Petrescu and Serban Pavelescu note that after 1968 'the repressive apparatus was omnipresent and highly effective' which prevented the rise of a subversive anti-establishment discourse in the 1970s.[27] It is this state repression of 1968 and the official discourse which followed that became the main focus for counter-memories of the period, produced by those who sought to bear witness to the events and reject what they saw as a distortion of its memory.

26 See Lan Yang's chapter in this volume.

27 Corina Petrescu and Serban Pavelescu, 'Romania', in Klimke and Scharloth (eds), op. cit., 204.

Political appropriation

If the memory of 1968 has been systematically repressed by the establishment, it has also been appropriated by that same establishment in order to serve vested political interests. One of the ironies of 1968 is that in countries such as France, Germany and the United States, the right has reinstated 1968 for its own specific ends. This vision of 1968 is of a wholly negative and destructive juncture in the recent past, one associated with moral stagnation and social decline and one that is seen as responsible for the many social ills that beset contemporary societies. 1968 is seen to have triggered a spiral of decline, marking the descent from the moral certainties of the post-war period to a new phase of moral turpitude, permissiveness and social violence. In Germany, the political mainstream, baffled by the student insurrection, launched a campaign of disinformation which cast leftist activists as reincarnated Nazis whose political beliefs were highly suspect if not dangerous. This line of criticism continues to prevail within German debates about 1968 as reflected by the recent book by the former activist and historian Götz Aly in which he too argues that a Nazi worldview lurked behind the students' leftist ideology.[28] In France, Nicolas Sarkozy's notorious pre-election speech of 2007 encapsulated this style of political appropriation by a right-wing establishment: 'May 1968 imposed intellectual and moral relativism. The heirs of May 1968 had imposed the belief that anything goes, that there was no longer any difference between good and evil, between true and false, between the beautiful and the ugly. They tried to make us believe that the pupil was equal to the teacher, that one shouldn't give grades for fear of upsetting the weaker pupils, that all classification was to be avoided.' More unsettling still, behind the legacy of 1968 lurked, according to Sarkozy, the spectre of renewed social disorder, anarchy and chaos which at any moment could burst forth and engulf the French Republic: 'It is interesting how the heirs of those who in May 68 shouted CRS=SS now systematically take the side of thugs, hooligans and

28 Götz Aly, *Unser Kampf. 1968 – ein irritierter Blick zurück* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2008).

fraudsters against the police'.[29] Here 1968 was invoked as a political metaphor, one that could be used to bolster right-wing support, to discredit the left and justify appeals for a break with the past. For Sarkozy, it was necessary to close the chapter on 1968 in order to strengthen a weakened moral fibre, to reassert collective identity and rebuild the foundations of the French nation.

Commercialisation

1968 is also present in the public domain as an iconic moment of youth rebellion that is harnessed towards purely commercial ends. It is indeed ironic that a movement that challenged consumer values and called into question the capitalist system itself is now often appropriated for purely consumerist purposes. In their seminal work, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello argued that during the 1970s 'the ideas of May 1968' were incorporated into a capitalist system which sought to challenge existing constraints on the freedom of capital and private enterprise. Whilst 1968 was a high point of social critique and leftist opposition, it had now been enlisted in the cause of greater economic liberalism: 'it was by recuperating some of the oppositional themes articulated during the May events that capitalism was to disarm critique, regain the initiative, and discover a new dynamism'. This new spirit of capitalism sought to transform the private firm from an oppressive institution into a site for personal freedom, autonomy and creativity and this opened the way for 'a new liberated, and even libertarian way of making profit.'[30]

As Martin Klimke shows in this volume, the commodification of youth counter-culture has facilitated the rise of a cultural memory of 1968 that transcends national boundaries. Thus 1968 is evoked as a symbol of youth culture, idealism and liberation that can be used to sell products as diverse

29 Nicolas Sarkozy. Speech at Bercy, 29 April 2007.

30 Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London and New York, 2007), 168, 201.

as trainers, high fashion and fast cars. Yet, this 'radical chic' is less about sustaining a memory of 1968 than reducing it to a pure image, a hollowed out symbol emptied of its political and historical significance.

Private memories

Personal testimonies

Alongside the official 'public memories' of 1968, we find a stream of counter-memories produced by protagonists, eye-witnesses or ordinary people which may find expression in autobiographies, testimonies, partisan accounts, film or literature. Unlike official memories or objective historical analysis, such memories are often imbued with a sense of moral urgency and legitimacy, as they seek to bear witness to events which, in their view, are misrepresented or distorted in public accounts. Thus in Mexico, the 'unofficial literature' on 1968 has been impelled by a profound sense of injustice in relation to the state's denial and misrepresentation of what occurred. Similarly, in Italy, public 'silence' in relation to 1968 and in relation to those who died during the political violence of this period, has been challenged by those who have built 'martyr monuments' in relation to those who died.

Political battles

Representations of 1968 are a site for 'memory battles' amongst those who, depending on their politics, offer very different narratives of this period. Thus in France, the 2008 anniversary gave way to a fierce 'battle of interpretation' amongst former activists of different political persuasions. On the one hand, former leftist activists who had converted to the right, such as André Glucksmann – a Maoist activist in 1968 who became a 'new philosopher' in the 1970s and who threw his support behind Nicolas

Sarkozy's right-wing government in 2007 – railed against the 'errors' of 1968, its misplaced utopianism, its political extremism, its excessive violence. Meanwhile, Daniel Cohn Bendit, once the public face of the French student movement and now a green MEP, urged the public to 'forget '68' which had lost its political and social significance in the present day.[31] In his view, this movement was driven by archaic political ideas which could no longer provide answers to today's problems. On the other hand, leftist activists and intellectuals such as Daniel Bensaïd and Alain Krivine portrayed 1968 as a moment of revolutionary change which challenged a capitalist regime, opened up new political possibilities and which continued to define the political terrain in the present. Echoing Marxist and neo-Marxist analyses from the period, they argued that 1968 was the proof that revolution was still possible in a Europe experiencing generalised modernisation and prosperity. In this, it paved the way for subsequent protest from the 'big strikes' of 1995, to protest against employment contracts in 2006, to more recent anti-globalisation protest.

Marginal voices

Remembering 1968 also involves giving expression to those who were sidelined or eliminated from the dominant narratives of the period. These may include women, often omitted from male-centred accounts, immigrants who do not fit in with national stereotypes of the student or worker and even ordinary citizens who did not actively take part, but whose lives were irrevocably shaped by the events. In her oral history of the 1968 generation in Italy, Luisa Passerini noted during her interviews with former activists some of these glaring omissions: 'The mother goes unmentioned, barely touched on, in these stories, even under the pressure of direct questions'.[32] One set of counter-memories therefore sets out to redress this imbalance, giving voice to the other side of 1968 and shedding a new and alternative

31 Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Forget 68* (Paris: Editions de l'Aube, 2008).
32 Luisa Passerini, op. cit., 32.

perspective on this period. In Italy, the oral testimony of those on the other side of the barricades – university professors, school teachers, police, lawyers, journalists can shed an interesting light on how ordinary citizens remember 1968. For some of them, 1968 is not remembered as a moment of utopia and idealism, but one of chaos, anarchy and social disorder. In Germany, the experience of those with a dual, transnational identity, who are positioned both inside and outside a national culture, namely Turkish-German writers, challenges dominant narratives of the nation-state and its reconstruction of the past and opens this up to a distinctly transcultural perspective.[33]

Fictional imaginaries

1968 has become a source of inspiration for a new generation of writers and film-makers who have sought to restore this movement and explore its different possibilities in the present. Thus, novels, films, poems, plays and autobiographies have helped to sustain and reconfigure a cultural memory of these events within different countries. Some German writers have revived 1968 as a 'magic moment' of past idealism and youth revolt in relation to which they now experience a palpable sense of nostalgia and loss. Recent autobiographical texts have contributed to a cultural memory of 1968 in Germany as a utopian dream cut short by political violence and tragedy. Yet 1968 is not necessarily remembered as a moment of utopian revolt – recent Mexican literature has taken a conservative turn, depicting 1968 within a narrative of failure and emphasising the violence, madness and futility of all revolutionary acts. In recent films such as the German-language *Edukators*, 1968 is represented as a politically charged moment that can provide a source of inspiration for radicalism and dissent in the present day. This representation challenges what appears to be a prevailing

33 See chapters by Hilwig and Rinner in this volume.

consumerist pop-culture which has reduced 1968 to a commodified image, a mere product for passive consumption.[34]

Decentring 1968

Other private memories depict how 1968 was experienced in local places outside the dominant centres of student and worker protest. Such accounts often contest the dominant narratives which have confined this to a few urban centres and which tend to reduce the periphery to a provincial echo of national events. In France, Kristin Ross has criticised the tendency to concentrate the French 1968 in space and time, referring to 'a geographical reduction of the sphere of activity to Paris, more specifically to the Latin Quarter'.[35] There is now growing awareness that local experiences can provide not merely a mirror for national events but a deeper or even contradictory experience. Thus the testimonies of political groups in provincial Italy tend to subvert stereotypical images of 1968 and its relationship with the family.[36] Studies published elsewhere have examined how, in certain cases, the provinces acted as a site of resistance to 1968.[37]

The chapters in this volume combine a discussion of the memory of 1968 within different national cultures with an analysis of processes of remembering that cross different national boundaries. Thus, in the first section, 'Memories and Places', the contributors discuss contemporary debates surrounding the memory of 1968 in different countries, analysing the key narratives and representations and the main lines of division and controversy within these debates. Martin Klimke begins by examining the rise of a transcultural memory of 1968 in Europe and the United States. Subsequent chapters by Daniel Gordon, Wolfgang Kraushaar, John Foot, Timothy Brown and Claire Brewster look at contrasting representations of

34 See chapters by Fenoglio and Homewood in this volume.
35 Kristin Ross, op. cit., 8.
36 See chapter by Serenelli in this volume.
37 See articles by Siân Reynolds and Chris Reynolds in the special issue on 1968 *Modern & Contemporary France*, vol. 16, no. 1, May 2008.

1968 in France, Germany, Italy, United States and Mexico respectively. In the second section, 'Personal Testimonies', Daniel Bensaïd, a leading activist during the May 1968 events in France, reflects on their political and social significance in France today. In the third section, 'Marginal Voices', Susanne Rinner looks at representations of 1968 in recent fiction by Turkish-German writers; Stuart Hilwig considers how the 'other side' remembers 1968 in Italy, in other words, ordinary people who were there at the time but did not march; Lan Yang goes on to examine recent debates on the internet in China which have sought to revise and rehabilitate the legacy of Mao Tse Tung's cultural revolution. In the fourth section, 'Fictional Imaginaries', Ingo Cornils examines the representation of 1968 in recent German fiction; Irene Fenoglio considers fictional representations in Mexico, whilst Chris Homewood goes on to consider the German-language film *The Edukators* and its portrayal of 1968. In the final section, 'Decentring 1968', Sofia Serenelli considers how 1968 is remembered by former leftist activists from the provincial town of Macerata in Italy.

In re-evaluating the way 1968 is remembered in this volume, we are negotiating not only with the past but with present circumstances and future possibilities. Luisa Passerini in her classic work, emphasised the importance of reconstructing the memory of 1968 as a way of mapping future directions: 'there is a vein of '68 acknowledged as a worldwide phenomenon that changed and will change the course of our lives, within a process that is not completed and is thus difficult to grasp. Reconstructing it is a way of continuing it and of detecting the next steps.'[38] In producing this volume, we hope to make a small contribution to this process of remembering, a process which is still ongoing and still incomplete.

38 Luisa Passerini, op. cit., 60.