Again on 1968. Some remarks on recent Italian historiography

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Although Italian — as well as international — historiography engaged with the fiftieth anniversary of 1968 in a very lively way, it was probably not groundbreaking in terms of its originality. From an editorial perspective, this liveliness has translated into the publication of a considerable amount of studies, which this article is able to examine only partially, given the variety of their approaches, analytical levels and interpretations. The article addresses a selection of these texts in order to discuss some of the most significant directions of research that emerge from them, in terms of methodological approaches, interpretations and arguments. These books are, in alphabetical order: Michele Battini, *Un sessantotto*, Università Bocconi Editore, Milano 2018; Guido Crainz (ed.), *Il Sessantotto sequestrato. Cecoslovacchia, Polonia, Jugoslavia e dintorni*, Donzelli, Roma 2018; Marcello Flores, Giovanni Gozzini, *1968. Un anno spartiacque*, il Mulino, Bologna 2018; Monica Galfré, *La scuola è il nostro Vietnam. Il '68 e l'istruzione secondaria italiana*, Viella, Roma 2019; Paolo Pombeni, *Che cosa resta del '68*, il Mulino, Bologna 2018; Francesca Socrate, *Sessantotto. Due generazioni*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2018.
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Introduction

Half a century after the climax of the 1960s, as epitomised by the *annus mirabilis* 1968, Italian and international historiography still conveys a vivid interest in this complex and multifaceted topic. Such enduring interest is by no means surprising if we consider the fact that a true historiography of 1968 is a relatively recent phenomenon. In fact, during the first two decades, literature on this subject was mostly produced by former protagonists who tried to leave a testimony — and a historical interpretation — of their extraordinary life and political experiences. It was not until the thirtieth and — even more so — fortieth anniversaries that efforts were made to turn the 1968 events into a topic of historical analysis, probably as a result of the novel interest

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manifested by a younger generation of scholars. Although new approaches substantially contributed to deepening the understanding of the 1960s, studies on 1968 remained focused on the Western world, particularly on the countries in which students' protests had reached the greatest public visibility, as in the USA, France, West Germany and Italy. Only recently, some historical studies have approached this subject by adopting a wider spatial horizon. This shift was probably stimulated by both the upcoming fiftieth anniversary of 1968 and new perspectives introduced by the rise of global history. Thus, in the wake of an interrelated vision of the various events that have marked the history of the 1960s in different parts of the world,[1] the study of 1968, too, currently gives evidence of a greater attention to the wide range of networks and intersections in which the movement developed. This attitude has been emerging within international historiography for at least a decade now, in particular with reference to the debate on the intellectual foundations of 1968.

In the Italian editorial context, the historiographical liveliness of the fiftieth anniversary manifested itself through the publication of a significant number of studies, which we cannot possibly consider in a thorough way, given the great diversity of approaches, analytical levels and perspectives adopted in these studies. To put it in generic — and inevitably reductive — terms, it seems that a large part of the most recent publications essentially place themselves in a line of interpretative continuity with previous studies, nevertheless trying to shed light on aspects that have hitherto received little attention. This vast and variegated category includes texts that focus on themes such as the clear generational composition of the sixty-eighters; the anything but marginal role of secondary school students, and the strong involvement of women, even if the latter remained voiceless due to a pronounced male protagonism and leadership;[2] the countercultural dimension.[3] Other works seek to identify the repercussions of 1968 beyond the main urban centres, on which dominant narratives have insisted until recently, instead focusing their attention on single, local or provincial communities,[4] or on areas often deemed politically and socially marginalised, such as South Tyrol.[5] Conversely, a second strand

[1] For a broad description of the 1960s and the impact of certain dynamics triggered by decolonisation processes, see Samantha Christiansen, Zachary A. Scarlett (eds.). *The third world in the global 1960s*, New York-Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2015.

[2] See, for example, Paola Cioni et al. 2018. *Donne nel Sessantotto*, Bologna, il Mulino; Franca Balsamo, Marilena Moretti (eds.), *Sessantottine*, Turin, SEB 27, 2018.

[3] Franco Bergoglio, *I giorni della musica e delle rose. Rock, pop, jazz, soul, blues nel vortice del Sessantotto*, Viterbo, Stampa Alternativa, 2018.

[4] See, for example, Alberto Molinari, Federico Morgagni, William Gambetta, *Il Sessantotto lungo la via Emilia. Il movimento studentesco in Emilia Romagna (1967-1969)*, Rome, BraDypUS, 2018; Renzo Bertaccini (ed.), *Il Sessantotto a Faenza: storie, testimonianze, immagini*, Faenza, Tipografia Valgimigli, 2018; Antonella Soldàm, *Il Sessantotto in Friuli*, Romagnano al Monte, Booksprint, 2018.

[5] Birgit Eschgfäller, *1968. Südtirol in Bewegung*, Bolzano, Raetia, 2018.

of studies — perhaps the most innovative one, and more deeply rooted in an international debate — has tried to overcome the traditional spatial boundaries of 1968 (mostly the Western world and the first world countries); their aim has been to shift the focus to contexts of social activism that have thus far been neglected or have rarely been considered in relation to the transnational movement that irreversibly marked the year 1968, offering a reading in global terms and, therefore, with a worldwide reach.

In what follows, I will turn my attention to a select number of texts that are representative of the various tendencies outlined above. These are, in alphabetical order: Michele Battini, *Un sessantotto*, Università Bocconi Editore, Milan 2018; Guido Crainz (ed.), *Il Sessantotto sequestrato. Cecoslovacchia, Polonia, Jugoslavia e dintorni*, Donzelli, Rome 2018; Marcello Flores, Giovanni Gozzini, *1968. Un anno spartiacque*, il Mulino, Bologna 2018; Monica Galfré, *La scuola è il nostro Vietnam. Il '68 e l'istruzione secondaria italiana*, Viella, Rome 2019; Paolo Pombeni, *Che cosa resta del '68*, il Mulino, Bologna 2018; Francesca Socrate, *Sessantotto. Due generazioni*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2018.

Before looking into each individual text separately, it is useful to highlight a somewhat paradoxical aspect that characterises all six works: the absence of a shared definition of 1968. It is as if we are dealing with a topic on which so much has already been written, and of which so much is known, that we can take it for granted and focus on new perspectives, further elaborate hitherto neglected aspects, or reflect on the effects triggered by or inherited from 1968 — an issue that will never cease to fascinate scholars. Granted, all six studies draw on a minimal and shared notion of 1968, viewed in terms of the culmination of a sequence of protests and social dissent in which the student population played a prominent role. Even if there is substantial agreement on this formal fact, which is nevertheless minimal and not very helpful for a comprehensive understanding of 1968, various divergences, instead, arise when trying to give it a meaning and evaluate the protests and social conflicts connected to that date, as well as their impact on society. Given its complexity and the many ways in which 1968 manifested itself, it is hardly surprising to see how the most diverse readings of this phenomenon continue to compete with one another.

Depending on where one wishes to place the accent, that "number" can each time be interpreted differently:[6] a synonym for cultural revolution, or a revolution of social mores; student uprising; generational conflict; political revolution or romanticism; explosion of subjectivities; ideological apogee, and so on. Yet, it is surprising to find how, fifty years later, notwithstanding some very significant and detailed historiographical publications, 1968 continues to remain

[6] Klaus Leggewie, *1968 - Ein transatlantisches Ereignis und seine Folgen*, in Detlev Junker, Philipp Gassert (eds.), *Die USA und Deutschland im Zeitalter des Kalten Krieges 1945-1990. Ein Handbuch*, 2 voll., Stuttgart, DVA, 2018.

mostly an evocative term, adaptable to different interpretations depending on the perspective from which it is being observed, and subject to different periodisations.[7] It would certainly be unrealistic to expect that we can develop a fixed and widely shared definition, which would encompass a complex social phenomenon that involved a plurality of subjects, and which was not without ambiguity.[8] Nonetheless, to settle for a minimal notion, regulated more by formal aspects than by content, while allowing scholars to reduce 1968 to a variety of heterogeneous events and developments that may or may not be interlinked, carries the risk of losing sight of the very object of research and, subsequently, of making it incomprehensible.

A point of no return

Those most at risk of advancing a similar interpretation are Marcello Flores and Giovanni Gozzini. Although theirs is undoubtedly one of the most original publications in the Italian historiographical landscape, it nonetheless presents weaknesses, on both a heuristic and an interpretative level. The authors of *1968. Un anno spartiacque* [1968. A watershed year] explicitly declare their intention to put aside the — by now consolidated — Eurocentric approach, which focuses on students and workers in agitation, in predominantly European capital cities; Flores and Gozzini, instead, favour a global perspective that is "open to the world and not restricted to a single area". In their opinion, this also means "broadening the cause-effect relationship [between the studied events and contexts] in space and over time, making it more flexible and less immediate and direct" (p. 92). Starting from a definition of 1968 as a "global history event", but without explaining exactly what is intended by such an "event" except that it was "the first to occur simultaneously in the four cardinal points of the world", the authors tentatively explain this simultaneity by referring to a global fact: the general increase of the student population. In other words, the more than proportional growth of a segment of the population

[7] 1968 as an event has been counterposed by a 1968 viewed in terms of a process that covered the entire decade, as expressed by the definition *années 68*, which has taken root in French historiography. See, for example, Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand (a cura di), *Les années 68. Les temps de la contestation*, Bruxelles, Complexe, 2001; Patrick Rotman, Charlotte Rotman, *Les années 68*, Paris, Seuil, 2008; Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, *Vom Mai 68 zu den 68er Jahren. Eine Geschichte der vergessenen Orte*, in Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey Hg (eds.), *1968 - vom Ereignis zum Gegenstand der Geschichtswissenschaft*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998, pp. 101-15.

[8] This aspect was re-evoked in the debate published over a decade ago, edited by Simone Neri Serneri, *Il 1968 nella storia europea. Interventi di Simone Neri Serneri, Gerd-Rainer Horn, Giovanni Gozzini, Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, Detlef Siegfried, Alberto De Bernardi, Jean-Philippe Legois*, "Contemporanea, Rivista di storia dell'800 e del '900", 2008, 3, pp. 471-514, doi: 10.1409/27306.

that is young and highly educated, and therefore equipped with a solid dose of cultural and social capital, to put it in Bourdieu's terms. Drawing on data they obtained from a French study on the youth rebellion,[9] Flores and Gozzini illustrate their hypothesis using a spatial representation of the "events of youth rebellion, October 1967-June 1968" (Fig. 1.1, p. 16). In doing so, however, they fail to assess whether those "events of youth rebellion" necessarily coincided with collective movements or could somehow be linked to that peculiar collective movement that aimed at challenging the establishment and widening democratic forms and spaces: the movement of 1968 as it made its mark in that part of the — Western — world in which it was first recognised and designated according to the period of its escalation, in the course of the year 1968.[10]

In fact, the authors' attempt to advance an innovative methodological approach neglects the idea of 1968 as a collective movement, as a social subject marked by a profound sense of collective belonging and directed towards specific goals; instead, they adopt the aforementioned minimal notion. Although their approach highlights the central role of intellectual or, at the least, educated youth, it nonetheless fails to take into due consideration the different directions and goals pursued in other contexts. Without going into the aspects that characterise the movement of 1968, almost as if they take its history and meaning for granted, Flores and Gozzini seem more interested in accounting for the epochal impact of the historical "moment" of 1968 — rather than of the "movement" — on a global scale. 1968 thus becomes a factor — whose nature remains implicit and unclear to the reader — that determines cultural, political and social turmoil on a global scale, albeit in different times. On the basis of similar premises, it then becomes possible to identify a 1968 moment in Arab countries (Chapter III), drawing on incidents of student protests occurring in the streets of Cairo (February 1968), even if the authors admit that this was "a quite different circumstance than those that mobilised their counterparts in different parts of the world" (p. 92), or on the uprising of Palestinian youth against the raids of the Israelian army (March 1968), in the Jordan village of Karameh. Given the relevance of these clashes for the birth of the OLP in 1969, the authors do not hesitate to claim that "the Palestininan 1968 carries the name of Karameh: this means 'dignity', in Arab", and that it also designates the location of a battle of particular importance for the liberation movement of Palestine (p. 95). Yet, how and why the clashes of Karameh should be categorised under the 1968 heading remains unclear. Likewise, it is difficult to understand why the actions of university students in Bangladesh — to the background of the profound ethnic and secessionist tensions that were affecting the young Pakistani nation —

[9] Jean Joussellin. *Les révoltes des jeuenes*, Paris, Ed. ouvrières, 1968, pp. 13-15.

[10] This interpretation of 1968, also advanced by Peppino Ortoleva in his *Saggio sui movimenti del 1968 in Europa e in America*, Rome, Editori Riuniti, 1988, is discussed in detail in Marica Tolomelli, *Il Sessantotto. Una breve storia*, Rome, Carocci, 2008.

ought to be counted as a 1968-global event, rather than as just another example of postcolonial nationalism (pp. 98-102).

Even if the authors focus their attention on a much wider range of examples taken from various contexts, I believe that the mere protagonism of a young intelligentsia on the rise in diverse areas of the world, in the year 1968, cannot convincingly support the idea of 1968 as a "global history event". Rather, it would be preferable to develop a line of reasoning that could highlight the specificities of the various contexts of mobilisation that culminated in the year 1968, but without neglecting, first of all, the structural fact of a global increase in the student population and, secondly, the search for elements that might link the Bangladeshi students' claims to those of Italian or Dutch students, to give an example. That said, it must be noted that the interpretative weakness of this study also depends on the authors' very aim, namely to grasp the importance of 1968 as a watershed moment rather than to offer a new reading of the movement of 1968. In view of this, we cannot claim that the work does not succeed in its intentions; the authors' global perspective enables them to highlight lines of connection, cause-and-effect relations and dynamics of wide-ranging developments between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. These developments were often accelerated or triggered by the social, political and cultural turmoil that culminated at the end of the 1960s, and were caught up in webs of relations, communicative networks, and in the circulation of ideas and people, well beyond the ideological boundaries set out by the Cold War. Nonetheless, these dynamics were activated not only by the movement of 1968 as it developed in the Western world, even if its cultural and political origins coincided with changes taking place on a global scale, such as decolonisation and the redefinition of geopolitical balances, conflicts dictated by the bipolar order, and the crisis of Soviet socialism.

A 1968? *The* 1968

A book that is diametrically opposed, in a certain sense, to that of Gozzini and Flores is Michele Battini's *Un sessantotto* [A 1968]. Battini, too, has no pretension to offer a universal or catch-all definition of 1968, focusing instead on the intellectual genealogy of the political project that guided the movement's formation, in particular within the Italian context. In doing so, he takes as a starting point a number of essential texts that were produced during the movement's "auroral phase". Hence, like Gozzini and Flores, Battini is not interested in tracing the history of the 1968 movement, and although he shows a deep awareness of the movement's transnational dimension, he turns his attention to "a" 1968: the Italian experience, "the conflicting process that spanned the period from 1966-67 to 1972-73". At first sight, the author does not seem to be offering any new perspectives on the object in question, focusing on a limited

number of published sources that are highly familiar to experts in the field: *Università come istituto produttivo* [The university as a productive institution] and *Contro l'Università* [Against the University], published respectively in Trento and Turin in 1968, and especially the *Tesi della Sapienza* [The Sapienza theories], a "canonical" text of 1968 in Italy, written during an occupation in Pisa in February 1967. Thanks to an impressive philological sensibility, the author manages to provide an in-depth and telling analysis of this text, highlighting its political and cultural origins and, in doing so, revealing the political nature of 1968 well beyond its national boundaries. Rather than to attribute a representative value to the *Tesi della Sapienza*, Battini succeeds — by attentively rereading the document — in historicising the intellectual genealogy of 1968 well beyond the specific political context, namely that which opens with the political instability of 1956 and the rise of a transnational "new Left".[11] Within the Italian context, the themes and problems outlined in the *Tesi* of 1967 were posed in terms of an almost linear continuity with some of the most essential, problematic issues to have emerged from the founding moment of republican democracy or, more specifically, from its foundational text and its implementation in post-war Italy. The author attributes these issues to the tension between the [Italian] "Constitution" and "class struggle", that is, between a Constitution that aims to address social inequalities and, as a result, the varying degrees of citizenship practices, on the one hand; and a political situation characterised by a top-down exercise of (more economic than political) command and, therefore, by the essential role of a class struggle capable of expanding spaces of access to and participation in the creation of the political will of Italian society, on the other hand.

It is in light of these analytical premises that we might explain the structure of Battini's short yet significant piece of work. Following a first chapter on the "Theses" and on the (Italian/transnational) student movement, the author next moves to a consideration of Art. 3 of the Constitution, "Lelio Basso's institutional masterpiece", according to Stefano Rodotà.[12] He then focuses his attention on an intermediate link between the Constituent Assembly and the activities of the student delegations that gathered in Pisa in February 1967: Raniero Panzieri's reflections on the workers' control, developed between 1957 and the foundation of the "Quaderni Rossi" (1961). In this politico-cultural journey, which takes the reader from the principle of Art. 3 via the development of a strategy for class emancipation (in terms of a defeat of capitalist dominion) to the declaration — by the new "labour force in training" — of the will to contrast the compromise between formal democracy and capitalism, the author

[11] Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The spirit of '68. Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.

[12] Michele Battini, *Un Sessantotto*, Milan, Università Bocconi Editore, 2018, p. 54.

sheds light on significant nodes of continuity. A persisting line of thought continuously animates the most critical components of the Italian Left, in part active in the institutional area but, at the same time, also fully integrated in the debate on the transnational "new Left".[13]

Obviously, Battini's analysis is not a mere philological exercise, meant as an end in itself. The author's intention is to understand when and how the movement distanced itself from the political project that had shaped it in the first place. This project aspired to an actual extension of full citizenship to the subaltern classes, aimed at stimulating real participation and the possibility to truly influence decision-making processes, to such an extent that even a defeat of the established order was not to be excluded. Moreover, even if this project was restricted to the specific political cultures that developed in different national contexts, it had guided the formation of student movements far beyond national boundaries; from the early 1960s onwards, the movement arose first in the United States — Battini, in fact, recalls another founding text of the movement, the Port Huron Statement (1962) — and then in federal Germany, France, and subsequently also in Czechoslovakia and Poland, albeit on the basis of a shared functional approach, which did not, however, coincide in terms of contents. Finally, this project was subject — in different ways and at different times — to a process of postponement or redirection, or what the authors calls *dérapage*, which determines the movement's defeat in Italy as in the other countries affected by 1968. Battini's intention, in fact, is to explain why the original goal of substantial democracy, to be obtained via the progressive development of participation and social citizenship practices, vanishes in favour of an impatient idea of direct democracy, which is intended more as a free and full expression of — individual or collective — subjectivity, guided neither by normative models nor by well-defined reference points. Consequently, the movement moved from challenging the institutions of "formal democracy" via provocative acts and forms of "counterdemocracy",[14] the so-called "pratica dell'obbiettivo" (practice of reaching goals), to direct confrontations and battles — among which armed struggle — against institutions that had become synonymous with police repression.

At one point, a *dérapage* occurred whose effects turned out to be devastating for the fates of both 1968, in first instance, and the worker's movement and the European Left, in the long run. In the author's opinion, the reasons behind a similar derailment could be ascribed to two main factors. In first place, there was an internal factor, related to the movement's composite nature,

[13] Marica Tolomelli, *"Nuova sinistra" e Psiup. Considerazioni su legami e affinità non solo teoriche*, in Learco Andalò, Davide Bigalli, Paolo Nerozzi (eds.). *Il Psiup. La costituzione e la parabola di un partito (1964-1972)*, Bologna, BraDypUS, 2015, pp. 73-84.

[14] Pierre Rosanvallon, *Controdemocrazia. La politica nell'era della sfiducia*, Rome, Castelvecchi, 2012.

both from a social and a cultural perspective. This meant that, at one point, "the rebellion took on an existential connotation that was nurtured by the alternative countercultures, from music to artistic experiences",[15] not easily reconcilable with the culture of the workers' movement. Second, Battini identifies a structural factor linked to the repressive role of the State's methods of control and existing power relations. Latter were strongly affected by the international recession of the 1970s and by the beginning of a process of capitalist reorganisation that aimed at substituting the Fordist model (at least in the Western world). These reasons undoubtedly explain certain crucial and hardly disputable aspects of the history of 1968. More problematic, however, is the idea of a "deviation" of 1968, as the title of the book's last chapter suggests. This seems to imply that the movement's goals, trajectories and stages had been clearly outlined from its earliest phase, and that its success would have been guaranteed by following the movement's political programme. Battini is by no means naive about this point, and expresses clear awareness of the uncertainties and the insufficient solutions offered by the movement to the problems it had itself raised: "with regard to constitutional democracy, in 1967 the student movement seems to adopt a contradictory attitude, which goes beyond the claim of the right to an education viewed as a case of the right to work. A similar contradiction is of utmost importance to understand the reasons behind the limits of the movement's political culture, which prevented its informal 'leader groups' to develop a strategy capable of creating unique forms of participatory democracy within a constitutional framework".[16]

We must, however, note that 1968 was a collective movement: a highly composite subject that was constantly forced — as a movement — to redefine its goals, strategies and forms of action so as to maintain a good level of mobilisation, which was its life and soul. As the sociology of movements has demonstrated more than once, those movements aimed at radically changing the existing social order differ from organised political forces (e.g. political parties) and mobilisations born from single events, in that they cannot become definite within a strictly invariable platform.[17] This is also what happened to 1968: having taken shape with a certain horizon of aspirations, the movement unfolded in a continuous confrontation with new problems and in the search for answers, in a chain of reactions and counter-reactions provoked by the daily challenge to authorities and the established order. The movement's political horizon was, in a certain sense, clearly recognisable from its very

[15] P. Rosanvallon, *Controdemocrazia*, p. 90.

[16] P. Rosanvallon, *Controdemocrazia*, p. 88.

[17] Studies that remain a classic point of departure include those by Donatella della Porta in the Italian context; Dieter Rucht, Joachim Raschke and Hanspeter Kriesi in German-language academia; Alain Touraine in the French academic world. Authors such as Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald remain essential references in an Anglo-American context.

statu nascenti, but it was also an open horizon, composite and — especially — in continuous evolution. The "instances of existential liberation, supported by cultural suggestions that are unrelated to the cultures of the workers' movement and inspired by psychoanalysis, anthropology and the various 'sciences of language', up to the point of developing autonomous practices", to which the author makes reference,[18] didn't emerge until later. Although perhaps easier to identify in contexts other than the Italian one, even in Italy these instances were a fundamental part of the cognitive orientation of 1968 ever since its creation. However, for some time they remained in the shadow of the intellectual authority of the "older militants and leaders, who had been trained between the late 1950s and the 1960s"; the latter were more distinctly directed towards the "heretical cultures of the workers' movement (anarcho-unionism, workers' councils, critical neo-Marxism)".[19]

Studying "anthropological substances" under the microscope

This brings us to the issue Francesca Socrate analyses in depth in her *Sessantotto. Due generazioni* [1968. Two generations]. Although it falls under the category of those texts that consider 1968 a global movement, which started with the climactic moment of the student protests in 1967-1968, thus consistent with the reading offered by Flores and Gozzini, Socrate's study focuses on the Italian context in order to critically re-examine the movement's generational dimension. As the title indicates, this re-examination aims at shedding light on the mixed nature of the "anthropological substance" that shaped the movement, and subsequently developed it from an age and gender perspective. In line with the clash between older and younger students that Battini also highlights, Socrate examines this aspect more in detail, and comes to identify two *social generations*, distinguished — and even separated — by an "anthropological break".[20] It is in the composite nature of the alleged *generation of 1968* that the author traces one of the main reasons behind the famous ambiguities or contradictions — up to the *dérapage* that Battini underlined — that are generally ascribed to 1968.

This generation is composed of at least two generations, distinguished by a small yet decisive age difference. The older generation grew up during the post-war transition period and was profoundly affected by the climate of the late 1950s, dense with political and cultural tensions, as well as by the crucial turning point of the crisis of July 1960. A generation anchored in and marked by the *statu nascenti* of the new democratic-republican order, which focused

[18] M. Battini, *Un sessantotto*, p. 89.
[19] M. Battini, *Un sessantotto*, p. 89 e ss.
[20] Francesca Socrate, *Sessantotto. Due generazioni*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 2018, p. XV.

on the central role of highly organised parties that were structured around the country's political life. Moreover, it was very sensitive to Art. 3 of the new constitutional charter, as Battini also observes. The younger (though only by a few years) generation was born and grew up during the ascending phase of the *golden era*; it was lured by an exciting horizon of resources — economic but also, and mainly, cultural ones (an element discussed also in Galfré's study, which will be analysed further ahead) — and far more distant from political institutions. This is demonstrated by the decline in participation in all political youth organisations throughout the 1960s. Halfway the decade, the most perceptive sociological studies on youth behaviour — Socrate specifically refers to a study by Guido Martinotti — had already spotted meaningful links between the increasing signs of disaffection towards institutional politics and expressions of "accentuated radicalism", which stressed "a more intense interest in certain basic values and a stronger inclination to engage in actions with other individuals not connected by a friendship relation".[21]

In her analysis of the various aspects that define the two different generations, Socrate does not exclusively rely on statistics, sociological studies, texts produced by the movement and audio-visual sources. An expert in the use of oral sources, the author also falls back upon the personal accounts of former protagonists, both men and women. She thus manages to reconstruct — in an exceptionally unique way — the memory of 1968 that emerges from the numerous subjective narrations. Indeed, the author makes use of a kind of database composed of 63 oral history interviews, gathered over a period of 10 years, which have been transcribed, analysed and re-examined using a computational linguistics method, of which Socrate provides a brief technical explanation in the introduction. The full data and graphical representations of the used materials are presented in an appendix. Thanks to this possibility of extracting from the body of interviews a *characteristic vocabulary* and a *specific vocabulary*, as well as a *peculiar language* and *co-occurrences*, based on varying criteria (sex, year/place of birth, location of university enrolment in 1968, etc.), the computational linguistics method has enabled Socrate to widen the perspective, enhance the understanding and enrich the historical analysis of the object of her research in a highly original way. As a result, she is able to unravel and then critically reconstruct the question of the generational dimension of 1968. In fact, the words, the verb tenses and personal pronouns, the adverbs and the specific vocabulary, recognisable thanks to the author's unique linguistic analysis, manage to express and account for the differences in political socialisation and in worldly values, as well as for differences in gender and social belonging, around which *the* generations of 1968 are constructed. Consequently, differences emerge that should be traced back not so much to

[21] Guido Martinotti, *La partecipazione politica dei giovani*, in "Quaderni di Sociologia", n. 3-4, 1966, pp. 366-368, cit. in F. Socrate, *Due Generazioni*, p. 24.

heterogeneous, cultural orientations; rather, they constitute the movement's composite anthropological substance, and may help to understand the nature of those ambiguities and contradictions that characterise 1968, which form the starting point of Socrate's study.

The youngest among the young

Another essay that deals with the composite nature of the subjects linked to the generation of 1968, although motivated by a different interest in the matter, is Monica Galfré's *La scuola è il nostro Vietnam* [School is our Vietnam]. Based on largely unpublished and hitherto neglected sources, this study enhances the state of the art of existing historiography, as it takes into serious consideration the world of Italian secondary education. In tune with Gozzini e Flores's hypothesis regarding the global rise of the student population, the author highlights the leading role of a *third* generation, so to speak, which was also present within the movement: the first generation "to have attended a unified secondary school, which contributed to increase the distance between the level of education and cultural adaptation of new generations and that of previous generations".[22] Compared to the cultural profile of the university students, Galfré sustains that this third generation was a more homogeneous group, more deeply integrated "in the mass society of the economic boom and of consumer goods", having been immersed in it ever since infancy.[23] Clearly the author is referring to a homogeneity in worldly values, universal languages (transmitted to adolescents in a particularly strong way through music) and behavioural dispositions, which obviously does not cancel out the heterogeneous composition and social position of youth aged between 14 and 19 years. Nevertheless, the protests that shook up the world of Italian secondary education between autumn 1968 and spring 1969 highlight the dominance of cultural homogeneity over social heterogeneity. Drawing on the extremely rich documentation produced by headmasters, superintendents, ministerial supervisors and police prefects, held at the Central Archive of the State in Rome, in addition to texts produced by the students themselves (e.g. magazines, flyers, public statements), Galfré accurately and meticulously reconstructs a form of mobilisation that indiscriminately involved students attending upper secondary schools, technical schools and professional institutes.

On closer inspection, the new subjects that emerge from 1968 in the context of secondary education are mainly technical school students as well as students attending professional institutes, the latter at a later stage. This part of the student population coincides with those individuals that are the most explicit

[22] M. Galfré, *La scuola*, p. 121.
[23] M. Galfré, *La scuola*, p. 119.

expression of the "new educational claims of the subaltern classes".[24] The upper secondary school students, by contrast, were equipped with more cultural tools and spaces of self-expression; consequently, they anticipated — to some extent — or launched the school protests even before the mobilisation took off. Thus, the context of Milan, which represented the movement's "innovative peak", had made its mark as early as 1966, with the notorious scandal involving students of the Parini high school; guilty of having discussed the topic of sexuality with their fellow students in ways hardly fitting with the prevalent puritan moral of the time, the students again caught public attention following an occupation in March 1968, which had a contagious effect.[25] In sum, if the upper secondary school students were most accustomed to the capture of speech among the students in secondary education that participated in the movement, those of the technical — mostly industrial — schools and professional institutes present themselves, instead, as the most vivacious part of the "anthropological substance" — to use Francesca Socrate's words — of the protests. This is because, other than fully experiencing the classist nature of the school system, the latter also represent the crucial joining link that can convey the idea of "students and workers united in the battle" that was so dear to the Italian 1968 movement.[26]

In view of these rather heterogeneous social backgrounds, there are ultimately two facts that unite the school protests: the first must be linked to the struggle for the right to assemblies during school hours. This demand, which indiscriminately cuts across the most varied contexts of student mobilisation and responds to the students' heartfelt need for debate, confrontation and decision-making, takes on a profound symbolic meaning. Viewed as a "freedom of expression of the base" or as "an effective weapon in the hands of the student population",[27] the assembly represents a crucial instrument of direct democracy in the struggle against authoritarianism — of which the school was the "main centre of reproduction and legitimisation" — and against all those who express such authoritarianism:[28] school headmasters, the "treacherous" (yet often allied) teachers, parents, police or state authorities. The second essential fact, which characterises 1968 *tout court* and therefore not just the specific context analysed in this study, relates to the profound awareness of the links between the protests in the educational world, society as a whole and the numerous, ongoing conflicts in other parts of the world. The slogan chosen for the title of Galfré's book explicitly conveys the continuous cross refer-

[24] M. Galfré, *La scuola*, p. 85.

[25] In this regard, the author cites the words of the superintendent of Milan who, in a letter to the Ministry of Public Education, defined the Parini occupation "the first breeding ground and centre of contagion of the [student] protest". Ivi, p. 45.

[26] M. Galfré, *La scuola*, p. 86.

[27] M. Galfré, *La scuola*, p. 165.

[28] M. Galfré, *La scuola*, p. 115.

ences between the most diverse situations of social conflict and the insistence on self-representations aimed at putting the Italian secondary school students on the same level as the "youngsters of Vietnam, Latin America, Guinea, Mozambique and Angola who fight and die for their freedom".[29] From this perspective, the historian's analysis enriches the history of 1968 by including the secondary school students, with full rights, among the movement's leading actors and with an autonomy of their own: no longer, then, as "the last wheel of the car" being pulled along by older brothers and sisters. Thanks to this shift in focus, Galfré not only manages to add a missing piece to the composite mosaic of 1968, but she also provides elements for a more complete understanding of the specific dynamics of the movement's development and duration in Italy. Thus, if we consider the crisis that the university protests were going through in autumn 1968, as became evident during the national assembly held in September of that year at Ca' Foscary University of Venice, the growth of the mobilisation in schools up to spring 1969 — accompanied by a continuous search for links with wider social conflicts — greatly contributed to stir up the protests and eventually trigger the worker's Hot Autumn. In sum, from Galfré's reconstruction it emerges that the function of secondary school students as a "third generation" of 1968 was anything but secondary in assuring the movement's astonishing duration, if compared to other geographical contexts, such as the German one.

A game of scales: from a global perspective to Eastern Europe

By shifting the focus from a global dimension to Eastern Europe, part of the historiography under examination here looks with new interest at the events of 1968 that left deep wounds beyond the Iron Curtain, leading to an irreversible crisis. This is particularly the case of Guido Crainz's edited volume, *Il Sessantotto sequestrato* [The abducted 1968], although we should also mention a recent special issue of the journal *Europa Orientalis*. The latter, though, was more centred on the literary reception and cultural impact of these events.[30] Based on the premise of a "substantial indifference of the Western Left, beginning with the brief period of student movements", Crainz aims to give a voice to those who were left unheard in the historical context of the late 1960s. He thus presents the reader with texts — backed up by additional documentation — written by others: Pavel Kolář on the Prague Spring; Wlodek Goldkorn on the Polish 1968 that "the West refused to see"; Nicole Janigro on the peculiarity of the very brief but intense 1968 in Yugoslavia. The volume ends with

[29] Flyer by student committees of Bologna, n.d., M. Galfré, *La scuola*, p. 120.

[30] Cristiano Diddi, Viviana Nosilia, Marcello Piacentini (eds.), *L'altro Sessantotto: Politica e Cultura nell'Europa centro-orientale e orientale*, "Europa orientalis", XXXVIII, 2019.

an essay by the historian Anna Bravo. Linking back to Crainz's introductory chapter,[31] Bravo offers her thoughts on the possible reasons behind the failed dialogue — not to speak of solidarity or interaction — between the movements that emerged in the two areas of divided Europe.[32]

It goes without saying that neither Vietnam nor the sophisticated mechanisms of alienation that marked prosperous societies, capable of neutralising the oppositional force of the workers' movement, blinded as it was by dazzling mass consumption, inspired the university students of socialist countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, or the forgotten Yugoslavia. Nonetheless, the nature of the conflicts that sparked social mobilisation in these contexts can be attributed to the tension between Constitution and class struggle that Battini considers as the origin of "that" 1968 he analysed in his essay, but which — as I have already mentioned — was at the basis of the movement on a transnational scale. This was a tension between principles of social equality and supremacy of the popular classes, and a reality structured around hierarchies contingent upon obedience to the power that had given shape to peculiar forms of social disparities, and from which new economic elites had emerged. It was also a tension between principles of fundamental freedoms — "of speech, press, assemblies, political meetings, marches, demonstrations", as declared by Art. 71 of the Constitution of the Popular Republic of Poland — and daily practices marked by systematic bans and censure, which occurred in the most diverse expressive circumstances, mostly cultural ones.[33] In a certain sense, as had happened in Western Europe, the clash between shared egalitarian values (none of the protests in Eastern Europe were antisocialist in nature) and a reality permeated with lies and mystifications was probably at the foundation of a discontent that was perceived and expressed — not by chance — mostly by a young intelligentsia that had evolved in the second post-war period. Still, beyond the mere functional equivalence that emerges from references to the foundational principles of post-war democratic governments, there was no substantial coincidence in goals and aspirations. As the chapters of Crainz and Bravo clearly point out, in Western Europe the movement aimed at overcoming the democratic semblances that post-war capitalism had adopted so as to guarantee a new validating basis; it aspired to a substantial democracy that would not settle for fundamental (read formal) freedoms and rights. In short, with regard to the demands that had emerged from the student protests in the

[31] Guido Crainz, *L'Europa che non abbiamo capito*, in Id. (eds.), *Il Sessantotto sequestrato*, Rome, Donzelli, 2018, pp. 3-62.

[32] Anna Bravo, *Parigi/Praga: dalla differenza alla separazione*, in G. Crainz, *Il Sessantotto sequestrato*, pp. 161-186.

[33] The Article is cited in the document by Zygmunt Bauman, *Contestazione a Varsavia*, p. 118, and has been partially reproduced in the book edited by G. Crainz, *Il Sessantotto sequestrato*, in the open section that contains Wlodek Goldkorn's contribution, *La Varsavia che l'Occidente non ha voluto vedere*, pp. 101-121.

socialist world, the Western 1968 movement felt that it had reached a decisively more advanced stage. In other words, it noted a change of direction — in terms both of social criticism and goals — that could only enhance the distance from and scepticism towards the events happening on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

What further obstructed the possibility of dialogue was the fact that the reform movement in Czechoslovakia did not represent a uniquely grassroots opposition to authorities; rather, it was closely linked to aspirations shared also by the Communist party and by government bodies. This fact inevitably raised doubts and reticence among those who considered a grassroots mobilisation in open defiance to the State decisive in a successful strategy of deep social transformation. It is true that there were also more carefully considered attempts, at least in the case of the Prague Spring, as Crainz recalls, whereas Goldkorn and Janigro observe that the protests in Poland (March 1968) and Yugoslavia (June 1968) went unnoticed. Rudi Dutschke visited Prague as early as April 1968, announcing his solidarity with a shareable aspiration to a "socialist democracy",[34] or a "democratic socialism", as the students of Belgrade would announce not long thereafter.[35] Despite the importance that the words of a charismatic leader such as Dutschke might have had on the German student movement, widespread scepticism and a fundamental lack of willingness to understand the Czechoslovakian events nevertheless prevailed. The Western 1968 movement remained focused on more distant and "exotic" contexts, which could thus be interpreted and adapted more easily to the claims and aspirations of the movement itself. Not surprisingly, the cases of Vietnam, China and Cuba continued to exert an almost hypnotic fascination even after the limits and contradictions of these societies had become evident.

Although the distance and unrelatedness of the type of socialism these countries embodied undoubtedly nurtured distorted readings, if not actual mythicisations, the reasons behind the failed interest in Prague, Warsaw and, in particular, Belgrade, did not lie exclusively in the exotic charm of distant countries. One factor that does not emerge from the volume edited by Crainz, but which seems relevant to understand the Western movement's weak empathy

[34] The text was swiftly translated in Italian, under the title *Dutschke a Praga*, Bari De Donato, 1968.

[35] A year on from the week that marked 1968 in Yugoslavia, in June 1969, *The three thousand words* was published; this document reiterated the fact that the students were, and continued to be, in support of a "democratic socialism" that had not yet been fully accomplished, in spite of the principles set out in the Constitution. Significantly, the document evoked the Prague Spring (and not the Western movement), calling back to mind a famous document — *The two thousand words* manifesto — written by Czechoslovakian intellectuals in June 1968, prior to the invasion. See Nicole Janigro, *Ambiguità e doppiezze del Sessantotto jugoslavo*, pp. 123-43, especially p. 136. Part of *The two thousand words* manifesto has been reproduced in Janigro's book, pp. 89-93.

with its Eastern European counterparts, is that the socialist world of the Soviet Bloc had already lost its charm long before the "finishing blow" generated by 1968. Thus, any hopes for reform and evolution in terms of the completion of a socialist democracy had vanished completely with the events of 1956, from the criticism of Stalinism to the invasion of Hungary — more than a decade prior to 1968. The disappointment these events had generated played a decisive role in shifting the focus to more convincing — or, at the least, different — alternatives to a Soviet model no longer capable of raising hopes of real social change. Moreover, we mustn't forget that, among the intellectual origins of 1968 in the West, there was the transnational and multifaceted idea of a "new Left" that emerged, not surprisingly, after the divide caused by 1956, as part of the search for an alternative to Soviet socialism. All these elements enable us not to justify or judge, but to explain the reasons for which — in spite of the energies, the originality of thought and the human costs of the Eastern European uprising between the spring and summer of 1968 — the Western movement remained reserved and biased. We could therefore assert that in the context of the time, things could not have gone differently. The Western students weren't necessarily obtuse or insensitive; their hopes simply resided elsewhere. In other words, they thought they would find answers to their questions and aspirations in places where socialism was still in progress, especially in postcolonial contexts, rather than a universe trapped in rigid dogmatism and intolerant of attempts to change it from the inside.

It is understandable that, 50 years on, and especially in light of the relentless global crisis of the Left, one feels the need to reconcile with the insensitivity of the past, directing one's attention to a part of the world that has long been neglected. It is therefore comprehensible — as Anna Bravo reminds us — that certain leaders of the Italian 1968 should travel to Prague, as happened in 2008, to pay tribute to Jan Palach's memory. Bravo also points out that it is equally comprehensible, in retrospect, to feel utter embarrassment when remembering that "half a million of soldiers and 5,000 tanks were not enough to shift our politics of the time by a millimetre" and that we "ranked our pain on a scale of 1 to 10".[36] However, it is not a matter of taking 1968 once again to trial for its limits and undeniable inconsistencies. Rather, we must try to fathom the reasons behind those reactions and find clues that may render 1968 understandable in all its different aspects. In sum, if the places of the memory of 1968 remain Paris or Berkeley, Berlin or Trento (the cover of Flores and Gozzini's book, too, features a symbolic image of "May '68", despite the declared intention to adopt a global history perspective), this is because it was in the Western world that 1968 had most impact. Other than reaching extraordinary levels of radicalism, in the West it manifested itself in remarkable ways

[36] A. Bravo, *Parigi/Praga*, p. 136.

and with a certain coherence of its own: it managed to impose itself on the public scene more than in any other context of mobilisation, it openly challenged authorities, and it continued to produce effects and dynamics for years to come. Obviously the Prague Spring also played its part, becoming none other than "a watershed that anticipated the successive decline of the Left on a global scale, a moment in which a bold idea of democratic socialism merged with anti-utopian scepticism".[37] Yet, if this event represented a turning point in the history of the European Left, it proved far less important for the idea and the practices of 1968 that the Western students were giving shape to.

For clarity, 1968 in the West took on a overt anti-systemic connotation, whereas in Eastern Europe it aspired more to humanise socialism and reconduct it to the path it had long derailed from, on the basis of a debate that was different — and, regrettably, also divided, Bravo observes — from the watchwords proclaimed in the Western capitals. These words are not nurtured by any love for deeply-rooted Eurocentric paradigms: I simply feel that not all epoch-making events that occurred in the year 1968 can be ascribed to the 1968 movement. To sustain the opposite means to continue harbouring a myth that history has no need for whatsoever.

Legacies?

This statement brings me to the last publication under examination in this review: a "booklet" — as the same author defines it — about the legacy of 1968, from the hands of Paolo Pombeni. Published by il Mulino, in a series called "voices", *Che cosa resta del '68* [What remains of '68] isn't the result of in-depth research, but a balanced reflection in which the expert and competent point of view of a historian intertwines with that of a citizen and former participant in the movement, albeit "from the fifth row", as the author ironically states. Without claiming to be complete and avoiding — like all other essays examined here — a precise definition of a movement the author considers difficult to label given its multiple facets, Pombeni limits his reflection to the Italian context. He thus probes for traces and legacies of a movement to whom he attributes, much like Gozzini and Flores, dividing effects. From a methodological perspective, this is by no means an easy enterprise; as a collective movement, from its very beginning 1968 interacted with its surrounding environment, at times also triggering unintentional dynamics and effects. Consequently, it becomes even more arduous to distinguish between effects that can clearly be ascribed to 1968 and those following from the

[37] Kolář, p. 87. On the explosive impact of the Prague Spring on the Left, see Maude Bracke, *Which socialism? Whose Détente? West European communism and the Czechoslovak crisis, 1968*, New York, Central European University Press, 2007.

interaction with other social actors. However, 50 years is a long time, and if one considers the national history of the last five decades, it is evident that numerous profound changes have taken place: the very composition of Italian society has altered, as have the people and forms of representation, political cultures and, needless to say, the international context. All this makes it rather difficult to conduct an archaeological study of 1968, a fact that neither alarms nor scares the author.

Drawing on a professional competence developed over years of research, Pombeni simplifies his methodological approach by identifying a number of essential issues that the movement raised, to then move ahead in time so as to examine how these issues manifest themselves still in the present. His analysis thus unfolds along the lines of certain main points: the school system and education, in general; work and the role of the working classes; gender relations and forms of cohabitation that are alternative to the small middle-class family; the religious dimension; power relations and world views. What emerges is an indefinite picture, of which one may grasp both virtues and vices, as the author rightly observes, without drifting towards one-sided judgements of the movement, be they substantial condemnations or hagiographic glorifications. All in all, Pombeni's observations highlight the importance of what he considers the *pars destruens* of 1968 and the fragility of the *pars construens* the movement has given proof of. In other words, 1968 — at least within the limits of the Italian context — predominantly called into question, challenged, condemned and attacked the established order, though without having "[sufficiently] strong legs" to follow a trajectory of change: or, better still, to implement a profound social transformation on the basis of the pursued values. All this happened regardless of whether one considers the school system — where "the idea itself of school and education went into crisis",[38] as Galfré aptly demonstrates — or interpersonal and gender relations, the reorganisation of work and production, the movement's interactions with the institutional arena of politics, or its judgement of the world. However, in these fragilities the author sees not the only, but certainly one of the explanatory factors of the many problems that continue to affect Italian society and its institutions: so much so, Pombeni concludes, that we now end up having to retrieve the famous slogan "this is only the beginning, the battle continues!" in order to proceed in our attempt to guide and govern — with the tools of reason and rationality — the transitional phase, the passage of humanity towards a new and yet to be defined "historic era". If 1968 managed to give expression to some of the symptoms of this passage, raising important questions and problems, Pombeni claims that — in its search for alternative worlds — it slackened off and surrendered to "a naive belief in the utopia".

While this judgement is certainly shareable, it fails to take into account two

[38] M. Galfré, *La scuola*, p. 122.

aspects: first, although it is true that 1968 sought to emphasise the existence of an alleged maieutic power of utopia, the latter was conceived as a concrete utopia, to put it in Ernst Bloch's words. That is, as a part of reality. Second, in spite of the fact that the 1968 movement was highly successful in occupying space in the public arena and gaining wide appeal in the long term, the ideas and visions it represented clashed, day by day, not only with resistances and contrasting values, but also, and especially, with all the complex elements related to that momentous transition that Pombeni rightly pinpointed. Thus, the reach of 1968 progressively diminished, leaving traces of its passage only in its capacity to continuously raise questions, debates, and historical and political reflections on the contradiction between principle and reality (constitutions and power relations), on the basis of which the movement had developed. In doing so, it revealed an extraordinary demystifying force.

What next?

Fifty years on, it is clear that 1968 continues to evoke a certain historiographical interest. It is worth mentioning how, at least in Italy, the debate is being kept alive mostly by former leaders, even if we must acknowledge that they have increasingly sought to adopt a critical distance or to fall back upon innovative methodological approaches. In sum, many questions are still raised by those who have been marked, in varying degrees, by the formative experience of 1968. Yet, we must also attribute a considerable exploratory interest to the youngest generations, fascinated as they are by the impetuous and apparently unparalleled force of that movement. Frequent questions raised by young people regard the possibility that 1968 could be "repeated", that is, if a politically conscious youth might once again become a historical protagonist and "capture speech",[39] and consequently decide its direction, conquering a space of its own in the public scene. The answer to this question is simple: after all, we know very well that history does not repeat itself. However, studying 1968 can undoubtedly be useful to identify some of the ways in which collective action originated and developed in different political and social contexts. Additionally, it can help understand the weaknesses and limits of social movements when they are unable to equip themselves with adequate tools of representation, through which to reach out to the authorities.

With regard to the spatial perimeter of 1968, some have tried to expand the viewpoint, convinced that they could find traces of the movement across the globe. Departing from a conception of 1968 that is not necessarily Eurocentric, while remaining conscious of the salient peculiarities that it acquired in the

[39] Michel De Certeau (1968). *La prise de parole et autres écrits politiques*, Paris, Seuil.

West, I feel that the tendency to stress the movement's global dimension reflects a fascinating challenge but also a forced act, with a scarce heuristic value. It might be more useful to adopt a comparative perspective, capable of highlighting possible, functional equivalences between the movements of the various areas in the divided Europe of the time, and perhaps also certain movements in postcolonial contexts (in particular post-1962 Algeria and a number of Latin American countries). An essential aspect of 1968 was the emphasis the movement placed on the issue of democracy, the search for more authentic and substantial forms of participation in public life, in associative life, in processes of shaping a political will, regardless of whether one wishes to decline democracy in terms of a participant or socialist form of democracy. Given the current, historical phase in which the spread of anti-politics is threatening people's affection for democracy *tout court*, it seems that this aspect could be picked up again and given value, so as to reread 1968 from a perspective that is, yes, European, but not because of this Eurocentric.