

Historein

Vol 13 (2013)

Questions and Orientations in History during the last 20 years. Part 2



1968, 1989, 2011: reconsidering social movements, 'moments of change' and theoretical framing over time

Kostis Kornetis

doi: [10.12681/historein.164](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.164)

Copyright © 2014, Kostis Kornetis



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Kornetis, K. (2013). 1968, 1989, 2011: reconsidering social movements, 'moments of change' and theoretical framing over time. *Historein*, 13, 57–70. <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.164>

Historical dates have traditionally served as something more than mere conventions used to help historians carve up time, punctuate moments and create meaning regarding the past. Specific years such as 1968 and 1989 act as landmarks, not least because they corresponded to landslide events; they also act as a synecdoche for greater sets of events, meanings and processes, having acquired some kind of transcendental Gestalt of their own. Even more interestingly, some of these “moments of change” – linked to social movements and popular revolutions – have been seen as interconnected.

In this article, I focus on three separate moments – 1968, 1989 and 2011 – in order to trace the changes in the way in which social movements were theoretically framed on a research level since the 1960s.¹ Rather than focusing on the real or imaginary connections that activists often create with the contestatory past (or the rejection thereof),² I try to demonstrate the ways in which specialists (who were often directly implicated in the events) theorised those moments and forged genealogies between them. In this respect, I will argue that 1968 was the starting moment that defined to a greater or lesser extent how we still view and experience collective mobilisations. Although our perspective on the “long Sixties” has evolved significantly over time, and despite a brief interlude in 1989, this extended decade generated the conceptual tools through which we still make sense of social movements. Finally, this article serves as an intellectual history of the literature on contentious politics.

1968: The vertex

The vertex for social movements³ during the second half of the twentieth century is surely the

1968, 1989, 2011: Reconsidering social movements, ‘moments of change’ and theoretical framing over time

Kostis Kornetis

New York University

1960s. 1968, in particular, was the *annus mirabilis* of social protest in the postindustrial world; it was a polymorphic, global movement, with broad participation from all social strata and equally broad objectives that ranged from the very specific, such as better infrastructure at universities, to the very general, such as the abolition of authoritarian structures in state and society.⁴ Moreover, new social subjects – primarily women, students and regional groups – seemed to replace the working-class movement as the historical actor par excellence in terms of contestatory action – even if thinkers such as Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pizzorno thought that there was a revival of class conflict in the mobilisations of that time.⁵

Interestingly, up to that point, social movement theory had been driven by such dated classics as Gustav Le Bon's *The Crowd* (1895), or more recent – but equally problematic – works such as William Kornhauser's *The Politics of Mass Society* (1959), which interpreted social movements with antipathy through the lens of irrationality and pathology.⁶ 1968 was a clear break from this tradition insofar as efforts were made to interpret the movements synchronically and in a positive light. In a major example of this tendency, Cornelius Castoriadis, Claude Lefort and Edgar Morin – for some, the intellectual “fathers” of the *événements* – published the collective volume *La Brèche* in the immediate aftermath of May '68; unlike theorists before them, they sought to achieve a sociological and philosophical evaluation of a recent movement in which they were personally involved.

1968 also gave birth to the so-called new social movements (NSMs), encompassing second-wave feminism, environmental movements, gay rights movements, campaigns of racial or ethnic minorities, among others. An entire crop of social scientists went to analyse the changes in tone and orientation of these new “cultural” movements. According to the consensus view on new social movements, their novelty was that they posited issues of identity in the same peremptory way that the movements of the past posited issues of social class, disputing the latter's centrality in political developments. They vigorously rejected the old left, were deeply suspicious of the state⁷ and proposed a radical reform not only of the political, but also of the personal field – hence abolishing the boundaries between the collective and the individual. If the traditional social movements aimed first and foremost at a redistribution of wealth and greater access to the decision-making centres, the new social movements emphasised autonomy and resistance to social control. Along with this change in orientation, their repertoire of contention shifted dramatically compared to movements of the past, as they promoted nonhierarchical forms of organisation, based on horizontal, decentralised and “disorganised” social networks. Finally, their demands were more qualitative and usually nonnegotiable. These claims added a dimension of intense expressivity because, above all, they were statements of identity and lifestyle.⁸

Among those who characterised these movements as “new” were ringleaders of the 1968 movements and in general persons in close contact with them; they did so while the movements were still unfolding – something which was quite problematic due to the lack of critical distance. The French sociologist Alain Touraine, who was very close to the movement of Nanterre and May '68, was the first to differentiate the traditional social movements of the past from the movements of the present. As Touraine himself notes: “The idea of social movement was conceived, at least in my mind, in opposition to the traditional concept of class conflict.”⁹

Touraine and other young scholars of the era were guided, beyond their scientific intentions, by an admittedly political intent. Specifically, Claus Offe was a student leader in West Germany, Gareth Stedman Jones was a leading member of the *New Left Review*, Barbara Taylor was a radical feminist and Luisa Passerini a situationist.¹⁰ This trend is clearly visible in other research sectors that emerged at the time, from studies of social gender to oral history; theory and action, scholarship and activism became interwoven.¹¹ By way of historicising this tendency, one should of course note that in the “long 1960s” the tenor was also dictated by Frantz Fanon, Mao Zedong and Che Guevara, who just like Marx, Engels, Lenin or Gramsci were not only actively involved in revolution but also engaged in improving theories of revolution. It seemed that things had come a long way from the famous Thesis 11 on Feuerbach by Marx; the philosophers were interpreting the world while also trying to change it.

Hermeneutic framing of 1968 and the 1960s

Three main approaches have been developed in the hermeneutic framing of 1968 and as a response to the plethora of protest movements and new revolutionary subjects that emerged in its aftermath. First of all, a “structuralist” approach in social-movement theorising appeared on the other side of the Atlantic. John McCarthy and Mayer Zald articulated in 1977 what would become the hegemonic paradigm in terms of social movement theory: the “resource mobilisation” approach. Founded on the axiom that a necessary prerequisite for a movement’s success is the mobilisation of structural resources, this theory, in evolving forms, has persisted for decades. Equally enduring is the thinking of the so-called “patriarchs” of social movement theory, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, and, specifically, their theories of political opportunity structures (which emerge at specific moments, for example when a system of power seems vulnerable to social change) and protest cycles (which result from the widening of political opportunities that create motives for collective action that might last as long as the ten years of the Italian *Sessantotto*). Tarrow and Tilly insisted, moreover, that spontaneity in social movements is a misleading factor of analysis, and that any kind of dispute requires pre-existing organisational structures.¹² Here we should emphasise that these views, set forth in the 1970s and 1980s, became, and still remain to some extent, the predominant scientific paradigm – the so-called “political process” school – to the extent that even sudden explosions and short-lived unrest are viewed by social scientists through this prism. Hence, a large part of the conceptual tools that we use to this day in order to understand and give meaning to social movements dates back to theories from the 1970s and 1980s that examined the après-1968 new social movements.

It should be stressed that all these gurus of social movement theory were concerned with the movements that followed 1968 – and very few of them with 1968 itself, and the 1960s in general.¹³ The systematic efforts for the interpretation of 1968 commenced in the late 1990s and subsequently, when the hermeneutic framing of new social movements also changed. This is because the interpretations no longer came from the activists of the 1960s themselves, who were theorising their experiences, or at least from people who had experienced the movements firsthand, but from younger researchers. Also, it is noteworthy that, in comparison to the North American experience and the flowering of theories about social movements, it took ten more years for European

researchers, such as Dieter Rucht in Germany or Donatella della Porta in Italy, to present robust research regarding the social movements in western Europe.¹⁴

If there is something remarkable in regard to social movement theories up to 1990, it is that they produced speculation concerning the fragile processes of collective action formation, without considering conflict dynamics as implicit. However, apart from being an asset, their focus on “collective subjects” was also their greatest disadvantage, because it removed the emphasis on the individual, lived experience, thus excluding biographical approaches.¹⁵ Furthermore, a large number of these researchers dealt almost exclusively with radical ideologies and political protest, ignoring significant parts of the movements that concerned culture or counterculture.¹⁶ So, in contrast to the so-called “postmodern condition”, where small-scale themes supersede grand narratives centred on issues concerning work and class division, and despite the modernist dimension of new social movements, we may observe that the effort to evaluate them through research during the 1970s and 1980s was undertaken in piecemeal fashion, and with much less vigour than that possessed by the very same social movements on which it sought to elaborate.

Since in the early 1990s, there has been an effort to counteract these disadvantages, and this marks the development of the second main approach, namely the “culturalist” one. Some of the major figures in this turn include Alberto Melucci and Enrique Laraña, who focus on issues of identity,¹⁷ Doug McAdam, Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jameson, in their work on cognitive liberation as a key process for the emergence of conflictuality, and David Snow, in highlighting the significance of the theory of hermeneutic framing for social action.¹⁸ Projects such as these represented a paradigm shift to progressively more cultural approaches, focusing on culture, biography, identity, emotions and affect,¹⁹ moving away, as it were, from the hitherto dominant structural approach to social movements. The way in which activists imagined the changes that their actions would bring about in addition to the ways in which they evaluated them *ex post facto* – activists’ subjectivity in other words – began to be treated as equally important as the action itself.²⁰

On the other hand, however, social movement theories remained somewhat indifferent in regard to the so-called establishment or the “system” – hence being unable to evaluate in detail the impact of protest on the wider political field.²¹ Although it is erroneous to judge social movements only by their outcomes, excluding this dimension is certainly a drawback in regard to their thorough interpretation. The big question that remains unanswered by the culturalist tendency is what are the consequences of the movements on the political system or political culture; the macroscale of social protest, in other words, in relation to the microscale – the assessment of general theoretical dimensions together with subjective experience, and their interaction. While theory has certainly evolved over the last 20 years, especially with the “political process” theorists who emerged in the 1990s to focus on the dynamics of state–society relations, unfortunately this stake is not always satisfied.²²

Moreover, sociological theories monopolised the interest in the specific field for approximately two decades. Only in the late 1980s and early 1990s did historians, such as Ronald Fraser and Luisa Passerini, make an effort to approach the 1960s mostly at the level of memory.²³ The 1990s and the proceeding decade sealed the shift of research on 1968 from the social sciences into the hands

of nonsociologists – such as Robert Lumley with *States of Emergency* and Gerd Rainer Horn with *The Spirit of 1968*.²⁴ It is, we might say, the moment of the dynamic entry of the humanities into the analysis of social movements of the past, which was surely missing. And here we should also mention the late British historian Arthur Marwick who, in 2000, published a hugely influential book, *The Sixties*, in which he essentially proposed an alternative periodisation, what has since entered the bibliography as “the long 1960s”.²⁵

In the middle and end of the first decade of the 2000s, there appeared two new subrends of the historical revisiting of the long 1960s and their aftermath, what we could call the “revisionist” trend. One concerns a viewing of the 1968 movements as a transnational phenomenon; it deemphasises specific national case-studies, instead privileging networks, interconnections and communication between movements, cultural transfers and mobility.²⁶ The other trend concerns an evaluation of the so-called après-1968, that is, not so much with the events themselves, but with what followed afterwards, their *Nachleben*. Emblematic of this trend is the book *May '68 and its Afterlives* by Kristin Ross,²⁷ as well as an idiosyncratic production of testimonies, not of the protagonists but of either their parents or their offspring. A characteristic example of such testimonies is Stuart Hilwig’s work on the parents of some of the leading figures of the Italian ’68. Other striking examples include *The day my father shut up* by Virginie Linhart, daughter of Robert Linhart, a Maoist leader of May ’68, and *With one foot stuck in history*, by Anna Negri, daughter of the well-known philosopher and leader of the Italian Autonomia, Toni Negri. Their common denominator is that the inheritance of the 1960s and 1970s is treated as a burden. “We were prisoners of their world, their dream, their plan,” Linhart writes about her activist parents.²⁸ What is equally interesting, at least in Italy, is that soon after these books were published, the history of the 1960s and 1970s began to be narrated also by the children of the anti-68ers or the victims of leftwing terrorism, thus establishing a peculiar sort of memory battle staged by the offspring.²⁹

By the end of the first decade of the 2000s, when these writings appeared, momentous changes and dramatic sociopolitical transformations had already taken place: the collapse of the iron curtain regimes, the loss of a solid point of reference such as the Soviet Union, the marginalisation of communism and the metanarrative of the class struggle and the passage from a bi- to a multipolar world – all this was symbolically summed up in the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. As the Italian historian Alessandro Portelli writes, any subsequent viewing of 1968 – at least at the level of memory – is therefore doomed to be mediated by 1989.³⁰

1989: A reverse 1968?

So far, we have talked about 1968 and the reverberations of that pivotal moment in historical literature. But how did these frameworks translate in the understanding of 1989? Three approaches stand out. First of all, the “continuation” theory, which was characterised by the tendency – a temptation perhaps – to view 1989 as the natural extension of 1968 in Eastern Europe. Thinkers such as the British and American historians Timothy Garton Ash³¹ and Padraic Kenney,³² who have both focused systematically on eastern europe, have posited that there exists a relationship of causality between the two dates, especially in Warsaw but above all in Prague. In fact, Garton Ash pointed out the fact that Czechs in 1989 actively linked the two dates, both by chanting “Dubček–Havel”

and remarking that the number 89 is 68 turned upside down.³³ Similarly, American political scientist David Ost and German historian Stefan Garsztecki argued that *Solidarność* in Poland was the product of the “new left” and “radicals of ’68”,³⁴ while American sociologist Gil Eyal argued that the counter-elites that emerged in Czechoslovakia were a byproduct of 1968 and reform communism, only to subsequently define themselves against it.³⁵

Considering a linearity between 1968 and 1989 as a given seems extremely problematic. Luisa Passerini has rightly pointed out that it is the lack of historicisation of both dates that leads to a hermeneutical deficiency linking the two moments in a perverse way, whereby the economic liberalism of the 1990s is interpreted as the natural continuation of the social and cultural libertarianism of the 1960s by other means.³⁶ If there is a defining aspect of this relationship, however (beyond the fact that there were many 1989s, as there were many 1968s), it is that while in 1968 Alexander Dubček became a symbol throughout the Eastern bloc and the “third way” became the vision of young Eastern Europeans, 1989 definitively put these ideas to rest. In the memoirs of protagonists, such as Jacek Kuroń, or even Václav Havel himself, there is a strong resentment for the transition from the utopia of so-called “socialism with a human face” to the realism of unconstrained neoliberalism, the transition from Dubček to Thatcher.³⁷

In light of this outcome, a second strand of analysis was the so-called “reverse revolution” theory. This was articulated by thinkers who rushed to proclaim the events of 1989 as more of a return to the past than a revolution looking to the future.³⁸ Certainly the most significant intervention and effort to understand the events of 1989 as a reverse revolution came from Jürgen Habermas, in his 1992 article “What does socialism mean today?”.³⁹ What Habermas points out in view of the movements of 1989 is the complete lack of innovative ideas and the total reinstatement of civic values. Although for many, the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 meant a shift away from the values of the French revolution and the Enlightenment – and of the western revolutionary tradition in general – 1989 refuted the inheritance of 1917. According to Habermas, this was the first revolution that not only condoned the class system, but in fact it demanded its full recovery. The title of an article by Eric Hobsbawm in the same volume is rather telling: “Goodbye to all that”.

A third tendency was the “civil society”-driven one. It was characterised by the departure from the supposed relationship to 1968 or the nonrelationship to 1917, to a viewing of 1989 as an autonomous or independently significant revolution, a grandiose totemic movement, which was the result of the awakening of civil society.⁴⁰ Francis Fukuyama’s “the end of history” and Misha Glenny’s “re-birth of history” approach could be ascribed to this tendency.⁴¹ Equally interesting was the reversal of this theory. On the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, various researchers subverted the premise of the dynamic civil society, questioning whether 1989 was indeed a bottom-up revolution. Historians Steven Kotkin and Jan Gross, for example, used the provocative term “uncivil society”, presenting 1989 as the result of the decline of the communist elites at the top and reminding us that the truly multitudinous *Solidarność* of Lech Walesa in Poland was not at all a representative example of social mobilisation.⁴² According to this line of argument, apart from *Solidarność*, collectivities with specific demands in Eastern European countries were strict minorities, if they existed at all. Only when the collapse of the regimes became a given did the silent majorities take to the streets. This is a viewpoint that rejected the possibility that social subjects in the Eastern bloc

could develop autonomous action and, thus, refused to acknowledge them agency, in a tacit dissonance with the 1968 revolts. Thus 1989, via this top-down interpretation, represents an interlude in the studies of social movements and revolution, a direct challenge to the social movement theories that, since the 1990s, have given more priority to activists' subjectivity and agency. However, the fact that, past a certain point, politicians in Eastern European countries in 1989 had very little control over events that were speeding along on their own, remains to a great extent unexplained, with only a few notable exceptions. For example, political economist Cornel Ban challenges Kotkin and Gross's insights by way of an interdisciplinary analysis on how the complex transformations structured by the debt crisis of the early 1980s, regime ideology and citizen protest in 1980s, rather than simple endogenous regime meltdown, interacted in ways that ultimately led to the end of the Ceausescu regime in Romania.⁴³

All in all, the analysis of 1989 did not manage to move beyond 1968 categories regarding collective action, and its interpretation still depends on political contingencies. It did not manage to create its own credible separate categories of analysis, nor did it revolutionise social movement theory or bring about a paradigm shift. Moreover, as 1989 did not take place in Western Europe, but in Eastern Europe and within a cold war legacy, contrary to 1968 theorists did not participate but contemplated this from the West and from a certain (conceptual) distance. Even the ones who did participate in the events – like Garton Ash, who theorised his experience – were outside observers/participants rather than local actors, organically linked to the movements.⁴⁴ Last, but not least, in terms of the US experience it has to be noted that the 1989 moment was not deemed of revolutionary importance in general, since it did not have any particular ramifications in terms of ideologies or political parties – in stark contrast, for example, to the strong communist parties of Western Europe which all suffered an enormous blow.

2011: A new 1968, another 1989 or something new?

In accordance with the uncivil society approach regarding 1989, the 1990s were characterised by a retreat of the radical protest waves of the previous decades. This led many social movement scholars to rush to confirm that this was the inauguration of a "social movement society":⁴⁵ existing movements, in other words, were now largely characterised by reformism and distinguished by their tendency to be incorporated and co-opted by prevailing political institutions. It is noteworthy that in this context, and contrary to the tendency of the 1960s and 1970s, the gap between activists and academics seemed to widen.⁴⁶ Things started to change once again when the global justice movement partly refuted the relevant discourse, giving rise to a plethora of bottom-up movements. These had as their peak the Seattle protest during the WTO ministerial conference (1999) and the Genoa protest during the G8 summit (2001); during the latter, the killed activist Carlo Giuliani became a symbol of civil unrest. The new millennium was also characterised by a reactivation of riots, set around France in 2005, Greece in 2008 and England in 2011.⁴⁷

The year 2011, in particular, seemed to be a moment of change with respect to the relationship between theory and action. The Arab spring and the indignados (indignant) movements in Spain, Greece, Israel, Chile and elsewhere, and, of course, the Occupy Wall Street movement in the US were, at least initially, seen as dynamic game changers in terms of contentious politics. The extensive use of new

technologies and the glocal nature of these movements (“thinking globally, acting locally”) were cited as a proof, in this respect, and it is precisely in this field that the most original research has appeared so far – like, for example, Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimports’ work on the “digital repertoire of contention” and W. Lance Bennett’s work on “connective action”.⁴⁸ But historical framing seemed to lead the way. Two tentative propositions stand out. One is the framing of the Arab uprisings of 2011 as “another 1989”. A typical example is provided by American political transition theorist Michael Kennedy, who underlined the common elements between the two moments; these included the tremendous speed of events, the transnational diffusion of protest and the introduction of huge institutional changes (at times peacefully, at others not). Not to mention the fact that both moments caught the local elites unawares and western governments unprepared.⁴⁹ In this respect, Kennedy argues, both events represent an authentic form of “refolution” – a combination between reforms and revolution. But in his effort at a hermeneutic framing guided by history, Kennedy did not fail to compare 2011 with 1968 either. In fact, he argued that the danger for the 2011 movements would be to “become” 1968 instead of 1989, maintaining that their low degree of organisation and the lack of leaders – a shared characteristic with the 1968 movements – could prove fatal in regard to their long-term effect at the political level. The nontransformation of movements into parties or pressure groups constitutes a great danger, Kennedy concludes, without, however, also mentioning the multiple dangers inherent in the movements’ institutionalisation, their incorporation into the system and their eventual commercialisation – the nullification of their movement potential, in other words. Kennedy’s assessment that the 1968 movement failed at the political level, however, has to do with the erroneous practice of judging movements solely by their tangible political outcomes.

In stark contrast to this view is the second theory that considers the 2011 movements as carriers of the positive “current of 1968”. One of the apostles of this theory is Immanuel Wallerstein, a pioneer of social movement theory and originator of the term “antisystemic movement”, who claimed in an op-ed that if there is something interesting about the 2011 movements, it is precisely the fact that they share common features with 1968:⁵⁰ first, they are uprisings against antidemocratic behaviour by arbitrary authority structures; second, the movements have horizontal organisational structures, which facilitate peaceful protest; and third, they facilitate the emergence of all sorts of minorities as active revolutionary subjects – something which is strongly reminiscent of the theories of Herbert Marcuse in the 1960s regarding the wretched of the earth who supposedly constituted the new revolutionary subjects par excellence.⁵¹ Among the obvious disadvantages in Wallerstein’s analysis, however, is its omission of the attraction that armed revolutionary movements and third worldism held for the 1968 movements and their presentation as totally peaceful in character.

Both these theories point to the impossibility to escape the historical past. If for 1968 there were dates against which it was constantly weighed or paralleled (1848 being one of them), for 2011 the 1960s and 1980s seem to be the other dynamic “alter egos”. Historical framing of the present by way of the past reached an apogee in the case of the Occupy movement in the US. The fact that the founder of the Vancouver-based anticonsumerist magazine and organisation Adbusters (whose call to occupy Wall Street kicked off the Occupy movement) made direct references to the Situationist International as his most powerful source of inspiration,⁵² while shortly afterwards former SDS leader Todd Gitlin published a book drawing on his own role as a student leader as a means to conceptualise the current movement, are illustrative of the long shadow of the 1960s.⁵³

Lastly, no radical departure has taken place from the new social movement paradigm that has shaped our understanding of social action so far and none is really in sight, despite the radical shift in the social and political environment. And this despite the fact – apart from the chronotopical distance from earlier times – that these “newly found” movements (and especially the Arab spring) lacked available resources and organisational and mobilisation structures. Even though they were a far cry from the axiom posited by Zald and Tilly, however, no one has yet accounted for the fact that they actively put to question this once-dominant paradigm that relied on the concept of rational activist choice based on existing resources.⁵⁴ Moreover, the Arab spring demonstrated that despite the fact that social movement theories had tried previously to expand geographically – analysing the Zapatistas in Mexico or the Landless Workers’ Movement (Movimento dos Sem Terra) in Brazil, which Michel Wieviorka labels “global movements”⁵⁵ – the mainstream academic understanding of social action remains extremely western-centric (not to say Americanocentric) in its basic premises and approach.

Hence, the sociology of contentious politics seems to be trapped in the ‘68 moment (with a touch of ‘89). However, being stuck in the long 1960s does not help us understand the current conundrum. First of all, the 1960s were a very specific historical moment marking the apogee of the progressive liberal project, including the consolidation of consumption, full employment and strong organised labour. These premises are no longer available. Secondly, the 1960s movements came about at the climax of the drive of scientific rationalism, while today we live in times of religious revival, the Arab spring included. Thirdly, as a significant part of the 68 agenda – which included feminism, sexual rights and the liberalisation of mores in general – has been to a certain degree fulfilled, at least in the western world, contemporary movements rather tend to focus on other issues, such as distribution. The diminishing welfare state, the privatisation of public wealth and the ongoing difficulties in accessing full employment are the main issues on the agenda, none of which were actually under threat back when these theories were developed. In addition, the indignados, in particular, seem to be socially conservative in comparison to ‘68, with no intention to radically reshape society or the status quo; their focus is on more voice and participation instead. If there is an issue that is worth discussing linking the past and the present, however, it is that of political representation; the 1960s and the present converge when it comes to the attack by activists on the oligarchic tendencies of states, ossified democratic parliamentarism and the demand for direct democratic processes in terms of decision making.

All this means, in terms of the intellectual history I have presented above, is that different conceptual tools are desperately needed. Still, the institutionalisation of contentious politics and social movement theories, as regards academia and the canonisation of certain texts belonging to those schools of thought, are not promising factors in terms of the renewal of the field. Furthermore, the fact that the dominant scholars in the field of social movements no longer actively participate in contemporary social movements has rather led to a clinical and nonimaginative treatment of current movements so far. In contrast, independent scholars outside the mainstream (who often also happen to be activists) have tended to publish the most original work on recent movements.⁵⁶

By way of conclusion, we might say that when faced with the triptych “1968–1989–2011” it is the first one that still defines to a greater or lesser extent how we view and experience collective mobi-

lisations, at least in Euro-Atlantic societies. Within this context, 1968 and its new social movement afterlives gave rise to the social movement discipline, providing the tools, scope and thus object of research with respect to collective “contestatory” mobilisation. 1968 and the long 1960s and their aftermaths have been narrated in many distinct ways, creating an imaginary past and a movement yardstick against which all collective mobilisations are measured. Moreover, people connected to the movements, either organically or just contextually, have developed what has been the dominant paradigm in terms of social movements. All dominant theories ever since have derived from a certain sensitivity that was connected to that time and the political lessons thereof. 1989, on the other hand, is a year that did not manage to change this paradigm, despite the fact that authors insisted on the crucial role of civil society as a social actor. Finally, in terms of 2011, it remains to be seen whether the “moment of change” that brought the Arab spring and the indignados about will be looked on in future years as a new 1968 or a new 1989, or simply as another year in a long succession of political changes. Or maybe this type of historical framing and comparison will be deemed to be entirely misplaced, marking the onset of a distinctly new paradigm in social protest, functioning as a contestatory depot for future activists as well as theoreticians.

NOTES

* I would like to particularly thank Cornel Ban, Jeff Goodwin, Hara Kouki, Alice Mattoni and Eduardo Romanos for their very insightful comments and important suggestions on drafts of this article. Thanks also go to Isaac Jabola-Carolus for his editing and the journal’s two anonymous referees for their very useful feedback.

- 1 For a relevant, albeit different approach to distinct “moments of change”, see Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney, *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. For a more structuralist approach, see the classic by Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979.
- 2 See in this respect Kostis Kornetis, “No more heroes? Rejection and reverberation of the past in the 2008 events in Greece”, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 28/2 (2010): 173–197.
- 3 According to the definition of “social movements” by French sociologist Eric Nouveau, these are forms of coordinated collective action for a given purpose, in favour of something, and against a specified opponent. The collectivities that constitute social movements, through the mobilisation and organisation that provide them with enhanced access to and influence in the public sphere, also create, in some way, a special public field of their own: the field of social conflicts. Eric Nouveau, *Sociologie des Mouvements Sociaux*, Paris: La Découverte, 2005.
- 4 For the imaginary linkages and the juxtaposition of 1968 with other revolutionary moments in time – such as 1848 or 1870 – see Eleni Varikas, “The utopian surplus”, in *Thesis Eleven* 68/1 (2002): 101–105, here 102.
- 5 See Michel Wieviorka, “After social movements”, *Social Movement Studies* 4/1 (2005): 1–19, here 5. Also see Colin Crouch and Alessandro Pizzorno, *The Resurgence of Class Conflicts in Western Europe since 1968*, London: Macmillan, 1978.
- 6 Douglas Bevington and Chris Dixon, “Movement-relevant theory: rethinking social movement scholarship and activism”, *Social Movement Studies* 4/3 (2005): 185–208, here 201.
- 7 Immanuel Wallerstein, “New revolts against the system”, *New Left Review* 18 (2002): 29–39.
- 8 From very early on, the new left and new social movements were criticised and attacked for not privileging categories such as class, for not being as “progressive” as they proclaimed and, above all, for

not being so “new”. Another typical critique is summarised in the idea that their focus on issues of identity and culture bred lifestyle phenomena that were ultimately “postmodern” and apolitical. See, for example, Kenneth H. Tucker, “How new are the new social movements?” *Theory, Culture and Society* 8 (1991): 75–98, and the most recent critiques by Luc Boltansky and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Verso, 2007, and Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, then as Farce*, London: Verso, 2009. Also see Steven M. Buechler, “New social movement theories”, *The Sociological Quarterly* 36/3 (1995): 441–464, and Kostis Kornetis, “New left and social movements in Europe”, in David A. Snow, Donatella Della Porta, Bert Klandermans and Doug McAdam (eds), *Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, Malden: Wiley, 2013: 844–846.

- 9 Alain Touraine, “The importance of social movements”, *Social Movement Studies* 1/1 (2002): 89–95, here 89. We should note here, however, that Touraine’s influence – beyond the paternity of the term “new social movements” – was quite limited, especially outside France.
- 10 On personal reflections on the ways in which militancy affected various thinkers’ scholarly production and vice versa, see various contributions the Historein volume on “ego-histoire”, 3 (2001).
- 11 For an insightful approach of the dialectic relation between activism and academia, see Seraphim Seferiades, “1968 as an epistemological catalyst: contentious politics and antinomies in the study of social movements”, *Historein* 9 (2010): 101–15, here 111–112. Also see Eduardo Romanos, “Epílogo: Retos emergentes, debates recientes y los movimientos sociales en España”, in Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Los movimientos sociales*, Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas y Editorial Complutense, 2011, 315–346.
- 12 See, in particular, Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Reading: Addison–Wesley, 1978, and Sydney Tarrow, *Struggle, Politics, and Reform: Collective Action, Social Movements, and Cycles of Protest*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- 13 One exception is Robert Inglehart, who very early on emphasised the role of postmaterialist values in collective action, and the fact that the majority of activists were middle class. See Robert Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1977. It was only in the 1990s that 1968 started being analysed in relation to social movement theory. See Carl Boggs, “Rethinking the sixties legacy: from new left to new social movements”, in Stanford M. Lyman (ed.), *Social Movements: Critiques, Concepts, Case Studies*, London: Macmillan, 1995, and Elizabeth Wood, “A chronology of the new left and its successors, or: who’s old-fashioned now?”, *The Socialist Register* 31 (1995): 22–49.
- 14 Dieter Rucht, “Themes, logics and arenas of social movements: a structural approach”, *International Social Movement Research* 1 (1988): 305–328; Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- 15 Wilfried Mausbauch, “Historicising ‘1968’”, *Contemporary European History* 2/1 (2002): 177–187, here 182.
- 16 Arguably, the American mobilising structures and political opportunity structure theorists neglected radical ideologies/movements – and precisely for this reason they overlooked cultural or countercultural elements of movements. See, for instance, Kathleen J. Fitzgerald and Diane M. Rodgers, “Radical social movement organizations: a theoretical model,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 41/4 (2000): 573–592.
- 17 It has to be noted here that Jean Cohen and Alberto Melucci wrote influential articles that dealt exclusively with the subject of identity as early as the mid-1980s. See Jean Cohen, “Strategy or identity”, *Social Research* 52/4 (1985): 663–716; Alberto Melucci, “The symbolic challenge of contemporary movements”, *Social Research* 52/4 (1985): 789–816. However, it was only in the 1990s that these approaches began to spread, especially in North America.
- 18 Alberto Melucci, “Getting involved: identity and mobilization in social movements”, *International Social Movement Research* 1 (1988): 329–348. Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, Joseph R. Gusfield (eds), *New*

- Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity*, Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1994. David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, "Master frames and cycles of protest", in Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, New Haven: Yale UP, 133–155. Much of the frame theory was based on the earlier works by Erving Goffman, such as *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Boston: Northeastern UP, 1974.
- 19 Also, on emotions, see Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper and Francesca Polletta (eds), *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
- 20 Within the sociology of social movements, however, these cultural categories (identity, frames, emotions, stories) have been used instrumentally to explain mobilisation, which alongside outcomes has generally remained the object of interest. See Andrew Walder, "Political sociology and social movements", *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 393–412, and Kevin Gillan, "Understanding meaning in movements: a hermeneutic approach to frames and ideologies", *Social Movement Studies* 7/3 (2008): 247–263.
- 21 Mausbauch, "Historicising".
- 22 In terms of 1968, just recently a volume was published edited by German researchers Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth on the impact of movements on systems of power, but there is still a long way to go. See Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, *The 'Establishment' Responds: Power and Protest During and After the Cold War*, New York: Berghahn, 2009. As for short-term outcomes and long-term legacies of social movements mobilisation, see Lorenzo Bosi and Katrin Uba, "Special focus issue on social movement outcomes", *Mobilization* 14 (2009): 409–504.
- 23 Ronald Fraser (ed.), *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt*, New York: Pantheon, 1988. Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation: 1968 in Turin*, Hanover: Wesleyan UP, 1996.
- 24 Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978*, London: Verso, 1990. Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.
- 25 Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.
- 26 For an interdisciplinary approach that ranges from 1968 to the antiglobalisation movements, with a broad geographical scope and humanities' perspectives brought together by young scholars, see Hara Kouki and Eduardo Romanos (eds), *Protest Beyond Borders: Contentious Politics in Europe since 1945*, New York: Berghahn, 2011. Pioneering in respect of transnationalism was Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, Detlef Junker and Daniel S. Mattern (eds), *1968: The World Transformed*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.
- 27 Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*, Chicago: Chicago UP, 2002.
- 28 Virginie Linhart, *Le jour où mon père s'est tu*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008. Anna Negri, *Con un piede impigliato nella storia*, Rome: Feltrinelli, 2009.
- 29 See, for example, Benedetta Tobagi, *Come mi batte forte il tuo cuore: Storia di mio padre*, Turin: Einaudi, 2009, and Mario Calabresi, *Spingendo la note più in là: Storia della mia famiglia e di altre vittime del terrorismo*, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore: Milan, 2007.
- 30 Alessandro Portelli, "Intervistare il movimento: Il '68 e la storia orale", in Pier Paolo Poggio (ed.), *Il Sessantotto: L'evento e la storia*, Brescia: Annali della Fondazione Luigi Micheletti, 1989, 125–132.
- 31 See Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague*, New York: Random House, 1990.

- 32 See Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney, *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.
- 33 See Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern*. I am borrowing this passage from Luisa Passerini's insightful analysis "The problematic intellectual repercussions of '68: reflections in a jump-cut style", *Historein* 9 (2010): 21–33, here 23. Passerini further discusses the cases of Paul Berman, arguing that 1989 was the 1968 generation's later age passage from a leftist utopia to the utopia of liberalism, and the analysis by Giovanni Arrighi, Terence K. Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein, whereby 1968 is portrayed as the starting date of a process that ultimately came to completion in 1989. See Paul Berman, *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968*, New York: Norton, 1996, and Giovanni Arrighi, Terence K. Hopkins and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Antisystemic Movements*, London: Verso, 1989, 97.
- 34 David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics: Opposition and Reform in Poland since 1968*, Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1991. Stefan Garsztecki, "Poland", in Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (eds), *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 179–187.
- 35 Gil Eyal, *The Origins of Postcommunist Elites: From Prague Spring to the Breakup of Czechoslovakia*, Minnesota: Minnesota UP, 2003.
- 36 Passerini, "The problematic intellectual repercussions", 23–24.
- 37 In a telling interview to Czechoslovak radio in 1990, Havel said that face-to-face with the millionaire estates on the island of Bahamas and the slums in Nicaragua, he was becoming left-leaning. See Martin J. Matušík, "Havel and Habermas on identity and revolution", *Praxis International* 10/3–4 (1990/1991): 261–277, here 266.
- 38 See Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995.
- 39 Jürgen Habermas, "What does socialism mean today?", in Robin Blackburn (ed.), *After the Fall: The Failure of Communism and the Future of Socialism*, London: Verso, 1991. This article was published in a volume on the subject of the fall of communism, edited by the renowned new left scholar Robin Blackburn. Twenty-three years earlier, in 1969, Blackburn coedited a landmark book on the student movements of 1968, the celebrated Student Power, which was published in Greek during the junta by Armos Press.
- 40 See, for example, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Cambridge: MIT, 1994. Also see Immanuel Wallerstein, who explains that the concept of civil society "draws upon a nineteenth-century distinction between le pays légal and le pays réel – between those in power and those who represent popular sentiment", *Ibid*.
- 41 See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Penguin, 1992. Misha Glenny, *The Rebirth of History: Eastern Europe in the Age of Democracy*, London: Penguin, 1990.
- 42 Steven Kotkin, Jan Gross, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment*, New York: Modern Library, 2010.
- 43 See Cornel Ban, "Sovereign debt, austerity, and regime change: the case of Nicolae Ceausescu's Romania", *East European Politics and Societies* 26/4 (2012): 743–776.
- 44 As he noted in his best-selling book *The Magic Lantern*, "the witness can see what a historian cannot find in any document: a glance, a shrug, a chance remark can be more revealing than a thousand speeches".
- 45 See Dieter Rucht and Friedhelm Neidhardt, "Towards a 'movement society'? On the possibilities of institutionalizing social movements", *Social Movement Studies* 1/1 (2002): 7–30.

- 46 Bevington and Dixon, "Movement-relevant theory", 202; Marcy Darnovsky, Barbara Epstein and Richard Flacks, "Introduction", in Marcy Darnovsky, Barbara Epstein and Richard Flacks (eds), *Cultural Politics and Social Movements*, Philadelphia: Temple UP, vii–xxiii, here xvi.
- 47 Three ways of looking at the events dominated, coinciding to a large extent with the recent taxonomy of political violence coined by the influential political sociologist David Apter: the "diagnostic" method, namely the attempt to analyse events according to the rational processes that brought them about; individual psychopathology, or the "problematic backgrounds" of the protagonists that prompted them to use violence; and finally, social pathology, in other words the inherent problems of the social system and the asymmetries of power that lead to an uprising. David Apter, "Introduction", in David Apter (ed.), *The Legitimization of Violence*, New York: Macmillan, 1977, 1–32, here 6–7.
- 48 Jennifer Earl and Katrina Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change: Activism in the Internet Age (Acting with Technology)*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011. W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, "The logic of connective action: digital media and the personalization of contentious politics", *Information, Communication & Society* 15/5 (2012): 739–768. Also see the latest book by Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, Cambridge: Polity, 2012.
- 49 Michael D. Kennedy, "Arab spring, Occupy Wall Street, and historical frames: 2011, 1989, 1968", *Jadaliyya*, 11 Oct 2011 [www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/2853/arab-spring-occupy-wall-street-and-historical-frame], accessed 3 Jan 2013.
- 50 Immanuel Wallerstein, "The contradictions of the Arab Spring", *Al Jazeera*, 14 Nov 2011 [www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/20111111101711539134.html], accessed 3 Jan 2013.
- 51 "Hope lies with the hopeless," as Marcuse famously said. See *An Essay on Liberation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.
- 52 Kalle Lassn's exact words were: "We are not just inspired by what happened in the Arab Spring recently, we are students of the Situationist movement." See Gary Kamiya, "The original Mad Men: What can OWS learn from a defunct French avant-garde group?", *Salon*, 21 Oct 2011 [www.salon.com/2011/10/21/the_original_mad_men/], accessed 3 Jan 2013.
- 53 Todd Gitlin, *Occupy Nation: The Roots, the Spirit, and the Promise of Occupy Wall Street*, New York: HarperCollins, 2012.
- 54 For a lucid critique of the normative claims imposed on mass action by the new social movement interpretative frame – including the classification of protest that breaks with conventional norms of political conflict as "marginal" or "irrational" and the failure to account for the initial stages of protest, when risks and benefits are obscure – see Hara Kouki, "Where do we go from here?" December 2008 Riots in Greece and social movement analysis", *Losquadero* 14 (2009): 25–28 [www.professionaldreamers.net/images/losquadero/losquadero14.pdf], accessed 3 Jan 2013.
- 55 Wieviorka, "After social movements", 8.
- 56 See, for example, Magid Shihade, Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Laurence Cox, "The Season of Revolution: The Arab spring and European mobilizations", *Interface* 4/1 (2012): 1–16; Raúl Zibechi, *Autonomías y emancipaciones: América Latina en movimiento*, Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos et al., 2007, and the nonacademic editions by Antonis Vradis and Dimitris Dalakoglou (eds), *Revolt and Crisis in Greece: Between a Present Yet to Pass and a Future Still to Come*, Edinburgh: AK Press and Occupied London, 2011; "Revolt and Crisis in Greece" [www.occupiedlondon.org/revolt-and-crisis-in-greece/], accessed 3 Jan 2013, and Benjamin Noys, *Communization and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles*, New York: Autonomedia, 2012 [www.minorcompositions.info/?p=299], accessed 3 Jan 2013.