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“Angelic Spirits of ‘68”: Memories of Sixties Radicalism in Responses to the 2010-11 UK Student Protests

Abstract:

The winter of 2010-11 saw mass student mobilisations around the UK, in response to higher education funding cutbacks and increases in student fees. This paper provides an analysis of the manifold ways in which the memory of sixties radicalism was invoked in responses to the student protests, with a focus on left and liberal left media. Using analytical insights drawn from performativity theory, the substantive part of the paper identifies a sharp polarisation between affirmative and negative invocations of “1968” in responses to the 2010-11 protests. Whilst ostensibly rather different, these two narratives exhibited remarkable convergence. They were both characterised by a degree of uncertainty about what precise features of the radical sixties were being remembered, and both tended to frame the radical sixties as singular and undifferentiated. The paper argues that that this is in part a consequence of an absence of a clear-cut collective memory of the various strands of the British radical sixties. More broadly, the analysis presented here sheds light on the hitherto under-explored mechanisms through which memories and legacies of sixties radicalism shape the discursive and affective landscape of contemporary radical politics.

Keywords: student protest; media; memory; 1968; discourse

November 2010 saw a sudden upsurge of student protest in the UK, encompassing a series of demonstrations and protests against tuition fee increases, as well as a spate of student occupations.¹ My home city of Leeds saw a number of protests, and one of Leeds University's main lecture theatres was occupied by a sizeable group of student radicals in the run up to the Christmas holidays. A striking feature of the occupation was the preponderance of images from the French May '68. Allusions to "1968" were by no means unique to the Leeds occupation: references to, and comparisons with, sixties radicalism would come to figure prominently in wider responses to the student protests, laying testament to the continued prominence of the radical sixties in contemporary discussions of protest and radical politics.

Drawing on performativity theory, this paper examines in detail the various ways in which the memory of sixties radicalism featured in left of centre responses to the 2010-11 protests, i.e. those what were partly or wholly sympathetic. As shall become apparent, there was much variability in the character of these invocations of "1968". Frequently, favourable comparisons with "1968" were used to affirm the radicalism and significance of the 2010-11 student protests, whereby the latter was cast as reinvigorating a spirit of rebellion and protest associated with the radical sixties. Conversely, there was also a widespread tendency to emphasise distance from, and discontinuity between, the 2010-11 protests and sixties radicalism. However, I argue that these seemingly rather different types of responses to the 2010-11 protests exhibited some striking similarities. Both positive and negative invocations of sixties radicalism were often strongly felt at an affective level. However, these strong feelings belied a certain vagueness and lack of precision about the character and scope of the radical sixties being invoked. This, in turn, arguably reflects an absence of a clear collective memory of sixties radicalism among left-wing activists and journalists in contemporary Britain, the latter referenced primarily as a "spirit" rather than a clearly defined set of beliefs or practices. Thus, the paper calls for analytical and political sensitivity to the contradictory mechanisms through which often vague and spectral memories and legacies of past forms of radical politics impinge upon and shape the present. In so doing, I emphasise the importance of recent historical work that interrogates and demystifies different strands of British sixties radicalism, facilitating the cultivation of a more nuanced collective memory.

In what follows, I begin with a short summary of the 2010-11 student protests, before offering an overview of existing literature on both contemporary radical politics and the

history and legacy of sixties radicalism, affirming the need for a more thorough analysis of how articulations of the legacy of “1968” shape, and are shaped by, discussions of contemporary radical politics. I then flesh out the theoretical and methodological aspects of my analysis, before moving on to the main analytical section, in which I summarise findings from my analysis of left-wing journalistic and activist commentary on the 2010-11 student protests. I end with some critical reflections on the role of memory and generation in the shaping of the discursive and affective landscape of contemporary radical politics.

Student activism, radical politics and the memory of ‘68

Shortly after coming to power in May 2010, the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government drafted legislation that enabled a threefold increase in the cost of tuition fees, and a substantial reduction in the UK higher education budget. This prompted rumblings of discontent among both staff and students in UK higher education, culminating in a national march against fees and cuts, organised by the National Union of Students (NUS) and supported by the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) on 10th November 2010. The turnout was estimated at 50,000. At the end of the march, a breakaway group of around 200 protestors entered the Conservative Party headquarters at 30 Millbank, with a further 1,000 protestors in the square outside. Images of students occupying the roof – and an image of a masked man breaking the glass entrance to the building – would soon become iconic. The 10th November protest kicked off a series of subsequent demonstrations in London, as well as numerous local protests around the country and at least 23 student occupations.² Whilst student activism continued around the country during 2011, the passing of the bill on 10th December 2010 – and the downturn associated with the Christmas break – led to a loss of momentum during the early part of 2011.

This outbreak of student activism attracted considerable media attention, both positive and negative. What is more, convergences and divergences between 2010-11 and sixties student protest soon became a prominent theme within media responses to the protest. In a context where the precise mechanisms through which memories of sixties radicalism shape (and are shaped by) the present remain under-explored, reaction to the 2010-11 student protests

therefore presents us with an valuable case study of a moment in which a range of competing narratives about the memory of '68 came into focus.

But what precise form do those competing narratives take? And how does recent scholarship characterise the contested landscape of memory surrounding sixties radicalism?³ Existing scholarship (as well as popular narratives) on the British radical sixties tends to bifurcate into broadly affirmative and negative/sceptical accounts. An influential strand of the latter argues that we often significantly overplay the scope and radicalism of the various left-wing and counter-cultural movements that emerged in sixties Britain. Dominic Sandbrook's *White Heat*, for instance, is particularly insistent in its claim that the social and political upheavals associated with the second half of the 1960s belied an underlying continuity in most peoples' everyday experience.⁴ Similarly, Arthur Marwick downplays the significance and long-term impact of the radical politics of the period, but concedes the decade gave birth to a "cultural revolution" associated with lifestyle and attitudinal changes.⁵ More sceptical still is Gerrard DeGroot, whose account of the British as 'bit players' in the decade's political upheavals verges on the dismissive. British student protesters, DeGroot argues, were a 'tiny minority of an otherwise apathetic student body',⁶ whilst Bryn Jones has suggested that the UK was the European country 'least affected' by the upheavals of 1968.⁷

Such claims reflect a widespread perception that a distinctively British stoicism and aversion to extremes tempered the radicalism of student protest in sixties Britain. Sylvia Ellis, for instance, describes the UK student movement as 'less violent, less radical and more easily controlled'⁸ than in the US or mainland Europe, whilst Nick Thomas has argued that 'contrary to the popular myth that the 1960s were the 'golden age' of student protest in Britain, most students seem to have been politically apathetic'.⁹ Taken together, these accounts lend weight to Holger Nehring's claim that it is difficult to identify a wider collective memory of "1968" (at least in its more radical, politicised sense) in the UK.¹⁰ Indeed, if there is a collective memory of sixties radicalism in the British context, it is often elusive and ill-defined, or tends to be aligned to the cultural and/or creative radicalisms of Biba, Mary Quant and the Beatles, rather than the politicised left-wing or student radicalisms found in Italy, West Germany and France. Consequently, when analysing contested collective memories of sixties Britain, it is not always easy to disaggregate romanticised memories of the cultural upheavals of "Swinging London" from invocations of the political radicalisms of the peace, student and anti-capitalist movements. Indeed, for some activists, the 2010-11

protests were framed as significant precisely because their politicised radicalism was seen as marking a break from a rather sanitised and clichéd 1960s model of counter-cultural protest.

As indicated, other strands of literature and popular memory adopt more affirmative positions towards the politicised radicalisms of the period. Some of the scholarly literature is motivated by attempts to sustain the memory of sixties radicalism as a potential antidote to the depoliticisation, decline and withdrawal¹¹ seen by some as characteristic of our post-democratic¹² and post-political¹³ times. Within such a context, affirmative memories of sixties radicalism feature as a reference point for a now lost (but potentially recoverable) spirit of protest and rebellion,¹⁴ or in some cases as a key formative moment in the shift towards “poststructuralist” or “post-foundational” conceptions of the political.¹⁵ Other strands of the more affirmative literature are based on first person autobiography,¹⁶ or seek to highlight the diversity of sixties radicalism by rectifying exclusions within the existing literature – such as its relative inattention to anti-racist, feminist and lesbian and gay politics,¹⁷ or the tendency to focus on the French May ’68 at the expense of a more transnational analysis.¹⁸ Elsewhere, work by the likes of Chris Harman, Gerd-Rainer Horn, Kristin Ross¹⁹ and, to some extent, Alain Badiou and Mark Kurlansky²⁰ all aim to affirm histories of protest, radicalism and revolution obfuscated by “culturalist” or generational interpretations of sixties radicalism, contesting what Joseph Malsen calls the ‘social master narrative of the 68ers as a generation’.²¹

However, not all of the affirmative literature refers directly or explicitly to the UK context. More directly pertinent to the UK context, however, are a number of recent publications which seek to contest the view that sixties radicalism qua radical left activism was marginal to the political landscape of late 60s Britain. Nick Thomas, for instance, while cautioning against the dangers of overplaying the role of student protest in sixties Britain, nonetheless suggests that sixties student activism set in motion a ‘fundamental shift in the position of young people in British society which made it possible for young people to question authority, and to demand participation in government’.²² In a not dissimilar vein, Caroline Hoefflerle, in arguably the most comprehensive study of 1960s UK student protest to date, takes Marwick and Sandbrook to task for their ‘lack of archival evidence on the student movement’.²³ Hoefflerle’s extensive archival work leads her to suggest that ‘far from being an imitative and insignificant element of the global student movement, [the British student movement of the sixties] was a vibrant, globally conscious movement with its own unique blend of issues,

strategies and theories'.²⁴ Indeed, she concludes by drawing a link between the student protest of the sixties and the 2010-11 protests, the latter framed as testament to the continued capacity of mass demonstrations to 'influence decision-making and "make history"'.²⁵ Within such a context, it comes as little surprise that memories of sixties student protest retain a certain allure when responding to, and making sense of, mass student protest in the present.

In a similar vein, the recent oral history-based work of Celia Hughes also offers an affirmative reading of sixties radicalism, taking aim at the pejorative readings of British youth activism in the 1960s offered by DeGroot and others.²⁶ Indeed, a number of Hughes' interviewees felt their experiences had been "written out" of dominant narratives of 1960s counter-culture and radical politics.²⁷ Thus, Hughes aims to trace the ways in which individual memory and subjectivity is formed and negotiated through participation in, and recollection of, sixties radicalism. Striking in Hughes' analysis is the complexity of the contested historical memories of different strands of radical sixties activism, in which individual memories are partly shaped by the different trajectories of various strands of Marxist, Trotskyist and non-aligned left activists.²⁸ The more affirmative, but no means uncritical, analyses offered by the likes of Hughes and Hoefflerle suggest that there is still considerable appeal for young activists in affirming continuities between sixties radicalism and the present. Whilst, as shall become clear, affirming connections between 2010-11 and "1968" can be fraught process, it need not inevitably be predicated on naïve or misguided romanticisations of the period, as the likes of DeGroot and Sandbrook might suggest.

Taken together, the works cited above depict a fraught and contested landscape of memory marked by disagreement over, first, what precisely is being remembered and, second, whether the memories are framed in a positive or negative light. Furthermore, whilst invaluable, the above texts tend, for the most part, to give limited attention to the processes through which memories and invocations of sixties radicalism shape responses to forms of protest and activism in the present. Indeed, such processes also tend to be overlooked in the small body of existing research on the 2010-11 protests, which focuses primarily on the concrete practices, demands and strategies of the movement,²⁹ rather than the wider discursive and historical context.³⁰

The aim of the rest of the paper, then, is to trace some of the contradictory ways in which narratives of sixties radicalism shape the discursive landscape of contemporary radical

politics,³¹ as well as to analyse and explain how and why collective memories of sixties radicalism in the UK context are both strongly felt at an affective level, yet at the same time rather spectral and ill-defined. Towards the end I suggest that the kind of detailed archival work carried out by the likes of Caroline Hoefflerle and Celia Hughes is invaluable for the demystification of contemporary understandings and indications of sixties radicalism, and therefore for the cultivation of more politically and analytically productive renderings of the memory of sixties radicalism.

Theoretical and methodological considerations

As indicated, I am interested in the mechanisms through which particular invocations of sixties radicalism shape responses to contemporary protest, focussing specifically on the 2010-11 student protests. My approach is informed by the likes of Kristin Ross, Chris Reynolds and Jones and O'Donnell,³² insofar as these authors all foreground legacies and subsequent representations of sixties radicalism. In particular, they draw attention to the ways in which memories and representations of sixties radicalism have an enduring capacity to influence responses to a range of cultural and political phenomena in the present. However, my approach departs from these analyses in several important ways. Whilst I share with, for example, Jones and O'Donnell an emphasis on the importance of legacies of sixties radicalism for making sense of the present, they tend to bypass some of the contention and ambiguity surrounding invocations of sixties radicalism. For instance, they contend that the 2009 campaign to force Rage Against the Machine's anti-establishment anthem Killing in the Name to the UK Christmas number 1 spot could, and should, be read as indicative of a continued influence of late sixties counter-cultural ideas in contemporary Britain.³³ However, legacies of sixties radicalism are not as self-evident as this example might suggest, i.e. they cannot be seen as self-evidently present in specific contemporary political and cultural practices. Rather, I argue that to posit a contemporary practice as exhibiting characteristics of sixties radicalism involves the attribution of characteristics to the practice in question, rather than simple description. In addition, the work of Reynolds and Ross tends to focus on how the preoccupations of the present inform representations of the historical events of May '68, whereas my intention here is to reverse the emphasis onto how contested invocations of historical events inform our understandings of the present.

Taking up Ben Cranfield's framing of "1968" 'as a historical moment and textual manifestation',³⁴ I want to approach "1968" as an idea that continues to be subject to debate and contestation, and continues to play an important role in shaping the discursive and affective landscape of contemporary radical politics. In so doing, I regard comparisons with "1968" not simply as descriptive but also as performative. In this context, the term "performative" is drawn from J.L. Austin's speech act theory, and describes a speech act that brings something into existence through the process of naming, as in the utterance "I name this ship". It is to be distinguished from a "constative" statement, which simply reports or describes a given state of affairs.³⁵

This notion of performativity – and particularly its recasting by Derrida and later Judith Butler³⁶ – encourages us to view claims of (dis)continuity between sixties and contemporary radicalism not simply as describing an already existing or self-evident state of affairs, but as actively creating collective understandings of the phenomena in question. This in turn presupposes – in line with poststructuralist renderings of discourse analysis³⁷ – that the meanings of "1968" and the 2010-11 protests are contingent, subject to change, and dependent on the particular ways in which their (in)significance is articulated by a range of relevant actors. Thus, the protests might be variously framed as a an unwelcome outbreak of disorder and violence, a welcome revitalisation of the spirit of sixties radicalism, an outbreak of discontent by young people towards the privileges enjoyed by the baby-boomer generation, or the death throes of an inevitable descent into apathy and political disengagement.³⁸ Against this theoretical backdrop, the central aim of this paper, then, is not so much to evaluate the historical accuracy of different narratives of sixties radicalism. Rather, it is to examine what kinds of effects and consequences flow from particular invocations of sixties radicalism in responses to the 2010-11 student protests, and to reflect upon how often rather spectral collective memories of sixties radicalism shape understandings of radical politics in the present.

To go about this task, I analyse a range of recently published books focussing on the student protests (and wider contemporaneous upheavals such as the anti-cuts and feminist movements): these include single author reflections as well as edited collections of comment pieces by activists and academics. I also undertook an exhaustive analysis of articles concerning the student movement published on four key left and left-liberal websites which

played host to a number of lively ongoing debates about the role, status named significance of the protests. These are The Guardian, Open Democracy, New Statesman and New Left Project. The Guardian is the leading left of centre daily broadsheet paper in Britain, with a circulation of around 205,000, although its website is much more widely read, and is one of the most popular news websites in the world. Open Democracy is a news and comment website founded by Charter 88 organiser Anthony Barnett, hosting a range of news and comment pieces, typically concerning democracy and human rights. Its political orientation is to the left of centre, and it seeks to foster dialogue and engagement between activists, academics and journalists. New Left Project hosts a range of comment pieces of interest to those on the left, but is non-aligned and reflects a broad range of left-wing opinion. New Statesman is a British weekly political magazine with a circulation of around 25,000 and with an accompanying website. Its political orientation is broadly centre-left – with historical links to the Fabian Society – but it similarly plays host to comment pieces spanning a broad range of left-wing opinion. Suffice to say, focussing on these four sources rather than others will mean the view presented here is partial: these publications arguably tend to represent rather more mainstream and established voices on the British left, and are by no means free of biases in relation to political orientation, and – as with much of the British left – the dominant voices are skewed in terms of their gender, race and race composition. However, these four sites are among the largest and most influential within the left and left-liberal public sphere in the UK, and taken together provide helpful insights into the range of different narratives and characterisations of the relationship between “1968” and the 2010-11 protests.

I conducted an exhaustive analysis of all relevant articles on these four websites up until March 2013, focussing specifically on references to sixties radicalism, but also more broadly seeking to hone in on the tropes and rhetorics used to frame the wider context of the protests. In part taking inspiration from Clare Hemmings’ analysis of the reproduction of “stories” about the recent history of feminist theory, my attention was often directed not to the substantive content of the articles, but to glosses, asides and contextualising remarks.³⁹ My aim was to trace how particular tropes and narratives recurred across different articles, and to see which kinds of characterisations of the 2010-11 protests (and their relationship with sixties radicalism) took precedence. Thus, rather than doing a comparative analysis of the different kinds of claims made in The Guardian as opposed to the New Statesman (for instance), in what follows I offer an overview of the different kinds of narratives that circulated across the various sites and sources I analysed.

Revitalising the spirit of '68

One of the most common narratives framed the 2010-11 student protests as a welcome, yet unexpected, resurgence of a distinctively “sixties” ethos or spirit of radical activism. It was unexpected largely because prior to 2010 there was a widespread presumption that any appetite for the kinds of mass radical politics associate with the late sixties had long dissipated. For instance, Russell Jacoby, reflecting a widespread fin-de-siècle left-wing pessimism, wrote in 1999 that ‘the distance between today and the most recent utopian eruption of the 1960s might be measured in centuries’.⁴⁰ Similarly, Gerd-Rainer Horn kicks off his account of the “spirit of ‘68” by claiming that ‘at a time of widespread pessimism experienced by social movement activists in the age of Bush and Blair... it appeared important to recall a very recent period in modern and contemporary history when, to paraphrase one of the ubiquitous Situationist graffiti gracing the walls of Paris in 1968, it was considered realistic to demand the impossible’.⁴¹ Within such a context, invocations of sixties radicalism became a common technique through which to reference the surprising, unexpected and disruptive character of the 2010-11 protests.

For instance, Paul Mason begins his widely read analysis of the ‘new global revolutions’ (encompassing both the UK student movements and the “Arab Spring”) with a short extract from a speech by a Berkeley student leader from 1964, after which he comments ‘you may thought such days were gone – such idealism, such eloquence, such creativity and hope. Well, they’re back’.⁴² A further example could be found in Clive Bloom’s book *Riot City*, which outlines an alternative, unacknowledged history of protest and rebellion in London, and contains a detailed account of the 2010-11 student protests. The memory of sixties radicalism lurks spectrally at the margins of his account, but is rarely tackled head on. He notes, for instance, the ways in which the 2010-11 protests were ‘a rallying cry for the parents from the rosy days of the 60s and 70s’,⁴³ whilst also dramatically commenting ‘Revolution was in the air. Students would have their own ‘Days of Rage’’,⁴⁴ referencing the 1969 Days of Rage protests in Chicago.

More overt or direct references to sixties radicalism tended to take one of two forms, split along a broadly generational cleavage. One tendency was for younger activists and commentators to claim a continuity with sixties radicalism, drawing a parallel across time between present-day demands and practices in the present, and the practices of earlier generations of student activists. A rather different tendency was for older activists – including those who participated in the student movements of the sixties – to affirm, sometimes from an assumed position of status and authority, a continuity between sixties and present forms of radical activism. Whilst different, both of these narratives carry, to borrow a phrase from Chandra Mohanty – and expanded upon by Maria do Mar Pereira in a discussion of feminist scholarship and epistemic authority⁴⁵ – an “authorising signature”,⁴⁶ whereby the invocation of a spirit of ’68 is an important means of conferring status and significance on contemporary forms of radical activism. And yet, a certain vagueness characterised invocations of sixties radicalism as an “authorising signature”. Similarity to sixties radicalism was often posited as self-evidently desirable, and it was rarely spelt out which precise characteristics of the radical sixties were being referred to, although spontaneity, horizontality, and a resistance to the consumerist logic of the neoliberal university were implicitly referenced a number of times.

Furthermore, there was a degree of variability in the precise ways in which this authorising signature functioned. In several instances it took the form of what we might call embodied authority, whereby sixties veterans participating in the 2010-11 student protests were afforded status and significance simply by virtue of them being veterans of the sixties and being physically present at the 2010-11 protests. For example, Paul Mason recounts a situation where a 68er at the SOAS occupation in London was applauded for suggesting a strike and occupation of the university’s main administrative building,⁴⁷ whilst at the Leeds occupation in December 2010 I witnessed a man being cheered when he said he participated in a sit-in in the same institution in 1968.

More usually, however, the authorising signature of sixties radicalism was textual (rather than involving physical presence). The precise source of the authority in this case is difficult to pin down but again performativity theory may prove useful. As Derrida pointed out, for an utterance to yield a performative force, it must be continually cited and repeated over time.⁴⁸ In the context under discussion, the repetition and circulation of images, symbols and references to sixties radicalism has given them a certain gravitas, status and familiarity within a variety of different activist communities. Consider, for example, the widespread use of

French May '68 posters (bearing iconic slogans such as “nous sommes le pouvoir” and “Mai 68: début d'une lutte prolongée”) adorning the walls of student occupations during late 2010. Elsewhere, Dan Hancox's ebook *Kettled Youth* recounts an enthusiastically received screening of a “68er film” at a protest at Birkbeck College, London,⁴⁹ whilst a further example is the edited book *Springtime: the New Student Rebellions* – consisting primarily of reflections from contemporary young activists on specific aspects of the 2010-11 protests – which contains numerous textual and pictorial allusions to sixties radicalism. In *Springtime*, textual reflections on various aspects of the 2010-11 student protests are interspersed with a series of “flashbacks” including images from radical magazines such as *Black Dwarf* and *Red Mole*, as well as Mick Jagger's handwritten lyrics for ‘Street Fighting Man’.⁵⁰ The effect of this juxtaposition of imagery from sixties radicalism with material from the present is striking. It visually articulates a sense of continuity and overlap between the aims and practices of contemporary student protest and the radical sixties. It does this in part by placing imagery from the late 60s and reflections on 2010-11 on adjacent pages, or by selecting imagery and slogans applicable to both temporal contexts. Page 22, for instance, features a demonic yet rather comical skull with protesting students trapped in its mouth, bearing the slogan ‘The Real Face of the Liberal University’.⁵¹ Whilst the image exhibits a visual style associated with the radical sixties, it is very clearly inferred that the political sentiment it expresses – opposition to the disciplining logics of the (neo)liberal university – also pertains to 2010-11. As co-editor of the book Clare Solomon (a prominent figure in the student movement) explained in an interview for *New Left Project*, ‘I think it's important to show the connection between what is going on now and what has happened historically. We chose them [the images from the sixties] in conjunction with *Verso*... the 60s, the explosion of student activism, produced a plethora of amazing artwork and analysis, so it was quite easy to get hold of’.⁵²

In keeping with this, several other young contributors to *Springtime* enthusiastically emphasise and endorse continuities, parallels and equivalences between sixties radicalism and the 2010-11 protests. LSE student radical Ashok Kumar describes how ‘the memory of '68, its dissent and protest, had been indelibly etched into our psyches’,⁵³ and also remarks that

until recently, the mass activism at the LSE was something we could only read about in history books and talk about in class. The spirit... of the radicals of the movements

who ignited that torch in 1968, seemed of the distant past. Their iconic images, seared into our collective memories... are an inspiration for our present day struggles.⁵⁴

Similarly, Hesham Yafai notes that both the 2009 pro-Palestine occupations in British universities and the 2010-11 protests were such that ‘the myth of the so-called ‘ipod generation’ had been exploded; suddenly, there was talk of the reawakening of the spirit of ’68’.⁵⁵ Also in Springtime, Jo Casserly discusses the centrality of the student occupation to the 2010-11 protests, emphasising the continuity with sixties radicalism in which ‘the memory of May ’68 remains an inspiration to us all’.⁵⁶ Finally, an article in *The Guardian* by high profile student activist Michael Chessum claims that ‘the student revolt of 2010 represented the awakening of a political consciousness unseen among young people since the 1960s’.⁵⁷ These various remarks indicate that for many participants in the 2010-11 student protests, the memory of sixties radicalism is something positive, galvanising and inspiring, insofar as it indexes a historical precedent for mass student protest to impact upon and shape wider society. Further, in situating the 2010 student protests within a longer tradition of radical activism, young activists were able to afford their activism a certain authenticity, less vulnerable to accusations of indulgence or superficiality.

Most of the above examples consist of young activists claiming and affirming a continuity between sixties radicalism and the 2010-11 protests. An alternative tactic – particularly prominent in comment pieces in *The Guardian* – consisted of older commentators writing approvingly about the 2010-11 given their perceived similarities/continuities with sixties radicalism. Justin McGuirk, for instance, begins an article on protest posters by noting that there was nothing at the time of the 40th anniversary that connected us to the spirit of ’68. However, ‘three years later... that spirit seems to have been exhumed’.⁵⁸ Likewise, despite raising some concerns regarding the student movement’s tactical considerations, veteran Marxist theorist Alex Callinicos mentions that a valuable closing of the ‘gap between words and deeds’ was ‘as visible in France in 1968 as in Britain in 2010’.⁵⁹ In a not wholly dissimilar vein, Francis Beckett concludes a tentatively approving article on the 2010-11 protests by noting that ‘the spirit of the baby boomers lives on, weary, introspective, but unbowed’.⁶⁰ *Guardian* writer Polly Toynbee adopts a slightly different approach in arguing that the young activists of 2010-11 have the potential to ‘lead the class of ’68 back into action’.⁶¹ Thus, rather than presuming that the 68ers are in possession of status and authority

which is then conferred upon younger activists, Toynbee argues that the younger activists can, conversely, inspire members of the '68 generation to revisit the radicalism of their youth.

However, perhaps the most explicit example of an affirmative attribution of the spirit of '68 by an older journalist towards young activists is a piece by Jonathan Jones in *The Guardian* in which he reflects on a now almost iconic image of a group of schoolgirls at a student protest in London in November 2010 surrounding a police van so as to shield it from attacks from fellow protestors. They are, says Jones, 'conscious of what they look like – angelic spirits of '68'. He continues: 'the 1968 allusion is not superficial: the images these girls are summoning, just as much as the van-smashers did, are pictures of revolution – the real thing, in its romantic and large-minded soixante-huitard form'.⁶² In so doing, Jones articulates perhaps the most romanticised and hyperbolic comparison between the 2010-11 protests and "1968", in which both are afforded an almost mythical, otherworldly – indeed 'angelic' – status. Jones' rhetoric is also clearly imbued with a deeply gendered account of the legacy of '68, whereby authentic sixties radicalism is associated with a particular representation of femininity at once rebellious, yet also invoking notions of purity and innocence more typical of traditional gendered discourses.

Less hyperbolic, but nonetheless striking, was John Pilger's 'message to the students', published in the *New Statesman* in December 2010, which represents perhaps the most overt and striking instance of an older activist conferring excitement, significance and status onto the 2010-11 protests on account of their similarity to the spirit and ethos of sixties radicalism. Pilger describes the protests as 'one of the most important and exciting developments in my recent lifetime', and continues by noting 'people often look back to the 1960s with nostalgia – but the point about the Sixties is that it took the establishment by surprise. And that's what you have done'.⁶³ Here, once again, the 2010-11 protests are rendered exciting and important precisely because they are framed as exhibiting the elements of surprise and radicalism that characterised the student protests of the sixties.

In some respects, the kinds of authority described above are rather different. Younger activists claimed status and authority by linking their practices to a longer tradition of radicalism: authority is derived from the historical precedent that sixties radicalism offers. Conversely, older commentators such as John Pilger are presumed to be always already embodying an experiential authority derived from their first-hand experience of the radical

sixties. Whilst, as shall become clear, this did lead to some tensions, we should not lose sight of what is shared by these different narratives. Indeed, all of the narratives outlined thus far suggest that sixties radicalism continues to yield a considerable affective pull and symbolic hold over contemporary forms of student and radical politics, but in a manner that is often vague, spectral and difficult to clearly demarcate. Whilst there were discussion sessions at several student occupations about connections between the sixties and 2010, in the texts analysed here sixties radicalism is typically cast as a ‘spirit’ rather than a clearly defined set of practices. Indeed, this ‘spirit’ is invoked not through detailed political and/or strategic justifications of spontaneity, horizontality or other characteristics with which it might be associated. Rather, invocations of a ‘spirit of ‘68’ are typically made through glosses and contextualising remarks that tap into a shared positive sentiment about the radical sixties that is assumed to already exist. This combination of vagueness and positive feeling (sometimes bordering on romanticisation) is, perhaps, symptomatic not so much of an excess of discussion of the radical sixties but, paradoxically, of an absence of a clear collective memory of sixties student radicalism. Indeed, it is perhaps this absence of a widely shared knowledge or memory of sixties radicalism that allows for rather romanticised visions of a “spirit of ‘68” to circulate, untroubled by any acknowledgement of the uncertainties and ambivalences that characterised individual and collective participation in the radical politics of the long sixties.⁶⁴

From ambivalence to repudiation

However, memories and legacies of sixties radicalism are not always viewed in such affirmative terms. Many commentators, particularly younger activists, express reservations about drawing parallels between “1968” and the 2010-11 protests. As authors such as Kristin Ross and have argued, popular representations of “1968” often obfuscate, rather than affirm, the radicalism of the period. Conversely, some, such as Marwick and DeGroot, cast doubt on the extent to which the late sixties, particularly in Britain, were characterised by an ethos of political radicalism. Against such a backdrop, for participants in the 2010-11 protests, comparisons with the radical sixties may in fact not be altogether desirable or positive. Thus, another recurrent trope in discussions of the 2010-11 student protests saw commentators seeking to distance the 2010-11 protests from the memory and legacy of sixties radicalism,

affirming that which is different, unique and unusual about present forms of student radicalism.

This sense of uncertainty and ambivalence towards the “68ers” is particularly evident in several contributions to Dan Hancox’s edited book *Fight Back: A Reader on the Winter of Protest*, which gathers together commentaries on aspects of the various radical movements that emerged in 2010-11. Whilst there is an acknowledgement that ‘the spectre of the 68ers looms large over the current protests’, the book argues that ‘what has been striking about this student movement has been its eagerness to shed such comparisons with 1968, despite its romance’.⁶⁵ This eagerness to shed historical parallels manifests itself either through insisting on the singularity and uniqueness of the 2010-11 protests, or through emphasising parallels with historical moments other than 1968. For instance, in a contribution to *Fight Back* Gerry Hassan writes that ‘some of this may evoke John Lennon and 1968, but the more relevant comparison is with those other mass protest movements against Conservative governments: the 1979-81 discontent against mass unemployment, and 1990 opposition to the poll tax’.⁶⁶ Similarly, Paul Mason takes the view that comparisons between the upheavals of 2010-11 and other comparable moments such as 1968 or 1989 are misplaced: ‘there is something in the air’, he argues, ‘that defies historical parallels: something new to do with behaviour, technology and popular culture’.⁶⁷ That said, in a review of *Fight Back*, Mason expresses scepticism towards the ‘constant rhetorical disdain for the “baby boomers”’, although he concedes that ‘this is understandable, given just how much patronising crap has been written by that generation about this’.⁶⁸

Other instances in which there is palpable unease towards comparisons with 1968 can be found in Nick Pearce’s argument that even Grosvenor Square ’68 cannot compete with the iconography of the photo of Charles and Camilla stuck in a group of student protestors, before going on to say that ‘the real images of the night were not of the violent black-flag brigade, nor of the middle class heirs to the 68ers, but of London’s black teenage youth’.⁶⁹ This again typifies a certain ambivalence towards the legacy of “1968”, whereby its memory and legacy is not explicitly rejected, but there is nonetheless an insistence on the uniqueness and singularity of the 2010-11 protests, rather than simply a repetition of the spirit of ’68.

At times this ambivalence spills over into something closer to repudiation/rejection, whereby connections, associations and equivalences between sixties student radicalism and the 2010-

11 protests are unambiguously rejected. Although a rather different context, one particularly clear example of this is a piece of graffiti in Athens conveying the words ‘Fuck May 68; Fight Now!’ mentioned by Paul Mason.⁷⁰ Although one only rarely encounters repudiations of “1968” as overt as this, many commentators sought to distance themselves from an affirmative view of sixties radicalism. In part this reflects the air of generational conflict that underpinned some of the discourse of the 2010-11 student movements. According to Ed Howker and Shiv Malik’s 2010 book *Jilted Generation*, ‘the boomers have concocted a near-mythological narrative of their youth, of rallies and riots, ideology and idolatry, which many of them claim changed the face of British society’.⁷¹ Although written slightly before the emergence of the student protests, Howker and Malik’s claim that the baby boomer generation have enjoyed a range of economic and cultural privileges at the expense of the young resonated with sections of the 2010-11 student movement. Indeed, this led to some commentators and participants to position the 2010-11 movement not only as different from, but in opposition to, the “1968” generation.

Laurie Penny – a young left-wing journalist who has become one of the key commentators on protest and activism in the British media – is one of the most vocal exponents of an emphasis on discontinuity between sixties and present radicalism. Much of her writing is imbued with a scepticism and antipathy towards the drawing of affirmative comparisons between 2010-11 and 1968. She writes:

‘Many are already calling it ‘the new 1968’. I am far from the only young activist who finds that aphorism decidedly unambitious. For one thing, it reduces the profound political reawakening taking place in Britain and elsewhere to a trajectory of inevitable failure. Anyone who has met, or indeed been, a young person in the developed world in the twenty-first century, can assure you that the naysayers haven’t quite grasped our ruthlessness, nor how little we have to lose’.⁷²

Elsewhere, she writes that the movements of 2010-11 lack ‘the bitter, arthritic infighting that blighted the student protests of the 1960s’⁷³ and, in describing the occupation of University College London (UCL), notes that ‘unlike the 1968 generation with which they are so often compared, [the occupying students] are – on the whole – drug-free, and have banned drinking at meetings and sex in the toilets’.⁷⁴ This is a recurrent theme in Penny’s writing: she worries that to emphasise parallels with “1968” is to overlook that which is new, unusual and important about the 2010-11 protests. Furthermore, there is a certain moralism in Penny’s repudiation of comparisons with 1968: her writing sharply juxtaposes a morally righteous,

open-minded, sober and authentic 2010-11 student movement alongside a depiction of “the 68ers” as indulgent, drug-addled, privileged and flippant. Consequently, for her and some 68 sceptics, the 2010-11 student movement’s key aim was to dismantle the structures of privilege enjoyed by the ’68 generation at the expense of today’s students. Indeed, such sentiment is arguably also present in a piece by Bronwyn Hayward in *Open Democracy* entitled ‘Where Have all the Adults Gone?’, which chastises the older generations for their alleged lack of solidarity and support for the new generation of politicised young people.⁷⁵

This ‘rhetorical disdain’⁷⁶ (in Paul Mason’s words) for the legacy of sixties radicalism is a recurrent theme in much commentary on the 2010-11 protests. In a contribution to *Fight Back* discussing aspects of student occupations, Oliver Wainwright sardonically writes

‘Hordes of ageing commentators, seeing current student antics as a means to relive their imagined youth of ’68, have used their columns to wallow in the rosy mists of nostalgic reverie, remarking with surprise that Thatcher’s children have turned out politicised after all. Look, today they were all marching, isn’t it sweet’.⁷⁷

Like Penny, Wainwright’s barely concealed contempt for the ways in which sixties veterans have sought to reframe the 2010-11 protests as a revitalisation of a dormant spirit of ’68 is infused with a desire to affirm the novelty and singularity of the 2010-11 protests. It also carries traces of Penny’s pitting of a morally upstanding 2010-11 movement against a misguided and indulgent generation of ’68. A slightly different tack is adopted by student activist Sofie Buckland in a piece for *New Statesman* who, in a general overview written at the height of the movement in late November 2010, writes ‘let’s not be starry-eyed about this. We’re not a new “generation of 68”, skipping past cops and holding hands across barricades. Implicit in the reclaiming of what constitutes politics is a hard-edged cynicism’.⁷⁸

At first glance, there is very clearly a generational dynamic at work here, whereby a significant number of younger activists and commentators felt compelled to reject links between the 2010-11 protests and what they considered to be rather tiresome and romanticised recollections of the sixties. To some extent, this mirrors generational antagonisms in a variety of contemporary modes of political activism: consider, for example the ways in which many young Anglo-American feminists, in affirming “third wave” feminism, have sought to clearly differentiate themselves from that they consider to be their politically and symbolically more powerful “second-wave” forerunners.⁷⁹ However, it would

be unduly simplistic to frame this as simply an antagonism between different age cohorts of activists. This is because particularly among younger activists there was considerable variability in the different ways in which the memory of sixties radicalism is framed and understood. For instance, disagreement over the value and legacy of sixties radicalism was also clearly present within, as well as between, generational cohorts. Thus, whilst generational factors undoubtedly did come into play, the contestations mapped here frequently defied easy categorisation into opposing generational categories. Thus, generational conflict should be seen as mediated by a range of strategic and tactical disagreements aims, character and historical context of the 2010-11 student protests.

Dilemmas of “1968”: memory, romanticisation and demystification

What, then, can we deduce from the preceding analysis? At a very general level, it is clear that the memory and legacy of sixties radicalism continues to have important consequences for how contemporary student activism – and radical politics more broadly – is framed and understood. The analysis suggests, in keeping with several recent analysis of contemporary radical politics (but particularly in relation to feminism) that there remains a common presumption that late sixties and seventies radicalism provides a benchmark for genuine, authentic, radical politics.⁸⁰ In such a context, contemporary activists and commentators are faced with a number of options: the terms of radicalism and authenticity can be contested, contemporary activism can be cast as lacking the radicality and authenticity of “1968”, or it can be argued that specific instances of present radical politics continue to embody the spirit of ’68.

The first strategy can be found in the writings of Laurie Penny and other “68 sceptics”: the baby-boomers have, it is argued, produced a self-legitimising romanticisation of the radical politics of their youth. As such, “1968”, particularly in its more sanitised culturalist and generational representations, is positioned as anathema to the authenticity and sincerity of the 2010-11 student movement. By contrast, for authors who take a more affirmative stance, the authenticity of the 2010-11 protests arises precisely from their similarity or convergence with the spirit of sixties radicalism.

However, despite being ostensibly different, these affirmations and repudiations of “1968” exhibit a number of common characteristics. For one, they tend towards casting sixties radicalism as a singular, unitary entity invested with either a positive or negative valence, and thus tend to bypass the tensions and complexities that underpin the history and memory of sixties radicalism. Also, they remain within a discursive framework in which “1968” is – for good or ill – afforded a high degree of significance and importance. Sixties radicalism therefore continues to exhibit a strong affective pull for many contemporary activists, be it positive or negative. But despite this, the precise character of the radical sixties being positively or negatively invoked is often poorly defined and elusive: it is often unclear which strand of, or practice associated with, the radical sixties, is being called upon. As a result, sixties radicalism would typically be framed in terms of an ill-defined, yet singular and undifferentiated, ‘spirit’ of rebellion, rather than a clearly defined set of practices. This in turn reflects, I would argue, a general lack of a clear-cut or widely understood collective memory of the British experience of the radical sixties.

This then begs the question of precisely why there seems to be an absence of a clear-cut collective memory of sixties radicalism in Britain. A comprehensive answer to this question is beyond the scope of the paper. However, one possibility is that it is in part a consequence of the cumulative effect of the bewildering variety of both romanticisations and dismissals of the experiences and legacies of the 60s Britain during subsequent decades. Indeed, as Kilmke and Scharloth have pointed out, ‘the actual historical events have been transformed by subsequent narratives illustrating a vast array of nostalgia, condemnation and myth making’.⁸¹ As a consequence of this it often becomes very difficult for activists (as well as analysts and historians) to disaggregate the different strands of the collective memory of sixties radicalism. Indeed, in the British context, memories of radical forms of protest and political activism have tended to be overshadowed by the more widely known “cultural revolutions” associated with the various forms of fashion, music and art characteristic of sixties Britain. Consequently, established narratives and “myths” about the sixties continue to circulate independent of the substantive memories of period.

But why then did invocations of sixties radicalism continue to recur in responses to the 2010-11 protests, despite the former’s contested, vague and spectral character? The answer lies in part in the surprising and dislocatory character of the 2010 protests. As indicated, the 2010-11 student protests were dislocatory moments in which narratives of youth apathy and British

apolitical stoicism were called into question. This means that the protests confronted us with something strange, unfamiliar and potentially confusing. Representations of sixties radicalism, by contrast, seem familiar and knowable by virtue of their continued circulation in popular discourse. Thus, the drawing of an equivalence between “1968” and the 2010-11 protests potentially functions as a way of rendering the latter – initially strange and unfamiliar – knowable and familiar. As Linda Zerilli points out, much political theory and analysis is wedded to what she calls (following Kant) ‘determinate judgement’, which entails the subsumption of particular cases under more general rules.⁸² Determinate judgement is problematic, she argues, insofar as the unfamiliar or the curious is cast to the margins, or domesticated in such a way as to be rendered simply one further instance of an already existing rule or category.

The danger here, then, is that in casting the 2010-11 protests as a contemporary example of a “spirit of ‘68”, we potentially fail to acknowledge that which is unfamiliar, unusual or unique. The potential value and specificity of the 2010-11 student movement becomes sidelined or domesticated by casting it as just one further instance of a sedimented conceptual framework. Such a view tends to cast contemporary activism as significant and radical only to the extent that it models itself on the ethos and practices of sixties student radicalism. Indeed, when veterans of left and student radicalism such as John Pilger or Manuel Castells⁸³ speak approvingly of contemporary young protestors, the flipside of their approval, however, is the implied suggestion that a lack of willingness or ability to approximate “68er” models of student activism would render the current wave of protests insufficiently radical or significant. Indeed, something approaching this kind of operation is evident in a comment made by Tariq Ali on Occupy London: ‘Oh, you know ... It's very sweet. It's lovely seeing young people being engaged again. I'm not being patronising, I think it's great. But I think you have to recognise it for what it is: essentially, a symbolic protest’.⁸⁴ It is, I would argue, precisely this kind of discursive operation that motivates Laurie Penny and others’ rejections of the tendency to draw parallels and linkages between sixties radicalism and the 2010-11 protests.

Perhaps, then, one should endorse Mihnea Panu’s claim that a “political imagination” informed by 1968 inscribes a conception of politics that is narrow, myopic and Eurocentric.⁸⁵ However, such sweepingly repudiative orientation towards “1968” carry a number of risks and dangers. In an engaging exchange between Penny and Alex Callinicos in *The Guardian* in December 2010, the latter accuses Penny of ‘articulating one of the characteristic illusions

of any new movement, namely that it renders all existing theory and past experience obsolete'.⁸⁶ In a similarly engaging exchange with Guy Aitchison in *Open Democracy*, Jeremy Gilbert asks whether 'in hindsight many of the claims made for the significance, inclusivity and originality of the campaign were hyperbolic beyond the point of ordinary enthusiasm, and that in particular they were predicated on a deeply ahistorical grasp of the place of the protests in British political history'.⁸⁷ Furthermore, narratives of repudiation potentially serve a disciplining function that is similar yet inverse to the disciplinary effects of affirming "1968". If one casts sixties radicalism as a hindrance to the radicalism and significance of the 2010-11 protests, one risks denigrating the inspiration and positive affect that the legacy of '68 potentially offers young activists, and also risks casting sixties radicalism as a monolithic entity, with a singular, in this case unambiguously undesirable legacy.

Consequently, my aim is not to suggest that we should either reject or affirm the legacy of sixties radicalism, but to suggest that it might be fruitful, both politically and analytically, to continue the work of "demystifying" the radical sixties, so as to avoid the rather polarising oscillations between repudiation and romanticisation that we find in much of the commentary on the 2010-11 protests. A crucial aspect of such a project will be the kind of detailed archival work characteristic of the work of, among others, Celia Hughes, Sarah Browne and Caroline Hoefflerle. Whilst, as mentioned, this strand of work is broadly affirmative (insofar as it contests the rather dismissive accounts of British sixties radicalism offered by the likes of Gerard de Groot) it nonetheless, in tracing the contestations and hierarchies that characterised different strands of British sixties radicalism, pushes us away from straightforward romanticisation. That is not to say that such work offers us a truer account of the radical 60s than other analyses, as any account will by definition be partial and selective. But I would argue that greater awareness of and commitment to the kind of detailed, located and contextual work provided by Celia Hughes, is essential if we are to cultivate a more nuanced and productive collective memory of the British radical sixties. As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of 1968, such a move will also offer a welcome counterweight to the oscillations between romanticisation and dismissal that characterise most contemporary responses to sixties radicalism.

Concluding remarks

The bulk of this paper has sought to draw on performativity theory to highlight the different ways in which invocations of sixties radicalism were used to construct different meanings and understandings of the 2010-11 student protests in the UK. The substantive part of the paper mapped a polarisation between positive and negative invocations of sixties radicalism. Positive invocations sought to affirm an at times romanticised ‘spirit of ‘68’ which many felt had been reawakened during the student protests of 2010-11. More negative invocations, by contrast, framed the 2010-11 protests as important and significant precisely because they were distinct from, and indeed perhaps in opposition to, models of protest and rebellion inherited from “1968”. And yet, whilst ostensibly rather different, these two different narratives exhibited remarkable convergence. They were both characterised by a certain vagueness about what precise features of the radical sixties were being remembered or invoked. In so doing they tended to implicitly position the radical sixties as something rather singular and undifferentiated. I have suggested that this is perhaps a consequence of an absence of a clear-cut collective memory of the different strands of radical politics of sixties Britain. Furthermore, I have argued that invocations of the radical sixties are appealing because they provide a route through which to analyse, make sense of, and perhaps domesticate, potentially strange or unfamiliar contemporary forms of radical activism. More broadly, the analysis carried out in this paper is important in part because historical literature tends not to examine in detail the precise mechanisms through which memories and legacies of sixties radicalism shape the discursive and affective landscape of contemporary radical politics. Furthermore the existing work on current forms of student protest in particular, and radical politics in general, often says rather little about the ways in which these are shaped by memories of past instances of radical politics.

In conducting my analysis, I have sought to avoid prescribing a “correct” vision for how contemporary activists should negotiate the contested legacy of “1968”. Instead, I have tried to shed light on how different sorts of constructions of the memory of ’68 carry with them various possible risks and dangers, but this is not to argue that we should seek to enact some kind of prohibition on comparisons between contemporary radical politics and “1968”. And Whilst I have been critical of certain kinds of affective orientations towards the radical sixties, I am not calling for a cold, dispassionate analysis in which affect is sidelined. After all, I became interested in these research questions in part because I myself felt the affective pull

towards a certain nostalgia for the radical sixties at the time of 2010-11 protests. As such, it seems likely that the contested memories and spectres of “1968” will continue to haunt our discussions of contemporary radical politics. The task at hand, therefore, is not to set about trying to speedily exorcise these spectres, but to remain attentive to the pleasures, risks and ambivalences that marked different strands of sixties radicalism, as well as ongoing attempts at constructing (dis)connections between “1968” and contemporary radical politics.

¹ See Ibrahim, ‘The New Toll on Higher Education’.

² See, for example, Aitchison, ‘Reform, Rupture or Re-Imagination’; Ibrahim, ‘The New Toll on Higher Education’; Salter & Kay, ‘The UWE Student Occupation’.

³ I borrow the evocative term ‘contested landscape of memory’ from one of the anonymous reviews of the initial draft of this paper.

⁴ Sandbrook, *White Heat*, 794

⁵ Marwick, *The Sixties*, 728-719

⁶ De Groot, *The 60s Unplugged*, 363.

⁷ Jones, ‘All Along the Watershed’, 8.

⁸ Ellis, ‘A Demonstration of British Good Sense?’, 54

⁹ Thomas, ‘Challenging the Myths of the 1960s’, 282.

¹⁰ Nehring, ‘Great Britain’.

¹¹ See, for example, Boggs, *The End of Politics*; Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*; Jacoby, *The End of Utopia*.

¹² See, for example, Crouch, *Post-Democracy*; Rancière, *Dis-agreement*; Stavrakakis, *The Lacanian Left*.

¹³ See, for example, Mouffe, *On the Political*.

¹⁴ See, for example, Horn, *Spirit of ’68*; Jacoby, *The End of Utopia*.

¹⁵ See, for example, Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*; Bourdieu, *From Revolution to Ethics*; Rancière, *Dis-agreement*.

¹⁶ Notable examples include Ali, *Street Fighting Years*; Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation*; Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream*.

¹⁷ See Bhabra & Demir, ‘Introduction: 1968 in Retrospect’, Segal, ‘She’s Leaving home’, and Hines, ‘Riding the Waves’.

¹⁸ Fink et. al., ‘Introduction’; Klimke & Scharloth, ‘Introduction: 1968 in Europe’.

¹⁹ Harman, *The Fire Last Time*; Harman, *Spirit of ’68*; Ross, *May ’68 and Its Afterlives*.

²⁰ Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*; Kurlansky, 1968.

²¹ Malsen, ‘Autobiographies of a Generation?’ 25.

²² Thomas, ‘Challenging the Myths of the 60s’, 291.

²³ Hoefflerle, *British Student Activism in the Long Sixties*, 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 208.

²⁶ Hughes, ‘Negotiating Ungovernable Spaces’, 72

²⁷ *ibid.*, 61

²⁸ For a further exceedingly rich example of current oral history scholarship on sixties and seventies activism, see Browne, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Scotland*.

²⁹ See, for example, Bloom, *Riot City*; Ibrahim, ‘The New Toll on higher Education’; Sealey-Huggins & Pudsey, ‘Neoliberalism and Depoliticisation’.

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- ³⁰ For an analysis of the 2010 student protests which, in foregrounding media constructions and representations of the protests, adopts an approach not dissimilar to my own, see Cammaerts, ‘The Mediation of Insurrectionary Symbolic Damage’.
- ³¹ In doing this, I am mindful of Tariq Ali’s caustic remark that it is a “boring question” to ask how current protests compare to those of the sixties. However, this is a risk I am prepared to take! See Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, 6.
- ³² Ross, *May ’68 and Its Afterlives*; Reynolds, *Memories of May ’68*; Jones and O’Donnell, ‘Sixties Radicalism’.
- ³³ Jones and O’Donnell, ‘Preface and Acknowledgements’, iii.
- ³⁴ Cranfield, ‘Students, Artists and the ICA’, 112.
- ³⁵ Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, 4-11.
- ³⁶ See Butler, *Excitable Speech*.
- ³⁷ See, for example, Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*; Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.
- ³⁸ Again, see Cammaerts, ‘The Mediation of Insurrectionary Symbolic Damage’, for an analysis of how some of these competing characterisations of the protests featured in mainstream news media.
- ³⁹ See Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*.
- ⁴⁰ Jacoby, *The End of Utopia*, 159.
- ⁴¹ Horn, *The Spirit of ’68*, 1.
- ⁴² Mason, *Why It’s Kicking Off Everywhere*, 4.
- ⁴³ Bloom, *Riot City*, 55.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.
- ⁴⁵ Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes’; Pereira, ‘Feminist Scholarship and the Epistemic Status of Nations’.
- ⁴⁶ Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes’, 335.
- ⁴⁷ Mason, *Why It’s Kicking Off Everywhere*, 45.
- ⁴⁸ Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, especially 324-328
- ⁴⁹ Hancox, *Kettled Youth*.
- ⁵⁰ Solomon and Palmieri, *Springtime*, 79
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 45.
- ⁵² Solomon and McKeown, ‘Springtime’ (no pagination). See also Hanman, ‘Springtime: the New Student Rebellions – Review’.
- ⁵³ Kumar, ‘Past and Present’, 27.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 28
- ⁵⁵ Yafai, ‘Rebirth of Student Activism’, 35.
- ⁵⁶ Casserly, ‘The Art of Occupation’, 75.
- ⁵⁷ Chessum, ‘The NUS Can learn from the Activist Left’, no pagination.
- ⁵⁸ McGuirk, ‘Beauty is in the Street’, no pagination.
- ⁵⁹ Callinicos, ‘Student Demonstrators can’t do it on Their Own’, no pagination.
- ⁶⁰ Beckett, ‘Student Protests of Yore’, no pagination.
- ⁶¹ Toynbee, ‘Thatcher’s Children Can Lead the Class of 68 Back into Action’, no pagination.
- ⁶² Jones, ‘Angelic Spirits of ’68’, no pagination.
- ⁶³ Trilling, ‘John Pilger’s Message to the Students’.
- ⁶⁴ For instance, whilst offering a generally affirmative account of sixties radicalism, Celia Hughes’ oral history interviews in *Young Lives on the Left* are testament to the often fraught and ambivalent character of radical subject-formation in sixties Britain, as well as shedding light on the gender, race and class hierarchies that structured the activist communities in which her interviewees participated.
- ⁶⁵ Anon, ‘Old Politics and New Movements’, 278.
- ⁶⁶ Hassan, ‘The New Sound of the Streets’, 289.
- ⁶⁷ Mason, *Why It’s Kicking Off Everywhere*, 65.
- ⁶⁸ Mason, ‘Fight Back!’, no pagination.
- ⁶⁹ Pearce, ‘The Morning After the Fight Before’, 293.
- ⁷⁰ Mason, *Why It’s Kicking Off Everywhere*, 101.
- ⁷¹ Howker & Malik, *Jilted Generation*, 159.

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- ⁷² Penny, Penny Red, 6.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 40.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 40-41.
- ⁷⁵ Hayward, 'Where Have all the Adults Gone?'
- ⁷⁶ Mason, 'Fight Back!', no pagination.
- ⁷⁷ Wainwright, 'Beyond the Occupation', 97.
- ⁷⁸ Buckland, 'No-one is Going to do This for Us, so We'd Better Get it Right', no pagination.
- ⁷⁹ See, for example, Dean, *Rethinking Contemporary Feminist Politics*, chapter 5; Budgeon, *Third-wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity*.
- ⁸⁰ See, for example, Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter*; Roy, 'Melancholic Politics and the Politics of Melancholia'.
- ⁸¹ Klimke & Scharloth, 'Introduction', 7.
- ⁸² Zerilli, 'We Feel Our Freedom', 159.
- ⁸³ See Trilling, 'John Pilger's Message to the Students'; Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*.
- ⁸⁴ Ali, in Harris, 'Global Protests', no pagination.
- ⁸⁵ See Panu, 'Subjectivization, State, Other'.
- ⁸⁶ Callinicos, 'Student Demonstrators Can't do it on Their Own', no pagination.
- ⁸⁷ Gilbert, in Aitchison & Gilbert, 'Reflections on Britain's Student Movement', no pagination.

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