

## *Sebastian Berg and Claus-Ulrich Viol*

# Voices of 1968 Fifty Years On

There is something which makes fiftieth anniversaries particularly precious: one can still ask eye witnesses and participants for their experiences and reflections and they can comment from a long-term perspective. This is what this section of the issue does. It documents the views of three individuals who were involved in the debates, protests, and activities of the long 1968. All three have remained political intellectuals and activists in their later lives. Different as these three perspectives are, they raise a number of questions which are central for identifying the legacy of 1968 over the next 50 years: what was the relationship between the students' movement and other social movements? Did these other movements start in or after 1968 or did they precede it? Which legacies of 1968 have been celebrated (and exaggerated)? Which have been ignored (and undervalued)? How did the activists of 1968 combine solidaristic struggle with self-emancipation? Does the criticism that 1968-style libertarianism served as a door-opener to neoliberalism contain some truth?

These questions are answered in the texts and thus do not need answers here. Two points, however, need explication because the writers are perhaps too modest to emphasise them more strongly: firstly, in terms of cultural liberation, there are achievements of the long 1968 that have become so normalised that it is sometimes forgotten people actually fought for them. Secondly, these fights succeeded because the fighters combined social theory and reflection with political practice and activism. For the current generation of critical students, juggling odd jobs and streamlined degree courses in a hybrid environment of virtual and physical reality, this might be an important insight. For the current generation of critical academics, teaching social and cultural history and theory in the 'competitive' environment of the entrepreneurial university, it might be too.

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