

# May 68': Spacing

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**Abstract:** This work takes into account the aftermath of the events of May 68. It starts from the premise that it was not neither a revolution, nor a crisis. It analyses the phenomena's which dominated the events 50 years ago and deals with the transformations caused by these events. At the end, it argues for the impossibility of projecting a 'new world'.

**Keywords:** new world, revolution, old age, time, impossibility

May 1968 was not a revolution, as we know, since no new order was imposed. It was not a crisis either because it did not declare itself as an inflammation of an organism, but rather as a stasis in a flux. It was not a revolt, which would then stumble **but not fall**. Neither a sedition, whose supporters would have clearly identified. There have been all these features, and even others. Two phenomena dominated this event: on one hand, the proven failure of the colonial wars, thus the end of all colonial legitimacy - and on the other hand, the proven failure of progressive trust in the developed countries (politics, morals, culture, nothing fundamentally made "progress" - apart from technique and profit).

There were therefore two sides of the same phenomenon: the civilization which thought to guide the world, whether under a democratic and spiritual banner or under a socialist and material crest, was temporarily suspended. She did not recognize herself anymore. She described herself as an "old world". The most eloquent slogan of the French 68' was: *Run, comrade, the old world is behind you!*

But this old world was not distinguishable from a new world. There was just no new world: nor the one who had worn the name of America, nor the one which the Soviet epithet had indicated. There was a breakdown of the two-headed machine that had both ruled and divided the world since 1945 or even since 1920, as we prefer to say. Fascisms had already arisen from a desire to project towards a new world, unheard of, which had already been experienced as old age or exhaustion. They had collapsed for presuming the strengths of their mythological old junk.

But old age and exhaustion did not affect the machine itself - out of its ideological heads. The sciences, the techniques, the calculations of production and profitability did not cease to progress. We were going to tackle major structural changes in energy sources and in production objectives, we were going through a computer mutation that nobody saw it coming while it was already maturing in laboratories of prospection.

It is normal not to see what matures in a shade which is too thick. The announcements of the future were, also, less frequent and less noisy than today's, we did not see this intensification of "communication" coming from all-around. There are, however, some spirits which are often more piercing than others. In '68, Pier Paolo Pasolini, who had a keen sense of the tragic, spoke about the prologue of his film *Theorema* of the coming advent of a generalized middle class.

This announcement was intimately linked to the whole narrative of the film: the irruption of a strange visitor who reveals to a bourgeois family the emptiness of its existence and "a new meaning" that yet "remains indecipherable".

It was a beautiful mutation of signs and meanings. It occurred through the emergence of one world overtaking the two elder ones. One and the same world which, however, instead of composing a unit, behaved rather like a gap. It opened without revealing any outline or depth of its opening. This was later to be called "globalization" according with an expression by Marshall McLuhan, whose major books had just appeared in 1967.

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1968 inaugurated a new spacing between a world and itself. Between a globe and a cartography. The globe was going to be criss-crossed with connections, transports, transfers and transhumances, but it would be more and more difficult to draw lines representing countries and countries representing cultures.

None of us knew at the moment. On the contrary, we felt a new solidarity from San Francisco to Tokyo in both directions and passing through all over, even if it was clandestine. 1968 was also the year of Prague and a considerable shake-up of Eastern Europe, while in the West, the Beatles sang the year before that *All you need is love* premiered the first world TV transmission. In Tokyo, the year '68 had the most powerful student demonstrations in the world. It is also the year of the first annual special issue of the magazine *Jeune Afrique* which presents a state of its continent, as well as the year of the *Black Power Salute* at the Olympic Games in Mexico. We could multiply the signs, and this has already been done in more than one work.

In '68, a gap was opened which was no longer that of the distance between an ideal and a real, nor about the time projected to accomplish a project - at the same time, it was no longer solely that of an opposition of classes without being reduced either to a domination of races or to a confrontation of worldviews. It was rather the world where both perceive themselves as an unprecedented involution - a surprising self-relation that reveals itself unrecognizable. Tendentially this involution is separated from an evolution and of history's oscillations. It is space that transforms, expands and contracts, according to pressures and torsions that no instrument has yet grasped its characteristics.

Like in any relation to oneself, one discovers that his identity escapes him. He feels himself apart (*espacé*) from himself in himself. He acknowledges that he does not know himself and this recognition, by principle, can not produce knowledge. What had been known - or believed in a knowledge - of history, progress, mastery and finally "man" himself (as well as an "Idea", "Presence" or even "Being") is exposed

to the challenge of a non-knowledge that Sartre had already mobilized while retaining a purpose in the horizon of a humanism, as broad and revolutionary as it was. In '68, it is the horizon of all humanism - of all centrality or human finality - that dissipates. Foucault attests this same year in a March interview.

This is why '68 is also the point of practical, affective and symbolic crystallization of a philosophical displacement that has started for more than ten years and that it has continued to transform ever since. It is a displacement within philosophy itself - not considered solely in its academic discipline but in all the manifestations of thought, knowledge, the arts and morals. It is the displacement of the "world view" into an interrogation on the two terms of this expression: is it "seeing"? and is it a "world"?

This inner spacing to the major meanings of the entire conceptual apparatus of Western civilization is the deep reality of which '68 has been the gushing expression. We have no more visions of the world, we do not have people anymore, we have algorithms and procedures. And we are at the same time more and more pushed, not pressed towards the future of a project, but towards the impossibility to project of what can not fail to arrive. *Let's run, comrades!*

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Translated by Rodrigo Gonsalves