



História (São Paulo)

ISSN: 0101-9074

revistahistoria@unesp.br

Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de
Mesquita Filho
Brasil

Aguirre ROJAS, Carlos Antonio

1968 as a turning point in historical thinking: changes in western historiography

História (São Paulo), vol. 23, núm. 1-2, 2004, pp. 197-218

Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho

São Paulo, Brasil

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=221014789010>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in redalyc.org

redalyc.org

Scientific Information System

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative

1968 as a turning point in historical thinking: changes in western historiography

Carlos Antonio Aguirre ROJAS¹

RESUMO: Este artigo faz uma análise do significado da Revolução Cultural de 1968 como um “evento de ruptura”. Grandes rupturas ocorreram desde então na historiografia, abalando certezas presentes em diversas concepções de História e direcionando essa disciplina para os estudos culturais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Historiografia; presentismo; geração de 1968.

RECONSIDERING THE SIGNIFICANCE AND CHARACTERIZATION OF THE 1968 CULTURAL REVOLUTION

More than thirty years after the symbolic year of 1968 - that great “rupturing – event” – occurred, it is now so much easier to adequately measure and comprehend its true and profound significance. The reason is that with the perspective provided by three decades that have since transpired, it is now clear that 1968 was in fact only the concentration point and the most evident and spectacular reflection of a more comprehensive moment of profound revolutionary changes that affected practically the entire planet. These include the great Chinese Cultural Revolution unleashed in 1966 along with the “hot” Italian autumn of 1969, obviously passing through the famous French May, the Czechoslovakian Spring of Prague, the tragic October 1968 massacre of Mexican students and civilian population, the brief uprising rehearsal of the Argentinean “Cordobazo”, or the different movements leading to the occupation of facilities in New York or Berkeley in the United States, among many, many others.²

Because today, it is clear that the fundamental dividing circumstance of 1968 has spread on a *worldwide* scale. And it is now also clear

that – way and beyond its multiple and diverse forms of expression at the different geographic spots, obviously associated with the historic features of each respective region, nation or space –, the 1968 movement is deep-down (basically) a true *cultural revolution*. Consequently, at its most representative and characteristic epicenters as well as at the entire group of places and spaces of its multiple appearances, the historical 1968 rupture always emerges with a double scenario: one, as a process in which the explanation is never entirely complete stemming only from the data of the corresponding *local* situation –forwarding us therefore to its universal dimension – and the other, also as a transformation in which, whatever might be the political fate or the mediate or immediate destiny of its direct actors, as individuals or collectively, it always ends up by radically upsetting, without any possibility of turning back, the forms of functioning and of reproduction of the main cultural structures that it refutes and questions.³

Thus, the 1968 Revolution, “actually and in fact travels all over the world”, having first to readapt itself to conditions of the developed capitalist world (as in the French May movement), and to the main dilemmas of the different projects of “real socialism” societies (as in the case of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and later the tragic Spring of Prague), or, finally, to the contextual peculiarities of the Third World and under-developed countries (as the experience of the Mexican student-popular movement). This worldwide experience was to anticipate the world economic crisis unleashed in 1972-1973, to generate the birth or re-launching of the new social movements displayed during the last thirty years, to build the emergency conditions for the “new leftist” revolutionaries, and to finally make possible a total and complete renewal of the cultural sphere of modern societies the world over.

If we are to ask ourselves regarding the common strokes shared by all these movements and uprisings – that staged and represented the spirit of protest and opposition to the system between the years of 1966 to 1969 in all corners of the world – we can easily recognize that in all of them, beyond the diversity of their concrete and specific circumstances, what was being questioned and hopefully changed was mainly the functioning logic and the mode itself of expression of the dominant forms of culture that were then in force. With this, there seems to have been a

kind of unique and secret process that by means of its multiple threads linked the radical challenging of the antidemocratic, authoritarian, and hierarchical culture which, in addition, was deaf to the complaints of civil society of all of the so-called “Third World” countries, and connected it to the total and demolishing criticism of the consumer society, alienating, standardized, superficial and also extremely rigid of the developed capitalist world. It also connected to the vigorous and forceful criticism of the “false socialist culture” or the stagnant official culture of the then so-called “socialist world”. A triple aspect of this 1968 cultural revolution, though focused towards the evident epicenters of Mexico City, Paris, Peking and Prague, has become evident as well, throughout the different countries and the different continents of the entire world.⁴

Additionally, and in each one of them, it placed the already mentioned contemporary culture precisely in the center of its attack. Because if 1968 is not just a simple minor change or a simple mutation, but actually a *true revolution*, and if this revolution is fundamentally of a *cultural* nature, it is then logical that what has changed since 1968, is much more the nature and the essential function of the three main institutions within which modern culture is produced, generated, maintained and reproduced, that is to say: family, school and mass media. It is precisely here, at the core of these three contemporary cultural reproduction apparatuses, where the mark of the passage of the 1968 revolution has left its definitive imprint, signaling a clear before and after in the history of these three spaces.

For, as we once again view the problem from a global perspective and with a long worldly spirit, it is clear that the family that existed throughout the world up until the fifties of the twentieth century, has little to do with the family as we know it today. And not only because a method was discovered that allowed the control and planning of the size of the family and of the time for it to grow or not, all due to the revolution created by the invention of the birth control pill, but also because of the fact that between the family of thirty years ago and the present day family lie all the conquests and advances of the modern feminist movement, as well as all of the effect – at times more subtle or indirect but by no means less effective – of the spreading of contemporary psychoanalysis and anti-psychiatry.

Radical progress in the family cell, unleashed by the rise of feminism and anti-psychiatry, both post-'68 social movements, which are evident in the explorations of the generation of the sixties, seeking *new* forms of family organization – going from the famous “communes” of the *hippy* movements to the feminist experiments of exclusive maternity without male fathers – in the spectacular increase of the divorce rate all over the world and the now daily consideration (evoking) of the “crisis of the couple”; in the generalized development of the “rights and obligations of children”; in the complete change of the social and family role of women, and also, in the diverse perception and role of the older generations within that same family space.⁵

At the same time, and in support of this total revolution of the family nucleus' mode of operation, the internal structures of the school system are also to experience complete change. What those students who wrote slogans such as: “Teachers: you are old ... and so is your culture” on the walls, were centrally attacking was a clear *framework of the transmission of knowledge*, a framework of hierarchical and completely vertical relations where the teacher was considered as the sole depositary of knowledge, recreating the assumed truth of the aphorism *Magister dixit*, while the students were considered as only *passive* receivers who listened, received and learned, without reacting nor interacting in a more dynamic fashion with these teachers. This was a school that functioned by reproducing a disciplinary scheme much more extended among the entire social body, with the most traditional logic of the exercise of knowledge / power which was not to survive the brutal and shocking clash of 1968.⁶ Because it is not by chance that after 1968, the great pedagogical debates flourished all over the world, intending to create new models for transmitting knowledge that precisely could be capable of incorporating the students in an active, participative, critical, and creative manner, thus making their relationship with their teachers more horizontal and renewing the forms of generation as well as of transmission of new knowledge.

This revolution of the schooling institution that is simultaneously a change of the “capitalist school”, and that in the “socialist” countries will be expressed by means of the specific challenging of the old division between manual and intellectual labor, and in the critique and re-discussion of the social role and of the specific function of the “intellectu-

als" strata within society, as the double movement to bring the shop close to the school and the school close to the factory and the country.

These are essential modifications in the function and character of the school and the family which are finally accompanied by a significant change in the role that as of that date shall be played by the mass media within society. Because it is evident that after 1968 the mass media is to pass from a situation of presence more marginal and limited to the upper and middle classes of society, to a condition that converts them instead into articles of widely *popular* consumption, therefore beginning to play the part of true *formers of public opinion* and developers of new functions regarding information, education and generators of culture which were entirely non-existent before the end of the sixties.

With a significant multiplication in the number of copies of newspapers and widely circulated magazines, as well as in the audiences and the broadcasting capacity of radio, television and the movies, this mass media thus begins to compete with the school and family regarding the process of transmission and circulation of all types of information, but also, and going even further, with the process itself of the formation of consciences, of the spreading of certain life and behavioral models and of the definition and establishment of complex cultural patterns of recent creation and elaboration.⁷

Acting upon those three privileged spaces where culture is conceived and reproduced which are schools and universities, the mass media and the family, the 1968 revolution destroyed the structure of the group of forms in effect of that same, precise contemporary culture, closing an important chapter of that cultural history and initiating the forms of cultural organization and creation which have been developed during the last configuration of modern knowledge and the entire collection of the different cultural scenarios of the world, as well as the processes of conformation of new subjects, of the new social movements and of the new left, have been modified as well. All of this has thirty years and up until our days.⁸ And in keeping with these essential changes, both the obviously ended up by causing a profound impact in the general profiles themselves of contemporary historiography after 1968 in a manner that is well worthwhile reconstructing more thoroughly and with utmost attention.

THE IRRUPTION OF THE PRESENT INTO HISTORY

Given the enormous desire for change expressed in 1968 –and given also how radical the forms of expression of this desire were at the length and breadth of the world –, there is no doubt whatsoever that this movement signified for all of the societies of those times, a definite *irruption of the present and of its total validity* in the group of consciences that took part and were close range witnesses of those events. And, viewing that in every case what the 68 movements were determined to change was their own present, overthrowing the alienated, or falsified or authoritarian reality in which they lived, their outburst necessarily became evident in the action of placing at the center of attention the most *recently lived experience*, the burning and essential facts of the most vivid current situation.

“To live without dead time and to enjoy without restraint” is another of the '68 slogans. This slogan emphatically expresses the reassumption and radical updating of the present that is characteristic of any time of revolution and that was to cause significant impact upon post – 68 historical studies. From this perspective, it is clear that the root of this cultural revolution of the second half of the sixties, *the present*, is going appear with much more strength in historiography, breaking with the rigid division between present and past that was still dominant, and installing in its place, with full rights and a diversity of forms, *actuality* within the objects and the pertinent and habitual themes of the study of historiographic research.

The reason is that against the traditional and reductionist vision of history that had survived until 1968 and that stated that history was only the science “of the past”, these last thirty years are going to witness the assertion of an each time more disseminated and accepted position that states that history is the science “of man within time” and therefore, the science of the most absolute and burning present, as well as of the many and most diverse pasts that have already occurred.⁹ This is a vision that is also to vindicate the present as an object of historical study, and that was not invented after 1968, but actually its most ancient connections go back to a whole critical and marginal tradition that begins with Marx and continues to this day, passing through authors such as Marc

Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Norbert Elias or Fernand Braudel, among many others. One tradition that has been and continues to be in a minority, but that nevertheless, as a result of the effects of 1968, is to win an important battle regarding this issue. Because if Marx, the Annals and the School of Frankfurt had already “vindicated” the present as history, 1968 is going to *definitely legitimize* it as such within the historiographic activity, turning it precisely into one of the inevitable fields of research of this activity.

At the same time, this irreversible legitimization and incorporation of the present into historiography shall become apparent in multiple forms, in the different national historiographic spaces. First of all for example, in the enormous popularity attained over the last six lustrous by the branch and method of *oral history*; that history supported upon the direct testimonies of people who are still living, which is necessarily a history of the most immediate past and of the present, and in consequence, of events and processes that are still fresh, recent, close, and many times still active and in effect.¹⁰

In addition, the oral history we refer to, does not simply limit itself to obtaining and using the direct testimony of those witnesses or actors still living of a certain close or immediate historical reality, but it also includes, in its more radical versions, the explicit intention of “giving voice” to the historical agents themselves, incorporating them as creators of the written history itself of their own diverse historical experiences and actions. . Moreover, given the fact that according to these radical positions, it is the masses and the working classes that really *make* history, it is therefore logical and necessary that these same groups be the ones to write their own history, actively participating in the historiographic research of their own experiences and, together with the historians, directly constructing the main results of the historiographic task. It is the radical history of the present and of the immediate past that incorporates and vindicates an oral history that goes far beyond the simple interview or the classic life history account, which are techniques which have equally become popular and divulged on a large scale, after the 1968 breach.¹¹

This “presentification” of history will also appear within the academic environments of the social sciences, causing an important “migration” of “today’s specialists” towards history. Thus, after 1968, it was

common for sociologists and political scientists, as well as economists, to penetrate into history, once again contributing their approaches to historic teaching and occupying themselves mostly with those same periods of the recent past and of the present, that are now legitimized and incorporated by historiography in a more vast and popular fashion. Similarly, along this same line, is the explanation for the multiplicity of academic institutions that are now occupied with this immediate history. Institutions, such as France's *Institut d'Histoire du Temps Present*, that very importantly re-launch the role of contemporary history into historic studies and also very importantly, dedicate themselves to rescuing the archives and the testimonies and documents of all the players and characters of the XXth Century.

CHANGING THE AGENDA OF HISTORICAL STUDIES

Fundamentally, 1968 is a profound and structural cultural revolution. For this reason, when it bursts with great force into the ambience of contemporary "culture" and of its principal mechanisms of reproduction, the movement of '68 does away with the structure of this sphere of social totality, mobilizing all the spotlights of the historic drama towards those cultural dimensions, and providing the space for the obvious boom that the study of the history of all these themes was to have during the last thirty years that have since transpired.

It is therefore not a coincidence that after 1968, practically all the historiographies of the Western World –and possibly even beyond – became involved in the group of new themes, where the common denominator was that they were *themes of cultural history*. In order for these themes to be studied, they necessarily caused an important multiplication of new focuses, concepts and approximations. Because it is clear that it is the spirit of 68 and its multiple effects that always make themselves present, in the studies of English *psychohistory* as well as in the multiple and heterogeneous models of the confessedly ambiguous French *histoire des mentalités*, in the *new intellectual history* of North America, in the branch of cultural history of Italian *microstoria*, in the British history of *popular culture*, and in the German *Alltagsgeschichte*, among

many other expressions.¹² An international movement is created then that surfaces during the sixties in multiple locations of the planet. Post-68 historians begin to investigate the new, and up until then, unexplored themes of the history of the family and of sexuality, the history of attitudes regarding death or madness, the deciphering of the rite and the myth of the witches' sabbath, of the history of women and of the image of the child in the old regime, of popular culture in modern ages and of the cosmovision of the oppressed in the XVIth Century, of the traditions and folklore of those becoming a real working class, or of the "imaginaries" popular in the old French regime, among many, many of the cultural history themes that have been since addressed.

At the same time and together with this opening of themes that were formerly given little attention or simply ignored by historiography,¹³ an intense and plurifacetic of *methodological reflection* shall develop, that attempts to construct the most adequate categories for the study and explanation of those cultural realities, at the same time that it intends to create ambitious global models for the interpretation of these same cultural type phenomena. An then, equally criticizing the inadequacies and ambiguities of the French concept of "mentalities", as well as the rigid system of fading always in the direction of the culture of the elite towards popular culture, or, delving deeply into the debate of the complex relations between folklore, tradition and culture, or in the possibilities of the isomorphic method in the reconstruction of historical and cultural affinities. After 1968, 'Clio' practitioners have passed from the anachronistic and limited history of ideas towards a new and more elaborated social history of the different cultural practices, or towards the more recent versions of that new history of culture.¹⁴

Simultaneously and as an almost spontaneous supplement of this renovation of the agenda of historians' themes that now incorporates these cultural themes with full rights, and thanks to the already mentioned development of these new focuses and models for their treatment and approach, there is also a profound *renovation* in the manner of approaching old historiographic themes, that form this post-68 perspective are to be learned in a radically different way. For example, the old and traditional histories of the workers movement that always concentrated its attention on the history of its leaders and of the workers' elite

and of the political destiny of the movements, have, over the last three decades, addressed the transformations in customs and daily life of the workers' masses after these same movements; questioning themselves also regarding the effects of these movements in the workers' conscience and in their forms of the most daily and elemental forms of organization and work. Also, in the case of the study of economic and social processes such as, for example, the formation process of an internal market, or of the transit from the feudal world to the modern capitalist world, these are no longer going to be studied as if they were simply great impersonal and anonymous movements, to now be examined in their real effects and consequences on farming populations and on the urban strata, and seen as well in their concrete singularities and in the complex weaves of all kinds of changes in values, attitudes, perceptions and cosmovisions that they entail.¹⁵

HISTORY IN THE NEW CONSTELLATION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Also, after 1968, occurred the collapse of the "system of knowledges", constructed during the second half of the XIXth Century and that, upon multiplying itself constantly and progressively consolidating new "disciplines" or social sciences, ended by establishing, as an epistemological strategy for grasping (what is) "social", to that host of ambits, specialized among themselves and supposedly autonomous that were the diverse social sciences of the XXth Century. These different social sciences divided the complex unity of the social ambit, postulating that this division *indeed corresponded* to reality itself, which at that time gave us, according to this vision, an economic object next to a psychological field, a purely political sphere and an exclusively social dimension, a uniquely geographic ambit and a space reserved for anthropology, and, in consequence, the necessary foundation so that each of these "sciences" or "disciplines" could elaborate and vindicate for themselves their own study object, their specific techniques, their particular concepts and their completely singular methods.¹⁶

Nevertheless, and regardless of having affirmed itself as the dominating "episteme" during the last third of the XIXth Century and the

first two thirds of the XXth Century, this system of divided and autonomized knowledges, based on specialization, rapidly showed its epistemological limits, being criticized and questioned by practically all the innovative trends and by all of the critical thinkers of the century that goes approximately from 1870 to 1968.¹⁷ This repeated critique to the limitations of this form of approximation to the social ambit, which is also to be at the center of the 1968 challenges, exerting its effects upon the whole collection of these social disciplines and also upon its own historiography.¹⁸

As it is not merely by chance that, after 1968, inter / multi / pluri / transdisciplinary projects, institutes, perspectives, centers and approaches are going to prosper and become popular all over the world, even though as a whole they only express, even in a *incipient and limited* fashion, the true process, unchained three decades ago, that is a process that at the base marches towards the construction of a new configuration of the system of knowledges, towards a new dominating “episteme” for the study and grasping of reality, social as well as reality in general.¹⁹

Here is a new situation of knowledge regarding the social ambit, in process of developing and maturing, that, in immediate terms and for the specific ambit of historiography, has redefined the relation of alliances and of links of the latter with all of the remaining social sciences. Thus, over the last six lustrous, we have passed from a situation of enclosed links and generally bi-univocal, that at its different moments history established with economy, sociology, geography or demography, to a new situation in which history opens permanently and without exception to all of the distant social sciences, with which it mutually intermingles and cross-fertilizes, in a multiple dialogue that legitimizes and fulfills the old paradigm of global history. This paradigm was defended by Marx and some Marxists, as well as by the *Annals* and by all and any innovative historiographic trend that basically, in its ultimate and most radical sense, points towards the suppression of these disciplinary barriers and towards the constitution of the new episteme or system of knowledge already mentioned.

And here also is a new concert with many voices, of history with all the social disciplines, which is exemplified paradigmatically with the opening towards anthropology in regard to which history is to recuperate,

after 1968, practically the whole collection of its contributions. We are to see the *classical* themes of anthropology, traditionally occupied in the study of customs, of everyday life, of issues of relationships (kinship / bonds) or of the myths, as well as its most characteristic techniques including polls and participative observation, are to be taken up again by history to become in the last thirty years, the history of everyday life, as well as the history of family and of sexuality or, also, in the history of material civilization and of the cultural archetypes; annexing to its research territories all those dimensions and problems formerly reserved to the examination of anthropologists. Similarly, this is repeated in the case of the anthropologic techniques mentioned before, that on the side of history are to be reproduced under the forms of oral history and of history constructed “to bottom up” with the working classes and from absolute immersion in their struggles and in their daily and regular practice.

History is also to become impregnated with the legacy of anthropology while attempting to copy its principal methods, becoming interested in its direct and meticulous analysis of the experiences lived by different historical actors and in a closer approach to the concrete dimension of its analyzed objects, as well as grasping the perspectives and the specific “glances” that make it possible to capture those problems of folklore, tradition, of beliefs and of cosmovisions to which anthropology is accustomed. Finally, it shall become impregnated of this legacy by readapting concepts and models developed within anthropology, such as those regarding macro / micro dialectics, the analysis of social networks, the study of “in situ” phenomena or the global reconstruction of a “thick description”. Clio practitioners have given life to that anthropologic history or historical anthropology that has had so much success and development during the recently experienced last decades.²⁰

FROM GENERAL HISTORY TO LIVE HISTORY

Supporting itself on a new rebellious social subject; the student sector – which up until that time scarcely had a leading part, and that from 1968 on has shown itself as a particularly *active* subject in anti-systemic movements – the movement that occurred three decades ago, placed in doubt the *absolute* validity of the great general models that had

been developed many years before, and whose total validity had been considered legitimate and unquestionable during several decades. But, by placing that new student subject in the center of the 68 movements, 1968 was putting the old schemes of social change to test: unchaining a universal crisis of the old left wings and opening the multiple and plural development of all the social movements and of all the new left wings that fill the landscape of the world of the anti-capitalistic opposition and resistance of the last thirty years.

In this sense, 1968 is also a breaking off with those *general, abstract, rigid* and almost always, empty models that were defended by that old left wing and that proclaimed that only the working class was revolutionary, and that history marched by force and almost automatically towards socialism. The different movements of the end of the sixties demonstrated precisely, that there was no automatism in history and that history is made by men. Which implies that with the complexity of capitalism, the anti-capitalist fronts also become more complex and diverse and that with the expansion and spreading, both extensive as well as intensive, of capitalist exploitation and oppression, there must also be a multiplication and diversification of its opposition's movements and actors.

Thus, with the crisis of the old left came also the crisis of those general models incapable of grasping reality²¹ at the same time as an explicit demand of reintroducing into the analysis, the live element of history, the dimension truly lived by the actors and, more generally, the vindication of the need to rescue for social sciences, the entire collection of those *concrete-historical* elements progressively excluded by social analysts. This exclusion ended up converting these models in simple assemblages of structures, abstract, rigid and completely devoid of content.

The former was assumed in the field of historiography in two diametrically opposed forms. On one hand, the easiest but also the most sterile through the postmodern position: the one that in the face of this real crisis of general models, simply chose to deny any general model, stating that the time had arrived when the "meta-narrative" and of the "great constructions" had come to an end; thus leading to relativistic and logocentric positions that completely deny the scientific character of history, they reduce it to its sole condition as discourse and at the end, represent a dead end for this same historiography.²²

On the other hand, and in a much more complex and difficult vision, but also more fruitful, this crisis of the general models and the concomitant demand to restore its rights to the concrete-historic dimensions, gave birth to those multiple efforts that, after 1968, passed from the history of structures to the history of the actors, from the history of economic and social realities to the history of subjectivity and of cultural perceptions, from the history of power to the history of resistance and of insubordination, from general histories to local and regional histories, from the macro-historic processes to the micro-historic universes, from the history of laws and norms to the history of non-typical individuals and deviations, and from the history of the established and central groups to the history of minorities, of the underprivileged and of the small groups. A pluri-facetic and complex movement of many and very different actors, whose general sense is not to renounce to the general models and to macrohistory, but rather to once again level the scales of historical analysis, reintroducing together with these structural and more universal coordinates of history, the collection of concrete-historical dimensions, and of levels and realities that are supplementary to said coordinates. Thus, restoring the different dialectics from general / particular, macro / micro, structures / actors, economy / culture, power / resistance, global / regional-local, norms / cases and centers / margins, post-68 historians have once again made more complex the task of the historian, by reintroducing again the active and creative role of historical subjects in the construction of their own history. With this, they make an echo and once again give meaning to that '68 slogan, apparently paradoxical but completely feasible, that wisely recommended: "let us be realistic, let us demand the impossible".

1968: THE OPENING OF A NEW SITUATION OF "HISTORICAL BIFURCATION"?

Together with the mentioned changes and in a more general way, 1968 has also changed the *manner itself of functioning and interconnecting* amongst each other of the national historiographies, more globally incorporated within that cosmos we could call western historiography.

Because if we analyze from a long lasting perspective, the entire journey of the curve of contemporary historiography – that clearly begins with Marx in the second half of the XIXth Century and that continues to unfold to this day – our attention will immediately be caught by the change produced once again by the deep 1968 breach.²³

Before 1968, historic studies had always functioned under the pattern of always constructing an *historiographic hegemonic center*, a national or regional space in which nine out of ten times the most important historiographic innovations in existence were generated and produced, where the great historical debates of the period were staged, and where those, that shall later be the “classic” works of the historiography of that same period, shall be written. Thus, it is clear that between 1870 and 1930 it has been a German and Austrian, German-speaking historiography that has played the role of the leader within the Western World’s historiographic scenery, building then the “dominant model to be imitated” by the rest of the historiographies of Europe and of the world, establishing the then famous “trip to Germany” as a mandatory activity in the preparation of any historian who wished to be at the royal height of that profession’s demands in those years towards the end of the XIXth and the early part of the XXth Centuries.

Following, is a clear model of the functioning of an hegemonic center in historiography, surrounded by multiple historiographic spaces that revolve around it, and that legitimize and reproduce said hegemony as they reconstruct in their own manner, the methodological proposals, the research models and the new problematic fields that this center generates. There is one model that, between 1930 and 1968 has placed that domination within the French hexagon, giving France the quasi-monopoly in the discovery and invention of the new historiographic paradigms, concepts, problems and developments during those four intermediate decades of the chronological XXth Century. This is an asymmetric way of functioning of the collection of national historiographies of the Western World, that also ruptures as a consequence of the profound changes contributed by the 1968 Cultural Revolution.

If, as we follow the route of the entire curve of contemporary historiography, we ask ourselves what has happened after 1968, at that command post of domination of Western historical studies, we will realize

that no such successor to France exists, because the form of interconnecting with these national historiographies has changed during these last thirty years. At present, *there no longer exists a hegemonic center* within the Western and worldwide panorama, since historiographic innovation is generated and processed today, and ever since six lustrous ago, throughout the length and breadth of the weave of that same planet-wide historiography. In this, and during the three decades following 1968, lies the importance of the third and fourth French Annals or of several branches of Italian micro-history, as well as the representatives of the new North American radical history and the new German social history, passing through many others, including the recent Portuguese institutional history, the renovated Latin American regional history, Russian historical anthropology or several currents of British Marxist history.

Multiple expressions of the post-68 historiographic renovation, now present everywhere, give testimony of the constitution of a new unprecedented situation, characterized by *polycentrism in historiographic innovation* and due to the variety of alternatives for the development of historic research, which are both strokes that define a new operational or functioning modality and the new form of interconnection between the local and national historiographies of the entire world.

This plural and polycentric situation that, otherwise, does not seem to be exclusive of historiography and not even of the social sciences, but would rather seem to extend very much farther, and appear as one of the possibly general strokes of the global situation of world capitalism after 1968. Because, if we once again open our perspective for analysis, and from the vantage point of historiography we go back towards culture in general and beyond, to society as a whole, we shall observe that the crisis of the model constructed around the *centrality* of one of its elements is a much more extended and universal crisis, that covers social movements as well as their most traditional and established demands, and also, the form of articulation of international economic relations or of the forms of social reproduction as a whole. Therefore, it can be verified that after the fundamental changes of 1968 – 1972 / 73, the United States has ceased to be the hegemonic center of world economy and geopolitics, having lost its prior centrality to give way to a new, more *polycentric* situation, in which now the different transnational economic

blocks that are in the process of construction, confront each other and struggle for domination. Or also, in the case of the working class, it has ceased to be the only revolutionary agent and indisputable center of anti systemic social movements, to be substituted by a new and complex constellation of new anti capitalistic subjects and social movements, as polycentric and plural as are the multiplication of fronts and spaces of capitalist exploitation and oppression.

What is verifiable and evident is a transition from a concentric situation to a new polycentric situation of plurality that is recorded also, at the level of the demands of these new social movements, which demands have ceased to be centrally economic or political, and have diversified and pluralized into the different demands: feminist, pacifist ecological, urban, antiracist, ethnic, community and of the many repressed minorities that come to the surface of the arena of post 1968 social struggles. And, in addition, the clear movement of the entirety of the cultural sphere in which the old situation of domination of certain cultural patterns or of certain dominating cultures, for example, in the artistic environment, it has ended to give way to the flourishing of diverse cultural expressions, that co-exist and sustain dialogue throughout the world without any pre-established hierarchies and without any kind of exclusions. Europe has ceased to be the radiating center of the dominating culture of the Western World, at the same time in which music, sculpture, painting and the arts of all the regions of the world become universal and are disseminated everywhere, asserting themselves as so many other cultural, alternative and possible cosmovisions have within the new situation of cultural and social polycentrism.

These are movements where centers decline. And where the role itself of centrality as a global mechanism of social functioning is delegitimized in its own foundations, which may basically express the opening of a new and radically different situation of world capitalism, that after 1968 – 73 began entering into a clear situation of historical “bifurcation”.²⁴ This situation of divergence in which the mechanisms of stabilization and reproduction of the world capitalist system as a whole ceased to function, announcing its inevitable end as well as the pressing need for its deep mutation and transformation. Following Immanuel Wallerstein’s incisive hypothesis, we could ask ourselves if 1968 did not

then have, in addition to its profound character as a global reaching cultural revolution with civilizing consequences, a new and additional supplementary significance: that of having inaugurated with its irruption, this clearly terminal phase of the life of modern capitalism that was initiated more or less five centuries ago.

However, as we have well been reminded by the “soixante-huitard” generation the world over, history is not an automatic process with is inevitably one way, but rather it is a process carried out by men themselves, who with our collective action and our reflections help to decide their possible destinies, in accordance with the conditions of possibility of each specific historic moment. Therefore, it depends precisely on those collective actions and that work of intellectual comprehension, that 1968 can be recalled, perhaps in the year 2068 – one hundred years after its healthy and beneficial irruption – as that threshold moment that with its development inaugurated, the final stage of the world capitalist historic system, and the clear transition towards a non-capitalist world in which economic exploitation, political repression and all forms of social discrimination have all passed to become bad memories of a finally overcome past. And possibly it may not even be necessary to wait until that year 2068, in order that this last and most profound significance of 1968 may be recognized by all. In any case, 1968 remains there with its main lessons and effects, to continue encouraging us day by day, to actively work so that this may be the case.

ROJAS, Carlos Antonio Aguirre. 1968 – ponto de inflexão no pensamento histórico: mudanças na historiografia ocidental. *História*, São Paulo, v. 23 (1-2), p.197-218, 2004.

ABSTRACT: This article deals with an evolution of the meaning of 1968 Cultural Revolution as an “rupture event”. Big ruptures have occurred since then in the historiography, affecting convictions present in several conceptions of History and directing this discipline to the cultural studies.

KEYWORDS: Historiography; presentism; 68 generation.

NOTAS

¹ Researcher at the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. CEP 04359 Ciudad de México. aguirre@servidor.unam.mx

² Regarding the general characterization of this movement cf. WALLERSTEIN, Immanuel. 1968: Revolution in the World-System. Thesis and Queries. in *Geopolitics and Geoculture*. Cambridge: Co-edition Cambridge University Press/Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1991. And also, ARRIGHI, Giovanni; HOPKINS, Terence; WALLERSTEIN, Immanuel. 1989, the continuation of 1968. *Review*, v.XV, n.2, Binghamton, 1992.

³ Regarding this cf. WALLERSTEIN, Immanuel. 1968: Revolution in the World-System. Thesis and Queries. cited., BRAUDEL, Fernand, Renacimiento, Reforma, 1968: Revoluciones Culturales de Larga Duración. *La Jornada Semanal*, n.226, Mexico, October 10, 1993; and La troisième partie de L'Identité de la France: la France dans sa plus haute et plus brillante histoire. *Les Ecrits de Fernand Braudel. Les Ambitions de l'histoire*, Editions de Fallois, Paris, 1997; and AGUIRRE ROJAS, Carlos. 1968: la gran ruptura. *La Jornada Semanal*, n.225, Mexico, October 3, 1993, and Repensando los movimientos de 1968. In: *1968: Raíces y Razones*. Ciudad Juárez: Ed. Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, 1999.

⁴ Regarding this coverage and only for the case of France, see the map reproduced in num. 264 of the *Dossiers et Documents de Le Monde*, of April of 1998, page 5. Also the first chapter of Christine Faure's book, *Mai 68. Jour et nuit*, Gallimard, Paris, 1998. Even though the best recent works about '68 almost always begin with a review of the main sites of this movement's outbreaks all over the world, and very few delve into the deepest causes of this global simultaneity. And that is the idea that we here intend to underline, and that has been especially well addressed. by Immanuel Wallerstein in his above cited essays.

⁵ In regard to this item, cf. HOBBSBAWM, Eric. *Age of Extremes: The short Twentieth Century 1914 – 1991*. London: Patheon Books, 1994. Even though Hobsbawm relates several of these changes, his assessment of the 1968 movement is entirely different from the one we are here developing. Whatever the case, in our opinion the "cultural revolution" that he tries to explain as a slower and more gradual process, corresponds to the whole period of 1945-1990, which process would be parallel to the "social revolution" of these same years, and thus finally *fades out* the radical sense of rupture of 1968, which in this analysis is reduced almost to the level of something anecdotal and of little relevance. For another assessment of this same period of 1945-1990, that, on the contrary, especially underlines the breaking point of the years 1967-1973, cf. the book coordinated by HOPKINS, Terence & WALLERSTEIN, Immanuel. *The Age of Transition. Trajectory of the World System 1945-2025*. London: Zed Books, 1996.

⁶ FOUCAULT, Michel cf. his book *Vigilar y castigar*, Siglo XXI, Mexico, 1993, is undoubtedly the author who, critically speaking, has best, dismantled this disciplinary structure of schools – present as well in factories, hospitals, prisons, army, etc.

⁷ With which, they are only going to display up until the end, many of the functions that had already been keenly analyzed for the mass media of their time by BENJAMÍN, Walter cf. by the latter *Essais I* and *Essais II*. Paris: Denoël, 1983.

⁸ Only for the French case, and at a purely descriptive level, cf. the book by LE GOFF, Jean-Paul. *Mai 68. L'héritage impossible*. Paris: La Decouverte, 1998. Also the articles by ZANCARINI-FOUMEL, Michelle. *Changer la vie. Une histoire sociale des années 68*. and by DOSSE, Françoise. “Les mots pour le dire”, both of which are included in the journal. *Page des libraires*, n.50, Paris, February-March of 1998.

⁹ Regarding this matter, cf. DOSSE, Françoise. *Mai 68: les effets de l'Histoire sur l'histoire*. In: *Cahiers de l'IHTP*, n.11, Paris, april, 1989.

¹⁰ We refer to the classic and well-known works of Paul Thompson and Philippe Joutard. In Mexico this line of thought has been developed by part of the Instituto Mora Oral History Team, coordinated by Graciela de Garay. There now exists an International Oral History Association with its own journal.

¹¹ To mention just one example, cf. the works of the Group of the *History Workshop* journal, for example, the books *Village Life and Labour*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1975 and *People's history and socialist theory*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981.

¹² We refer to that entire collection of works and approximations that, ever since 1968, have intended to “problematize” the object of culture from very different angles. Simply as a sample, see for instance, the methodological reflections that this movement has raised in the texts by LEGOFF, Jacques. “Las mentalidades: una historia ambigua” (“Mentalities: an ambiguous history”) in the book *Hacer la historia*, v.3. Barcelona: Laia, 1980; GINZBURG, Carlo. *Mitos, emblemas, indicios (Myths, emblems, clues)*. Barcelona: Gedisa, 1994; GAY, Peter. *Freud for Historians*. Oxford University Press, 1985; THOMPSON, Edward P. *The poverty of theory*. London: Merlin, 1978. DARTON, Robert. *The kiss of Lamourette*. Reflections in cultural history. New York: I. W.W. Norton & Company, 1990, or LÜDLKE, Alf *Histoire du quotidien*. Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1994.

¹³ Which underlines the value of Norbert Elias' pioneering work in *El proceso de la civilización* (“*The process of civilization*”) or *La sociedad cortesana* (“*The court society*”). Regarding this issue cf. AGUIRRE ROJAS, Carlos Antonio. “Norbert Elias, historiador y crítico de la modernidad” (“Norbert Elias, historian critic of modernity”) in the book *Aproximaciones a la modernidad (Approximations to modernity)* Edited by UAM Xochimilco, Mexico, 1997.

¹⁴ Regarding this new and more contemporary cultural history, see the work of CHARTIER, Roger. *El mundo como representación* ('The world as representation'). Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa, 1992, and *Au bord de la falaise*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1998; BOUREAU, Alain. Propositions pour une histoire restreinte de mentalités. *Annales E.S.C.*, year 44, n.6, Paris, nov-dec, 1989; and GINZBURG, Carlo. *Historia nocturna* (Nocturnal history). Barcelona: Muchnick, 1991.

¹⁵ Along this line, all the woks produced by the different representatives of the Italian *microstoria* are interesting. Citing as just an example cf. LEVI, Giovanni. *La herencia inmaterial* ('The immaterial inheritance'). Barcelona: Nerea, 1990; GRIBAUDI, Mauricio. *Itinéraires ouvriers, Espaces et groupes sociaux à Turin au début du XXème siècle*. Paris: Editorial de la EHESS, 1987; CERUTTI, Simona. *La ville et les métiers*. Paris: Editorial de la EHESS, 1990; GINZBURG, Carlo. *El queso y los gusanos* (The cheese and the worms). Barcelona: Muchnick, 1991; and *Pesquisa sobre Piero*, (Inquiry about Piero). Barcelona: Muchnick, 1984; and GINZBURG, Carlo & PROSPERI, Adriano. *Giochi die Paziienza*. Turin: Einaudi, 1975.

¹⁶ Regarding this, cf. WALLERSTEIN, Immanuel; et al. 'Open the social sciences', Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

¹⁷ To cite just one example, cf. the case of the trend of the Annals and its permanent defense of the paradigm of *global* history. To this regard, see AGUIRRE ROJAS, Carlos Antonio. *Los Annales y la historiografía francesa* ('The Annals and French historiography'), Quinto Sol, Mexico, 1996; _____. *Fernand Braudel und die Modernen Sozialwissenschaften* ('Fernand Braudel and the modern social sciences'). Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1999; _____. *Braudel a debate*. Caracas: Co-edition Fondo Editorial Tropykos/Fondo Editorial Buría, 1998; and _____. *La escuela de los Anaes. Ayer, hoy, mañana*. Barcelona: Montesinos, 1999.

¹⁸ The work that undoubtedly better expresses this crisis in the knowledges system, deriving in fact in some of its applications towards history, is the work of Michel Foucault. Cf. of the latter, *Las palabras y las cosas* ('Words and Things'), Siglo XXI, Mexico, 1986 and *La arqueología del saber* (Archaeology of knowledge'), Siglo XXI, Mexico, 1985.

¹⁹ Regarding this problem cf. the works of Immanuel Wallerstein, Boaventura De Sousa Santos, Pauline Rosenau e Isabelle Stengers, as well as the Bibliography of Richard Lee, included in the special number of *Review*, v.XV, n.1, Binghamton, 1992.

²⁰ Two clear examples of the intense approach of history and anthropology would be both that of the marxist history of E. P. Thompson, like the majority of Italian micro-history authors. On this item, cf. THOMPSON, E.P. *Historia social y antropología* (Social history and anthropology), Instituto Mora, Mexico, 1994, and REVEL, Jacques (dir.) *Jeux d'echelles. La micro-analyse à l'expérience*. Paris: Co-edition Gallimard/Le Seuil, 1996.

²¹ A pioneering and anticipated critique of this post-68 stroke of social sciences, is the criticism of the empty and rigid models defended by the variant that corresponds to the vulgar, and simplified Marxism that has been cultivated by the majority of the world's communist parties, and that is contained in the of SASTRE, Jean-Paul. *Crítica de la razon dialectica (Critique of Dialectic Reason)*. Buenos Aires: Losada, 1970.

²² In the case of works that, despite their subtleness and argumental complexity, in the end assume this postmodern position in history as in the case of VEYNE, Paul. *Comment on écrit l'histoire*. Paris: du Seuil, 1978 and of CERTAU, Michel de *La escritura de la historia (The writing of history)*, Edicion de la Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico, 1985.

²³ Regarding this item, cf. AGUIRRE ROJAS, Carlos Antonio. Tesis sobre el itinerario de la historiografía del siglo XX. Una visión desde la larga duración (Thesis on the itinerary of XXth Century historiography. A vision from the long lasting perspective), Revista *Prohistoria*, n.2, Rosario, 1998.

²⁴ This is the hypothesis set forth by Immanuel Wallerstein in his most recent essays. In addition to the text mentioned in footnote 4, cf. his book *After liberalism*. New Cork: New Press, 1995.

Artigo recebido em 04/2003. Aprovado em 04/2003.