

Guest Editors
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**Rethinking 1968
and the Global Sixties**

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Toni R. Juncosa
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RETHINKING 1968 AND THE GLOBAL SIXTIES

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ON RETHINKING 1968 NOW: MOVEMENTS, PRACTICES, FORMS

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At the Washington, D.C. History Conference at the University of the District of Columbia, held in November 2019, the sports writer Bijan Bayne presented a paper entitled “1969-2019: 50th Anniversary of the Year D.C. Became the Sports Capital of the World.” During the ensuing Q&A session, an interesting contrast emerged from the audience. On one side of the room, a seventy-something long-haired white man, coming from one of the fanciest neighborhoods of the city, told the speaker: “Thank you for reminding me of all these sports events. I’ve been remembering only the tear gases and anti-war protests of that year.” He was “one of those activists,” he said. On the other side of the conference room, a slightly younger African-American man suddenly asked to speak. “I would like to reply,” he stated fiercely. “I do have different memories of 1969. In fact, the only thing I do remember is my mother and my father going to one of the games mentioned.” The assertiveness of the second man, a historian himself, made one of the authors of this introduction jump out of her seat. His intervention sounded like a sort of position statement, claiming the collective memory of more than half of the city population: the black one. Indeed, the peace movement against the war in Vietnam rallying in Washington, D.C. in 1969 was mainly a “white affair,” both at the first Moratorium parade on October 15 and at the one organized by the New Mobe on November 15 (Hall 2005). Fifty years later, a quick look at the speakers and the attendants gathered at the “Waging Peace in Vietnam” symposium—organized at George Washington University by the Vietnam Peace Commemoration Committee for the 50th anniversary of 1969 protests—easily confirms this.

Let us conclude this brief tale with a final comment on the speaker’s presentation. Bayne stressed the relevance of the baseball, basketball and football games taking place in 1969 in Washington, D.C. and celebrated at national level because they helped move the attention of the media away from the aftermath of the massive riots of the year before. The games cast a refreshing light on the city at the national level, and this was not of minor importance for the politics of Washington, D.C. at the time. Indeed, the local perception and the national one have often been conflictual in forging the identity of the city. Exemplary in this sense is the fact that the speaker, an African American himself, did not mention at all the national resonance of the anti-Vietnam War protests of 1969.

Washington, D.C. has, of course, a unique history in the United States. However, this opening anecdote helps us to understand what “rethinking the sixties” could mean

nowadays, especially with regard to two fields of inquiry we believe are still particularly relevant for further research on that historical period: memory studies and local studies, which often are interconnected. As far as memory studies are concerned, historiography has already successfully dealt with the once prevailing memories of the former 1960s activists, putting their subjective points of view in dialogue with a broad range of sources and voices. A critical analysis of the mainstream media and institutional narratives has been acknowledged too (Bothmer 2010). Nevertheless, how did the traumatic events of the sixties affect the memories and the identities of the communities later developed around the places, the icons and the witnesses of that period's upheavals and fractures? Why does the individual and collective consciousness of the sixties still take on a politicized valence, as our anecdote seems to tell us?

Historical analysis is not the only approach to answer these questions, obviously. The text analysis approach and the sociological approach—the latter coming from social-movement studies—offer effective tools to unlock such dynamics of groups, memories and identities. For this purpose, a local inquiry has a double value. First, it allows scholars to take advantage of the great number of valuable oral history projects carried out in the United States since the late 1970s.¹ Second, the local focus has some of the most effective leverage to get the contemporary public engaged in providing further grass-roots sources and current memories.

Finally, local history is useful to “rethink” the sixties not only because of this field’s methodological approach. A local perspective enhances two distinctive features of the “long 1960s” social movements in the United States: their geographical capillarity and their great diversity. Both factors gain further relevance within the American three-level institutional framework that was the context in which the social movements confronted established power. As Van Gosse wrote in his attempt to map out new directions to research The Movement, “First, we urgently need local studies, of city, town, state, and countryside” (2002, 295). Second, he states, “we should look closely at how the once-new radicalism inflected and influenced institutions, communities, and constituencies” (ibid.). “Case studies,” he remarks, “constitute an endless process for historians—every community or locality, rendered historically, can be compared against other communities” (ibid.). After almost two decades and, by now, a well-established global turn in the study of U.S. history and culture, Van Gosse’s insight is still relevant within an innovative and multidisciplinary pattern of studies.

It is in this spirit that this special issue aims to reflect on the significance of 1968 and the Global Sixties. In 2018 and 2019, many international scientific journals have dealt with

¹ See, for instance, “Contemporary History Project (The New Left in Ann Arbor, Mich.), Transcripts of Oral Interviews: 1978-1979,” Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan; “Interviews and speeches, 1963-1987,” Joseph A. Sinsheimer Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University; “Civil Rights History Project collection (AFC 2010/039),” American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

the legacy of such transformative years through critical accounts and forums.² Our contribution to the debate, in line with the journal's aims of reshuffling "oxidized practices and arbitrary academic hierarchies" (Morello 2018, 7), goes together with the awareness of being part of a "third generation" of scholars approaching the Sixties and its heritage's multiple meanings in history, literature, and studies of cultural and social movements. But this special issue of *JAm It!* is also the result of putting into practice the famous second-wave-feminism slogan "the personal is political." Indeed, our collaboration as editors fostered a fruitful interdisciplinary dialogue between two different but connected approaches to American Studies, one of us being a historian and the other one being a literary scholar. Moreover, this special issue is the product of a wider network of early-career scholars working in the field of American Studies that allowed the two of us to meet (back in 2016), to organize a conference at the Centro Studi Americani in Rome on September 28th, 2018, and to extend this model of networking further.

The 1st AISNA Graduates conference, "Rethinking 1968 and the Global Sixties," has been a foundational moment for the young scholars of the Italian Association of American Studies and for the association as a whole. We strengthened an existing network of early-career scholars currently engaged in the multifaceted kaleidoscope of topics, fields and diverse methodological approaches which stemmed from the Sixties and developed in a global perspective. For this special issue, we mapped out some of the research directions of these early-career scholars and put them in dialogue with more established researchers. This has been, and still is, an ongoing process, as our aim is to present some of the most compelling research areas to make "Rethinking 1968 and the Global Sixties" a living pattern.

The essays contained in this issue not only reflect on the meaning of the Sixties now, they also echo some of the ideas that those changing times helped disseminate around the world. This is evident from the plurality of voices—from different geographical locations and various academic backgrounds—that are here able to create a collectivity of knowledge. Peer-to-peer education and critiques of hierarchical knowledge were the protest-based premises of the academic teach-ins and the alternative universities in the United States, *les autogestions* in France or the *controcorsi* in Italy, all expressions of the same brand-new belief in a collaborative culture that emerged during the long 1960s across the national borders.

To connect the origins of our scholarly practice with the subject of our study is not only a way to keep on retracing an "embodiment" of knowledge. In fact, reflecting on the educational and communication theories and means of the 1960s social movements cast some new light on potential research directions. The network relationships established among the huge amount of diverse protesting groups inside the United States or among social movements and radicals at the transnational level are the ideal setting of inquiry for the data, text, or sentiment analysis applied to historical, literary and sociological studies.

² See, among others, *AHR* (2018); *The Sixties* (2018); Berk and Visser-Maessen (2019).

This is one of the ways the research on the Global Sixties could benefit from the burgeoning alliance between humanities and quantitative analysis, which originally comes from the social sciences' set of tools.

A further means to explore the world-wide network of 1960s social movements is borrowing the concept of “connectedness” from Global History and historical sociology. Connectedness refers to the history of mobility of people, goods, ideas, information, beliefs and practices in a borderless world (Belich et.al. 2016, 15). Historiography has already gone beyond the West or any other national originalism to tackle 1968 events: the paradigm of the Global Sixties has geographically reframed the long 1960s protests, recently retracing untold stories of youth rebellions in Asia and Africa (Jian et al. 2018). But what about the international connections and reciprocal inferences carried out by travelling activists, underground papers, and newsreels mailed overseas to share political experiences or even correspondence among the representatives of far hotspots of radicalism and subculture? After two decades of comparative accounts of different national experiences and a lively literature of self-centered memoirs or biographies of travelling activists, the actual political and cultural exchanges that occurred across the borders still deserve scholarly attention.³ For example, accounts of student-and-worker strikes in Italy were not rare in some American underground papers of the late 1960s.⁴ Around the same period, Italian students who happened to be in the United States during some campus occupations, translated, published, and disseminated in Italy some selected protest papers from American colleagues.⁵ Most likely those kinds of materials circulated widely. The rebellious claims went global, but the world was still divided by the Cold War and, conceptually, split in three worlds. What if these mutual translations, calques, loans of ideas and models of action gave birth to interpretations, cross-fertilizations, or misrepresentations able to survive in national politics and cultures throughout the following decades up to today?

Going back and forth from “the times they are a-changing” to our own present time as scholars is a substantial part of unraveling the work and reflections laying behind this special issue. Along this journey, Jeffrey C. Stewart offered us an inspiring motto when, in concluding his keynote speech at our conference, said: “Our knowledge affects others and other people’s knowledge affects us.” Stewart’s open editorial elaborates further on this, and highlights a continuity between the knowledge revolution of 1968 and the kind of disseminated knowledge that the internet allows for today. Knowledge, he remarks, is now “a dialogical formation, a system of exchange between people who are constantly updating

³ Exemplary in this sense is the research put forward by Martin Klimke. See Klimke and Scharloth (2008) and Klimke (2010).

⁴ Examples can be found in *Workers’ Power* 69, December 8, 1972; Andrea Savonuzzi, “Strike Wave in Italy,” in *I.S. - International Socialist* 14, December 1969, p.12; and in “Hour of The Wolf News,” in *Kaleidoscope* (Madison) 3, no. 15, June 1971, p. 7, all in *Culture di opposizione negli Stati Uniti. Periodici degli anni Sessanta e Settanta*. Fondazione Gian-giacomo Feltrinelli.

⁵ See Cavalli and Martinelli (1969).

knowledge by input from its consumers” (Stewart 2019, this issue). So, the concept of connectedness is reshuffled into the practices of our network of early-career scholars “operating out of a ’68 model” (ibid.) to keep the mobility between people, ideas, knowledge, and narratives alive.

This connectedness and inter-connectedness of scholars and scholarships confirms the idea that reflecting on the Sixties now does not come out of an anachronistic effort. Likewise, stretching or condensing the five decades behind us to keep up with contemporary issues does not mean dismissing an accurate historical awareness. Simon Hall’s invited contribution to this issue is exemplary in this sense. Hall’s essay provides an up-to-date review of the historiographical literature around 1968 by means of an original and sharp discourse, which stresses equally the legacy and the discontinuities of the late 1960s social movements in the United States. The subsequent historical reconstructions of the following decades are put against the various cultural turns in American Studies. Against the backdrop of some 1960s narratives, Hall critically analyzes the role of historians and their projections, without sparing himself. In fact, his provocative essay is an invitation to reflect on which historical categories still matter nowadays.

This reflection is especially relevant for teaching practices. Indeed, Hall’s final remark introduces in the issue a recurring debate on the teaching of a so magmatic and contentious subject such as the ‘long 1960s.’ We believe that approaching this task with an innovative approach could provide some timely tools to handle such demanding issue. Indeed, explaining the historical dynamics of that period in front of a young audience requires not only to find effective ways to manage a time that is still both fascinating and divisive, but also to attend to the frequent requests for comparison between then and today’s demands for social change. These requests are inherently rooted in the subject, as the Sixties impact on the social movements’ strategies and politics that followed (including the present ones) is well-acknowledged. Nevertheless, the teacher is asked to deal, in historical perspective, with a wide range of socio-political issues that are central for today’s students. That is, the students’ needs change according to the national or international politics they are necessarily confronted with and their specific social backgrounds. Regardless of the necessity of avoiding presentism, all of these variables strongly affect the pedagogy of student-centered teaching.

It is within this line of thought that Lorenzo Costaguta contributes to the issue by sharing a thorough reflection on his own personal experience on teaching the Sixties to today’s students. His essay, “Teaching the Sixties: Politics, Pedagogy and the Meaning of a Decade” offers a number of relevant teaching strategies. One of these is the use of a social-constructivist approach, so that the students’ “prior knowledge on the Sixties stop[s] being ‘a problem’ and [becomes] a resource” (Costaguta 2019, this issue). Another strategy concerns the syllabus design, which needs to meet the students’ expectations in an appealing way. Moreover, Costaguta’s essay comprises an analysis of the challenges that teaching one

(isolated) module on the history of the Sixties may pose. On the one hand, students might be lacking the necessary background to fully understand the political categories that activists used to refer to fifty years ago. On the other hand, it is crucial to include the most recent scholarship within a transnational approach. While offering some solutions, Costaguta eventually opens his reflection up to many further issues, calling for new, specific methodological teaching practices.

Moving away from pedagogical issues, the second part of the special issue aims at giving a sample of the variety of topics that characterize the current research of American Studies graduate students in Italy and abroad on the ‘long 1960s’ and its legacy. Stemming from a selection of the papers presented at the 1st AISNA Graduates Conference, the following contributions are exemplary of the idea of rethinking 1968 now. In “I Got the Cell Count Blues:” Danez Smith, HIV, and the Legacy of The Black Arts Movement,” Toni R. Juncosa establishes a connection between the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and the 1970s and a contemporary poet, Danez Smith. Juncosa remarks that in *Don’t Call Us Dead* (2017), Smith continues the legacy of the BAM, renovating its attempts at raising awareness around structural violence against non-white US citizens. Juncosa argues that Smith’s poems, representing HIV/AIDS as a form of imprisonment, are in dialogue with the discrimination the artists working around the BAM were calling attention to. The essay contends that Smith’s collection aims at participating in the creation of a collective consciousness for people who are otherwise silenced in contemporary U.S. society, that is, it aims at re/gaining nationhood for queer, black and seropositive subjects.

Vincent Veerbeek’s “Writing 1968: A Native American Perspective on the Nineteen-sixties” underlines the role the standpoint of minority groups has in composing the mainstream public memory of a well-remembered decade as the Sixties. For this purpose, Veerbeek addresses the perspective of American Indians on the politics and culture of the 1960s through the words of essayist and leading American Indian voice Vine Deloria, Jr. This kind of analysis allows Veerbeek to reframe the decade’s main issues and events according to American Indians’ common beliefs and interests. Moreover, the focus on the Vietnam War and the African-American freedom struggles puts Deloria’s works in dialogue with other influential black voices of that time, stressing the relevance of first-hand accounts to rethink the Sixties’ public memory.

Rachele Colombo’s “‘The paranoia was fulfilled’—An Analysis of Joan Didion’s Essay ‘The White Album’” discusses the sixties through her analysis of Didion’s essay. Colombo focuses on Didion’s paranoia and the atmosphere in Los Angeles before and after the Manson murders (1970). The essay retraces the interconnection between that social situation and Didion’s personal depiction ten years later. Didion’s narrative shows signs of her own paranoia and disorientation, which she expresses by writing in fragments. In other words, Colombo remarks, in “The White Album,” Didion surrenders to a society she cannot understand and can only narrate through fragments and disconnected images.

While these latter contributions participate to that plurality of voices and connectiveness this special issue aims at realizing, the two interviews that follow focus on the impact the 'long 1960s' had on research methods and approaches. Margarida McMurry and Virginia Pignagnoli interviewed Robyn Warhol, one of the leading scholars in the field of feminist narrative theory. Marta Gara interviewed John McMillian, who has reevaluated the analysis of the underground press as a plentiful source of information on the American social movements of the long 1960s (McMillian 2011). Warhol's interview starts from a discussion of the texts from the Sixties that were foundational in forming her critical thinking, and concludes with the idea that, today, attending to difference, and in particular gendered difference, is still crucial. The interview with McMillian introduces some of the still under-represented potentialities of underground papers, for both American Studies and transnational research.

Finally, in keeping with the dialogic spirit of both the journal and this special issue, the book review section concludes with the input of two early-career scholars—Natália Guerellus and Walter Bruno Renato Toscano—on, respectively, Christopher Dunn's *Contracultura: Alternative Arts and Social Transformation in Authoritarian Brazil* (2016) and Alessandro Portelli's *We Shall Not Be Moved* (2019). The reflection on the Sixties emerging from the variety of voices composing this special issue provides, we believe, an interdisciplinary connection of practices, methods, and forms through time and space. This interdisciplinary connection is a tool that makes the 1960s not only a "usable past" for early-career Americanists. On the contrary, our rethinking, far from ambitions of comprehensiveness, is a means to reflect on the various movements of the 1960s through the sharing of information and knowledge and a fluid network of ideas and scholarships.

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THE KNOWLEDGE REVOLUTION OF 1968

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A political revolution emerged in 1968 that is no less important for understanding contemporary education than the humanist revolution in fifteenth-century Italy. For like its Italian predecessor, the Revolution of 1968 occurred because of the rise of democratic values, really a democratic consciousness, around the world that insisted on a new sense of civic and republican duty in the nation states of late capitalism (Nauert 1995, 1-94). In 1968, it suddenly became clear that throughout the world the *consent* of the governed was crucial to maintaining the legitimacy of government. Domination of the global sphere had meant the suppression of dissent, the curtailment of human rights, and the silencing of the very people who would be the source of creative ideas for the next century. From the United States to France to Mexico to Czechoslovakia to Vietnam, those who were previously silent, silently oppressed and marginalized in the Cold War consensus, suddenly spoke out and demanded to be heard and their consent sought, secured and won by those who purported to rule them. The actual nature of that consent remained blurred, confused, and at times easily dismissed. But the necessity to find a new way of treating formerly oppressed people—Black Americans and women, to take only two examples, emerged as a key consideration of leadership.

With the sense of a new calculus of democracy worldwide came the sense that a new kind of education was needed to help man and woman face the moral and political questions of how to create a just world in which all could enjoy the fruits of democracy, liberty, and justice. Thinkers of several nations tried to answer this question: what kinds of knowledge are needed to prepare the young leaders of tomorrow to exercise moral judgment, make good political decisions, and grow a world in which human conservation matters as much as global profit? This led to facing a daunting question: how could we craft an educational system that prepared everyone, not just the white, the male, and the elite, to participate, broadly and knowledgeably in a polity that extended beyond our national borders, and that took seriously the notion that “justice for all” meant just treatment for those less fortunate, less educated, and less corporately powerful than we are.

As we move towards the conclusion of 2019, a half century after 1968, we have to acknowledge that many stumbles have occurred since 1968, caused, let us be clear, in part, by a relentless counterrevolution of politicians, corporate interests, and even academics and students, who resisted the democratic vision of radical transformation of '68 because it would reduce if not eliminate their power and privilege. Not least is that true in the realm of education, where today we see a resurgence of the kinds of resistance to a new kind of

education at all levels of the educational establishment, from K-12 to post-graduate higher education. Indeed, during the Reagan administration, a concerted and successful effort was waged to de-legitimize university trained intellectuals and impoverished learners who wanted to change the American educational system and its curricular and broader educational programming to bring more opportunities for earning and more intellectual power to the underclasses of the world. It was during the Reagan administration, for example, that the gains made through affirmative action for placing of women and minorities in management positions in corporations and in universities plummeted (Wolters 1996). In our own time, a concerted campaign continues to discredit public intellectuals and activist thinkers, and continues to make it more difficult for those who are first generation college students to succeed in getting into the best of schools. And now we see that schools that pioneered innovative affirmative action plans have had those rolled back by passage of such extra-legislative fiats like Proposition 209 in California (Nadav and Savio 1996). As if that is not enough, during our current moment in the United States, a relentless Supreme Court has put even programs to promote diversity on life-support while the Secretary of Education attacks even the rights of assaulted and raped women on college campuses (Saul and Taylor 2017).

Nonetheless, despite such setbacks since 1968, despite the missteps we ourselves have made, despite the counterrevolution we have heard shouted in our ears daily, a corner was turned in 1968 that cannot be turned back. An opening has been made, largely by students on campuses like UCSB, and by Black students like those who took over North Hall in October of 1968, that cannot be closed. Once the misguided subject comes out of Plato's cave and sees the light and the world with her own eyes, there is no way that, even if put back in that cage, she will see the world in the shadowy way she did before. A new light inside has been turned on in our students and our educators, and what is needed now, more than ever is a clear, critical assessment of what has been gained, what has been lost, and what we can do now, in the current educational environment, to move our peoples—and they are many and diverse and global—forward.

I want to suggest that there was a hidden and unacknowledged dimension to the knowledge revolution of 1968 that we have largely overlooked, made visible when 12 Black students seized the computer center in North Hall on the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara on the morning of October 14, 1968 and issued a series of demands to Chancellor Vernon Cheadle to create a Department of Black Studies and a Center for Black Studies as part of the university. For by seizing the computer center, those students point our attention to something no other cadre of revolutionary-minded Black students on other college campuses identified—that the computer already had transformed the university. For the computer and the students who took over North Hall revealed something that would become clearer as the years went on—that the computer was the source of power in knowledge formation for the 20th and subsequent centuries. For unlike the many

other insurgents on college campuses who seized college president's offices or student centers, etc., the administration at UC Santa Barbara, mainly Chancellor Cheadle, reacted immediately with a conciliatory attitude to resolve the standoff and get the students to peacefully exit the building. He knew he could not afford to lose the power in those computers in that building, which consisted of all of the records and billing and pay stubs and student records for the whole university (Stewart 2015).

This was a different kind of power than that which was crumbling in Detroit, the power of the second industrial revolution, as Jeremy Rifkin puts it, the oil and car power that was still driving the American economy. No, this was the power of information and the use of that information to affect the thinking of people, countries, and the world, a power that was building, almost silently. These students saw how dependent the university had become already on that power, and by temporarily seizing the computer, they changed the calculus of power on campus, immediately, and for the next fifty years. Because out of that seizure of computer power came a seizure and transformation of the knowledge disseminated by the social sciences and the humanities on this campus, a transformation that was huge at first, and that has waxed and waned since then, but that resulted in the creation of the Department of Black Studies and Chicano Studies, and the eventual creation of the Department of Asian American and Feminist Studies afterwards. A permanent shift in the knowledge all students at UC Santa Barbara, and arguably at other UC universities, occurred because of seizing the power of the computer on this campus.

There was another aspect to this seizure of the computer by these students that is largely unnoticed. Few if any at the time realized it, but the computer that was mainly thought of as a storage compartment, a calculating machine that kept records and printed out paystubs, in 1968, would become, after the creation of the World Wide web in 1990, the main source of knowledge for students and professors alike (Andrews 2019). For once the computer began to replace the library as the most visited site of knowledge, knowledge at university was no longer something contained in a library in books written by a single or group of authors removed from those who are their reader. No, today, through the web, and the smartphone, knowledge is a dialogical formation, a system of exchange between people who are constantly updating knowledge by input from its consumers. And this is actually in sync with the knowledge revolution that Black students insisted on in 1968 UC Santa Barbara—broadening the community of those who created and disseminated knowledge on campus by admitting Black authors into that community.

For key to Black students' demands for a Black Studies Department and a Center for Black Studies was that the education taught at the university there be *relevant*. This concept is often critiqued, but in fact is the key to the shift from the "banking system of education," as Paulo Freire put it in his classic, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, into a dialogic system of education, in which knowledge emerges from a dialogue between the teacher and the student, that engages the student as an active participant if education, real education, is to

take place. Knowledge has to be relevant to those who consume it. Black students wanted a knowledge taught them that was relevant to the syllabus of knowledge they had gained from living in America's ghettos; and in demanding a Black Studies Department, they were demanding that the knowledge they received in UC Santa Barbara had to be in dialogue with the Black epistemologies they brought into Santa Barbara, as well as those already there for them to learn for the first time.

Now here's the irony: the computer they took over was the ultimate symbol of the banking system of knowledge—it banked the financial records no less than the intellectual property of Western civilization the university force-fed all students who entered the campus. Black knowledge, Chicana knowledge, Asian American knowledge, Feminist knowledge were kept out of most of the books on the shelves in the library and the files in this supercomputer. By seizing the computer, the Black students threatened to destroy a literal “bank of knowledge.” But what the computer created in the 1990s through the web replicated what Black students were doing on campuses in 1968—challenging, critiquing, and revising the knowledge they received on campus. Ultimately, that capacity of constant updating is what the web means to any knowledge we gain from it. Knowledge is never stable, never sacrosanct, and never so certain that its counters were permanent. And this permanent nature of knowledge was precisely what the teaching of so-called Western Civilization was before 1968. Students from Black communities were supposed to come to universities like UCSB and assimilate the knowledge already held in the libraries and classrooms of the university. In effect, the process of challenging received knowledge began with 1968 rebellion, even the knowledge that Black students believed they had when they arrived at university. Because all knowledge, 1968 taught us, was constructed out of racial, class, and gender bias that was subject to critique, and necessarily so, if it was to grow and reflect reality.

Black youth also added one other element: that knowledge that helped form educated Black thinkers had to dialogue with the community, the Black community, outside of historically-white colleges and universities, in order to be relevant to the Black experience of America. The enlightened Black community was already a World Wide Diaspora of embedded Black epistemologies. That meant that everyone could be criticized by those with knowledge and, depending on how they react to that critique, able to change. A personal story illustrates this functionality of embedded epistemologies in the formation of my knowledge in 1968.

In 1968, at UCLA, I, along with several other undergraduates, went down to Watts for a meeting. It occurred after Dr. King was shot. The late Winston Martin, my dorm's 3rd floor president, had arranged the meeting as part a job-training program called, “Operation Bootstrap.” But there was nothing job training-like about this meeting. Rather, it was threatening critique of our positionality as students at a university in a society that directly subjugated black people. Suddenly, the ivory tower was standing in the wasteland of the

Watts riot of 1965. We were complicit in the oppression of poor black people, and the question was, “What were we going to do about it?” While I had been criticized by my family and friends before, this was the first time that black strangers critiqued my decision to go to college and went further to criticize my role as a bourgeois black student with no other real goal than personal success and aggrandizement. I remember the room like it was yesterday. It was in a cavernous garage (with roll-down steel doors). The confrontational aspect was enhanced by the fact that the visitors were seated on folding chairs in a circle, and standing behind them and against the walls and doors was a congress of young black males with accusatory voices. This trip to Watts was at night, to a place where there were no friendly faces—the feeling of danger was palpable—particularly when the doors rolled down and clanged shut. But mostly I remember the leader, a medium dark brown skinned man who spoke with tremendous energy, as he paced back and forth in front of us, with his words spat out at us like bullets. His anger came from this—that we were about to become agents of oppression for hundreds of people we would never meet and we had a choice. We could reverse course and become the agents, the representatives, the voices of the people in Watts, if we would only dare to open our eyes, unplug our ears, and perceive what was happening in what was then called the urban black community of 1968 America.

We rode back to Westwood largely in silence. But a mini-revolution occurred in me. Afterwards, conversations about what had happened took place in the dorm Weyburn Hall. I attended them and participated in the discussions with others at the Black Student Union. Through those discussions I met a whole host of other black students I had only seen casually crossing campus, and began to engage, timidly at first, in discussions about “what is to be done?” I began to read books not assigned in my classes, but brought up and referenced in these conversations—conversations that spoke to the prospects and problems of black liberation. I also began to participate in demonstrations and meetings where some Negroes I had never seen before showed up on campus with guns. And I want to assure you that I am not trying to romanticize this story, because later that year, I was on campus when two Black Panthers were shot and killed in the basement of Campbell Hall, an incident, along with other considerations, that led me to transfer to the Santa Cruz campus the following year to complete my undergraduate education.

But something interesting had happened. I was transformed.

Jumping ahead to the last class I took at UCLA, an independent study with a political scientist, leads me to another personal, but relevant story. The professor asked me to come over to his apartment the last day of the Spring quarter to participate in an end-of-the-year get together for his graduate students. After snacks in a tiny Westwood apartment with a great view, each of the students presented a critique of a book they had chosen. One student had chosen Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*. He criticized the book as advocating violent Black Nationalism, which this student believed was counterproductive to moving the Civil Rights agenda forward. The professor turned to me, expecting me to comment.

Without much thought, I took apart the student's argument, providing a detailed exegesis of the chapter, "On the Pitfalls of National Consciousness," proving that instead of advocating an unreflective nationalism, Fanon critiqued the nationalist dream, warning of the problems ahead if Algerians and other former colonial peoples simply reproduced the nationalist paradigm that the Europeans had extended onto the African continent. After I spoke, there was a brief silence. Then, the professor nodded and went on to the next student.

I wondered afterwards exactly why the professor had invited me to the meeting. But even later, I was struck by the ease with which I took apart the graduate student's argument, and then I remembered that I had read the book and had debates about it in small group sessions in the Black Student Union. I read *Wretched of the Earth* quite differently and devastatingly, because I had been part of a conversation outside of the classroom about the text and its meaning for a revolutionary new world we imagined as possible, if the right kinds of thinking were engaged. By participating in those sessions and having those conversations, I had developed a certain kind of criticality that had been embedded in the Watts' garage experience, but was amplified and theorized in readings and discussions I had had on campus. This professor, I realized many years afterwards, had brought me to that tiny Westwood flat to function as the *native theorist*, as Nelson Maldonado-Torres would put it (2007).

In retrospect, what I realized is that I was exposed to the epistemology of the Black working and lower class Los Angeles community on that trip to Watts, and in a way that is uninterrogated in American intellectual or educational history, admitted, if briefly, to a community of practice of criticality that had been going on under the radar, so to speak. Michel Foucault would call it a *subjugated knowledge*—a tradition of literate and discursive practices with political intent that was unacknowledged and dismissed soon after the 1960s passed (Foucault 1980, 78-92). Those ways of thinking, then, were amplified and augmented on campus in the small group discussion sessions I participated in at UCLA.

Now, I want to conclude that something like that went on in students all around the world in 1968. While emerging out of the particularity of Southern California, one of the 12 Black students, Dalton Nezey, who seized the computer at UC Santa Barbara, recalled that the sense of isolation he and other Black students experienced on the lily-white Santa Barbara campus generated a tight-knit sense of intellectual collaboration among the alienated students that led up to the decision to take radical action. Almost six thousand miles away in Nanterre, France, outside of Paris, a group of French students, led by Jean-Pierre Duteil, launched the March 22 movement with a similar sense of alienation and anger. Jean-Pierre recall that at his French university in the working class suburb of Nanterre, "there was nothing, we had to create everything. A social life, a cultural life, a sense of belonging, social relations, places, means of expression . . ." What race imposed in Southern California, class imposed in Nanterre. This alienation bestowed on students an urgency to create a "way out

of no way” to transform the educational contract in France in ways similar to that in America. As Jean Pierre recalled, “Just like any other political family, a strong Nanterre identity: we felt we were different from everybody else” (Duteil 2008: n.d.).

A transnational analysis of 1968 student activism breaks down the segregation of knowledge that keeps most of us from linking Black student activism in America to student activism in France. What linked the Black UCSB students and the French Nanterre students was how they were treated and how they responded. They were treated as if there were nothing, as if they had no intelligence, no knowledge, that as working-class youth they brought nothing to the table of learning worth knowing. Their jobs as students were to sit and listen and take in, not question, not react, not rebel against the lies and misrepresentations they were forced-fed by what went for university education in 1968. Instead of deference, however, students of ‘68 took the demand that the consent of the governed must be obtained in order for a democracy to exist and applied it to their educations—the consent of the student would be the criteria on which education, especially higher education, would rest moving forward from 1968. There was a sleeping giant alive in these students that refused to be treated as an inferior, a ward of knowledge. That giant awoke and asserted their rights as equal partners in the production of knowledge, as educational citizens who can, if they wish, withhold their consent, their obeisance, their agreement to swallow whatever shit a university wants to force down their throats, and demand something relevant to their knowledge of the world. Students asserted their right to question, not only the knowledge, but also the world, the system, that that knowledge sustained, and to reject that knowledge if it led to fundamentally cruel and dehumanizing outcomes. This was the revolution in the form of knowledge that is sometimes ignored by our legitimate focus on its content—that the relationship between the student and the school was fundamentally changed by 1968. The educated had a right to withhold or give consent to what they learned if they found it illegitimate.

There was something more. Black students in the UCs went beyond even Freire to argue that knowledge was not something that erupted only in the process of formal education, when literacy gave the peasant power over his or her world. That was important. But that was not all. For the takeover of the computer center at UCSB and the demand to teach a history and culture ignored in American education also meant that those occupying students demanded that the knowledge they already possessed from sites of epistemology like Watts needed be taught at UCSB to make it a more perfect mirror of American society. I experienced that subjugated knowledge in Watts myself—an embedded criticality that educated *me*. That subjugated knowledge made under the conditions of racism, urbanism, and the built environment of commodity enslaved ghettos, had to be part of the dialogue of higher education in America. By analogy, in the suburbs of Paris, the ghettos of Buenos Aires, Detroit, London, and Beirut, other epistemologies existed of how the global system of subjugation works. And that knowledge is transformative if learned and disseminated

throughout a system of education, especially one heretofore designed to keep the oppressed silent, marginal, and unknown.

After 1968, higher education would usually ignore that knowledge; but it could never be sure it would not raise its ugly head of criticality once the oppressed gained their voice, again, and demanded to be heard. After 1968, the knowledge of American and global domination would always be worried that this knowledge would once again speak its truth in embarrassing situations of dialogic confrontation. It meant that no matter how often American university education repeated to unwitting student triumphant discourses of America as the beacon of freedom, teachers also would have to be prepared for student articulation of the counter assertion that America was also the home of slavery.

Students today need to reclaim that sense that to become educated means to be self-conscious about the embodied knowledge they bring to college and university. Students are embodied dialogues with their communities of origin as they engage their university educations. Even if they are turned off from such knowledge from their past, the current moment brings a plethora of knowledge from oppressed communities and the criticality associated with them through the smartphone every day. One's knowledge is constantly being updated in new and spectacular ways often with so-called illegitimate sources of knowledge as much as that from university presses. Verification, of course, is the new challenge. Our job as thinkers today is to assess critical opinion using the very tools 1968 brought into being—the Internet of our communities, who, like those men in the garage in Watts, critiqued me. Our system of embedded criticality has expanded into an Internet knowledge formation today—a collaborative, risky, porous, but perpetual system of update that makes the twenty-first century a new epoch in world intellectual history. Through that process, certain important things traceable to 1968 are important, and I close with three.

First, we are witnessing the expansion and attempted universalization of due process as one outcome of the expansion and attempted universalization of access to knowledge. What do I mean by that? The injured have the right to be compensated, redressed, by transforming unsanctioned knowledge into a system of reparations. This is emerging today in the #metoo movement by which testimony by those injured, deeply, can be disseminated through social media as truth to power. The right to redress, to compensation, and to be made whole after devastation by some person or some institution is broader today than ever before. Despite the attempts of the dark web to crush those who speak out against abuse, the abused can get a hearing by taking over the computer center of social media and demanding to be heard.

Second, those who protest abuse can marshal a worldwide community through social media and the Internet to support them and buoy their confidence despite the almost inevitable counter-attacks that result. We are seeing this in the #metoo movement and also with the #blacklivesmatter movement, despite the babble of those who say the latter is dead (Taylor 2019). We know, for example, today, almost every time an unarmed black

person is shot and killed by a police officer or by the private guards of white private property, a minute later the information is beamed all over the world. People who have never met become a community of protest, just like the students who brought to a halt, if only briefly, universities in the France and United States, in March and October of 1968, that pressures those responsible about what has happened. Even as we lament that this marshalling has not stopped the practices of sexual assault and state supported racial murder, there is some redress: even though the policeman who killed Michael Brown got off scot-free, the prosecutor who defended his decision not to bring charges against the officer was voted out of office.

Third, through mastery of social media and web-based knowledge platforms like Wikipedia and others, students have the power to produce knowledge relevant to them, to their communities, and to their emerging political consciousness, disseminate it and have it critiqued and revised in a matter of days, if not hours. For one of the lessons of 1968 is that students have the power to self-organize, to create programs, conferences, forums, governments, even, just as students of May '68 ran major services in Paris for almost a month! Students can take an organization like the graduate student organization of AISNA and transform it into a university on line for those without enough money to go to university on the ground. Students can publish their own papers, create their own peer review boards, bind papers together in virtual volumes, and distribute them all over the world—showing the world knowledge-making talent among graduate students in Italy. And if they do so they will be operating out of a '68 model and show that, rather than dead, '68 is more alive than ever in 2019.

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1968 AND THE AMERICAN SIXTIES

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More than a century ago, Antonio Gramsci lamented how, in their veneration for chronology, historians had advanced the (in his view, highly misleading) notion that particular years were “like mountains that humanity vaulted over, suddenly finding itself in a new world, coming into a new life” (1916). The Italian Marxist would, then, doubtless be disappointed by the recent glut of books about years (or ‘the x that changed the world’ books, in the words of the American critic, Louis Menand). During the past decade alone, there have been tomes on, among others, 1492, 1536, 1789, 1816, 1820, 1848, 1913, 1946, 1956, 1959, 1963, 1979, 1989 and 1995. The fiftieth anniversary of the events of 1968, meanwhile, saw the publication of edited collections, special editions of scholarly journals, reminiscences and reflections, and op-eds, essays, and features in various newspapers and magazines (Menand 2015).¹

As the author of a narrative history of 1956, and a contributor to a recent collection of essays on 1968, I am—at least in Gramsci’s view—part of the problem. But, as I have previously noted, whether we like it or not, 1968 would seem destined:

to be forever cast in popular imagination as a ‘magical year’ of rebellion and revolution; an extraordinary twelve months in which students and activists took to the streets of West Berlin, Chicago, Mexico City, Paris, Prague, and other cities, occupied buildings, denounced imperialism, called for freedom and equality, and dared to dream that a new and better world was possible (2018, 227).

But for scholars of the American 1960s (and, it might be added, for many former activists), 1968 has always seemed a rather curious year to single out for celebration. After all, the litany of disasters and setbacks that American progressives and their allies encountered during those tumultuous twelve months remains sobering—and scarcely believable—a half-century later. Among other things, the year witnessed: the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy; serious racial uprisings in more than one hundred cities (including Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, Newark, New York, Pittsburgh, and Washington, D.C.) that left dozens dead, whole neighborhoods in ruins, and \$100 million in property damage; the implosion of the Democratic Party amid implacable divisions over the seemingly never-ending war in Vietnam; the dismal failure of the SCLC’s Poor People’s Campaign, whose ‘Resurrection City’ in Washington, DC was soon beset by rain, mud, ill-discipline, crime and plummeting morale; and the strong showing of the former

¹ See, for instance, Halliwell and Witham (2018), *European Journal of American Studies* (2019), *AHR* (2018), Fortin and Astor (2018), “50 Years Later, it Feels Familiar: How America Fractured in 1968,” *New York Times*, 15 January 2018; “That Was the Year That Was: Tariq Ali talks to David Edgar,” *London Review of Books* 40, no. 10 (24 May 2018).

Alabama governor, and notorious segregationist, George C. Wallace in that year's presidential election (his rambunctious campaign helped him to secure 13.5 percent of the popular vote, and five states, in what was the best performance by a third party candidate since 1924). The White House, of course, was ultimately captured by Richard Nixon. Stealing some of Wallace's best lines, he had run on a "law and order" ticket and an appeal to what would subsequently be labelled the "silent majority," those whom he described as "the forgotten Americans—the non-shouters; the non-demonstrators," "good people," "decent people" who "work, and they save, and they pay their taxes, and they care" (Nixon 1968). Those, in other words, who were quite unlike the long-haired protesters in Chicago's Grant Park, who had taunted Mayor Daley's police with cries of "pigs eat shit, pigs eat shit" (Kusch 2008, 63).

In fact, the urban riots, Democratic infighting, and countercultural and political excess of the New Left continued to serve American conservatives well, long after the tear gas of Chicago had cleared, and the posters of Ho Chi Minh and Chairman Mao had faded from view. The GOP, after all, won five out of the next six presidential elections—in part by running against everything that the 1960s supposedly stood for. In 1980, in a moment fraught with symbolism, Ronald Reagan—who, as governor of California had famously faced down Free Speech activists at Berkeley—won the White House as his GOP took control of the Senate for the first time in a quarter of a century.

The entrenched notion of 1968 as marking the apogee of the 1960s is, it should be stressed, also at odds with the orthodox historiographical interpretation of the era: the so-called declension thesis. According to this "rise and fall" narrative, the early idealism of the civil rights movement and the student New Left, which centered on the creation of a truly inter-racial and participatory democracy, to be achieved via nonviolent protests and prefigurative politics, eventually gave way to the politics of rage. Embittered by the escalating war in Vietnam and bitterly disillusioned with what was viewed as the complicity of liberals in maintaining a corrupt and racist "system," the early cries of "we shall overcome," and peaceful occupations in favor of free speech and an end to restrictive *in loco parentis* regulations, were replaced by chants of "burn baby, burn," campus bombings, and open support for Ho Chi Minh, Mao Zedong, and other "Third World" revolutionaries. The chaos of 1968, in this framing at least, belonged very much to the "bad" rather than the "good" 1960s (Gitlin 1987).

Over the past decade or two, a determined and talented battalion of historians have expended a good deal of energy in complicating, challenging, and ultimately dismantling this declension narrative. They have achieved this by, among other things, contesting the long-held dichotomy between "civil rights" and "Black Power;" excavating the 1960s at the local level—especially in the South and the so-called "heartland" states, where things often played out rather differently, and to a different pace and timescale, than they did in New York, Madison or Berkeley; and extending our focus into the 1970s—where the explosion

of feminist organizing, LGBT activism, welfare rights campaigning, environmental crusading, and other progressive causes, belied the notion that the social activism and political idealism of the 1960s had given way to introspection and political apathy during the so-called “Me Decade” (Hall 2012, 5-23).

Scholars have also turned their gaze back to the 1950s, which were once regarded as little more than a political and social backwater: the “dullest and dreariest decade” in all of American history, as the Bancroft Prize-winning historian, Eric Goldman had it (Goldman 1960). Exploding, once and for all, the myth of a 1950s consensus, this new historiography has unearthed, and brought to deserved prominence, the origins of the post-war civil rights struggle and the white supremacist movement that mobilized to strangle it at birth, the student movement and wider New Left, and the growing spirit of generational and cultural rebellion. Whisper it, but one might even dare to venture that 1956 might be considered a more significant moment in post-war history than 1968 (Hall 2016).

Perhaps the most exciting historiographical development, though, has been driven by the ‘transnational turn,’ which has produced a wealth of scholarship on the “global sixties.” Long seen as a year of worldwide, rather than simply national, protest—and with a keen, contemporaneous sense of a wider generational revolt—1968 has, unsurprisingly, attracted renewed scholarly interest. The emergence of what might be termed a “global 1968” was given a major boost by the *American Historical Review*, which ran a special forum on “The International 1968” across two issues back in the spring of 2009 (the featured essays discussed such topics as the rise and fall of the international counterculture, student activism in Japan, gender and the “1968 generation,” and the relationship between youth travel and the development of a “politicized European identity” among the ’68ers) (Jobs 2009, 376).² Indeed, the recent enthusiasm for global history (and, specifically, the global 1960s) means that it has become rather anachronistic to even speak of a specifically “American” 1968.³

The 1968 that historians are wrestling with as we prepare to enter the third decade of the twenty-first century is, in fact, a world away from the (by now) rather hackneyed tale that begins with idealistic young students supposedly shaving off their beards, and trudging through the frozen snows of New Hampshire in support of Gene McCarthy, and which ends in the heat, despair and violence of Chicago (a narrative in which, it is worth emphasizing, the primary actors—whether disillusioned liberals, white New Leftists, anti-war students, or Yippies—are mostly men). In a recent essay for the *AHR*, which elected to mark the half-centenary of 1968 with a series of short scholarly reflections, Judy Tzu-Chun Wu focused on the rise of “Third Worldism” in the United States—where, in the spring of 1968, the Third World Liberation Front (which later laid the foundation for the Black Studies movement) led major protests at San Francisco State University, as well as on the emergence and

² *AHR* (2009).

³ On the global sixties see, for instance, Jian et al. (2018).

subsequent flourishing of women-of-color feminism. Moving beyond the traditional focus on the protests at the Miss America Pageant, in September 1968, and the wider activism of white, middle-class women, Wu reminds us that women of color “played a central role in advocating for women’s equality in the labor movement” and “offered profound critiques of reproductive politics to expand the agenda beyond access to birth control to include forced sterilization and the right of poor and racialized women to become mothers” (Wu 2018). Donna Murch, meanwhile, argued for the signal importance of 1968 in the “history of racialized mass incarceration,” and she traced a line between the government’s crack-down in the face of urban riots and Nixon’s pivot to “law and order,” and the “tough on crime” policies that would have such a devastating impact on the black community over subsequent decades (March 2018). Alongside these U.S. focused pieces were essays on when (or, indeed, whether) China had experienced a 1968; the significance of 1968 (and, specifically, the events of May) for young people in Palestine, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon; the student uprising in Poland (to which the regime of Władysław Gomułka responded by unleashing an “antisemitic *Kulturkampf*” that saw thousands of Jews flee the country); and experiences of 1968 in Canada, Europe (including Czechoslovakia, Germany, Italy, and Northern Ireland), Mexico, and on the African continent—where, by the end of the decade, a series of counter-revolutions had doomed the utopian dreams that accompanied the end of empire, and severely narrowed the boundaries of what was now considered politically possible (AHR 2018). Meanwhile *The Routledge Handbook of the Global 1960s*, published a couple of months earlier, interrogated the idea of 1968 as a post-colonial phenomenon, and explored in some detail how 1968 (as a year, an idea, and a collective experience) unfolded in Ethiopia, Senegal, and Iran (Jian et al. 2018). This is 1968, then, but not as you knew it—and all the more exhilarating for it.

Back in the summer of 1968, Hannah Arendt wrote that “children in the next century will learn about the year 1968 the way we learned about the year 1848” (Arendt 1968, 681). Her prediction might well continue to hold true in the decades to come. But—at least if recent historiographical developments are anything to go by—students will be learning about a starkly different year than the one that their predecessors were confronted with as the twentieth century came to an end. And that, surely, is something to celebrate?

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TEACHING THE SIXTIES: POLITICS, PEDAGOGY AND THE MEANING OF A DECADE¹

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The Sixties: a collage of fragments scooped together as if a whole decade took place in an instant.

Todd Gitlin (1987, 3)

The Department of History where I work offers to its second-year students a selection of fifteen optional modules per term. With around two hundred and fifty students per year, this means that normally each module enrolls fifteen to twenty of them. The usual arithmetic fell apart when, two years ago, the department decided to start a module on the Sixties in the United States. The first year it was on offer, eighty-two students (a third of the whole second-year History cohort) indicated the module as their first choice, fifty as their second choice.² You may think that the success of the module was caused by the popularity of the person that was going to teach it, but that was not the case. For one very simple reason: when the module was offered, the person who was meant to design and run it had not been appointed yet.

When I took up my current job, one of the first tasks I was asked to complete was to design and convene the brand-new module “The Sixties: ‘Years of Hope, Days of Fear.’” In the pages that follow, I offer some considerations based on my experience designing, delivering, and revising one of the most popular history modules offered by my department. The incredible popularity of the United States and the Sixties in British academia is a relatively minor indicator of the enduring success that this topic continues to have both among scholars of U.S. history and literature, in school education and the general public. Compounded in its success are surely the fascination for cultural myths and icons like the Beatles, John Fitzgerald and Robert Kennedy, or Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the enormous significance of the political events and changes that started in those ten years, from the Vietnam War to sexual liberation to the struggles for racial equality. At the same time—and perhaps more importantly for scholars of the period—the success is motivated by the persistent difficulty to furnish comprehensive and undisputed descriptions of the decade,

¹ The author wishes to thank the co-editors of the issue Marta Gara and Virginia Pignagnoli for their support in the planning and editing of the article; Tom Bishop for comments on earlier drafts; and the students of my 2017 and 2018 Sixties classes at the University of Birmingham, whose constructive and insightful participation gave me the primary material to write this article.

² These numbers were collected by a colleague working on module allocation for the academic year 2017/18. Second-year option modules consist of three contact hours per week and seven hours of independent study.

from its sudden and unexpected inception to its multiple and contradictory legacies to the roles of its numerous and cumbersome protagonists.³

The purpose of this essay is to investigate some of the pedagogical possibilities that a decade so rich with meanings and with a literature so sophisticated and varied can offer. I aim to reflect on some of the challenges that I have encountered in transmitting specific concepts and ideas to students, perhaps exploring what these difficulties could mean in the contemporary political scenario and in the context of contemporary American Studies. At the same time, I will explore ways in which simplistic narratives can be challenged and how the teaching of the decade can be innovated through the use of recent literature. This advice I offer will focus on three main points. The first is what to make of the (alleged) prior knowledge of the course topic brought to the class by the students themselves. Next, I will turn to the tension between two crucial concepts that run parallel in the historical exploration of the Sixties: the “cultural” and the “political.” Teaching the Sixties means finding the right equilibrium between debating the cultural production of the decade and exploring its dense political history, made of popular grassroots movement and broader paradigmatic shifts on a national level. At the same time, it means instructing students on the multiple meanings that the idea of “political” incorporates. Finally, I will conclude with two considerations on how to change and innovate teaching the Sixties, especially when discussed in the potentially “claustrophobic” context of a U.S. history module. I will suggest that countering the “declension” narrative—the idea that the Sixties were a “failure”—is crucial to shifting the conversation on the period. At the same time, framing the U.S. Sixties in the context of the “global Sixties” is a crucial way to expose students to multi-linear and problematized explanations on the origins, development, and legacies of the decade.⁴

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE FROM PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE

Each year, I start my module with an icebreaker exercise. First, I ask students to raise their hands if they know the name of a President who took office during the Sixties. Then I ask about a singer who became famous during the decade; artistic trends that started in the period; political leaders who died between 1960 and 1970. In each of these cases, most hands go up with no hesitation. Sometimes, I ask students to mention famous events happening in the decade: music festivals, demonstrations, protests, etc. Answers abound. They all want to say something, and the most knowledgeable students would strive to include in the list some event beyond the most notorious ones like the Selma march, the Summer of Love, or Woodstock. When the room is relaxed and on board, I turn to another question: now, who can answer the same questions for the Fifties, or the Thirties, or the Twenties in

³ Despite the incredibly high quality of the literature produced so far, syntheses of the decade, primary source readers and essay collections continue to be published at a significant rate. A selection of volumes published include Farber (1994); Bloom (2001); Isserman and Kazin (2003); Lytle (2006); Green (2010); Ward (2010).

⁴ This article joins a rich and growing literature on how to teach the Sixties in the U.S. See especially Bailey and Farber (2006); Lekus (2006); Levy (2004); Liebermann (2019).

the United States? Panic ensues. Some hands go up for the presidents. On singers, artistic trends, and politicians assassinated, I normally receive perplexed looks. I can try to draw a list of notable events, but it will never be close in length to the list compiled for the Sixties. This exercise helps me getting across the point that the Sixties are an exceptional decade. I want students to immediately realize that the Sixties is a period like no other. Regardless of individual backgrounds, I want them to reflect on the fact that each of them already has a structured idea of what the decade was about, be it its cultural production or its political and social impact.

The first time I taught the module, I thought my objective was to “destroy” these ideas and replace them with better informed ones. I was aware that, for many of them, the source of these ideas were GCSE or A-level classes on the Civil Rights Movement or the Cold War, contexts in which often unproblematized and rigid narratives of the events were taught.⁵ Across the years, I came to realize that my approach was all wrong. A pillar of the social constructivist approach to teaching is to “providing students with opportunities of ‘constructing’ their own knowledge and skills through practical experience in real-life or modeled activities” (Tarnopolsky 2012).⁶ In the context of my module, applying this method meant allowing students to construct their own understanding of the Sixties *relying* on what they already knew. In practice, this meant using their knowledge and building on it, facilitating from afar the “problematization” of the module content.

After realizing my mistake, I started using early classes to test the level of knowledge in the room, creating a friendly environment in which students felt confident to share their expertise on the subjects discussed. This approach was especially useful for topics students were already familiar with. The Cold War is a topic that students have often detailed knowledge of. They are experts on the steps that led to the establishment of a bipolar geopolitical order in the immediate aftermath of World War Two, and they are quite versed in debating main problems of periodization and causality (when did the Cold War start? What made it different from previous confrontations? What was the role of nuclear weaponry?). Students’ knowledge background is an excellent starting point to debate historiography on the origins and causes of the Cold War and to build a more critical understanding of the cultural and social impact of the Cold War on the domestic front in the Fifties. Starting from Cold War ideologies, students can more easily understand the dynamics of militarization of the domestic front and the oppressive nature of anti-communist propaganda. In turn, these sessions provide an excellent starting point to facilitate discussions on the start of the protests in the Sixties, from the late-Fifties anti-nuclear armaments rallies of SANE to the broader campus demonstrations of the New Left in the early Sixties.

⁵ GCSE stands for General Certificate of Secondary Education. It is the certificate that English, Welsh and Northern Irish pupils receive at the end of their secondary education. The GCSE is followed by the A-Levels, a two-year course in which students pick three subjects to study in more depth. The A-Levels precede the admission to an undergraduate course. Evidence shows that the Civil Rights movement and the Cold War are two of the most studied topics in A-Level history classes across the country (Child, Darlington and Gill 2014).

⁶ For a comparison between the different learning approaches, see Caffarella, Merriam and Baumgarten (2006).

This method—relying on students’ previous knowledge and building on it—had the added advantage of reducing my use of “lecture-style” explanations, where students just sit and listen with no active engagement.⁷ Each student would have a different response to the problems they were presented with, based on their level of knowledge, their level of understanding of the readings, their analytical and critical skills. Whatever the conclusions students reach, I could appreciate that this method had the positive effect of leaving students gratified by the fact that their knowledge was valued and used in a meaningful way, and for those who had no prior knowledge, by the fact that they did not feel left behind, but actually looked after and brought up-to-speed with the rest of the class. In this way, prior knowledge on the Sixties stopped being “a problem” and became a resource that allowed me to have an ampler set of tools to work on specific aspects of the module. Issues like the lack of participation in class, the involvement in the conversation of silent students, or the handling of overly talkative students were made easier by this method aimed at structuring and compartmentalizing the use of previously-held students’ knowledge on the topic.

DESIGNING THE SYLLABUS: STUDENTS’ EXPECTATIONS AND CONFLICTING NARRATIVES

Far more complex was finding the right balance between cultural, social, and political aspects in the designing and delivering of the module. While deciding the reading list and seminar program of my module, myriads of questions came to my mind. JFK’s New Frontier must surely be discussed, but how much emphasis should I put on JFK’s neglect of civil rights? Should I cut discussions on JFK’s domestic policies altogether and dedicate some proper time to Bob Moses’s voter registration efforts instead, rather than quickly covering SNCC in the larger context of the Civil Rights movement? Everyone knows that “The Times They Are A-Changin’” is one of the hymns of the decade, but how many know that by 1965 Bob Dylan had quit writing political songs for good? Does that even matter at all? Should I deal with Second Wave Feminism before or after discussing the advent of the New Right with Richard Nixon’s 1968 victory?⁸

To a certain extent, the main problem with deciding which direction the module should take was one of expectations. One of the main reasons why the Sixties are so popular is their cultural impact. The endless string of singers whose career started in the Sixties is only matched by the enormous changes in fashion and social habits brought by the decade. Pop music, rock and roll, sexual emancipation, and drug use were catalyzers of a radical shift that allegedly made people forget the conservatism of the Fifties and changed Western societies for good. Chats with students made me realize that their expectation was of a

⁷ The shortcomings of passive teaching methods like lectures, that do not include any sort of students’ active involvement, have been well documented since the 1970s (Dale 1969; Dale 1972; Lee and Reeves 2007).

⁸ These questions were provoked by reading some books in preparation for the module, a selection that included Bryant 2006; Hogan 2007; Wilentz 2010.

module that focused almost exclusively on these aspects—a cultural history of the “shiny” decade that laid the foundations of our modern pop culture.

To try and put some order in the abundance of options I had and to give a response to students’ expectations, I decided to classify the material I had along four different sub-narratives, running in parallel with one another. The first one tapped straight into students’ wants. Indeed, the multitude of famous artistic icons coming out of the decade (musicians in the first place, but also poets, actors, and film directors), together with innovations in fashion and the lasting impact of a freer social attitude towards sex and recreational drugs, they all made me look for ways to emphasize the cultural and social impact of the decade.⁹ Second, the seismic changes provoked by protest organizations like the Civil Rights movement, student movements, feminist movements, Black Power and other ethnic-minority groups, gay rights organizations, and anti-war protests invited reflections on the Sixties as the starting point of the “culture wars” still shaping our modern political debate, from identity politics to pacifism to reproductive rights.¹⁰ A third line of arguments involved national politics and its changes in relation to foreign and domestic dynamics. Traditional narratives indicate the end of the Sixties as the moment in which the New Deal coalition that organized U.S. politics since the Thirties fell apart, provoking a structural realignment that put conservatives in charge of U.S. national politics. Through Richard Nixon’s and, more importantly, Ronald Reagan’s presidencies, this conservative consensus produced the neoliberal socio-cultural infrastructure that still dominates American and Western politics today.¹¹ The fourth and last narrative placed the Sixties in the context of the Cold War and debates on America’s role across the world. Without a proper consideration of the impact of the Cold War both abroad and at home, no aspect of the decade can fully be appreciated.

Eventually, I decided to structure the module so that it would reflect the attempt to give a balanced and consistent relevance to the four aspects mentioned, and to fruitfully explain the connections between them. In practical terms, sessions dedicated to one of the four narratives (a broad and sweeping introductory session on the Cold War context; sessions on Civil Rights or the women’s rights movements; a seminar on political music in San Francisco during the second half of the decade) alternated with sessions on specific events or moments that helped students understand the interconnectedness and intricacy of the multiple threads developing throughout the decade.

⁹ There is a sprawling bibliography of non-academic and academic books on 1960s culture. In the preparation of the module, two useful points of reference have been Dickstein (1977) and Monteith and Halliwell (2008).

¹⁰ This is a line of argument that has recently been explored by Kazin (2018). For a sustained treatment of the role of the Sixties in the history of the culture wars, see Hartman (2015).

¹¹ Although the general lines of this interpretation remain unchallenged, scholars have furnished detailed interpretations that have allowed to better understand the features of this crucial passage of U.S. history. On the one hand, scholars have investigated the history of conservatism in the Sixties to understand the origins of the present neoliberal moment (McGirr 2001; Perlstein 2001; Mason 2004; McGirr 2011). On the other hand, they have unearthed evidence to show the long origins of the crisis of New Deal liberalism. For this aspect, the reference point, although quite difficult to use for teaching purposes, is Sugrue (1996).

An example of the latter is an activity on the 1968 Democratic National Convention protests.¹² During one of the most momentous weeks of the decade, thousands of protestors from all over the country paraded through the streets of Chicago while the Democratic Party was deciding its Presidential candidate. The marches, unauthorized by the city mayor, attracted the violent reaction of the Chicago police. The events of Chicago broadcasted live to the houses of millions of Americans, in a moment that historians have identified as a key shift in the path towards the triumph of Richard Nixon's message of "law and order."

A session on the Chicago protests gives me a perfect opportunity to show students how the four threads I identified above intertwined inextricably. Black and white demonstrators gathered in Illinois in a last-ditch attempt to stop the nomination of "warmonger" Hubert Humphrey and set the Cold War on a new course in Vietnam. In the streets, counterculture and New Left strategies shaped the course of the protest. While Allen Ginsberg tried to calm the crowd through group meditation sessions, counterculture-inspired yippie leaders marched carrying Presidential candidate "Pigassus the Immortal," a 145-pound domestic pig, running with the slogan "They nominate a president and he eats the people. We nominate a president and the people eat him." Meanwhile, a delegation of the Black Panther Party flew from the Bay Area to Chicago, in one of the first occasions in which white and black anti-war activists tried to find a political convergence. While the police responded to protestors with ruthless violence, at the International Amphitheatre delegates of the DNC chose to ignore people on the street and went ahead with Humphrey's nomination. This outcome confirmed the irreparable fracture between the Democratic Party and the anti-war movement, in a dramatic shift that set the course of the 1968 elections and eventually brought to a close a long period of hegemony of New Deal liberalism (Farber 1988).

Pulling apart the details of the Chicago demonstrations is a fascinating task. It requires familiarity with the trajectories of several movements (the New Left, the anti-war movement, the hippie movement, black power, the Democratic Party itself), as well as knowing the biographical sketches of many of its leaders (Tom Hayden, Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, Allen Ginsberg, Hubert Humphrey, and Eugene McCarthy), while of course being able to place the events within the big picture of the Vietnam War and the Cold War. It potentially allows the class to grapple with some crucial issues of historical thinking (to what extent can a specific event change the course of history? What is the relationship between social and political/institutional history? Is a media representation of an event more important than the event itself?), while at the same time indulging in counterfactuals and alternative scenarios that test the soundness of students' analytical skills. These types of sessions allow the teacher to test students' knowledge of a set of broader

¹² I am indebted with my colleague Tom Bishop for pointing me towards the teaching potential of the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

historical problems pertaining U.S. history and its development across the twentieth century. If this background knowledge is missing, it is inevitably impossible to carry on part of the conversation.

The balance between single-narrative and multi-narrative sessions proved quite successful, and I have continued to use it across the years, each time adopting small tweaks and changes to the sessions that did not go as planned to get to the learning outcomes I had set in advance. At the same time, a healthy amount of trial and error and suggestions received from university-arranged module feedback and informal conversations with students allowed me to identify specific issues that kept me pondering about more radical changes in the module program and larger issues of perception of the decade and its role in explaining the present intellectual context—problems on which I have continued and continue to work on today.

THE MEANING OF THE “POLITICAL,” THEN AND NOW

Perhaps the most interesting and poignant issue to discuss is relative to the features of the concept of “political” as understood by students. Let me introduce the issue with an anecdote. During a session on the Free Speech Movement, I asked the class to try to put themselves in the shoes of the Berkeley students that decided to scale up the protest on free speech in 1964. My aim was to discuss the dynamics leading to the politicization of the American youth in the Sixties: how come that a generation of well educated, middle-to-high class young individuals, with a promising future ahead of them, generated such a powerful and disruptive amount of protest energy? What was the source of their discontent? Searching for a question that could kick off the conversation, I asked something along the lines of: if you should think of a source of profound and deep dissatisfaction of your generation—something that scares you or causes you concerns—what would come to mind? The idea I originally had was to start from whatever answer I would get and progressively lead the conversation towards some of the issues at the basis of the protests of the New Left and the FSM: capitalist massification, the pressure towards conformism caused by Cold War ideologies, the anxieties generated by the nuclear threat, etc.

To my dismay, the only issue my students could find some agreement on was street crime and personal safety in the areas surrounding the campus. The lack of imagination or apparent unawareness about more pressing global concerns struck me. Sure, when the session took place we were in the middle of a knife crime wave of national proportions, a trend that hit Birmingham’s student-inhabited areas for the first time in years, so this must have been felt as an urgent and widespread issue to them (Walker 2018; BBC News 2018). But in that same moment, the U.K. was knee-deep in the Brexit crisis, at the apex of a supposed

“reawakening” of youth’s activism in Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour Party, and right after the beginning of the “Fridays for Future” strike initiatives. None of these points were raised in the classroom.¹³

This episode was in line with a broader trend I have been noticing in my students’ intellectual and personal backgrounds. Across the board, I could appreciate that students had more familiarity with certain understandings of the concept of “political,” while they struggled enormously to get others. “The personal is political” is a slogan that does not require any explanation in class. Students immediately get its meaning and its historical and contemporary implications. In fact, what is hard to explain to them is how the profoundly political implications of personal lives were apparently not fully clear before the Sixties.¹⁴ This is to the credit of second wave feminism and its many post-Sixties reincarnations, from black feminist collectives in the 1970s down to the recent #metoo wave of protests. The familiarity students have with the political implications of the personal sphere is a further confirmation of the profound impact that political ideologies born in the Sixties have on our present society.

Conversely, in my experience I have noticed that a large number of students have a harder time understanding the background, tortuous developments, and significance of more “traditional” versions of the “political,” in most cases when connected to historical and long-standing political ideologies, from Marxism to liberalism to conservatism. Being a scholar of the left in the United States, I have often been taken aback by students’ difficulty to place the passage from the “Old” Left to the New Left in the U.S. into any meaningful historical context, one including the long trajectory of left-wing ideologies (socialism, communism, and American liberalism); the role and impact of trade unions in the country’s history; and the significance (or the lack thereof) of the organized left. Not that I was expecting students to have any detailed knowledge of any of these aspects of U.S. history. But I thought I could rely on a generic understanding of the issues left-wing and right-wing political parties have been fighting about from the late-nineteenth century onwards: social and economic rights, political representation, personal freedoms and so on. Quite the contrary. In more occasions than I would like to admit, I found myself explaining to students what the difference between the “left” and the “right” was. The overlapping and unclear concepts of socialism and communism regularly made students’ heads spin, and it is not hard to imagine the exasperation deriving from attempts to explore some broad differences between the various schools of Marxist thought that emerged in the twentieth century.

¹³ This episode happened in November 2018, well before the “Fridays for Future” initiative gained wide global attention. I look forward to repeating this seminar in the early 2020 to see if the responses will change.

¹⁴ Of course, they were. Especially women’s rights activists early understood how the distinction between “public” and “private” spheres was a means to maintain patriarchal social structures and limit women’s influence in the society. 1960s Second Wave Feminism produced the first political breakthrough of the concept, which came to be historicized through the slogan “The Personal is Political,” the title of a famous article by Carol Hanisch (a title that she does not take credit for) (Hanisch 2009; Rosen 2006).

Don't get me wrong. That students are not passionate about the byzantine distinctions between the myriads of left-wing groups animating the Sixties' student movements is perfectly comprehensible. At the same time, quite rapidly I identified in this area a set of problems I should somehow try to solve, and therefore I embarked upon an attempt to turn a problem into a potential occasion. Eventually, I found out that teaching a module on the Sixties offers the opportunity to fill gaps in students' knowledge while at the same time start extremely fruitful conversations on the meaning of the "political," conversations that have influence not only on students' capacity for historical thinking but also on their positionality in our current socio-economic context.

For a start, I soon came to realize that the lack of background knowledge and familiarity with left-wing critiques of capitalism was a problem that made the task of understanding the origins and development of political protests in the Sixties virtually impossible. Far too often, the anti-capitalist critique expressed by protest groups in the Sixties sounded to my students as too abstract, overambitious, and narcissistic. Realism and practicability surely were not the main concerns of 1960s New Left groups, but at the same time dismissing the Yippie Manifesto, the Weathermen Underground's Communique#1, or documents from the Columbia Strike Coordinating Committee because they did not read as modern party manifestos was a clear sign of the fact that students struggled to go beyond the surface of the critique mounted by young left-wing activists in the Sixties (Bloom and Breines 2012, 50-60, 333-336, 385-391).

Fortunately, there is no lack of historical context that a good amount of preliminary readings and sweeping lectures cannot fix. In the context of the debate between the Old and the New Left, acquiring a better knowledge of the political goals and functioning of the Socialist Party of America, the Communist Party of the USA and the AFL-CIO became a less dry and daunting task. This background allowed us to better place into historical perspective the political and historical innovations that documents like Charles Wright Mills's "Letter to the New Left" brought to the theorization and practice of the American Left, and the impact that the New Left had on political movements of the decade (Bloom and Breines 2010, 61-65).

At the same time, and perhaps more importantly, debating the New Left and its limits allowed us to start a broader conversation on capitalism, individualism, and consumerism that would have been hard to imagine otherwise. The anecdote on campus safety and personal concerns that I mentioned earlier was an indication of students' under-developed capacity of critical thinking in relation to their own social, economic, and political positioning in the current socio-economic and political context. I responded to this circumstance with sources that went straight to the point. Mario Savio famously declared that "there is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part," and "you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels . . . upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it

stop!” (Cohen et al. 2014). Savio’s speech is the purest expression of the capacity of a generation of young American students to self-assess their own role in their society and contest its functioning, in direct opposition to a governing body that wanted to carry on along the same lines of the past.

Putting students in the condition to understand Savio’s speech and deploy an equally acute and vivid capacity of critical thinking is one of the most challenging but also rewarding opportunities that teaching a module on the Sixties has to offer. Mario Savio’s poignant critique towards the homogenization and the conformism brought by capitalist production is an opportunity for students to reflect on their own personal and political lives. At its best, the New Left introduced amongst other things an existentialist dimension in the left-wing critique of American capitalism that survived the socio-economic conditions of the Sixties and still applies to our present circumstances. Students can reflect on their own roles as workers, consumers, and intellectuals in a society whose structures are often presented as untouchable and unmodifiable. The request for a fulfilling life, so clearly articulated by Tom Hayden in the *Port Huron Statement*, was one of the main aspirations driving the American youth in the Sixties. It is a goal that does not stop ringing true now.

At the same time, learning about the Sixties’ protest movements is an occasion to more critically understand the injustices upon which our society is built. The composition of the student population of the University of Birmingham (quite accurately reflected in my classes) is hardly a faithful projection of the British society at large. As a Russell Group university with a prestigious reputation, UoB attracts students from a predominantly middle class background, with a systematic underrepresentation of students from BAME and working class backgrounds (University of Birmingham 2019). Much like the Berkeley students in 1964, the vast majority of my students belong to a privileged class. Learning about the Sixties give them a chance to develop a more acute awareness of the unequal foundations of our society. The New Left built their critique on foundations laid by civil rights groups of the late 1950s and early 1960s. They took strategies and goals from them. The early Sixties represent a shining example of interracial organization, a moment in which white protestors followed the lead of black leaders to getting a step closer to a more equal society. Exploring their struggles fifty years later is a way for our students to reflect on their own racial and class privilege. Through the example of white protestors who followed in the footsteps of black activists and put their lives on the line in the Students for a Democratic Society, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the myriads of organizations that sprang up in the U.S. after 1965, students can come to terms with the advantageous position their whiteness has offered to them, and perhaps understand how they can use it to serve the greater good of the antiracist cause.

These are but two of the many aspects I have been trying to work on when pushing my students to expand their understanding of the “political.” The history of the Sixties is full of many teachable moments that can be turned into pedagogical opportunities for our

students. In this way, the analytical skills acquired through historical thinking contribute to educate not only skilled employees but also self-conscious and critical citizens.

CONCLUSIONS: THE SIXTIES BEYOND THE SIXTIES

Two aspects I would like to mention in conclusion pertain to strategies that I have been using and I intend to use to further improve my module on the Sixties. First, and I am aware this will sound obvious, no module on the Sixties should really finish in 1969 or 1970. Discussing the legacy of the Sixties is as important as exploring the decade itself. More crucially, what I have found extremely useful is staying away as much as possible from the narrative of “declension” and “failure” that permeate many autobiographical narratives of former protagonists of Sixties’ movements (Hall, 2014). This narrative underestimates many of the most important results brought about by social movements started during the Sixties and tends to erase movements that started in the late Sixties and proliferated in the following decades. The Stonewall riots, the pivotal spontaneous protest that kicked off a national LGBTQ rights movement, took place in June 1969. When the decade was drawing to a close, gay rights movement was blossoming across the whole country. Women’s rights, anti-war, black power movements, they all continued well in the Seventies, and the consequences of the Civil Rights movement, from affirmative action to a larger presence of African American elected officials, shaped the American political scenario and society for decades (Gosse and Moser 2003). Disentangling the conversation on the Sixties from a declension narrative help students situating the decade in the longer trajectory of U.S. history, understanding it as a phase within a broader set of dynamics that panned out throughout the twentieth century (Dowd Hall 2006; Hall 2015; Sugrue 1996).

At the same time, it is refreshing and useful to place the Sixties into a geographical context that transcends the narrow borders of the United States. In the past decades, scholarship on the Sixties has moved towards a “globalization” and “transnationalization” of its geographical approaches. This has meant, on the one hand, rediscussing national movements in the context of international struggles (think, for example, to the civil rights movement in the context of decolonization struggles across the world); on the other, decentering the narrative from a focus on a single country to larger analyses on the links across several areas of the world (Dudziak 2002; Munro 2017; Von Eschen 1997). How to bring this development in the scholarship into the classroom is perhaps the biggest challenge I see ahead of me in the future revisions of the module program. Students would enormously benefit from being exposed to the newest methodological innovations brought forward by historians adopting global and transnational approaches. At the same time, using their works put teachers before new challenges: how is it possible to give students the adequate historical background to understand events taking place on opposite sides of the world? Is it necessary to know “national” narratives to understand the value and significance of transnational and global approaches? How limited and narrow can a university module be? Is it plausible

to design a module focusing on one year, or one movement only, if it covers a global geographical span? In the next couple of years, my department will test team-taught option modules on a variety of subjects. Perhaps, creating a teaching team and covering a similar topic across different countries could be a way to solve some of the problems mentioned above. It would solve problems of expertise, in a knowledge exchange that could be fruitful also for research purposes. My hope is to being able to test this arrangement and report back on its outcome in the future.

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“I GOT THE CELL COUNT BLUES”: DANEZ SMITH, HIV, AND THE LEGACY OF THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper connects Danez Smith’s collection of poems *Don’t Call Us Dead* (2017) to writing by the poet’s predecessors in the Black Arts Movement. I argue that Smith’s expression of HIV in their poetry continues and updates the denunciation of mass incarceration of, as well as structural violence against, non-white US citizens. My goal is to analyze intertextuality and the main topoi in Smith’s poetry as elements contributing to the extension of the BAM’s attempt to raise awareness and create Black self-determination and nationhood (Neal 1969). To do so, I read Smith’s work in light of contemporary thought, focusing on Judith Butler’s (2004) ideas of grievability, indefinite detention, and the hierarchies of death.

Keywords: Danez Smith, Black Arts Movement, HIV/AIDS, mass incarceration, indefinite detention

Our past is bleak. Our future dim. But I am not reasonable. A reasonable man adjusts to his environment. An unreasonable man does not. All progress, therefore, depends on the unreasonable man. I prefer not to adjust to my environment. I refuse the prison of ‘I’ and choose the open spaces of ‘we.’
Toni Morrison

STRANGE FRUIT, BLACK ROOTS

Years after the progressive dissolution of the Black Arts Movement after the 1970s, cultural production by, as well as social representation of, African Americans has continued to increase exponentially. Toni Morrison’s 1993 Nobel Prize, for instance, or the Academy Award for Barry Jenkin’s *Moonlight* (2016) as Best Picture are but the veneer of slow yet deep-rooted social progress. However, in spite of the hope held by many that Barack Obama’s presidency would bring real change for racialized citizens, his two terms from 2009 to 2017 proved unsuccessful in ensuring that equity was real for people of color. Even worse, today, white supremacy is spurred further on under Donald Trump’s administration. According to unofficial sources such as MappingPoliceViolence.org, US police killed 1,164 people in 2018, Black citizens being three times more likely to be victims of this type of violence than white citizens. To date, police brutality against Black Americans continues to materialize latent racism, thus reaffirming the importance of grassroots movements such as #BlackLivesMatter to demand real change in the United States of the 21st century.

In this context, Danez Smith’s poetry plays an essential role. The poet’s work tackles the issues of Blackness, racial discrimination, and the much-ignored persistence of HIV increasingly affecting queer African Americans long after the peak of the AIDS crisis at the end of last century. Inscribing their¹ words into the strong fabric of work by Black writers

¹ This article respects Smith’s identification with the gender-neutral pronoun “they.”

such as James Baldwin, Sojourner Truth, or bell hooks, Smith stresses the persistence of racial injustice well into the present day while also highlighting the intersectional relevance of sexuality to the experience of Black identity. With this in mind, it is my purpose here to suggest that Smith’s writing rekindles a much-needed denunciation of not only direct violence, but also cultural and structural violence against Black Americans. But how to bridge the gap between those artists in the 1960s and the poets of today? Is it reasonable to read Smith’s work—Smith being Black American indeed, but also queer and HIV positive—alongside, say, Amiri Baraka? As I will argue, Smith not only takes over, but also updates the denunciation embodied (yet far from concluded) by the Black Arts Movement. In order to establish the proposed cross-temporal connections, I will be reading Smith’s 2017 collection *Don’t Call Us Dead* in comparison with work by BAM authors and in light of Judith Butler’s notions of grievability, indefinite detention, and the hierarchies of death.

Smith has frequently linked their work to various voices of dissent who attempted to bring visibility to the gross inequality experienced by African Americans in the second half of the twentieth century. Smith’s connection with Sonia Sanchez, for instance, is evident in “strange dowry” or “poem where I be a house, hence, you live in me,” where the young poet’s exploration of domestic, more “feminine” spheres highlights the importance of a politics of mutual care. Moreover, Smith’s first collection [*insert*] *boy* (2015) resonates with Audre Lorde’s belief in the political power of sex, particularly in poems such as “craigslist hookups,” where queer sexuality is embraced religiously, or “i cast out my tongue,” where pleasure is celebrated as a transforming energy: “my mouth is busy asking / storm of flesh in front of me // I cast out my tongue like a key / strung to a kite, wait for thunder” (86). More explicitly, “dancing (in bed) with white men (with dreads),” uses Lorde’s surname to deify her in a situation of intersectional disorientation due to cultural appropriation. Having had sex with a white man with dreadlocks, the lyric I struggles to find peace: “Lorde, forgive me / for not grabbing the shears the night // I let him stay in my bed after he said race wasn’t real” (74). Most significantly, though, Smith’s work mirrors the leading figure of the Black Arts Movement, LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka. Juxtaposing Smith to Baraka is nearly inevitable in that not only does Smith’s Spoken Word performances ring with vitality, strength and a sensuous musicality rarely reached after Baraka’s readings, but their understanding of art as political action also reignites the spirit of the movement. Smith bursting into song during their performance of “genesissy” at the 2013 Soap Boxing Poetry Slam, for example, inevitably recalls Baraka’s reading of “Why Is We Americans” for Def Poetry Jam in 2002.

Five decades spread out between Danez Smith’s post 9/11 United States and that of the Black Arts Revolutionary Theatre/School at the heart of Harlem, yet, the parallelism is inevitable. In his heartfelt article “The Black Arts Movement,” Larry Neal (1969) famously described the many cultural expressions taking place at BART/S as the “aesthetic and spir-

itual sister” of Black Power (187). Their writing, music, painting, and plays were, Neal explains, a cultural reaction willing to “confront the contradictions arising out of the Black man’s experience in the racist West” (188). This understanding of art as an essentially political tool, I will be arguing, could not be more relevant to our reading of Smith’s work. Equally central to our interest here is Neal’s interpretation of Black Arts Movement (BAM) poetry as coming to “stand for the collective conscious and unconscious of Black America—the real impulse in back of the Black Power movement, which is the will toward self-determination and nationhood, a radical reordering of the nature and function of both art and the artist” (191).

There is a variety of reasons why Neal’s words about Black Power could perfectly refer to Smith’s poetry today, a connection that can be divided into four main points. First, there is a clear historical awareness—the “collective conscious” referred to by Neal—that pervades every single page in *Don’t Call Us Dead*. Smith’s homages to Emmet Till in “dream where every black person is standing by the ocean,” to Michael Johnson in “recklessly,” or to Tamir Rice in “every day is a funeral & a miracle,” to mention but a few, prove that the poet feels a strong connection to the African-American experience of today as much as of the past. Second, alongside such explicit references to Black history, Smith’s collection also engages in a wide variety of intensely symbolic imagery. From sea-crossing to Black Pentecostal testimony and down low culture, to gospel, blues music, and rap, each new explored context powerfully appeals to a shared “unconscious of Black America.” Third, both the dream-like utopia explored in the long poem opening *Don’t Call Us Dead*, “summer, somewhere,” and the lyric I’s “search for darker planets” in “dear white america” evidence an unquenched thirst for nationhood which I aim to expand on further down. And last, if most decisive, Smith’s illustration of HIV in its relation to racialization, and as a both external and internal force to fight against, fits perfectly into that “will toward self-determination” that Neal attributes to the BAM. This fourth point is probably the most problematic, since reading Neal’s reference to self-determination as a metaphor for freeing oneself from the constrictive nature of HIV may seem to be stretching his words beyond their original meaning. Yet, as I am about to claim, it is precisely the seropositive condition—understood as both the origin and a form of violence—that weaves the tightest bond between Smith and their predecessors.

A PROPHECY FULFILLED

Neal’s reflections on the artistic movement follow a clearly optimistic perspective, most visibly in the uplifting question he finishes his writing with: “If art is the harbinger of future possibilities, what does the future of Black America portend?” (202). More often than not, however, the take on Black life expressed by BAM writers, presented a combination of Neal’s hopeful vision with an acute awareness of their daily reality. Sadly, this duality finds its reflection in Smith’s own body of work today. As early as in the first pages of their *opera*

prima [insert] boy, Smith's lyric I wonders "How do you describe a son set / course to casket from birth?" (19), to then lament

you came out the womb
 obituary scribed on the backside
 of your birth certificate. you're nothing new
 they've seen this before. you're a rerun
 a dull flash in this earth. lightning in a ghost town (20)

Exposure to a violent death, Smith laments, is a common fate for Black Americans, frequently assumed as inevitable. It is disheartening to read such recent poetry and be faced with the persisting insignificance of Black citizens to those institutions that should protect them.

Back in the days of BART/S, though, LeRoi Jones's (1964) *Dutchman* already showcased the same unmasked racism and blatant impunity with which Black lives were ended in the U.S. In this one-act play, Clay, a young Black man, meets Lula, a playful white woman, on a New York subway train. After being teased and made fun of for most of the action, Clay's apparently naïve innocence turns into a verbal outburst which seems to respond to years of repressed anger. The white temptress then proceeds to stab the young man in front of a motionless crowd. Adding to the tension surrounding the scene, the other passengers on the train do not react until, having pulled the dying body over herself, Lula demands that the Black boy's corpse be taken off her. The normality with which the onlookers witness the murder in *Dutchman*—just as the multiple deaths in Smith's poetry—highlights the worthlessness of Black life in the eyes of far too many an American.

The third poem in *Don't Call Us Dead*, "it won't be a bullet" illustrates the same idea. Death is inevitably interwoven with the experience of Blackness in the United States: "in the catalogue of ways to kill a black boy, find me / buried between the pages stuck together / with red stick. ironic, predictable" (28). The lyric I's awareness of their disfavored situation is not in any way softened or evaded. Rather, early death is confirmed as "predictable" for Black people, and murder assumed as natural to the extent that there is even a "catalogue of ways to kill a black boy." With Foucauldian undertones, death is expressed in Smith's poetry as a quotidian fact, a procedure both surveilled and supported by the medical institution: "the doctor will explain death / & i'll go practice" (28). The speaker's foretelling intuition in "for black boys" puts it plainly: "a cold black boy body is a prophecy fulfilled. you have always been a dying thing" (20).

"ANYTHING SCARY & AFRICAN"

More than half a century separates Smith's work from Jones's, yet, to date, racialized violence and the impunity it is met with persist. What is new about Smith's poetry, though, is

their exploration of the *poz*² condition in its close connection to both death and Blackness. Regarding these two issues as explicitly approached in *Don't Call Us Dead*, one could attempt to establish a division between those poems specifically concerning racialization and those expressing the experience of HIV. In fact, on September 14, 2017, Smith explained that the collection was originally conceived as two separate books: “one that held a lot of poems written in the year following my positive HIV diagnosis and another written around the continuing narrative of state-sanctioned and home-grown violence against Black people in the USA” (Williams). To the editor’s suggestion, however, the poet decided to merge both collections into a larger project, one dealing with “many different thoughts on mortality and living” (Williams). The poems are thus not organized into chapters but instead resemble a rather chaotic amalgam of interconnected writing, a three-dimensional constellation of words that flow across images and motifs. Although some of the poems contain a majority of references to police brutality and others engage more in contagion and seroconversion, it would be completely impossible to separate *Don't Call Us Dead* into two distinct, individual volumes. Indeed, the issues of racial discrimination and serophobia overlap constantly in the volume, and they often appear as inseparable from each other.

Smith is not the first to daringly associate HIV infection to racial injustice in the United States. Back in 1993, Philip Brian Harper’s “Eloquence and Epitaph: Black Nationalism and the Homophobic Impulse in Responses to the Death of Max Robinson,” famously established connections between death and Blackness, adding AIDS to other forms of violence against African Americans:

Somehow the enormity of the morbidity and mortality rates for black men (like that for gay men of whatever racial identity) doesn't seem to register in the national consciousness as a cause for great concern. This is, no doubt, largely due to a general sense that the trajectory of the average African-American man's life must 'naturally' be rather short, routinely subject to violent termination. (117)

Alonso and Koreck (1993), too, pointed out this disproportionate amount of non-white victims of HIV/AIDS in “Silences: ‘Hispanics,’ AIDS, and Sexual Practices.” And even within the literary domain of poetry, Smith also pays homage to a path taken by Essex Hemphill’s (1992) spearheading *Ceremonies*, and Jericho Brown’s (2014) more contemporary *The New Testament*. Yet, despite the historical relevance of these writers—which Smith honors and explicitly acknowledges—the craftsmanship in Smith’s verse is unrivalled in its unrestrained political content.

In Smith, the connection between a particular racialized position and HIV contagion is so present that even before the poet’s own seroconversion, the possibility of contracting the illness is already expressed as an unavoidable fate for a queer, Black man. So much so that this awareness is already articulated in *[insert] boy*, where HIV is not yet a central

² The poet frequently uses this abbreviation over the more medical term “seropositive.” This linguistic decision has the twofold effect of both focusing on the “positive” side of the condition, and depathologizing those living with HIV. In order to avoid excessive repetition, both terms appear in this text indiscriminately.

issue. In “10 rentboy commandments or then the white guy calls you a nigger,” for example, the speaker, a Black sex worker, notes how a white client thinks of them “as a lion or AIDS / or anything scary & African” (56). Social prejudice against Blackness is indeed a key element influencing the lyric I’s own self-perception. Moreover, Smith’s inclusion of prostitution and class inequality add to racism and serophobia in the poem to exemplify a model case of intersectionality. Further on in the poem, this complexity is even intensified:

he still called you a nigger
but so what? You still gonna get paid.
(*respect or groceries?*) you still gonna answer
next time he call. (*this is money.*) you still
broke? Still piss (on him) poor? you got clothes
on your back, brandy in your coffee mug.
(*drink.*) is it worth it to stop this history
if you ain’t gonna eat? (56)

Great difficulty is faced when attempting to fragment neatly a position in society in which manifold tangents of identity intersect and overlap. This initial “tension”—to use Smith’s own word regarding [*insert*] boy in their interview with González on December 25, 2018—between the intertwining identitarian layers, sections, or “communities” represented in the first collection is further explored in *Don’t Call Us Dead*, where seropositivity is confirmed: “Is there a word for the feeling prey / feel when the teeth finally sink / after years of waiting?” (63) However expected it may have been, an HIV-positive diagnosis comes as a new burden to bear.

“THE DIAGNOSIS IS JUDGEMENT ENOUGH”

As I have mentioned above, while it might seem historically anachronistic, it is precisely through Smith’s inclusion of HIV as a central *topos* to their work, that the distance separating their poetry from previous writing in and around the BAM can be bridged.³ It is true that the first diagnoses at the onset of the epidemiological crisis were made public in 1982, years after the early dissolution of BART/S. However, *Don’t Call Us Dead* succeeds in breaking historical barriers. In the collection, HIV is many times referred to as a form of imprisonment, and it is in this sense that the experience of discriminatory incarceration imbuing voices such as Jones/Baraka, Angela Davis, Eldridge Cleaver, or Malcolm X’s is present in Smith’s verse. Even decades after what has come to be known as the era of mass incarceration, the poet repeatedly alludes to the harrowing experience of inhabiting a body helplessly perceived not as a sheltering haven, but rather as a constricting prison.

³ The issue of homophobia within the movement could definitely be held as a counterargument against the connection I attempt to establish here, especially when considering key figures in Black Power such as Eldridge Cleaver. However, the incorporation of sexuality and non-normative sexual experiences by “second generation” BAM writers I have mentioned above such as hooks or Lorde debunks the idea. For a general consideration of homophobia in African American writing, see Charles Nero’s (2014) “The Souls of Black Gay Folk.” For a more specific account of the matter, concerning Jones’s plays in particular, refer to José Esteban Muñoz’s (2009) queer reading of the author in the fifth chapter of *Cruising Utopia*, titled “Cruising the Toilet: LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Radical Black Traditions, and Queer Futurity” (83-96).

References to imprisonment pervade Smith's "recklessly" in a compelling exploration of guilt, mourning, and a recently discovered perspective on the self. In the first section of the poem, a luminous collage of Black music culture, the speaker expresses a state of complete shock. The HIV-positive diagnosis generates a flood of images and ideas producing a disorienting effect:

the bloodprison leads to prison
jail doubles as quarantine
chest to chest, men are silent
you're under arrest, under a spell
are you on treatment? PrEP? (wats dat?)
venom:sin:snake:cocksize
I got the cellblock blues
the diagnosis is judgment enough
...
i got the cell count blues
inside a cell: a man/inside his cells: a man
can you keep a secret?
a history of blood: from sacrament to sentence
the red the white the blue of my veins (41)

Engaging in dialog with references ranging from Langston Hughes's "Weary Blues" to R&B music by Beyoncé, the poet uses a number of wordplays and metaphors to convey the prison-like character of the *poz* body. For instance, the word "cell" is in this fragment used as a dilogy, being interpretable either as prison units, or as T lymphocytes—also known as "T-cells," the deficiency of which is caused by HIV, and the number of which must therefore be counted to check patients' health status. The same term is also used to express the peculiar alteration in the perception of physical limits or intersubjective connection: "inside a cell: a man/inside his cells: a man" (41). Smith generates a Russian-doll effect, an almost pictorial feeling of continuity deceiving conventional logic, as in one of Escher's maze-like drawings.

After various stages of initial bewilderment, however, the fifth section of the poem stumbles towards acceptance in an active exercise of self-forgiveness and atonement:

it's not a death sentence anymore
it's not death anymore
it's more
it's a sentence
a sentence (45)

Striving for inner peace, Smith's efforts to relativize the effects of illness closely resemble prayer. It is almost a mantra, quietly uttered to assimilate HIV, a hopeful attempt to deconstruct the condition and turn it into mere linguistic signs on a page. The lyric I struggles to reassure themselves that being HIV-positive does not necessarily imply developing AIDS, that it is now possible to live with HIV. The obtained result is nevertheless not entirely trustworthy.

It is true that thanks to medical advances HIV may not entail a necessarily painful, unavoidable death, but the ability to face seroconversion depends greatly on the geopolitical situation of the patient.⁴ From his racialized, working-class background, treatment affordability continues to be an unspoken, socially-unquestioned barrier, yet Smith's speaker valiantly resists defeat. They refuse to cast a blind eye on the political interests in not dealing with the persisting issue of HIV in the US. Even if it may not be a "death sentence anymore," society has still not truly changed its perception of the disease, and this Smith must denounce. The death sentence that the poet tries to dismantle seems to mutate in uncontrollable ways, even under their cropping will. Uttering the "sentence" may no longer signify legal punishment, yet the author knows perfectly well that it entails social stigma. Does the last line in the poem, then, refer to the fact that HIV diagnosis can be reduced to a mere utterance? Or is the speaker defeated in that HIV might not necessarily involve legal punishment but still engages a public form of imprisonment?

On a different note, it is also interesting to read Smith's verse in light of Tim Dean's (2008) highly controversial article "Breeding Culture," where he attempts to engage in an optimistic viewpoint on HIV. Dean daringly envisions the condition as having the potential to connect seropositive bodies to one another in a community-like network he names "blood brotherhood." Unsurprisingly, Smith's lines do not fail to convey such unexpected interconnectedness:

i hate my husband
 he left we with child

i cut his awful seed out of me
 but it always grows back (51)

However, while Smith's poetry does sometimes ring with notes similar to Dean's utopian perspective, it evidently shows that the punitive character of a socially stigmatized illness is stronger than any bond, imposing isolation—if not death—on the *poz* body.

After attempting to come to terms with the "death sentence" of HIV in "recklessly," the lyric I in "it began right here" accepts their fate: "they say it's not a death sentence // like it used to be. but it's still life. i will die in this bloodcell. / i'm learning to be all the space I need" (55). Were that to be true, though, could HIV still be some other form of penalty, maybe an even more terrible one?

THE PRISON OF 'I'

As Baldwin's *If Beale Street Could Talk* did in the 20th century, Smith's poetry presents the frequent practice of unfair incarceration of Black people in the US. In Baldwin's novel, father-to-be Fonny is falsely accused of rape, arrested and jailed before trial, thus being forced to leave Tish go through pregnancy without him. Smith's verse, on the other hand, rather

⁴ On this particular aspect of living with HIV, see Joshua Pocius's (2016) "Of Bodies, Borders, and Barebacking: The Geocorpographies of HIV."

than present a similar, updated case, reconceives the whole penitentiary system. Besides the added element of a disease as both cause and effect of imprisonment, what strikes the contemporary reader about Smith's work, is the fact that, as opposed to their predecessors' fierce claim to innocence, the lyric I hesitates to set themselves free of guilt. Rather, Smith illustrates how the HIV+ subject is made to feel responsible for their own health status. Building up on the moral approach to the disease, which insists on seeing it as a punishment for one's own reckless behavior,⁵ the HIV positive are made to assume the consequences of their "sin." Just as Baldwin presented his readers with innocent men taken to jail for crimes they had not committed, Smith suggests a type of inward incarceration for the seropositive. Not only responsible for their acts, those infected with HIV also pose a threat to others. This is plain in the self-annihilating observation taking place in the outstanding sonnet corona "crown:"

my blood a river named medusa. every man
i touch turns into a monument. i put
flowers at their feet, their terrible stone feet.
they grow wings, stone wings, & crumble. (57)

That is what Smith means by "the diagnosis is judgment enough," that the religious discourse preserved within the generalized perspective on the epidemic leads its victims to shame and self-repression under in the name of public wellbeing and healthcare. In the 21st century, Smith seems to point out, the penitentiary mechanism works differently from the 60s. Back then, suspects were falsely accused of crimes, then jailed without a trial. Today, HIV is a self-imposed type of penalty: it is the victims themselves that created a conception of their bodies likening them to jail cells.

In *Topologie der Gewalt*, Byung-Chul Han (2016) notes that in contemporary Western societies, violence, rather than having disappeared, has been internalized. Long gone are the days of "obedience societies" where an almighty ruler would impose his will on his subjects. Today, Han explains, ours is an "achievement society" in which explicit violence is no longer necessary to implement social control. Following the models of success blasted on the media, propelled by the ideal of self-sufficiency promoted in the American Dream, and guided by magical voluntarism, achievement-subjects do not need a master to actively impose punishment upon them. For it is the subdued who set themselves slave-like conditions in order to climb the ladder. Hegelian dynamics consequently persist in formerly unsuspected, subtler forms. Hence the philosopher's remark that the achievement-subject's "paradoxical freedom turns them into both victim and butcher, both master and slave" (193). While Han's arguments are at times overgeneralizing about a deceptively homogeneous Global North—factors such as race, gender and other minoritizing aspects do not enter his analysis—his dialectic metaphors do illustrate an expanding symptom and, in our

⁵ See Leo Bersani's *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (2010).

case, serve to explain a phenomenon revealed in Smith's poetry. The discriminatory mechanisms theorized by Han often materialize in the social contours depicted by Smith, resulting in the inescapable feeling of guilt pervading *Don't Call Us Dead*.

In contemporary U.S. society, Smith shows, seropositive individuals are made to assume responsibility for what is seen as their own self-destruction. In "litany with blood all over," too, guilt is expressed as one's own creation:

the test results say i am the father
of my own end

& i am

a deadbeat (49)

The link between specific segments of society and HIV transmission certainly proves useful to turn whole communities into victims of racist, homophobic discrimination. And what better way to refuse social or institutional help than attributing responsibility to the affected?

It may very well be that HIV does not necessarily imply death in a strictly literal sense anymore—as long as the needed medical assistance is provided, of course. However, *Don't Call Us Dead* evinces a terrible truth: that of excessive self-consciousness resulting in self-restriction around sexual intercourse. While the subject in Smith's work is not physically imprisoned, a feeling only comparable to incarceration is constantly referred to. But when can self-imposed imprisonment end? In this regard, Smith's situation presents a form of self-imposed "indefinite detention," in terms coined by Judith Butler (2004) in *Precarious Life*. Taking the case of Guantanamo prisoners as an example, Butler argues that certain subjects occupy a social position that goes against the will of power. These persons' lives are understood as undesirable, so they are kept away from their right to liberty. Locked up in jail indefinitely, without a prospect to be unchained anytime soon, the victims lose all hope of "livability." Taking the reader back to the ideas presented in "recklessly," Smith's lyric I in "it began right here" states the awareness of such a cruel fate: "they say it's not a death sentence // like it used to be. but it's still life. i will die in this bloodcell. / i'm learning to be all the space i need" (55). Smith's lines present inevitable analogies with Butler's notion of indefinite detention. "To be detained indefinitely," Butler explains, "is precisely to have no definitive prospect for a reentry into the political fabric of life, even as one's situation is highly, if not fatally, politicized" (68).

By losing their livability, then, the seropositive lose any form of agency, as possibilities of social involvement are nullified. Self-imposed detention as expressed by Smith thus illustrates how an HIV+ subject becomes a no-subject. Significantly, Smith's lyric I is both the master and the victim of their own judgment, so that there is no prospect of ever leaving their own "bloodcell." As a racialized outlaw, the *poz* self must submit themselves to indefinite detention. Briefly yet eloquently, Smith expressed Butler's paradoxically politicized state of being unable to access "the political fabric of life" when, in the aforementioned

interview with Williams, the poet denounced that “we internalize the justice system.” Once the body has become a “bloodprison,” once “justice” has become part of oneself, little hope is left. By means of the developed penitentiary imagery, and strengthening the link between prison and the police as agents of serophobic violence, Smith again wonders:

now, what
to do with my internal
inverse, just how
will i survive the little
cops running inside
my veins, hunting
white blood cells &
bang bang
i'm dead (65)

Such a notion as internalized police agents must inevitably take us back to the days of BART/S when, as William J. Maxwell (2015) explains in *F.B. Eyes*, the FBI monitored BAM lectures, meetings and publications. Under Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidency, J. Edgar Hoover ensured environments liable to instigate political movements continued to be strongly surveilled. In the 21st century, Smith testifies to the fact that invigilation has been perfected to the point of it being skillfully integrated within the self. The inclusion of police agents “running inside” Smith’s lyric I’s veins both recovers and updates the condemnation of deliberate racial discrimination carried out by BAM writers. However, discrimination is now intensified by the assumption of twofold responsibility by HIV+ subjects, since seropositivity implies an obvious danger to the self and it is also depicted as a potential threat to the general public. HIV is seen as a both inward and outward threat. No wonder, then, that the police—and, by extension, the penitentiary system—intrude into the HIV-positive, working from within the victim’s veins. As repressive forces are integrated within one’s own system, the act of surveillance is both embodied and performed by the very victims of the epidemic. Repression and control are thus interiorized by the seropositive. As Han rightly argues, achievement societies such as the United States produce subjects who inevitably become both victim and butcher. Indeed, *Don’t Call Us Dead* showcases the invisible workings through which the dominant discourse turns the HIV-positive subject into a living—dare I say dying?—panopticon.

“THEY SENT A BOY WHEN THE BULLET MISSED”

Having fully experienced their position as a Black, queer person in contemporary US society, Smith’s speaker, too, grows more and more critical. *Don’t Call Us Dead* conveys a sharp awareness that aggressions against the position it speaks for, despite their increasingly disguised and subterraneous ways, are the result of the current system of oppression. Smith’s reader is thus faced with the fact that, as Doug Meyer (2015) laments in *Violence Against Queer People*, violence “comes with the job” of being Black and gay in America (54). It comes as no surprise, then, that the lyric I in Smith’s work asks themselves whether HIV might

actually be inflicted not only deliberately, but also with full support from the state's institutional power. Adding their work to a seemingly never-ending list of voices demanding justice for US citizens of color, Smith reminds us that HIV is still used, even today, as a weapon against the non-normative:

i got this problem: i was born
black & faggoty
they sent a boy
when the bullet missed. (66)

Having been through innumerable situations of pain, the speaker concludes that the violence suffered for being Black on the one hand and HIV-positive on the other must be linked:

do i think someone created AIDS?
maybe. i don't doubt that
anything is possible in a place
where you can burn a body
with less outrage than a flag (65)

How far removed is Smith's complaint from the Black Power posters literally depicting policemen as pigs inflicting merciless violence on Black civilians? The connection established between patriotic iconography and violence in Smith's "every day is a funeral & a miracle" is significant in how criminal justice in the United States is linked to HIV. Growing to understand this issue as institutionalized violence against the non-normative, the speaker comes to realize his own country is in fact not interested in helping. Further down in the poem, the speaker juxtaposes victims of police brutality—Tamir Rice, Rekia Boyd, John Crawford—to their own body's organs—liver, kidneys, lungs—in a same, fatal list to then realize: "some of us are killed / in pieces, some of us all at once" (65). The lyric I is thus depicted as yet another drop of water in an ocean of murderous crimes. And it is this conception of the self as a part of a larger reality that makes Smith's work speak for so many. In "it won't be a bullet," the singular subject undergoes an unexpected transformation into a plural:

i'm not the kind of black man who dies on the news.
i'm the kind who grows thinner & thinner & thinner
until light outweighs us, & we become it, family
gathered around my barely body telling me to go
toward myself. (28)

The singular subject is suddenly developed into the plural forms "us" and "we". The *poz* body grows so dangerously emaciated that, indeed, his individuality disappears, joining a community of those affected by violence as is the speaker in *Don't Call Us Dead*. In "I've Got a Testimony" (2016), McKinley E. Melton marks how the works of both James Baldwin and Danez Smith "collectively give voice to their humanity, while simultaneously confirming the reality of their communities, in all of their nuanced complexity, with their trials and triumphs, beauty and flaws" (23). Indeed, kinship and community-making play a crucial

role in political struggles. Just as members of the Black Power movement believed in the impact of traditional fictive kinship terms “brother” and “sister” to strengthen bonds among Black Americans, Smith’s poetry leads the reader from the individual to the communal, from “I” to “we.”

THE OPEN SPACES OF “WE”

As we have already seen, the poet’s work carries on not only the BAM’s radical art, but also a tradition of Black critical thinkers questioning their belonging in US society. Thinking about the lives of other HIV+ Black men as Hemphill or Saints, Smith commented in an interview with Kate Kellaway for *The Guardian* on March 21, 2018,

I think about them all the time. They were gay, black and passed away in the 90s. They had such a clear vision about what it meant to survive with this disease. I want to sit with them and ask what their perfect world would be. I want to know what they think of this current moment.

Moments of acknowledgment to precedents are indeed perfectly explicit in *[insert] boy* as much as in *Don’t Call Us Dead*, where James Baldwin and Audre Lorde are quoted alongside John Singleton and Drake. In terms of content, Smith’s powerful “dear white america” is somewhere in between Langston Hughes’s “Let America Be America Again” and Amiri Baraka’s “Why Is We Americans.” However, while Smith’s piece does not aim to recover what Hughes perceived as the original, all-englobing freedom in the America of Whitman’s pioneers, neither does it demand compensation for the damages suffered, as Baraka’s poem fiercely claims. Instead, Smith’s is a direct acknowledgement of the reality of African American experience, past and present: “we did not build your boats (though we did leave a train of kin to guide us home). we did not build your prisons (though we did & we fill them too). We did not ask to be part of your America (though are we not America? Her joints brittle & dragging a ripped gown through Oakland?)” (25). Rather than complain, then, Smith’s poem creates a utopian space in “darker planets” where Blackness can be lived fully: “i’ve left Earth to find a place where my kin can be safe, where black people ain’t but people the same color as the good, wet earth.” Once in this new Promised Land, the speaker makes sure to claim

this life, this new story & history you cannot steal or sell or cast overboard or hand or beat or drown or own or redline or shackle or silence or cheat or choke or cover up or jail or shoot or jail or shoot or jail or shoot or ruin this, if only this one, is ours.

Climaxing the final polysyndeton, the alternation of jailing and shooting again takes us to the deadly state of indefinite detention referred to above. Most significant, though, is the urge to claim this new experience as “ours,” which indicates that “will toward self-determination” that Neal recognized and found hope in within the Black Arts Movement. This connection to BAM as described by Neal is also true of Smith’s “summer, somewhere,” which invokes a new, dreamlike, inhabitable space:

here, not earth
nor heaven, we can't recall our white shirts

turned ruby gowns. here, there's no language
for *officer* or *law*, no color to call *white*.

if snow fell, it's fall black. please, don't call
us dead, call us alive someplace better. (3)

Concluding the first section of the opening poem in the collection, Smith's words certainly ring with that Nealian dream of a shared “nationhood.” Regrettably, reality differs from the utopian aspirations in Smith's work. Often, the collection presents pain beyond measure, even reaching the point of considering suicide. Devastatingly, Smith's lyric I remembers: “America might kill me before I get the chance. /my blood is in cahoots with the law” (66).

Aware of the importance of media as an institutionalized expression of power in the United States, Smith's aforementioned claim “i am not the kind of black man that dies on the news” (28) exemplifies Meyer's statement on selective media coverage. As Meyer declares, “stigmatized aspects of LGBT people such as being HIV-positive are frequently hidden from public view, while normative aspects such as being white, male, and middle class become part of the representation” (6). Whereas representation of HIV in the media is not an issue I aim to approach in this paper, it should be noted that Smith's line highlights the persistence of a terribly unjust situation. Back in 1987 Simon Watney's now canonical work *Policing Desire* denounced that “what we read [in the media] is a literature of containment, endlessly policing human sexuality, as if the powers of the police themselves were insufficient to contain the dangers of deviance, henceforth to be branded indelibly with the ideological skull-and-crossbones sign of Aids” (12). More than thirty years after the publication of Watney's insightful text, Smith's poetry plays an updating twist on Watney's idea. It is not so much that “the powers of the police” are “insufficient” to contain AIDS—or its currently prevalent previous stage: HIV. It is, rather, that the United States has used the pandemic as a substitution for a part of the interventions formerly carried out by the police. As George Ayala and Patrick “Pato” Hebert (2012) protest in “The Soul of Our Work,” “it is not a coincidence that HIV in the States is hitting hardest with black gay men and Latino gay men” (131).

“PLAGUE AND GENOCIDE”

This intricate, racializing connection is presented most blatantly in *Don't Call Us Dead*. As “1 in 2” reminds us, data estimates that “1 in 2 black men who have sex with men will be diagnosed with HIV in their lifetime” (61). Smith's verse has the courage and the skill to beautifully sum it up in one painful line: “*plague* and *genocide* meet on a line in my body” (63). While the biblical reference to a plague refers to guilt in the seropositive subject, the added notion of genocide adds the idea of being a victim of a perfectly conscious mass massacre, thus making a clear accusation against the US. The concepts of genocide and

plague, Smith shows, are not contradictory. In fact, they “meet on a line” in the speaker’s body. *Don’t Call Us Dead* thus documents a struggle against guilt by making a bold accusation: that HIV/AIDS was not a crisis. It was, and still is, a genocide.

On this note, Smith’s significant reference to HIV as a “genocide” takes us to Ann Cvetkovich’s (2003) spearheading work *An Archive of Feelings*, where she insists on the need to re-examine the idea of trauma and conceptualizes it in relation to everyday experiences of race, gender, sexuality and AIDS. Taking Blackness as an example, Cvetkovich’s proposed revision of the notion of trauma allows for a broader use of the term to refer to subtler, if equally devastating, situations of the non-normative:

Whether the language of trauma is used or not, the project of investigating racial histories needs to be part of an interdisciplinary trauma studies. Everyday forms of racism, many of which are institutional or causal and thus don’t always appear visible except to those who are attuned to them, are among the effects of longer histories of racial trauma. (6)

Yet even more illuminating to Smith’s work is Cvetkovich’s statement when she reflects that “trauma histories are frequently taken up as national urgencies, histories that must be remembered and resolved in order for the nation to survive a crisis or sustain its integrity” (36). In contrast with this need, she protests that, just as any major event claiming the lives of thousands of citizens, AIDS should be treated as a national issue. In her own words: “AIDS has thus achieved the status of what I call national trauma, standing alongside the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, World War I, and other nation-and world-defining events as having a profound impact on history and politics” (160). Smith’s work is crystal-clear proof that the AIDS crisis, not to mention the current state of HIV, has not yet been understood as a trauma in mainstream, heteronormative US culture. It has never been seen as an urgent, nor national issue.

Just as crime was generally taken as an excuse for incarceration in the times of the Black Arts Movement, it may very well be, Smith illustrates, that institutionalized power now manipulates and brandishes HIV as a crime in itself in order to continue its systematic oppression of certain sectors in society. The state could be dealing with unwanted minoritized subjectivities, Smith warns the reader, through the systematic spread—or the equally harmful lack of prevention—of HIV/AIDS. Smith’s claim does not follow an impression. After firing the president’s HIV advisory council, in February 2018 the Trump administration proposed budget cuts of \$800 million to HIV/AIDS programs. What to make of this when 73% of those living with HIV in the United States contracted it in same-sex intercourse? When three quarters are non-white people?⁶ When a disproportionately large portion of HIV patients depend on such an increasingly neglected public healthcare system as Medicare? Apparently, under President Trump’s tenure, not even future victims of HIV are a concern.

6 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. 2017 Statistics. <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/statistics/overview/ataglance.html>

Smith's voice is essential in so far as it testifies to the fact that, long after Susan Sontag's (1998) *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, serophobia continues to propagate and to affect a large and suspiciously segmented portion of US citizens. Besides the multiple accusatory suggestions in their poetry, Smith themselves has also made public declarations regarding this issue. In their interview with Kellaway, the poet was not shy to point fingers when they stated: "I hope Trump will move poets who have long thought of poems as apolitical to reconsider."

Immersed in the 21st century, Smith's blues boldly accuses US force and penitentiary institutions of the disproportionate repression of racialized bodies. What can easily be deduced from the timeliness of their voices throughout decades in recent history is a confirmation of Butler's daring statement that a "hierarchy of grief" is taking place in the United States. Following on from her notion of livability as explained above, the philosopher condemns that in her country "certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war, while other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as 'grievable'" (32). If a life is not livable, rarely will it be seen as grievable, and vice-versa. James Baldwin's narrative depicted how insignificant African Americans were to institutionalized power during the second half of the 20th century. Danez Smith's poetry illustrates that, today, racialized Americans continue to occupy non-grievable—and, by extension, non-livable—positions in contemporary society. Critical writing examining the connection between Blackness and discrimination has certainly existed for a long time. Yet, time after time, such criticism sadly continues to prove necessary.

WHO COULD WE BE?

Despite the apparent disconnection of HIV/AIDS from the cause fought for by different artists included in and working around the Black Arts Movement, Danez Smith's poetry comes to show that it is precisely the disease that can allow such a cross-temporal link. Smith's expression of HIV as a form of imprisonment within one's own body is in direct dialog with the experience of negritude as a cause for incarceration developed by their precedents as a response to the disproportionate amount of racialized US citizens affected by mass incarceration. What differs from the earlier examples of this type of discrimination, though, is the fact that violence has successfully been invisibilized in the 21st century. These days, *poz* subjects—the majority of whom are racialized in the US—are taken as rebelliously nonconforming and, thus, made to assume responsibility for their condition through self-imposed, indefinite detention.

Exploring this new form of incarceration, Smith's verse in *Don't Call Us Dead* attempts to fight the sentence imposed on the seropositive which denies them their right to a livable life. Bridging the gap between minoritized communities, Smith demands recognition. Yet, "to ask for recognition," Butler argues, "or to offer it, is precisely not to ask for

recognition for what one already is” (44). Rather, “it is to solicit a becoming, to instigate a transformation, to petition the future always in relation to the Other.” So who is that “Other?” And who is that “us” Smith wants readers to recognize, to give life back to in *Don’t Call Us Dead*? It is many people in one group, many groups in one word. It is the collective consciousness Black Arts Movement writers had dreamed of, it is their envisaged self-determination, their longed for nationhood. And still, that expansive “us” unites the body in the poems to that of diverse communities, too. Queerness, Blackness, as well as seropositivity, all play a role and unite the lyric I to a larger network. Stemming from a line in “summer, somewhere,” the title to Smith’s collection manages to project an individual experience onto a broader stage. The pluralized pronoun enables a necessary claim of non-exclusiveness. As in the Black Arts Movement, a community politics is praised and envisioned as an ark of salvation, as the North Star to orient those who refuse to be lost.

In a beautifully nostalgic conversation with Peter Mishler on September 27, 2017, Smith refused to remain stuck in the past, or even in the present. Envisioning a promising world of possibilities ahead, the poet reflected, “[w]hen I am building a world in a poem, I think ‘Who could we be? What must I leave recognizable so we can see ourselves here and where do I have room to play?’” And it is precisely that wide realm of possibilities that gives Smith’s verse the room for a hope to go along with the pain. Repressive forces in the US might seclude *poz* subjects into a life-long sentence, yet, across space, through cell bars, the poet gives voice to a community of millions. Danez Smith’s collection is a desperate call to recognize a silent plurality, but it is also a rightful claim to life, a call to self-determination, an appeal to community-making, to re-gain nationhood. Out of Smith’s pages a mighty roar refuses to go unheard: Don’t call us dead!

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WRITING 1968: A NATIVE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE NINETEEN-SIXTIES

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ABSTRACT

One feature of United States public memory is the way in which it tends to neglect the Native American perspective on mainstream American history, regardless of their involvement. This holds true even for the nineteen-sixties, a decade that is generally seen as multi-faceted. Even if there are countless established memories of this well-remembered decade, however, the Native American narrative is not one of them. Using Vine Deloria's *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969) and *We Talk, You Listen* (1970), this paper will explore Native American understandings of the Vietnam War and the African American freedom struggle. Both were focal points of division in United States society at the time and have since come to define public memory of the nineteen-sixties, but are rarely considered from a Native American perspective.

Keywords: Vietnam War, Civil Rights, Black Power, Native American Studies, Vine Deloria, 1968

INTRODUCTION

Looking at the periods that have come to define United States history, few decades in recent memory have continued to haunt the public imagination quite as much as the nineteen-sixties. Often described in such terms as the “key decade” of the twentieth century (Rockwell 2013, 4) and “a period when the United States lost its way” (Strain 2017, vi), or conversely, a time when “liberation and freedom” (Strain 2017, vi) were found (cf. Isserman and Kazin 1999; Hall 2012; Witham and Haliwell 2018), it is perhaps not surprising that the period's significance continues to be debated even half a century later. After all, it was a time when the United States had to confront its racist past in the wake of the African American struggle for equal rights, ran into the limitations of its new role as a world leader during the Vietnam War, and underwent a political shift culminating in the election of President Richard Nixon. In each of these interconnected narratives, 1968 functions as a pivotal year.

In the 2013 *New York Times* retrospective *The Times of the Sixties*, a collection of defining articles from the decade, these common threads are particularly pronounced as well, featuring articles on civil rights protests, the Kennedys, and the war in Vietnam. These are the stories that made headlines at the time, and subsequently these are also the stories that have been passed down and remembered, whereas others have been forgotten. Most notably, Native American memories are altogether absent from both the book's articles and its introduction looking back on the 1960s half a century later. Obviously, newspapers are but one manifestation of a broader pattern of historical silence. Hence, it is not surprising that when Americans remember the events and developments now taken as defining of the

nineteen-sixties, it tends to be a rather narrow view informed by the experiences of mainstream society, which overlooks a range of alternative memories.

As such, public memory of the nineteen-sixties is multi-faceted in some respects and surprisingly uniform in others. This is true even as certain hegemonic interpretations have lost standing, most notably the idea that American society saw a change for the better in the early nineteen-sixties followed by a change for the worse—the “rise and fall’ or ‘declension’ narrative” (Hall 2012, 6). While this narrative has made way for more open-ended interpretations of the decade that take a broader perspective in some regards (Hall 2012, 17), old frameworks persist both inside academia and outside of it, especially when it comes to the social groups whose stories are remembered, including Native Americans. In this respect, the creation of public memory as a more or less coherent narrative continues to work along lines of ethnicity, class, and gender (see e.g. Reyes 2010). In the context of the nineteen-sixties, the 1994 collection of essays *The Sixties: From Memory to History* is a good illustration of this fact, as it presents the expected narrative of the decade as time of political and cultural change. Despite striving to “gain some clarity in thinking through who we were back then, who we might have become, and who we wish to be” (Farber 1994, 4) and covering a range of political and social issues, American minority groups occupy only a marginal position in the book.

Although some memories of the nineteen-sixties where Native Americans were protagonists have found their way into the mainstream consciousness, especially the main actions of the Red Power movement, uniquely American Indian perspectives of national trends are generally overlooked. This in spite of the fact that Native Americans were soldiers in Vietnam (even in disproportionate numbers, see Holm 1989, 58), voted in the elections of 1964 and 1968, and marched along with civil rights activists. Crucially, they made sense of these events from a perspective rooted in their own cultures and histories. Nonetheless, this type of involvement in the big historical events of the decade continues to be neglected in favor of more specifically Native American topics, such as the fight against termination,¹ protests for fishing rights and Red Power activism. This is true both in general histories like Van Gosse and Richard R. Moser’s *The World the Sixties Made* (2003), Mark Lytle’s *America’s Uncivil Wars* (2006), Christopher Strain’s *The Long Sixties* (2017), and Nick Witham and Martin Haliwell’s *Reframing 1968* (2018), as well as more specific texts, such as Terry H. Anderson’s *The Movement and the Sixties* (1995) or Sherry Smith’s *Hippies, Indians, and the Fight for Red Power* (2012). Finally, it is important to recognize recent historical accounts that reframe the American past from a Native American perspective, most notably Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz’ *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States* (2014) and David Treuer’s *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee* (2019), which inevitably touch upon the major events of the nineteen-sixties as well.

¹ Termination refers to the United States federal policy of the 1960s and sixties that aimed to assimilate Native American communities by revoking tribal sovereignty status and dissolving reservations (see e.g. Fixico 1986; Ulrich 2010).

Nevertheless, specific texts dealing with the Native American nineteen-sixties remain few and far between.

Turning to the era itself, however, the Native American point of view on domestic and foreign policies is far from absent. A good example is the work of Standing Rock Sioux intellectual Vine Deloria Jr. (1933-2005), who started a long career of writing about the position of Native Americans during the late nineteen-sixties. Deloria was one of the most influential American Indian critics of his time. Serving as the executive director of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) between 1964 and 1967, Deloria knew first-hand the concerns and feelings of Native Americans. As an author, he used these experiences to present a Native American perspective on contemporary United States society. In his early works, especially the essay collections *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969, 1988) and *We Talk You Listen* (1970, 1972), Deloria specifically addressed contemporary issues affecting American Indian communities such as the federal termination policy, but he also described his views on the larger state of affairs in the late nineteen-sixties. Because he wrote these texts so close in time to when the actual events occurred, Deloria's work has the potential to illustrate how Native American people experienced those events as they were happening. In the second instance, these kinds of writings challenge commonly accepted narratives rooted in biased reconstructions formed after the fact.

Considering the potential value of Deloria's work as a historical source for understanding the Indigenous perspective on American society at large, this paper will attempt to answer the following question: What new understandings of the 1960s can we gain from Vine Deloria's essays? Of the various developments of the decade, the focus here will be on the African American freedom struggle and the Vietnam War, as these were two of the most divisive issues of the time and the ones discussed most extensively by Deloria. In order to answer this question, this essay will first offer background on Deloria and the reception of his works before turning to an analysis of Deloria's writings about the Vietnam War and the African American freedom struggle in two essays from *Custer Died for Your Sins* and one from *We Talk, You Listen*. Where relevant, I will also compare Deloria's work to writings by James Baldwin and Eldridge Cleaver, both of whom were similarly influential critics.

VINE DELORIA AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

Many scholars have written about the trajectory of Deloria's personal and professional life (see e.g. Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997, Hoxie 2012, Martínez 2019). Born in South Dakota in 1933, Vine Deloria Jr. was the "descendant of generations of illustrious Deloria men" (Martínez 2019, 16), many of whom had been respected members of the Lakota community in their own right. Growing up near the Pine Ridge reservation, Deloria initially trained to become a minister like his father, but soon turned to advocacy. He entered the national

stage in 1964 when he was elected as executive director of the NCAI, promising to unite Native Americans in their stand against the federal government.

Deloria's tenure as executive director of the NCAI ended in 1967 when he resigned to pursue a law degree at the University of Colorado. Around that time, Deloria began writing *Custer Died for Your Sins*, which quickly became a huge success after it was published in August of 1969 (Martínez 2019, 6), especially following the occupation of Alcatraz by Native American protesters on November 20 that same year. Despite becoming an increasingly prominent public figure, Deloria was not directly involved in this new wave of activism. His position as a witness rather than a direct participant lent him a degree of critical distance. Over the course of the decades following the publication of *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Deloria published nearly thirty books and scores of essays on topics ranging from science to religion to politics. All the while, he continued to be an advocate for Native American issues in a variety of causes, including the foundation of the National American Indian Museum in Washington D.C. and the foundation of an American Indian Studies department at the University of Arizona.

DELORIA STUDIES AND ITS BOUNDARIES

Generally, scholars of Deloria's work tend to remember him as one of the most prolific authors in the field of Native American Studies and a powerful advocate for the rights of American Indian communities, and rightfully so. Given that his works are "knit together by an overarching concern for the place of American Indians in the modern world" (Demallie 2006, 933), it is not surprising that this is also the primary lens through which critics have studied his oeuvre. In his 2019 study of Deloria's early works, David Martínez offers a detailed overview of what he refers to as "Deloria Studies" (32), which illustrates this tendency quite clearly. In various obituaries and books published after his death in 2005 (e.g. Demallie 2006, and five articles published in the Fall 2006 issue of the academic journal *Wicazo Sa*), American Indian critics expressed their admiration and confirmed the general image of Deloria as a "role model" for his many contributions to Native American Studies (Tinker 2006, 170). In general, publications on Deloria focus on his position as an influential social critic who contributed greatly to the field of Native American or American Indian Studies. Judging by the literature on his life and legacy, however, the same cannot be said of his possible lessons for American Studies in general. Hence, it is interesting to see not just what Deloria wrote about Native American issues to Indian and non-Indian audiences, but especially what he has to say to American society at large *about* American society and the specific developments of the 1960s.

David Myer Temin (2018) and David Martínez (2019) both address Deloria's perspectives on non-Indian issues in some detail. Martínez devotes an entire chapter to Deloria's views on the African American freedom struggle, citing extensively from both *Custer Died for Your Sins* and *We Talk, You Listen*. Still, the chapter's overall emphasis is

primarily on the ways in which Deloria linked Black Power and Red Power. Likewise, Temin discusses *Custer Died for Your Sins* in the context of a changing perception of United States national identity after the Second World War, addressing the connections between termination policy and ideas of inclusion that played a major role in the early movement for civil rights. In addition, Temin also briefly comments on Deloria's writing about the Vietnam War. Like Martínez, however, Temin discusses these issues mainly in relation to the historical position of Native American communities. Both authors therefore address society-wide issues, but end up circling back to the significance of these developments for American Indian people instead of studying them in their own right. Nevertheless, both of these texts illustrate the value of reading Vine Deloria's work from a different angle that is more concerned with general society.

READING DELORIA

Within Deloria's overall corpus, the texts most valuable to the study of his thinking on the United States of the late nineteen-sixties are his earliest works, what Martínez refers to as the 'Red Power Tetralogy'—*Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969), *We Talk, You Listen* (1970), *God is Red* and *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties* (1974). In each of these books, Deloria presented different facets of contemporary American Indian life, contextualizing the rise of Red Power and giving insight into the issues that Native American communities faced. At the same time, however, Deloria also addressed the wider context of United States society at large. Although he touched upon a range of issues that were not specifically Native American, including the state of the economy, recent presidential elections and the role of religion in the United States, the Vietnam War and the African American freedom struggle feature most prominently and have entire essays devoted to them.

Although there are mentions throughout his early work, three essays from *Custer Died for Your Sins* and *We Talk, You Listen* stand out for their comprehensive overview of Deloria's thoughts on these issues. In *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Deloria discusses the Vietnam War at length in "Laws and Treaties," and the African American predicament is the main subject of "The Red and the Black." *We Talk, You Listen* on the other hand is "more theoretical in tone" (Martínez 2019, 135) and presents a broader vision of activism in the late nineteen-sixties. Particularly relevant here is "Another Look at Black Power", in which Deloria further develops his thinking on the African American protest movement. Taken together, these three essays articulate most clearly how Deloria felt about the ongoing issues of his time. Although *We Talk, You Listen* also includes an essay that pertains to Vietnam, it is concerned less with the military conflict itself, and focuses instead on the specifics of the domestic peace movement.

NEW CONFLICT ABROAD, ONGOING BATTLES AT HOME

In the second essay of *Custer Died for Your Sins*, “Laws and Treaties,” Deloria addresses President Johnson’s argument for continuing the war in Vietnam based on a supposed commitment by the United States to the people of Vietnam. Johnson first laid out this notion in a 1965 speech, stating that “to leave Vietnam to its fate would shake the confidence of all these people in the value of American commitment, the value of America’s word” (Johnson 1965), thus justifying continuation of the war in order to protect the reputation of the United States. In the essay, Deloria takes this speech as the starting point for a discussion of treaty relations between the United States and Native American nations, which in his perspective highlight the irony of Johnson’s remarks. Deloria describes a number of treaties the federal government made with Native nations across the country and some ways in which various promises, including rights to land and sovereignty, were broken. Perhaps the most egregious example of this behavior by the federal government is the taking of native-owned land, of which Deloria gives numerous illustrations, including the forced removal of several southeastern nations during the 1830s. At the end of the chapter, Deloria returns to the issue of Vietnam to demonstrate how the war embodies the same American hypocrisy that is evident from the history of treaty relations.

MAKING AND BREAKING PROMISES

By connecting his views on the Vietnam War to a discussion of treaty relations between the United States and American Indian nations, Deloria makes the case that these issues are in fact two sides of the same coin. The suggestion that the United States would lose face if it failed to keep its commitment to the people of Vietnam rings hollow given that “America has yet to keep one Indian treaty or agreement despite the fact that the United States government signed over four hundred such treaties and agreements with Indian tribes” (Deloria 1969, 28). Not only is the war in Vietnam reminiscent of the way in which the United States has historically treated Native Americans, the conflict also mirrors current behavior toward their communities. Citing a contemporary case where the Kennedy Administration took land from the Seneca tribe for the construction of the Kinzua Dam in 1960, Deloria remarks, “history may well record that while the United States was squandering some one hundred billion dollars in Vietnam while justifying this bloody orgy as commitment-keeping, it was also busy breaking the oldest Indian treaty” (1969, 29). Here, Deloria cites the Pickering Treaty of 1794, which explicitly states that the land on which the dam was built legally belongs to the Seneca tribe unless they decide to sell. For him, such recent incidents and the history of injustice they represent serve as a reminder for Native Americans that the idea of the United States keeping its commitments to non-white peoples in Vietnam or anywhere else is ridiculous (Deloria 1969, 50).

If anything, Deloria’s comments only became more relevant after the occupation of Alcatraz Island, not three months after *Custer Died for Your Sins* was first published. In a

sense, Deloria's reading of the Vietnam War through the lens of treaty relations provides a perfect example of Hoxie's comment that it seemed as if the "angry words in *Custer Died for Your Sins* were taking human form" (2012, 368), as the activists that were mobilizing in Alcatraz made treaty rights an integral part of their strategy. One example of this is their claim to the island based on the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, a mocking gesture that had no legal standing but nonetheless drew attention to the way the federal government has treated treaties. After all, the Treaty of Fort Laramie applied to Sioux territory in the Dakotas, but for the federal government it may as well have applied to Alcatraz or anywhere else, as they displayed a complete disinterest in Native American land claims across the continent. In a similar vein, Native activists staged other events in the following years—such as the 1972 Trail of Broken Treaties and the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee—that further illustrated Deloria's point that treaty promises are not something of the past. Consequently, making an effort to live up to these agreements is a prerequisite for future commitments, in Vietnam and beyond. Indeed, for Deloria the situation in Vietnam is clearly an immoral atrocity, but not necessarily more so than what the United States continues to do within its borders.

It is precisely for this reason that Deloria feels a potential solution to the Vietnam crisis lies in the improvement of relations with Native American tribes domestically. Referring to the war as a "symptom" (Deloria 1969, 52) of American ills, Deloria describes the conflict as "a side issue in comparison with the great domestic issues which must be faced—and justly faced—before this society destroys itself" (1969, 53). Here, Deloria takes Vietnam to be indicative of the imperialism that hides underneath the surface of American exceptionalism, and which could potentially be much more destructive if those affected by it decided to revolt. In his perspective imperialism, although affecting minority communities in myriad different ways—be it reservations, assimilation policies or police brutality—always results in oppression and would give Native Americans and others plenty of reason to make a stand. Vietnam serves to Deloria as a potent reminder of injustices committed within America's borders and is in many ways indicative of domestic tensions. In order to resolve the Vietnam crisis, Deloria therefore concludes that "morality must begin where immorality began" (1969, 52), as the United States should get its domestic affairs in order and reflect on its moral character before turning its gaze outward. That is to say, the United States cannot hope to keep any commitments in Vietnam until the federal government has made an effort to reconcile its imperialist nature.

In addition to being a war with imperialist undertones, the conflict in Vietnam was also part of Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, which Deloria engages with in the essay as well. Most interestingly, Deloria holds up a mirror to the United States by illustrating the similarities between American policy decisions considered acceptable on the one hand and Soviet actions criticized by President Nixon on the other. "It would take Russia another century to make and break as many treaties as the

United States has already violated” (1969, 28), Deloria states in response to a speech by Richard Nixon from the early nineteen-sixties on the treachery of the Soviet Union. To underline this point, Deloria even draws an analogy between the satellite states of the Soviet Union and Native American nations. Here, he suggests that Soviet interventions in Czechoslovakia and Hungary pale in comparison to some of the atrocities committed by the United States (1969, 42), such as the betrayal of Native American tribes that were allies during the War of 1812 and later became victims of Andrew Jackson’s policy of Indian Removal. Perhaps this is not a flawless analogy, given that the comparison overlooks differences in the respective relationships between the United States and Indigenous nations on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and the nations of Eastern Europe on the other. Nevertheless, as a rhetorical device, the comparison Deloria makes between the United States and its adversary is thought-provoking and has enough truth to it to serve as a powerful evidence for showing off American hypocrisy.

DOMESTIC TENSIONS ON AN INTERNATIONAL STAGE

The view of the Vietnam War as a domestic conflict playing out on a larger scale is not unique to the Native American community. James Baldwin and Eldridge Cleaver—African American critics who were, like Deloria, each in their own way at a distance from society and the events they critiqued—likewise wrote about the racist character of the conflict and its parallels to violence occurring in the United States. For example, in a 1967 essay, Baldwin wrote that “the assumptions acted on at home are also acted on abroad, and every American Negro knows this, for he, after the American Indian, was the first ‘Vietcong’ victim” (Baldwin 1967, 202). Where Deloria based his comparison on the specifically Native American issue of treaty relations, this particular analogy is rooted in a more specifically African American experience of United States imperialism. In an analogy presented by Baldwin (1972), the ghetto becomes the Vietnamese village and the Black Panthers the Vietcong (167). Similarly, Cleaver wrote that “the blacks in Watts and all over America could now see the Viet Cong’s point: both were on the receiving end of what the armed forces were dishing out” (1969, 131), likewise equating the two types of violence as manifestations of the same imperialist behavior. Although their oppression takes different forms, both Native Americans and African Americans saw parallels between injustices done to their people within the United States, and the contemporary situation in Vietnam. Even if there is a significant difference between the structural oppression of life in ghettos and on reservations and the direct military assault on the Vietnamese, the similar conclusions drawn by these authors suggest that both are manifestations of a similar logic of white supremacy, causing violence and oppression.

A related issue that Baldwin and Cleaver address is that of minorities fighting in Vietnam. Baldwin wrote, “I challenge anyone alive to tell me why any black American should go into those jungles to kill people who are not white and who have never done him

any harm” (1967, 200), urging his readers to reflect on the fact that American minorities are fighting people in a similar position rather than the real enemy, the white oppressor. In a message to African American soldiers in Vietnam written in January of 1970, Cleaver went so far as to urge soldiers to stop fighting for the United States, even encouraging them to take up arms against American generals if they want to. Obviously, Cleaver’s comments were not unique, as peace protesters frequently presented Vietnamese flags and slogans, and fellow Black Panther Huey Newton even addressed the Vietcong in a 1970 letter, offering to send party members to South Vietnam to aid their cause (Newton 1972, 178-181). What sets Baldwin and Cleaver apart, however, is the direct links they draw between the racist history of the United States from slavery through segregation, and Vietnam. Crucially, such calls to action draw attention to the potential domestic implications of the conflict, echoing Deloria’s warning that American society would tear itself apart if the United States did not come to terms with its history of imperialism. Here another parallel emerges, as Baldwin, Deloria, and Cleaver each in their own way introduce the notion of a reckoning based on the idea that the United States will have to face consequences for the way it has treated non-white communities across the globe. Such fatalism is particularly interesting in hindsight given that it feels almost hyperbolic in retrospect, knowing that none of their predictions came to pass, but indicates just how much was at stake from their perspective.

NATIVE AMERICAN SOLUTIONS TO AFRICAN AMERICAN PROBLEMS

In “The Red and the Black,” the eighth chapter of *Custer Died for Your Sins*, Deloria outlines the perspective of Native Americans on the African American freedom struggle. The essay addresses common misconceptions about the status of Native Americans and their relation to other minority groups, as well as the way the United States government has historically treated different ethnic groups. Writing shortly after the heyday of the civil rights movement, Deloria reflects on the movement’s successes and failures, as well as the reasons why the movement had been unable to realize its full potential. In addition, he describes responses from the American Indian community to the demands and strategies of African American activists. Based on his observations, Deloria outlines his views on the future of federal policy toward minorities, as well as the future of relations between different ethnic groups within the United States, concluding that “the red and the black must not be fooled either by themselves, by each other, or by the white man” (Deloria 1969, 195). In “Another Look at Black Power,” the sixth essay from *We Talk, You Listen*, Deloria follows up on this line of thinking, as he evaluates the successes and failures of the Black Power ideology. Crucially, Deloria argues that American society is “built upon individual expression and has no place for group expression” (Deloria 1972, 112), something that was gradually changing with the rise of these new movements. That is why Deloria concludes that despite the immediate practical failures of the more radical African American movement, their driving

philosophy is a valid one that can help the United States move toward a group-based society.

FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO BLACK POWER: EXPECTING THE INEVITABLE

While not giving a strictly chronological overview, Deloria makes a clear distinction between the different strategies that African Americans employed over the course of the 1960s. The first iteration of black activism involved the explicit demand for civil rights, a concept that “greatly confuses the issue and lessens our chances of understanding the forces involved in the rights of human beings” (Deloria 1969, 178), overlooking the immediate socio-economic circumstances of African Americans. By fighting only for a better legal status in rather abstract terms of equality, these activists failed to get to the root of the problem. As a result, Deloria finds that “for the majority of blacks progress is not made” (1969, 174) because ending segregation in restaurants does not fundamentally change the life of poor African Americans. It is a first step, but ultimately falls short of addressing more structural issues of inequality, which helps to explain why the progress that civil rights activists made did not truly revolutionize United States society.

A very different approach, which initially seemed more promising to Deloria, was Black Power; a notion that he suggests Native Americans had in some ways been anticipating from the start. As Deloria writes, “we only wondered why it had taken so long to articulate” (1969, 180), illustrating his perception that this development was almost a historical inevitability. In the end, however, Deloria concludes that despite its initial promise, the Black Power movement also fell short, because it “was not so much an affirmation of black people as an anti-white reaction” (182), as black activists still mainly presented their demands in opposition to white society. According to Deloria, the crucial problem here is that the African American community lacks ties to a homeland, which prevents them from developing a culture of their own and moving toward peoplehood. Concepts of both land and nationhood are central in his diagnosis of the African American situation—“the black needs time to develop his roots, to create his sacred places, to understand the mystery of himself and his history, to understand his own purpose. These things the Indian has and is able to maintain through his tribal life” (Deloria 1969, 188). The solution to the conundrum of African American rights therefore entails taking separatism to its logical conclusion by creating separate institutions for separate communities. By implication, Deloria feels he cannot say what the best way forward is, because every group can only know for themselves what they truly need. In order for African Americans to get there, however, they first need to develop a greater sense of peoplehood.

In light of these initial comments, it is interesting to see how Deloria’s thinking on the issue of African American rights developed. In “Another Look at Black Power,” Deloria is both outspoken about the failures of Black Power and optimistic about the possibilities for their ideology to point the way forward. After a brief analysis of the philosophy

presented in Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton's *Black Power* (1967), Deloria presents his own vision on the value of embracing group identity. More than simply a way of improving the structural position of African Americans, Deloria argues here that these ideas can also help Americans "find a way beyond the violence and hatred that has characterized the last few years" (1970, 101). From this perspective, Black Power and the movements it inspired—"Chicano Power, Red Power, Flower Power, and Green Power" (Deloria 1970, 101)—ended up aggravating divisions in society. Simultaneously, however, the basic principles underlying these movements can also provide a solution to these divisions by providing a new way of conceptualizing society. Deloria reiterates throughout this essay that the basic idea of embracing group identity is a step in the right direction. For Deloria, moving beyond a society of individuals is crucial, as he feels that "in recognizing the integrity of the group we can understand the necessity for negotiations between groups" (1970, 106)—only once groups know their own needs can they come together and work out their differences. For Deloria, the only way for the United States to survive is by allowing groups to flourish.

THE NATIVE AMERICAN RESPONSE

In his analysis of why the African American protest movements were ultimately unsuccessful, Deloria also gives an impression of the reasons why Native Americans—especially tribal leadership—were generally not interested in getting involved. Where African Americans should look for ways to come into their own as a people, what is important for Native Americans is *maintaining* their cultures (Deloria 1969, 188) and fighting the entirely different struggle of protecting their heritage and sovereignty. To explain these distinctions, Deloria outlines the traditional government policies of assimilation and segregation, by which "the white man forbade the black to enter his own social and economic system and at the same time force-fed the Indian what he was denying the black" (173), placing African Americans and Native Americans in very different and sometimes even opposing positions. Given these contrasting histories, it is not surprising that Native Americans were not interested in events like the March on Washington, where abstract notions of equality were the central concern (Deloria 1969, 179).

Even the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, which targeted more specific issues of poverty and economic equality, represented an endorsement of "middle-class values through pointing out their absence in the life of the poor" (Deloria 1969, 186-87) that ultimately fell short of addressing the real needs of Native Americans, too. At the same time, however, Deloria does acknowledge that while his skepticism was shared by part of the American Indian population, disinterest was only one response among several. Indeed, a number of Native Americans were part of the Campaign's organizing committee and around 100 Native activists protested outside the Bureau of Indian Affairs during the event (Landry 2017, n.p.). What is especially interesting is that, according to Deloria, even those

that did not take part in an event like the Poor People's Campaign were ultimately affected, as "Indian people all over begun to question the nature of their situation" (Deloria 1969, 187) in light of the kinds of concerns raised and the strategies employed to make these demands. Most importantly, Deloria's discussion illustrates that Native American engagement with African American activism was complex and often had unforeseen consequences.

THE CHANGES OF '68

What is interesting to see is that Deloria explicitly identifies the year 1968 as a crossroads in his discussion of African American activism.

No one seemed to know which direction the country would take. Return to the old integration movement seemed out of the question. Continuing to push power movements against the whole of society seemed just as senseless. (Deloria 1969, 183)

For Deloria, it seemed that peaceful activism was definitively over, and Black Power was struggling to live up to its goals. As a result, the way forward seemed uncertain. This sense of despair is embodied by the assassination of Democratic senator and presidential hopeful Robert Kennedy, which Deloria identifies as a particularly pivotal moment for United States society. In fact, he felt that Kennedy's death "has completely changed the nature of the Civil Rights movement and has altered the outlook of the American Indian toward American society" (Deloria 1969, 193). Most importantly, he felt that Kennedy had been one of the few white politicians at the time to go beyond race and identify the real issues facing Native American and African American communities, saying "Robert Kennedy did prove that race was not the real thing bothering this country and that the turmoil over Civil Rights was misunderstood" (Deloria 1969, 192), pointing out his role in changing the discourse. Even though Kennedy's legislative record on Native American issues was disappointing to Deloria (192), he did play an instrumental role in changing the debate on minority issues. In that respect, his death silenced a powerful voice that had been speaking on the behalf of Native Americans.

Interestingly enough, accounts by Baldwin and Cleaver present a similar view of 1968 as a pivotal moment in the struggles for minority recognition. For them, however, *the* defining moment is the assassination of Martin Luther King, an event that Deloria refers to but does not discuss in detail (Deloria 1969, 188). Throughout *No Name in the Street* (1972), Baldwin's retrospective of the nineteen-sixties, Baldwin returns to King's death time and again, frequently referring both to the ways in which it affected him personally and the African American community more generally. Cleaver likewise refers to King's death as a profound moment in his "Requiem for Nonviolence," stating that "the assassin's bullet killed a period of history. It killed a dream" (Cleaver 1968, 1). For Cleaver, however, the assassination was not simply a tragedy but served primarily as a reminder that King's strategy of peaceful activism had indeed been the wrong one.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Vine Deloria's work shows that Native American people often present narratives that are altogether different from those of other groups in United States society. In his discussion of the Vietnam War for example, Deloria focuses not on the geopolitical context of the Cold War in which historians traditionally position the conflict. Instead, he uses that context against the United States to illustrate how the war connects to domestic issues concerning Native Americans. With respect to African American activism, too, Deloria's accounts offer a slightly different understanding from traditional historiography. Crucially, his comments shed light on the Native American view of African American activism. Looking at the place of 1968 in all of these developments, it is interesting to see that Deloria and his contemporaries felt it was indeed a pivotal year in the history of the African American freedom struggle, with the assassinations of King and Kennedy. At the same time, however, this is much less the case for the Vietnam War, even though this is something on which the popular opinion *did* change its views that year.

Considering the discrepancies presented here between what we know from public memory, historiography, and the narratives introduced by Deloria and his contemporaries, it is evident that there are advantages and disadvantages to an approach rooted in contemporaneous accounts such as these. Most importantly, even if there is a short gap of time between events occurring and the publication of a book like *Custer Died for Your Sins*, it still gives an accurate impression of the way people felt about these developments while they were unfolding. That being said, accounts like this are subjective and can be prone to present a one-sided view of history. Furthermore, their closeness to past events means that authors may highlight events that turned out to be of less importance in the long term. An interesting example of this is the fatalism that appears in discussions of the Vietnam War in particular, but emerges in discourses surrounding the Civil Rights Movement as well. The idea that the events of the nineteen-sixties would trigger a reckoning for the racist and imperialist past and fundamentally change the United States ultimately turned out to be unfounded. Nevertheless, these kinds of ideas are an important indication of how strongly people at the time felt about what was happening in society and help to explain why they are perceived as having had such a lasting impact.

Finally, the approach presented here opens up a range of possibilities for future research. For one, this paper only covers three essays from Deloria's vast corpus, which is why the analysis presented here can easily be extended to his other work. For example, Deloria also discussed the Vietnam War at length in *We Talk, You Listen*, albeit in the context of the peace movement. Additionally, Deloria comments on the political process throughout *Custer Died for Your Sins* and *We Talk, You Listen*, another interesting case where his views extend beyond the scope of Native American Studies. Finally, this paper is also limited in its focus on Deloria, who is to some extent representative of the Native American voice but still only a single person from one tribe, which is why it would be

worthwhile to seek out other American Indian authors. What is more, a similar analysis is possible for critics from other backgrounds whose experiences may differ markedly from the narratives presented in mainstream public memory. In the end, Deloria and his contemporaries invite us to expand our views of United States society, and consider points of view that are not traditionally part of narratives about either the past or the present.

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“THE PARANOIA WAS FULFILLED’ – AN ANALYSIS OF JOAN DIDION’S ESSAY ‘THE WHITE ALBUM’”

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at Joan Didion’s essay “The White Album” from the collection of essays *The White Album* (1979), as a relevant text to reflect upon America’s turmoil in the sixties, and investigate in particular the subject of paranoia. “The White Album” represents numerous historical events from the 1960s, but the central role is played by the Manson Murders case, which the author considers it to be the sixties’ watershed. This event—along with many others—shaped Didion’s perception of that period, fueling a paranoid tendency that reflected in her writing. Didion appears to be in search of a connection between her growing anxiety and these violent events throughout the whole essay, in an attempt to understand the origin of her paranoia. Indeed, “The White Album” deals with a period in Didion’s life characterized by deep nervousness, caused mainly by her increasing inability to make sense of the events surrounding her, the Manson Murders being the most inexplicable one. Consequently, Didion seems to ask whether her anxiety and paranoia are justified by the numerous violent events taking place in the US during the sixties, or if she is giving a paranoid interpretation of completely neutral and common events. Because of her inability to find actual connections between the events surrounding her, in particular political assassinations, Didion realizes she feels she is no longer able to fulfill her main duty as a writer: to tell a story. Surrendering to the impossibility of building a narrative, she can only juxtapose images that results in what she defines as a *cutting-room experience*. Paranoia appears to be a *fil rouge* that tightens everything together, influencing Didion’s perception of the world and, ultimately, her writing.

KEYWORDS: Joan Didion, The White Album, Sixties, paranoia, Manson Murders.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last fifty years, numerous studies have been conducted on Joan Didion’s non-fiction and her representation of the sixties (cf. Duncan 2013, Foster and Porter 2012, Houston and Lombardi 2009), but the subject of paranoia in her works has often been overlooked. This article, therefore, aims at investigating the representation of the sixties, and in particular of paranoia, by means of an analysis of Didion’s essay “The White Album,” from the collection of the same name. She gives a subjective and personal representation of the 1960s which, even ten years after the ending of the sixties—when her collection was published—was still an influential point of view on that time, although contemporary historiography would consider it outdated.¹

Joan Didion is a widely recognized author—along with Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Tom Wolfe and many others—belonging to *New Journalism*. New Journalism is a narrative form that developed in early times, in particular during the nineteenth century with Pulitzer and Hearst, but made a comeback in the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century (Dennis and Rivers 2017, vii). The main characteristics of this style are the author’s personal involvement in the narrative and careful field work. From a stylistic point of view,

¹ Didion’s representation of the sixties is, in fact, in line with the *declension thesis* of historiography—now obsolete—according to which the sixties suddenly ended with the decade.

New Journalism allows the writer creative freedom and the use of literary techniques typical of fiction, such as realistic dialogue, personal voice and subjectivity. Along with New Journalism, appears the term *non-fiction*. The term describes a new genre characterized by hybrid stylistic elements, taken from both novel and reportage: non-fiction highlights the subjectivity of this kind of narratives and the authors’ rejection of the possibility of creating an objective form of journalism (Scarpino 2012, 457-458). It was used for the first time in this sense by the writer Tom Wolfe (1973). It is within this context that *The White Album* appeared in 1979.

Didion’s collection features essays dealing with the author’s personal life and her work as a field reporter during the sixties and the seventies in the United States. The essay titled “The White Album” refers extensively to the main events of American 1960s political and social situation, with particular attention to political assassinations. However, in line with New Journalism style, Didion does not tackle historical issues directly, rather she refers to them while describing events belonging to her private life and feelings. The essay results in a portrait of her spiritual confusion, interwoven with (and apparently caused by) major historical events from the history of the Sixties in the US.

While Foster and Porter (2012) focus on *The White Album* mainly to investigate the “Women’s Movement,” or Houston and Lombardi (2009) give a general overview of the essay, this article aims at investigating Didion’s representation of the sixties by analyzing the underlying paranoia in “The White Album.” Indeed, the author represents the Manson Murders as the fulfillment of paranoia, the climax, but the essay presents numerous references to paranoia before the telling of the Manson killings, and draws a path of historical and personal events of which the Manson Murders represent only the final step.

The first section of this article will analyze the way Didion represents the Manson Murders in the “The White Album.” The second section will investigate secondary representations of paranoia in her essay, putting them in relation with some historical events of the sixties. Finally, the last section will assess the consequences that the paranoid interpretation of the historical events of the sixties had on Didion’s writing.

THE MANSON MURDERS FROM JOAN DIDION’S PERSPECTIVE

This first section of the article aims at giving an overview of “The White Album” and its structure, and at analyzing the presence of Joan Didion’s paranoid tendency through a detailed analysis of the section of the essay where the description of the Manson Murders occurs. Indeed, despite the numerous references both to other historical events—such as the assassination of Robert Kennedy, the My Lai massacre and the Black Panther Party—as well as to the popular cultural landscape of the sixties, such as The Doors, Janis Joplin, and new religious groups, the central role in “The White Album” is played by the Manson Murders case, which represents the sixties’ watershed. As Alzena MacDonald notices:

The murder of Tate and the LaBiancas in their own houses demonstrated in absolutely stark and chilling terms that no one, from the richest and well-known Hollywood stars to the anonymous self-made wealthy class, was safe from the lower-class murderers . . . *The murders were a watershed moment that augured the death of the hope and promise of the nascent youth movement of the 1960s and ushered in the profound disillusionment of the 1970s* (MacDonald 2013, 186-187; italics mine).

According to MacDonald, the Manson Murders proved that no one—regardless of their social status—was safe from killers like the Manson Family. As the US was entering a new decade, these murders embodied the symbolic death of all the hopes the sixties youth movements had been promoting.

The Manson Family was a radical commune of roughly a hundred people who lived in California during the late 1960s under the leadership of Charles Manson. Manson's followers began to grow during the Summer of Love in 1967, until 1971, when their leader was imprisoned. The expression Manson Murders refers to the massacre—commissioned by Charles Manson to his “family”—of an eight-months pregnant Sharon Tate Polanski, along with four friends on August 9, 1969, and Leno and Rosemary LaBianca the following night in Los Angeles (in Didion's essay, the killings are referred to as the “Cielo Drive murders” after the area of the city where they were committed). The murders held a wide appeal for the general public, because of their violence and their targeting people from the Hollywood jet set. Two years after the murders, Charles Manson was sentenced to death, but, since California abolished death penalty in 1972, his sentence was then commuted to life imprisonment. Key witness at the Manson trial and his final judgment was Linda Kasabian, a former member of the Manson Family very close to Charles Manson, and eventually accessory to the Manson Murders. During Manson's trial, Kasabian testifies against him, playing a crucial role in his imprisonment. It is during these years that Joan Didion meets with Linda Kasabian several times and gets the chance to interview her, as she will report in “The White Album” (Bugliosi and Gentry, 1974; Guinn, 2013).

The first evidence of the central role played by the Manson Murders is the title of Didion's essay: both the essay and the collection are titled after The Beatles' *The White Album* (1968). This choice comes from a message the Manson Family left on the refrigerator during the murders at the LaBianca house: the killers wrote “Helter Skelter” in blood, the title of a track from the aforementioned album that was very popular among the members of the Family. Indeed, Charles Manson was convinced that the Beatles' songs were the prediction of a violent war, which he and his Family decided to ignite by committing this massacre. If taken literally, the expression “Helter Skelter” means “chaotic” and “disordered.” Both adjectives, according to Katherine Henderson, seem to be suitable to describe the Manson Murders and the social situation during the sixties in the United States: a diffused sense of confusion among the population, “[Helter Skelter] was an appropriate comment, not only on the mass murder, but on the decade of the sixties in the United States” (1981, 119). Moreover, along with the writing “Helter Skelter,” on the refrigerator of the LaBianca house, the writing “Piggies” was found. It was a reference to another track from the Beatles'

The White Album called “Piggies” and also a very offensive expression employed during these years by members of countercultural groups, such as the Manson Family, to address police officers.²

As far as the structure of the essay is concerned, “The White Album” is divided into fifteen short sections, and the representation of the Manson murders appears in section “10.” Section 10 can be divided into two parts: the first one, where Didion depicts society’s turmoil in the Los Angeles area during this period, and the second one, where she describes the reaction of the community to the massacre. In the first part, one can find the climax of the spiraling tension of the sixties. Didion represents these years as a period of excess, in which people often tended to cross lines, to commit crimes, without any fear of consequences, “This mystical flirtation with the idea of ‘sin’—this sense that it was possible to go ‘too far,’ and that many people were doing it—was very much with us in Los Angeles in 1968 and 1969” (Didion 1979, 41). As she states, the population of Los Angeles is aware of this complex social situation, and is increasingly concerned about it, “[T]here were odd things going around town. There were rumors. There were stories” (41). Nevertheless, the population may be able to imagine what is going to happen, but they appear unable to talk about it. This explains why, referring to that period, Didion writes, “Everything was unmentionable but nothing was unimaginable” (41), as if everyone is silently expecting something terrible to happen.

The contrast between what can and what cannot be said will also recur later in the essay, when the author tells about her meeting with Kasabian. Didion explains how “the case,” namely the Manson killings, are not referred to explicitly, they rather use different expressions:

In fact we never talked about ‘the case,’ and referred to its central events only as ‘Cielo Drive’ and ‘LaBianca’. . . This particular juxtaposition of the spoken and the unspeakable was eerie and unsettling, and made my notebook a litany of little ironies so obvious as to be of interest only to dedicated absurdists. (43-44).

Moreover, at the heart of the Manson Murders case lays what the author refers to as an “awesome and impenetrable mystery” (44), stressing once again the idea that the real trigger for these murders will probably never be fathomed.

In this situation, every crime that takes place during the sixties fuels anxiety in the whole community, which contributes to a building tension in society and a diffused sense of paranoia that leads Didion to “participat[e] in the paranoia of the time” (12). In her words, “A demented and seductive vortical tension was building in the community. The jitters were setting in. I recall a time when the dogs barked every night and the moon was always full” (41-42). As I will show, Didion appears to be in search of a connection between her—and the community’s—growing anxiety and these violent events throughout the whole es-

² Another reason for Didion’s choice of the title is the heterogeneous and experimental nature of The Beatles’ album, to which the author implicitly compares her collection of essays (Scarpino 2012, 455).

say, in an attempt to understand the origin of her paranoia. Indeed, she is hoping to understand whether her anxiety generates from the atmosphere in Los Angeles, or if she is giving a paranoid interpretation to events such as the Manson Murders.

A further consideration concerns the fact that, while a large part of the population in L.A. seemed afraid of the criminal groups committing violent acts around the city, another part seemed to be lured by them. Indeed, Didion seems to be aware of the attraction that groups like the Manson Family may have had on young people. And this could be the reason why Didion uses terms belonging to the sexual semantic field while describing the atmosphere in Los Angeles and the crimes: the word “flirtation” connected with the idea of sin, and “seductive” related to the vortical tension (Didion 1979, 41-42).³ These details from the first part of section 10 concerning the atmosphere in Los Angeles contribute to preparing the reader for the ensuing events, giving a clear frame in which to set the Manson Murders: a precise place, Los Angeles; in a precise time, 1968 and 1969; and in a precise mood, anxiety and paranoia. In other words, this is the prelude to the fulfillment of the sixties’ paranoia:

Many people I know in Los Angeles believe that *the Sixties ended abruptly on August 9, 1969*, ended at the exact moment when word of the murders on Cielo Drive traveled like bushfire through the community, and in a sense this is true. *The tension broke that day. The paranoia was fulfilled.* (47; italics mine).

Then, in a move that is characteristic of Joan Didion’s style, as well as other New Journalism authors such as Hunter S. Thompson, she does not describe the events directly, but she depicts them through her personal experiences and memories, assuming that her readers will have previous knowledge of the events she only evokes: “On August 9, 1969, I was sitting in the shallow end of my sister-in-law’s swimming pool in Beverly Hills when she received a telephone call from a friend who had just heard about the murders at Sharon Tate Polanski’s house on Cielo Drive” (42). At first, the author recalls that she was in the swimming pool, when she first heard the news, then she remembers the confusion following that moment and the several contradictory and incorrect police reports.

This technique of the representation of a pivotal historical event filtered through her own personal experience is recurrent in Didion’s essay. A further example is when she mentions Robert Kennedy’s funeral: “I watched Robert Kennedy’s funeral on a verandah at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in Honolulu, and also the first reports from My Lai” (13). The two quotes show the subjective way of representing events—typical of new journalism—by framing major historical events, the Manson Murders and Robert Kennedy’s funeral, into a common and intimate context.

Finally, particular attention must be paid to the closing sentence of section 10, which sums up the premises on society that the author makes in the first part, “I remember all of the day’s misinformation very clearly, and I also remember this, and I wish I did not: *I*

³ As Crenshaw remarks (2014, 1), this sex/death duality can also be related to the The Doors’ lyrics of the song “Moonlight Drive,” which are highlighted earlier in Didion’s essay (22).

remember that no one was surprised” (42). According to Didion, at the time when the Manson Murders are committed, the community in Los Angeles is in a state of profound paranoia, of which the killings represent the climax. In the author’s view, the majority of Americans deems all of the events from the sixties to lead up to that inevitable point: the Manson Murders. Thus, the sentence reveals a paradox because, on the one hand, Didion writes that “no one was surprised” by the Cielo Drive murders, but on the other, it is impossible to predict when and where these crimes are going to take place. In the following section, I will explore how this unpredictability of danger fosters the author’s tendency toward paranoia during the sixties to reach its climax in 1969 (cf. Melley 2000).

“THE PARANOIA WAS FULFILLED”

This section aims at demonstrating that Didion’s tendency toward paranoia manifests long before the Manson Murders. Indeed, while in section 10 paranoia refers almost exclusively to the atmosphere in Los Angeles and the Manson killings, in other sections of the essay, Didion connects it with her own personal condition. In particular, the author’s paranoia seems fueled by the physical and mental health problems in the author’s life: Didion at that time was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and suffered from several nervous breakdowns. Moreover, the sixties’ rise of conspiracy theories highly influences the author’s relationship with history, master narratives and the ability to understand the events surrounding her.

At the time, the US was shocked by several political assassinations: John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy. Even though Didion mentions only two of them in her essay—John and Robert Kennedy’s—the consequences of the other assassinations are no less important, because they pave the way for the diffusion of the so-called *conspiracy theories*, which will have a great influence on the culture of that time. The term conspiracy theory refers to the attribution of a cause of one or more historical events to a conspiracy, which the majority of people have no knowledge of. If *paranoid style* has always been present in American politics, as Richard Hofstadter remarks (1966, 4-8), the assassination of JFK created the perfect breeding ground for the development of conspiracy theories.

Conspiracy theories express the doubt of the population towards the legitimacy of their government, and they originate from people’s uncertainty and skepticism towards authorities and their narration of major historical events. As argued by Peter Knight, “Narratives of conspiracy now capture a sense of uncertainty about how historical events unfold, about who gets to tell the official version of events, and even about whether a causally coherent account is still possible” (2000, 3). As Knight argues, if before 1963 conspiracy theories were used almost exclusively by politicians, after the ending of the sixties, it is the people themselves who propose conspiracy theories about authorities’ abuse of power, attempting to put into question—and in some cases delegitimize—American *master narratives*:

From being a mark of extreme but influential politics promoted by those on the fringes of power, the paranoid style became a popular and perhaps indispensable cultural sensibility. In brief, the sixties witnessed a shift from conspiracy theories being told by the authorities about the people in the name of countersubversion, to conspiracy theories being proposed by the people about abuses of power by those in authority. (Knight 1995, 96).

Conspiracy theories become the inescapable filter through which Americans interpret and understand the world around them (Knight 2000, 3). Consequently, by becoming part of people's everyday life, conspiracy theories foster paranoia within Americans and considerably influence their cultural productions (Knight 2000, 2-3).

As Knight remarks, thus, paranoia and conspiracy theories go hand in hand from the sixties onwards, influencing people's perception of reality and the cultural productions of the period. As he highlights: "One of the most significant shifts in the function and format of conspiracy thinking in recent decades is from the deliberate promotion of single-issue demonological doctrines to a more fluid and contradictory rhetoric of paranoia that suffuses everyday life and culture" (11). Unlike other authors such as Don DeLillo, Didion never tackles conspiracy theories directly in her essays and novels, but the pervasive paranoia in "The White Album" seems to answer precisely to the climate of anxiety caused by the resurrection of conspiracy theories. In fact, paranoia in the United States—and particularly in Los Angeles—does not take over because of the Manson Murders, it is already there, present in society. For instance, according to the writer Norman Mailer, after the assassination of JFK, Americans constantly lived in a spiritual state characterized by paranoia, "Since the assassination of John F. Kennedy we have been marooned in one of two equally intolerable spiritual states, apathy or paranoia" (1992, 129).

In the definition given by Timothy Melley, paranoia is understood as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, a feeling of "suspicion about the causes of important social events," and, on the other hand, the awareness that—despite the attempts—the real causes of said events will never be fathomed, which makes people skeptical about their own thoughts and theories (Melley 2000, 26). As Maldwyn A. Jones highlights, all the major historical events taking place in the sixties make Americans feel unsure, to the point where they start putting into question the organization of their society and their system of values and beliefs, "The 1960s and 1970s were among the most traumatic decades in American history. The country was shaken by a sequence of political assassinations and by a protracted, shabby and shaming political scandal . . . These experiences left Americans divided and unsure of themselves. Some carried their rebelliousness to the point of questioning the very moral and constitutional foundations of American society" (1992, 543). During these years, such feelings permeate every kind of cultural production, from music to literature.

It is within this context that paranoia can be seen as the central element of "The White Album," a *fil rouge* that tightens everything together. According to Melley, Didion's essay deals with a period in her life "of deep uncertainty and nervousness," caused mainly by the increasing impossibility of the author "to understand her relationship to the chaotic

world around her” and to make sense of the events surrounding her, the Manson Murders being the most “inexplicable and disturbing” one (2000, 26). Melley, thus, establishes a relationship of cause-effect between Didion’s mental health and the social situation in Los Angeles. In fact, according to Melley, this increasing paranoia undermines Didion’s mental and physical health, and will lead her to suffer a major nervous breakdown in 1968. What makes her particularly anxious is the fact that her house is liable to be broken into by killers as is every other house in Los Angeles. She fears that something terrible is about to happen at any moment to her and her family. This is why, for example, she starts writing down all license numbers of panel trucks that come by her house and seem suspect, and then puts these notes into a drawer, where the police could find them when time may come, and, to use Didion’s words, “[t]hat the time would come I never doubted” (Didion 1979, 19). As mentioned earlier, Didion lives near Cielo Drive, where the Manson Murders and Ramón Novarro’s killing took place, in an area of Hollywood that is described for this reason as a “senseless-killing neighborhood” by one of the author’s acquaintances, and that is characterized by “sinistral inertia” something she cannot spell out by Didion herself (15).⁴

Dangerous events taking place in the outside world—such as Ramón Novarro’s killing and the Manson Murders—are paralleled by Didion with her inner world so that the boundary between that and outer world is blurred, and it is difficult to understand where one ends and the other begins. In “The White Album,” she links the randomness of the killings around Los Angeles to her illness, which—just like the killers—strikes randomly.

I had, at this time, a sharp apprehension not of what it was like to be old but of *what it was like to open the door to the stranger and find that the stranger did indeed have the knife*. In a few lines of dialogue in a neurologist’s office in Beverly Hills, the improbable had become the probable, the norm: *things which happened only to other people could in fact happen to me*. (1979, 47; italics mine).

Didion’s paranoia will grow even stronger when she later meets Linda Kasabian, who tells her that the Manson Family passed in front of her house on the night of the killings, “Linda Kasabian, the person I was interviewing on the Manson case, told me they had gone by our house, which was spooky” (Dunne 2017).

More evidence of Didion’s growing paranoia and imminent nervous breakdown is present later in the essay when Didion includes several excerpts from reports, interviews, and official documents. Among these is the psychiatric report of a woman who alienated herself from the surrounding world, losing touch with reality, and whom later readers will discover to be the author herself. Didion shares this very intimate document with her readers, using it as a chance to discuss the social situation in Los Angeles. In her opinion, this document gives an important commentary on the city at this time, almost comparing her

⁴ Before the occurrence of the Manson Murders, in 1968, Los Angeles is struck by another violent killing, the one of the Hollywood actor Ramón Novarro. He is murdered by two brothers, Paul and Tom Ferguson, who went to his house pretending to be hustlers while actually searching for a large sum of money. Novarro dies as a result of the torture he is inflicted by the Ferguson brothers who wanted to know where the money was hidden.

state of mental health to the city's. As Lynn Marie Houston and William V. Lombardi remark, "She is not as much interested in her own diagnosis as she is in its ability to provide a commentary on the time and the city in which she lived, specifically Los Angeles in the late 1960s" (2009, 84).

The question that Didion seems to ask is whether her anxiety and paranoia are justified by the numerous violent events taking place in the United States at this time, or if she is giving a paranoid interpretation of completely neutral and common events. In other words, is her anxiety a symptom of the social (dis)order or is she projecting her anxiety on society? The numerous aforementioned citations concerning Didion's apprehension about her family's safety, the strategy she used to try to keep them safe and the social situation in Los Angeles prove how, to Didion, the sixties were indeed a violent period, preventing her from leading a quiet life. Ultimately, Didion's answer appears to be clear when she states, "By way of comment I offer only that an attack of vertigo and nausea does not now seem to me an inappropriate response to the summer of 1968" (1979, 15), thus implying that the cause of her mental instability and nervous breakdown is to be attributed to the complicated social situation and upheaval.

In fact, the numerous major historical events taking place during the sixties in the United States, together with the rise of conspiracy theories, fuel Didion's paranoid tendency for the most part of the decade, and will reach their tipping point with the Manson Murders. Such events significantly influence Didion's perception of the world, ultimately resulting in a change of her writing style, as I will argue in the following section.

THE "CUTTING-ROOM EXPERIENCE" AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON JOAN DIDION'S STYLE

In this section, I highlight and analyze the passages from "The White Album" where Didion openly speaks about her anxiety to argue that it is Didion's feeling of paranoia that prevents her from understanding her time and building connections between some of the events occurring during the sixties, particularly during their final years.

Didion cites relevant historical events, such as Robert Kennedy's assassination and the My Lai massacre, and less popular news like a woman who had left her five-year-old daughter on the street to die, as something she cannot fathom. On this, Didion comments, "Certain of these images did not fit into any narrative I knew" (1979, 13), implying that she had never witnessed anything of the sort, thus making it impossible for her to understand said events. In her attempt to compensate for what she considers a lack of logic behind these, she tries to establish some connections with the numerous (apparent) coincidences occurring in her life during these years. For instance, Didion recalls that, on the day when John F. Kennedy was assassinated, she was in the city, buying a new silky dress. Some years later, she happened to wear that same dress at a party in Bel-Air, and Roman Polanski—who was attending the party with his future wife, Sharon Tate—ruined it by spilling some

red wine on it (Didion 1979, 44). However, she also soon acknowledges that connections like this are weak, and the violence is still unfathomable: “In this light all connections were equally meaningful, and equally senseless . . . I believe this to be an authentically *senseless chain of correspondences*, but in the jingle-jangle morning of that summer it made as much sense as anything else did” (Didion 1979, 44-45; italics mine). Didion cannot make sense of that time but she acknowledges this only on recollection, when she writes about it ten years later in “The White Album.” That is, during the sixties, what she defines as a “senseless chain of correspondences” appears to comfort her, as if she had found a semblance of logic in these events.

As a consequence of Didion’s inability to understand the historical events happening around her, she becomes increasingly disoriented and symbolizes this through her watch. The watch—the object one uses to make sense of time—is missing in the author’s list of things to carry on her trips, “There is on this list one significant omission, one article I needed and never had: a watch . . . *This may be a parable, either of my life as a reporter during this period or of the period itself*” (Didion 1979, 35-36; italics mine). As noted by Mark Z. Muggli, the watch stands not only for Didion’s disorientation during the sixties, but also for the author’s perception of the sixties, a period where people seem to have lost track of time, and, consequently, do not know what they are supposed to do, “We recognize the incident [the missing watch] as a symbol of her life, and we might even be able to see it as an emblem of the period as it is characterized in “The White Album”” (1987, 415).

Because of such disorientation and the inability to find real connections between the events surrounding her, in particular the political assassinations, Didion realizes that she is no longer able to fulfill her main duty as a writer, that is to tell a story, as Scarpino remarks (2012, 455). The author admits that she no longer has what she calls the “script”—a plan according to which events are supposed to take place; she starts to question all the premises of the stories she has ever told herself, and she gives up any attempt to find an explanation and build a coherent narrative: “I was supposed to have a script, and had mislaid it. I was supposed to hear cues, and no longer did. I was meant to know the plot, but *all I knew was what I saw: flash pictures in variable sequence*, images with no “meaning” beyond their temporary arrangement, not a movie but a *cutting-room experience*” (1979, 12-13; italics mine). This shows how Didion’s paranoia and disorientation have a direct influence on her writing because they prevent her from building a coherent narration of her time. She surrenders to the absence of a bigger picture, a structure, which is the ultimate demonstration of a lack of connection between the events and facts she wants to report.

As John Hollowell argues, Didion’s works are about meaning, and, more precisely, about the impossibility or unwillingness to find a meaning. She seems to be obsessed by the interpretation of the events, until she finally realizes that it is impossible to build a pattern:

[Didion's works] are about *the making of meaning*, and writer's *inability or unwillingness* to do just that . . . In all her work, Didion is obsessively fascinated with the interpretation of facts, events, the motives of people . . . Quite frequently, however, the act of interpretation breaks down, or the storyteller becomes frustrated with the act of *constructing meaningful patterns*. (1984, 164; italics mine).

Didion surrenders to the impossibility of finding a narrative: she is no longer interested in the plot, but only in images (Scarpino 2012, 455). In fact, she opens her essay with a description of the picture of a naked woman standing on a ledge outside her window, and she wonders whether this woman is about to commit suicide, her motives, and how the story will end. At the end of the essay, the author comes back to this image and states, "I was no longer interested in whether the woman on the ledge outside the window on the sixteenth floor jumped or did not jump, or in why. *I was interested only in the picture of her in my mind.*" (1979, 44; italics mine).

As Muggli remarks, "'The White Album' . . . is Didion's report on certain events that have *resisted her understanding*; these are the shimmering episodes that would in most of her works become emblems, but which here remain *images*, parts of a story for which she says *she can find no plot.*" (1987, 412; italics mine). That is, since Didion asserts she can simply describe and juxtapose pictures rather than telling a story, the images and events that she represents are conveyed without a precise order. The pattern followed by Didion becomes, as Scarpino highlights, "a-hierarchical" and "a-linear," (2012, 457; my translation). The events that she describes are left without an ending, without any moral, and they are followed—by juxtaposition—by a new image: "The stories fade into each other, like in cinema" (457). This is what Didion defines a *cutting-room experience*: instead of having a linear and coherent narration of events, she builds a narrative where facts are laid out as a series of (apparently) disconnected facts and images represented in no coherent pattern, reflecting the absence of connections between events in her real life. It results in a prose more similar to a movie, where scenes follow one another, rather than a fluent narration of events (cf. Hollowell 1984, 164).

Didion's writing style, thus, is fragmentary and blunt: Chris Anderson describes it as composed by "unrelated scenes, portraits, dialogues, and stories, creating a verbal collage," and "sentences [which] are unadorned and straightforward, connected by blank space rather than conjunctions" (1987, 137). This fragmentary style can be traced back to Didion's careful study of Ernest Hemingway's prose (cf. Griffin Wolff 1984, 127), but the lack of conjunctions in her prose is also the expression of what Didion defines as the "atomization" of society. Indeed, Didion's work reflects what she defines as "society's atomization" (1968, 31): the destruction of society as she knows it. Because of the lack of social fabric and order in the organization of society, the author suggests that it is impossible for her to retrieve the true meaning of existence. And her writing becomes nothing more than the expression of this absence. Despite Didion's several attempts to impose a narrative on

experience, nothing can be done to avoid what in the author’s mind appears to be a social disintegration (cf. Hollowell 1984, 164-165).

The author’s fragmentary style and the absence of connections make the reading more problematic. The various story lines are not connected, as to communicate to the readers a sense of disorder and disorientation: “the various story lines,” Malin highlights,—“Didion’s, the ‘psychiatric report,’ the traditional narrative—fight one another and, by doing so, fight our sense of order” (1984, 177). In other words, Didion’s works demand interpretation: like Leonard Wilcox remarks, it is the duty of the readers to be active and make sense of what they are reading, they have to pick up the pieces left by the author and put the puzzle together in order to understand the bigger picture (cf. Wilcox 1984). In order to do that, readers always need to be alert because Didion’s prose is rich in isolated sentences that may pass unnoticed, but are actually key elements to the understanding of the succeeding passages, or refer to other of her works. For example, when she introduces Linda Kasabian, she incidentally refers to the “dice” theory: “Linda operated on what I later recognized as ‘dice theory,’ and so, during the years I am talking about, did I” (18). “Dice” theory will not be mentioned again in the essay, but is a central element of her novel *Play It As It Lays* (1970). Or, again, she reports a quote by Linda Kasabian concerning her opinion on chance in life, “Everything was to teach me something” (18), which she will repeat at the end of her essay making a slight but important modification: substituting the pronoun “me” for “us,” implying that Didion made this theory her own: “Everything was to teach us something” (45).

Because of her fragmentary and disconnected prose, her style and structure may distance the reader, yet, on the other hand, the strategy Didion uses to describe events is much closer to how actual readers experience their everyday life. The author represents the impossibility of separating common events occurring in one’s life and major historical facts: everything is hopelessly intertwined.

To conclude, the sixties in the representation given by Joan Didion are portrayed as a complex—and occasionally violent—period. Indeed, Didion, along with many other Americans at that time, appears to have lived in a constant state of paranoia, fostered by several killings taking place in the US. Among these, the Manson Murders are the most relevant, and they represent the fulfillment of paranoia, the point of no return that determines the ending of the sixties. This complicated period resists the understanding of the author, preventing her from making a coherent representation of the time. Therefore, she surrenders to a situation that is to her ineffable, and she decides to represent it exactly as she sees it: a series of disconnected facts and images. The fragmentary style of her prose and the juxtaposition of images are the ultimate reflection of the “atomization” of society and the lack of connections between events during the sixties. Through her critical and personal approach, the author gives a vivid representation of her feeling of uncertainty and paranoia about the time she is living in. Since the sixties had such an impact on Joan Didion

and her writing, future research may focus on a comparison between her paranoid tendency in “The White Album” and more recent works such as *Fixed Ideas: America Since 9.11* (2003).

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QUEER AND FEMINIST NARRATIVE THEORIES: AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBYN WARHOL

Margarida McMurry
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Virginia Pignagnoli
University of Zaragoza

This special issue collects articles that reflect on how the effects of the cultural changes the sixties have produced are still relevant fifty years later. Is there a critical text from that period that has been foundational in forming your critical thinking as feminist narratologist?

It wasn't published until 1970, but because the work emerged in the previous decade I would cite Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* as an important 1960s influence on feminist literary criticism in general and feminist narratology in particular. With Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), it was one of the first works of literary criticism to consider the role gender plays in the production, reception, and interpretation of texts, and its appearance helped inspire the revival of Woolf and de Beauvoir in the 1970s. Millett takes on male authors whose novels were considered classics or classics-to-be in the 1960s: D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, and Jean Genet. These authors were also, as Millett demonstrates conclusively, profoundly sexist. Each of them is evidently unable to represent a female subject who is not merely an object or projection of a misogynistic consciousness. Her critical readings go beyond the question "Is this novel good?" to address the more pressing issue of "Whom is this novel good for? Who benefits from the worldview it perpetuates?" By modeling a feminist critical position attuned to gendered representation and gender-inflected reading practices, Millett gave us the kind of culturally situated analysis that is one of feminist narratology's main goals.

Over the last forty years, Queer and Feminist interventions helped narratology to widen its scope and priorities. Where, in your opinion, are further interventions most needed to help narrative theory maintain its relevance in the field of literary studies?

Almost as big a concern today as it was 25 years ago is the relative scarcity of scholars of color among those who explicitly practice narrative theory. Frederick Aldama has long been a pioneer in this respect, though I would describe the narrative theory he has developed as more universalizing than situated, and rising stars like Sue J. Kim, James Braxton Peterson,

and Christopher González bring much-needed perspectives on race to their contributions to the fields of contemporary fiction and comics. Many narrative theorists, including all the feminist narratologists I can think of, have focused our attention and our method on selected works by authors of color, but the narrative-theoretical canon is still predominantly white. I am embarrassed, after all these years, to look around at the 350-400 scholars who attend the annual International Conference on Narrative and to see so few non-white faces. The more fundamentally intersectional feminist narratology that scholars like Kim, Susan S. Lanser, Susan Stanford Friedman, and Suzanne Keen have been calling for is crucial, though I am fully aware that “intersectionality” is already considered a *passé* approach in many fields of feminist theory. These scholars and others have usefully shown what happens to narrative analysis when you understand that categories like race, religion, sexuality, class, and nationality are integral to what “gender” means. The challenge is to keep all these balls in the air while making descriptive statements about the workings of narrative and while doing close readings of individual narratives that test or extend the theory. One of the main assumptions of feminist narratology is that the author’s and reader’s identity positions will inevitably come into play in writing and reading novels. All the different valences of identity now have to be part of that analysis, most pressingly—in my opinion—racial difference. The more seriously we take this imperative, the less reflexively we posit “white” as an unmarked default in our analyses, the more relevant we will remain.

How has feminist narratology changed the way you read fiction?

This is hard to answer, since feminist narratology arose, in part, from the way I was reading fiction in the first place. I have long been fascinated—since the 19th-century British Novel class I took from Thomas Pinney my junior year in college—with the interaction between the author, narrator, implied reader, and reader of any novel. In college and graduate school I was taught that some novelists, like Thackeray and James, use that interaction brilliantly and deliberately while others, like Stowe and Gaskell, do it in an amateurish, sentimental way. I loved Thackeray and James, but Stowe and Gaskell moved me much more deeply, so as a student who had no authority to make literary value judgments, I wondered: if these novelists’ narratorial technique is so poorly executed, how can it be so effective? My dissertation never raised the issue of gender, following the example of my graduate school mentors like Ian Watt; instead, I made a taxonomy of different narrators’ stances *vis à vis* the reader without trying to place the novels in their mid-Victorian historical context. As I waded into new English translations of narratology to find the vocabulary that could describe the phenomena I was observing, I was perplexed by the 1960s structuralist insistence that fictional discourse had no referentiality. It seemed to me that my body’s reactions to emotions evoked by fiction were a clear sign that the text was not hermetically sealed off from the world. When I was revising my thesis into a book inspired by Barbara

Johnson's observation that there was a clear gender divide between the categories of authors I was identifying, I found inspiration in Joanna Russ's hilarious *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983) and in the work of Jane Tompkins, who had been an advocate of feminist reader-response criticism in the early 1980s, especially her *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction* (1986). She asked more bluntly than other critics: Why are the norms of male critics and male novelists the standard for "good" fiction? Why should "complexity" be an inherently superior feature of literary writing? Why is fiction about women and women's concerns less "universal" than fiction about men? Tompkins freed me to say that the novelists whose narrators evoked the deepest reactions from me were simply doing something different from what their male contemporaries had set out to do, and they were doing it brilliantly. Today, after decades of historical research showing the systematic devaluation of women and women's works throughout Western history, it seems so obvious to say, "These novels were written by women, and that's the reason they were automatically considered to be 'minor' or 'substandard' works." We have learned since I was doing that work in the early 1980s that a critical double standard demonstrably disqualified women's writing from "greatness." What feminist narratology has allowed us to do is to get into the specifics of *how* feminine-gendered writers' novels have differed from their masculine peers', and to celebrate their projects within the historical and cultural context which produced them.

Has the general raising awareness of the public and publishing authors' conscious effort to address questions of power inequality between genders and gendered role-models, including moments like the Me Too movement, changed queer and feminist narratology? If so, in what way, if not, do you think it will in the future?

I am not sanguine about predicting any change in the power dynamics of gender, inside or outside the institution of literary criticism. This is a factor of my age and generation, and I hope my younger colleagues can disagree with me. After 35 years of feminist activism in the academy, I am thoroughly discouraged about the persistence of gender inequality. A study in 2013 from the TIAA Institute showed that one in ten faculty women, or 9%, were full professors, up just 3% since 1993. Around 1995 I had postcards printed up for distribution on my campus that said, "It will take **142 years** for women faculty to reach parity with men [in the United States] as full professors." Therefore, at the rate we have been going, it will now take something like 118 years for there to be the same number of female and male full professors in the U.S. Not in my lifetime, not in my son's lifetime, and maybe not—if he has children and the tenure system in U.S. higher education happens to survive for 118 years, which seems unlikely—in the lifetime of his daughters. The research that inspired the postcards was based on the rate of increase of women full professors from 1975 to 1988; shockingly, the rate has risen only slightly since then. And don't even get me started on the

lack of parity between white full professors and full professors of color. As for queer and feminist narratologies, I have been bemused by the way they are typically recognized and then bracketed off from the rest of narrative theory, as well as by how little influence our approach appears to have had on the practice of other narratologists. Putting gender aside for the moment, the situated or contextual approach is still distinctively associated with feminist and queer narratology, as historical and identity-based differences of author, reader, narrator, or narratee seem not to have not come into the center of any other kind of narratological inquiry. So, as someone who has dedicated a career to “raising awareness” of the power inequality between genders, I don’t see radical change coming any time soon.

Although not explicitly engaging with feminist approaches, in a recent work co-authored with Malcah Effron (2019), we try to articulate how the audience receives the narrative communication, that is, the nature of reader responses, in order to emphasize, among other things, how the different starting positions of different audience members—rhetorical or otherwise—shape both the storyworld and the actual world. As female scholars who have worked predominantly within the rhetorical approach to narrative, we wonder if attending to the audience side of the narrative communication in the way briefly described above could be a fruitful way to apply feminist and intersectional interventions. Would you agree?

Yes, I love the idea of shifting the focus of rhetorical narratology to what you call the different starting positions of different audience members. Just as reader-response theory was one of the inspirations for the first feminist narratologies, this new turn of rhetorical narrative theory toward a focus on the flesh-and-blood reader will be a very positive development. The more we can link narratives to the historical circumstances of their production and reception, the more deeply we will understand how narrative structures vary, given their historical, political, and cultural purposes. And more significantly, we will better understand the cultural work that narrative does. Since history, politics, and culture are always inflected by the multiple identity positions of those who live them and those who create and receive representations of them, this situated approach can only be a good thing for rhetorical narratology.

There have been many developments in feminist and queer theory in recent years. Olson proposes that we have now moved beyond gender studies, but there seems to be many directions to go from here. Where do you place your work in feminist narratology in these recent developments and are there any paths you think are ‘dangerous’ for theorists to follow in the near future?

I’m not sure what it would mean to get beyond gender studies, especially if we understand a feminist approach as being thoroughly intersectional. I doubt that Greta had this in mind,

but to the extent that getting past gender would mean a return to generalizing something like “the human,” I think that would indeed be a dangerous path for any critical approach to follow. The old feminist objection to essentialism still holds for me. Any definition we can come up with for “female” or “woman” will exclude someone who identifies as such, in another culture if not in our own. Trying to define the “human” in connection with something as complex as the production or processing of narrative is even more impossible to do without defining many persons out. Everyone’s perspective matters, including—for example, people who are on the autism spectrum. Any approach that has to acknowledge exceptions to its conception of “the mind” is marginalizing some minds, and that’s not acceptable. Attending to difference—gendered difference among all the others—is as important now as it has ever been.

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THE UNDERGROUND PRESS AS A CRITICAL PRIMARY SOURCE: AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN MCMILLIAN

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The amount of alternative press produced by the U.S. social movements during 1960s and the following half-decade, the so-called underground press, has no parallels in any other country, for the number of newspapers, issues and the great range of different grassroots and political groups represented. In your opinion, what is the underground press' unique contribution as a primary source for writing the history of the "Movement of movements," as Van Gosse defined that long protest wave?

Underground newspapers are valuable as primary sources for a number of reasons. As I said in *Smoking Typewriters*, they can give us insight into a wide range of issues. Way back in 1968, Allan Katzman, a co-founder of the *East Village Other*, said as much. "In the future, people will be able to look back and understand this period, get a good feel for what it must have been like, by reading EVO." Later, literary critic Morris Dickstein wrote, "The history of the sixties was written as much in the *Berkeley Barb* as in the *New York Times*." Also, for a long time, the most influential writing on the 1960s was done by New Left veterans who were basically sympathetic to the idealism that anchored their activism during the Port Huron Era (I'm primarily thinking of Todd Gitlin, James Miller, and Kirkpatrick Sale). Also, their work focused heavily on the institutional history of SDS—especially in its early years—when in fact much of the decade's political energy arose from the grassroots. And it wasn't until the late 1960s that the New Left became a mass movement. SDS played a major role in the Sixties but its strategic and intellectual debates, which scholars have written so much about, must have seemed removed from the concerns of many grassroots activists. By contrast, underground newspapers engaged local, hot-button issues, and sometimes inspired devoted regional followings. Moreover, since these papers were interconnected—whether through the Underground Press Syndicate (UPS) or Liberation News Service (LNS)—they also became the Movement's primary means of internal communication. So, when we look at underground newspapers as primary sources, we can learn a lot about what went on in the New Left and counterculture, while also correcting for some of the distortions in the most influential writing on the New Left.

In your personal experience, how has the underground press become a research interest?

Well, it became a research interest of mine simply because back when I was a graduate student, I wanted to write about the New Left. My political views were quite a bit different then (I styled myself as a “radical,” whereas nowadays I’m a lonely centrist). And I wanted to write about the New Left’s “movement culture” (a bit like the historian Lawrence Goodwyn had written about agrarian populism). So, that led me to look at underground newspapers, which (I quickly realized) were a greatly neglected trove of valuable source material. Then, somehow, I came to the idea of making the underground press the subject of my dissertation. I don’t mean to brag (in fact, I’m not sure whether I’m even responsible for this) but it has been gratifying to look back and see that since the publication of *Smoking Typewriters*, many others have begun researching and studying the underground press.

In the last fifty years, which original features of the underground press have been reused or co-opted by the mainstream press?

Well, a while back it seemed to me that a lot of what we were seeing on the Web seemed to resemble what underground press journalists tried to do. With the proliferation of new tools for gathering, recording and transmitting news, we started seeing a collapsing of private space and a diffusion of power around knowledge and information. The left-wing blogosphere was briefly credited with helping to democratize the media. It could rapidly circulate information, influence the agenda of the mainstream press, and build communities among like-minded groups. All of that was resembled what, on a smaller scale, underground papers did forty or fifty years ago. In recent years, though, I’ve really soured on blogs, social media, “participatory journalism” or “citizen journalism,” and so on. There are profound downsides to all of this. I wish we could go back to the time when, for the most part, people read the same newspapers and magazines. We need responsible editors and publishers to make good, prudential judgments about what should be reported, and how much weight, shape and proportion various stories should have. One last thought: Nowadays, “establishment” or “mainstream” newspapers are far less stuffy and uptight than they used to be. They are quirkier, their staffs are far more diverse, and they make an effort to appeal to a wider range of readers. These are all welcome changes.

Since underground papers were often rooted in local, political, or professional communities stressing the readers’ participation, do you know any case of papers still operating in the same town or by the same group after four decades? If yes, did it maintain the same anti-establishment identity?

The *Austin Rag* was one of the first and greatest underground papers. It went through various iterations and then went defunct for a while. But now it’s back, as a digital publication. And it’s run by some of the same people who staffed the *Rag* in the 1960s. There’s a

longstanding, enjoyable, tight-knit community of countercultural activists in Austin who've stuck together for a long time.

One of the practical issues to face working on underground press is that a lot of issues have been lost and both documents and tools of the newsroom disappeared without any archive. When you have to reconstruct the history of a singular underground paper or retrace the network of people behind some publications, which kind of sources do you usually use? Do you also draw information from oral sources? And if yes, how do you let them dialogue with other accounts?

Of course, a lot of material has been lost. But many underground papers were very transparent with their readers about how they operated; they would bring internal issues to the public's attention. And if you look at the source material in *Smoking Typewriters*, you can find a substantial bit of correspondence between underground press writers and editors, reflecting on all sorts of things. Also, fortunately, when I was researching the underground press in the early 2000s, it was relatively easy to track down various people and interview them. Virtually everyone I spoke with was helpful. Naturally, however, you can't take oral history accounts at face value. Sometimes people's memories fail them. Some may also have reasons for skewing various things (perhaps unintentionally). So, you just have to be diligent, careful, and sensible in your judgments.

In my own research on underground papers, some traces reminded me of a global network: not only the well-known 1971 Underground Press Syndicate membership list with papers affiliated in Italy, France and Netherlands, but also GI's papers published in U.S. Army bases in Germany, the reports of the contemporary Italian workers strikes in American papers and also the existence of an Italian publication (Collettivo CR) which in the early 1970s gathered plenty of news from the U.S. main underground papers. Besides the evident similarities in graphics between the American most transgressive underground papers and the later papers in France and UK, do you think we could actually speak of a global network of know-how and personal relationships?

I don't have a great answer for this question. My focus was almost entirely on North American newspapers (the only radical paper outside of the US that I examined was the *Georgia Straight*, in Vancouver). But it is certainly true that underground newspaper journalists were often aware of European papers, like *Oz* and *International Times* (or, *IT*) in England. And American New Leftists drew inspiration from the fact that they were part of a global movement. You ask about personal relationships, and in my research I found a few letters between LNS folk (like Ray Mungo) and underground press writers and editors in England.

Online databases like Independent Voices or Mapping American Social Movements (University of Washington has lately provided free access to digitized issues or metadata of a great number of underground papers. Which are in your opinion the advantages and limits of these way of widening the circulation of the underground press—compared to microfilm or paper collections?¹

I don't see any disadvantages to this at all. As I've mentioned, underground newspapers are a terrific base of primary sources and they can provide insight into so many things. Until relatively recently, the best way to study underground papers was via the Bell & Howell microfilm collection. And that collection is very poorly organized and hard to access (most university and research libraries did not have it, so a person would have to get individual microfilm reels via interlibrary loan). As you know, microfilm is difficult to read. I think back to when I was researching *Smoking Typewriters*; it was so exceedingly time-consuming and difficult. So by all means, I think it's great if underground papers can be made more accessible.

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¹ Note of the Editors: Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli in Milan (Italy) conserves one of the most extensive collection of underground papers in paper format at European level.

WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED. VOCI E MUSICHE DAGLI STATI UNITI
(1969-2018)

Alessandro Portelli (author)

Roma: Squilibri, 2019, pp. 339, ISBN: 9788885571259

Reviewed by Bruno Walter Renato Toscano

In his latest book, *We Shall Not Be Moved*, the historian Alessandro Portelli describes the history of American radicalism through some audio tracks collected during his research stays in the United States. Starting from the Appalachian coal mines' music tradition, the reader/listener is taken through folk music of the Latin American community of Berkeley, the workers' songs of the Washington trade union demonstrations, and the voices of the young crowd that protested against gun violence in 2018. As Portelli writes, "We shall not be moved is the leitmotiv of this whole collection: it is the expression of the persistent resistance of ordinary people, workers, farmers, African Americans, Latinos" (74). In line with this remark, two elements are central to understand Portelli's book. On the one hand, the author aims at describing American society in its complexity. The book does so through both a class analysis and taking into the differences of gender and race within different social groups. On the other hand, the narrative structure of the book itself is based on the oral expressions of the "common people" involved in political and social movements. In this sense, Portelli, as already shown in his previous scholarship, gives an oral and written dignity to all those lesser-known political and social expressions, which are rooted in the history of American communities and in American history in general. Although there are also audio recordings by leading musicians of American music culture—such as Marvin Gaye, Barbara Dane or Frederick Douglass Kirkpatrick—in most cases the selected interviews and audio tracks are the political and cultural expressions resulting both from communities with which the author has had direct contact and from the indistinct masses gathered in chorus during the protest parades, from the 1960s until 2018.

Portelli arranges the collection—which includes 4 audio CDs that make up the core of the work—following an order that emphasizes the memory of the social actors involved in the recordings. The memory shared by ordinary women and men is therefore the key element of the narrative of *We Shall Not Be Moved* and it is a deliberately political and radical memory, that places the analyzed subjects and communities within their historical context. Indeed, Portelli presents radicalism as an integral part of American social movements since the late 1960s, permeating American music and cultural heritage. Investigating the political value of American music culture, in this sense, means to face a long-lasting tradition that reinterprets the biblical language rooted "within the veins of [American] culture" (134), the founding myths of the United States, the political ideologies, the cultural

representations, the stylistic features, and the music traditions in order to build new meanings for the historical past of the United States. From this point of view, the continuous return to the roots of U.S. historical identity is nothing more than an attempt by the subjects under analysis to seize the relevance of the past, reconstructing its forms and thus conveying new political values. It does not mean that these oral manifestations are flattened for the advantage of just one narration. Portelli instead puts the audio tracks together without trying to insert them into a whole interpretation tending to a well-defined conclusion. He leaves the reader the task to compose the pieces like a mosaic, making up the complex framework of American radicalism.

Unlike his previous works, in *We Shall Not Be Moved*, Portelli avoids the classical narrative structure of the essay, combining audio tracks and comments in four fundamental parts—songs related to Trade Union and radical struggles, very often linked to folk and country music (CD 1); blues music and ballads that revisit songs and sounds at the roots of U.S. musical traditions (CD 2); songs that reflect religious themes typical of gospel (CD 3); music, choirs, and recordings already published in the book *L’America della contestazione* (Portelli, 1970), to which are added two audio tracks collected in 2018 (CD 4).

If we analyze the work from a historiographic point of view, we can look at the text as a support for historians dealing with oral history, given the strong anthological component that creates a series of sources contextualized but not included in a much broader narrative. An innovative element is certainly the author’s attempt to look at the radicalism in some of the songs of American workers during the 1960s from the point of view of the Italian political and musical experience during those same years. This is the case, for example, of the song *I Hate the Capitalist System* by Sarah Ogan Gunning, which gives an opportunity to reflect on how “it was not true that the United States were a country without class struggle, as almost all the Italian left-wing believed (being convinced that American workers were ‘integrated’ with the crumbs of imperialism)” (258-259).

One of the merits of *We Shall Not Be Moved* is a narrative structure capable of synthesizing the history of American traditional music from the bottom up, thanks to the oral testimonies recorded by the author. On the other hand, it is difficult to capture an overall picture from *We Shall Not Be Moved* because of Portelli’s choice not to give a real guideline.

Unlike Benjamin Filene (2000) or Ricky Vincent (2013), who investigated the relationship between memory, history, political radicalism, and music culture in the United States, Portelli avoids inserting the audio tracks in a narrative that relates the oral tradition of “gospel, narrative songs” (260) within a broader history of American radicalism. Rather, in *We Shall Not Be Moved*, there is a lack of in-depth analysis to connect sources; indeed, individual audio tracks and comments associated with them are arranged by Portelli without explicitly indicating the reason for such provision.

Although the choice of the title of the work is justified as “the expression of the persistent resistance of ordinary people” (74), the main aims of the book, instead, are never

mentioned, neither in the short introduction, nor throughout the text. Portelli leaves room only for comments, tracks, a photographic apparatus that composes the last part of the book, and the stories that led Portelli to relate to the object of each piece. Although the sources collected by Portelli respect the principle of oral history, according to which “oral sources are not found by the historian, but built in his presence, with his direct and decisive participation” (Portelli 2008), the same cannot be said about the narrative. Indeed, what drives the meaning of the work is the expressive immediacy of the audio tracks recorded by Portelli. But the overall analysis of the sources collected and the direct relationship “between the historian as a listener” and the “narrator as a witness” (Portelli 2008) seems to be missing. Nevertheless, the anthology appears to be addressed both to a non-specialized audience and historians. Through *We Shall Not Be Moved*, indeed, the audience outside academia has the possibility to enjoy the audio tracks recorded by Portelli, and the historians could, at the same time, use the book as an anthology in order to investigate American music history and its multiple political meanings.

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CONTRACULTURA: ALTERNATIVE ARTS AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN AUTHORITARIAN BRAZIL

Christopher Dunn (author)

Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016, pp. 256, ISBN 9781469628523

Reviewed by Natália Guerellus

Christopher Dunn's *Contracultura: Alternative Arts and Social Transformation in Authoritarian Brazil* is striking for its unconventional narrative on Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985). The book cover displays a photograph portraying a group of young, white and black hippies on a beach. The photograph, which will be referred to throughout the text, is exemplary of the book's original perspective. Through an immense variety of sources (press, music, literature, photography, correspondence, fashion, advertising, plastic arts, reports of the organs of repression), Dunn manages to portray the spirit of a taboo era in Brazilian history without falling into left-wing versus right-wing political polarity. Dunn's analysis includes social circles, musical groups, hippie communities, and the biography of dozens of characters, bands and youth movements, mainly middle-class, between the late 1960s and the late 1970s in Brazil. This is done through a transnational and intersectional look, crossing analyses of gender, race, class and sexuality, demonstrating paradoxes, ambiguities and contradictions in the behavior of Brazilian youth at the apex of military repression. The book aptly received both the Roberto Reis Book Prize (2017) from the Brazilian Studies Association and the Honorable Mention (2017) from the Brazil Section Award of the Latin American Studies Association.

Before *Contracultura*, Dunn had already published *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture* (2001), *Brazilian Popular Music and Globalization* (2001) with Charles Perrone, and was co-editor with Idelber Avelar of *Brazilian Popular Music and Citizenship* (2011). *Contracultura* is, therefore, the result of more than twenty years of research and teaching in the area of Portuguese, Latin American and African Studies at Tulane University. The maturity of the work is also demonstrated by the deep knowledge of the Portuguese language, which allows the author to expose the various meanings behind words and phrases such as “desbunde,” “curtição,” “entendidos,” “croquetes,” “baianidade,” “deixar a desejar,” “bofe,” “bichas,” among others.

Dunn draws on the work of important researchers in the history of the period, especially Marcelo Ridenti, in Brazil, and James Green, in the United States. Surprisingly, Carlos Fico's scholarship is mostly missing (the author cites only *Reinventando o otimismo: ditadura, propaganda e imaginário social no Brasil*, 1997), although Fico is currently considered one of the most influential scholars working on Brazilian military dictatorship (he mainly focuses on the participation of the United States). The focus of the book, however, is neither the governmental power represented by politicians—military and civilian, nor the

armed resistance, nor the political, official or clandestine parties. And this is what makes the book so original. *Contracultura* shows how certain behaviors, tastes in fashion, everyday attitudes and the search for a personal identity may become alternative forms of resistance to a politically repressive and morally conservative regime.

The book is divided into five chapters, plus an introduction and an epilogue/conclusion. All sections include epigraphs evoking the main question raised in the chapter, which makes the book also a methodological example of writing a social history of culture. The introduction presents the definition and a historical overview of “counterculture” from a transnational point of view. Here, the author exposes not only the North American and the Brazilian context, but also reflects on the Hispanic-American contribution. At the same time, Dunn outlines the main events related to the Brazilian military dictatorship, which is essential for readers who are not experts on the subject. For the general audience, to whom the book is addressed, it is crucial to know the main historical episodes around this dictatorship, such as the 1964 *coup d'état*, the 1967 Constitution, the fifth Institutional Act (AI-5/1968), the presidency of Garrastazu Médici (1969-1974) or the Amnesty Law (1979). Although the chapters are thematic, in the introduction the author manages to establish a chronology that facilitates the understanding of the trajectory of the counterculture movements, from their apex to their decadence.

“Desbunde” is the title given to the first chapter and begins by positioning the object studied. The title corresponds to the verb “desbundar,” originally used by the left-wing armed movement to classify the militants who had abandoned their groups or fled from a guerrilla action. As Dunn remarks, “By the early 1970s, the term had acquired additional meanings to refer to countercultural attitudes and practices such as drug consumption, refusal of conventional employment, chronic itinerancy, and residency in alternative communities or communes” (38). The author focuses on those young, mostly middle-class and white Brazilians, who did not support the military government or the left-wing armed struggle, but who tried to resist the conservative moral codes of the dictatorship through individual attitudes. Among them, hippies, in dialogue with the international context, began to appear on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro, the epicenter of the movement in the early 1970s. At the same time that censorship would associate hippies with communists or repress them as vagabonds (a term frequently used by police repression in Brazil since the beginning of the 20th century), advertising knew how to create products for this target group and, thus, incorporate them into the consumer market. As examples of artists linked to counterculture, Dunn cites canonical singers of this era, such as Gal Costa and Raul Seixas, as well as the “Poesia Marginal” movement and the alternative press, especially in the person of Luiz Carlos Maciel (59-65).

The second chapter, “Experience the Experimental,” analyzes the “Cultura Marginal” movement and its relationship with, on the one hand, counterculture and/or, on the other, with the *concretistas* of the 1950s. Among all the chapters, this one seems to me the densest

and the most centered on some of the main characters of the period. The first of these characters is the artist and writer Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980). In 1968, Oiticica named one of his installations “Tropicália,” which is the same name used, in the same year, as the title of one of the albums that launches the Tropicalista movement in Brazil, with singers such as Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil. Oiticica deepens his belief in the participation of the public through his experimental expositions in London in 1969. Moreover, in 1970, he moves to New York, where, among other things, he starts writing art criticism. Another important figure Dunn mentions is the journalist Torquato Neto (1944-1972), who is not exclusively associated with marginal culture, Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, but is involved in numerous musicals, cinematographic and artistic projects as well. Oiticica and Neto are thus mentioned from their relations with *tropicalismo*, but Christopher Dunn explores their trajectories beyond this movement, highlighting original personalities of counterculture in Brazil.

The third chapter, “The Sweetest Barbarians,” focuses on the city of Salvador, in the state of Bahia, and its importance as a reference for young people linked to counterculture in the early 1970s. Dunn makes an excellent analysis where he explores the ambiguity of the state policy. On the one hand, the governors were interested in promoting *baianidade*, representing a life style marked by the sea, the beaches, leisure, tranquility, as a discourse to increase the tourist inflow to the city, especially in the carnival season. On the other hand, the state needed to eliminate those people considered “undesirables,” such as vagabonds and hippies. First, they were expelled from Salvador in organized police actions. An important hippie community settled in the village of Arembepe, 30 miles from the capital, but most members were dispersed in 1972. In this chapter, Dunn also focuses on the tour “Doces Bárbaros” carried out in 1976 by musicians who were already successful at the time, including Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Gal Costa and Maria Bethânia. For Dunn, the group “synthetized the confluence of symbols and discourses that aligned Candomblé (African-Brazilian religion) with the counterculture under the sign of *baianidade*” (144).

“Black Rio” seems to me the most innovative chapter. Christopher Dunn tries to demonstrate the connection between soul music *bailes* (parties) in the northern part of Rio de Janeiro in the 1960s and 1970s and the counterculture. In dealing with a black majority culture, Dunn discusses the ambiguities of the racial question in Brazil, where the affirmation of black identity could be criticized as an importation of a model of North-American segregation, alien to the Brazilian context. For instance, songs that dealt with the affirmation of black identity could sometimes be perceived as threatening to the Brazilian ideal of “racial democracy” and were, therefore, censored (159). Other songs, including “Zumbi” by Jorge Benjor (1974), instead, as they celebrated black national warrior heroes, were not censored. Even the very singers more representative of the time had different positions on the issue. Tim Maia, for instance, did not have militant lyrics of his own, while Wilson Simonal, Jorge Benjor, and Toni Tornado explored black identity in their songs. Despite the different

political involvement of the musicians, their music was played at the soul *bailes*, which were meeting places for black militancy.

“Masculinity Left to Be Desired” analyzes the authoritarian moralism of the military regime and its confrontation by some artists who did not necessarily assume themselves as gays, but questioned the classical definitions of masculinity. Singers and groups such as Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Dzi Croquetes and Secos e Molhados are examples of an androgynous aesthetics that can dialogue with current queer theories. At the time, these artists did not declare themselves militants in the gay cause, but positioned themselves in favor of sexual freedom and against the classic definitions of *macho*, so dear to the military institution. Finally, the epilogue begins with a short story by the writer Caio Fernando Abreu, titled “The Survivors,” where a couple discusses, melancholically, the past decade while smoking and drinking. The epilogue serves to connect the rest of the book to the present in a parallel with the short story by Abreu, which shows the blues of young people from Brazilian dictatorship. After having tried everything in order to escape from a difficult time (voyages, drugs, sexuality, love, militancy and even suicide), they have survived but still feeling defeated.

The author was lucky enough to finish his book before 2016, so not to be forced to update the countless twists and turns of Brazilian politics and society since then such as political and economic crisis, the impeachment of the president Dilma Roussef, the Car Wash investigation, the election of a far-right president, and the self-exile of artists and congressmen, among others issues. For Dunn, finishing his narrative in 2011, with the establishment of the National Truth Commission to investigate human rights abuses carried out by the dictatorship: “As Brazil ‘turns to memory’ . . . it is also important to remember the experiences of those Brazilians who largely avoided confrontation with the military regime but instead were inspired to embark on quests of self-critique and personal transformation” (206).

Contra cultura talks about alternative cultural attitudes during the Brazilian military dictatorship, where arts, writing, journalism, sexual liberation and drugs could serve as escape valves from political repression, censorship and moralism. Christopher Dunn’s book thus contributes to the memory of a taboo time that continues to affect the present of Brazilian history.

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