Ideology, the Counterculture, and the Avant Garde: Positioning the Filmmaker and the Spectator in Four Films of Late-1960s America

Mary Bronstein Cantoral

_DePaul University_

6-1-2015

Recommended Citation

Cantoral, Mary Bronstein, "Ideology, the Counterculture, and the Avant Garde: Positioning the Filmmaker and the Spectator in Four Films of Late-1960s America" (2015). _College of Communication Master of Arts Theses_. 29.

https://via.library.depaul.edu/cmnt/29

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Communication at Via Sapientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Communication Master of Arts Theses by an authorized administrator of Via Sapientiae. For more information, please contact wsulliv6@depaul.edu, c.mcclure@depaul.edu.
Ideology, the Counterculture, and the Avant-Garde

Positioning the Filmmaker and the Spectator in Four Films of Late-1960s America

by

Mary Bronstein Cantoral

Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

DePaul University

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

Media and Cinema Studies

DePaul University

June 2015
Dedication

To Professor of Physics Eduardo Cantoral for

our communication through a noiseless channel
Acknowledgements

I would like first and foremost to thank my thesis chair Michael DeAngelis for his steadfast encouragement in this endeavor, as well as my committee member Amy Tyson; their suggestions, encouragement and recognition of my scholarly promise have been fruitful. I value our sharing of ideas, observations and thoughts. Their professionalism, warmth and intellectual caliber have made the world a better place. I would also like to thank my professor of media and cultural studies, Luisela Alvaray, without whose early inspiration this thesis would not exist.

June 10, 2015
Abstract

Ideology, the Counterculture and the Avant-Garde

Positioning the Filmmaker and the Spectator in Four Film of Late-1960s America

By

Mary Bronstein Cantoral, B.A., M.A.

DePaul University, 2015

Thesis Advisor: Michael DeAngelis

Committee: Amy Tyson

Kenneth Anger’s *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969), Emile de Antonio’s *In the Year of the Pig* (1968), Jonas Mekas’s *Diaries, Notes, and Sketches: Also Known as Walden* (1969) and Haskell Wexler’s *Medium Cool* (1969) constitute historical artifacts as well as discursive interventions intended to shape a vision of the nation. Therein emerged varying imbrications of ideology and the volatility of the era, along with palpable disharmony that scholars have identified between the youth movement’s cultural and political camps.¹ In each case, the film’s avant-garde status did not, in and of itself, confer liberatory ideology. While all but *Medium Cool* are officially avant-garde, Wexler’s positioning of his subjects, and his shattering the fourth wall to confront the sociopolitical status quo and the mass-communications industry at a time of extraordinary ferment, renders his film among, if not the most, contestatory.
# Table of Contents

Introduction: Ideology, the Counterculture and the American Avant Garde…………………………1

Literature Review……………………………………………………………………………………………………3

Methodology………………………………………………………………………………………………………5

Outline of Chapters……………………………………………………………………………………………..10

Chapter 1: Positioning the Filmmaker
   Ideology and the Counterculture………………………………………………………………………………13

Chapter 2: Positioning the Subject………………………………………………………………………………60

Chapter 3: Positioning the Spectator:
   Power, Ideology, and
   Legacies…………………………………………………………………………………………………………111

Conclusion: …………………………………………………………………………………………………………153

Notes…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..154

Bibliography…………………………………………………………………………………………………………154
The basic story is that brave explorers like Christopher Columbus were the discoverers of the continent, introduced civilization to a savage world, and opened the earliest chapter of progressive globalization. Two hundred years later, our Pilgrim fathers, fleeing persecution and monarchy, created the City on the Hill, fought a revolution against British colonizers and created a democratic republic as a model for the world. The sixties were about a fundamental assault on this national creation story and its replacement by a more honest one.

-Tom Hayden, in *The Long Sixties* (2009, 17)

Cinema is never just the occasion of an object or a text, never simply the location of a message or of an aesthetic event, but always the site of manifold relationships among people and classes.

-David E. James, in *Allegories of Cinema* (1989, 5)

**Introduction**

**Ideology, the Counterculture and the American Avant-Garde**

The thesis explores ideology in four films, Kenneth Anger’s *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969), Emile de Antonio’s *In the Year of the Pig* (1968), Jonas Mekas’s *Diaries, Notes and Sketches: Also Known as Walden* (1969); and Haskell Wexler’s *Medium Cool* (1969), texts which, by virtue of their industrial outsidedness at a time of unprecedented cultural and political ferment and upheaval, might have contested dominant national narratives. The thesis explores how cinema was harnessed by these filmmakers to enlighten, interpellate or otherwise engage the viewer. Existing studies have observed these four films’ exemplary formal contributions, as well as some of their aesthetic and historical legacies. Cinema theorist David E. James (1989) observes some of the films’ ideological positions vis-à-vis the Hollywood industry and the capitalist modes of film production. Film theorist Paul Arthur (2005) explores Jonas Mekas’s *Diaries*’s ideological ambivalence in respect to the 1960s youth movement, a conflictedness that Anger, in *Invocation of My Demon Brother* shares yet moreover, converts into antipathy.
Kenneth Anger, Jonas Mekas and Emile de Antonio (1919-1989), regardless of their ideological valences, are three of the most renowned, artistically accomplished and influential avant-garde filmmakers in America. Haskell Wexler’s *Medium Cool*, while technically a Hollywood production, made cinematic history when it traversed the boundaries between fiction and documentary, and ruptured the fourth wall to engage historically with generational, racial and economic barriers. De Antonio drew from variegated, found footage to awaken political and moral consciousness, in a technique drawn from Soviet montage theory and American forms in music, which he termed *collage*. Anger, on the other hand, interrogated the limits of cinema as a “magickal weapon” (Kenneth Anger, qtd. Hughes 2011, 9) by using the medium to perform occult rituals. Aside from their formal attributes, political tensions were harnessed by these filmmakers to enlighten, interpellate or otherwise engage the viewer, and it is upon these questions that the thesis focuses.

The thesis, while focusing on the themes represented in the four films, explores how the imagined spectator is in some way invited by the artists to respond to their work spiritually, politically or intellectually, and examines how the films vary in their gestures to viewers. While scholars have observed how the filmmakers in this discussion achieved personal, poetically reflective and, to varying degrees, socially engaged perspectives, less examined are the ways that these films’ positioning of spectators might have bolstered their personal or ideological agendas. The films represent complex webs of grappling discourses of nationness, the counterculture, religion and race. While the New American Cinema, avant-garde and political films all constituted a refusal of postwar America’s cultural conformity, some of the filmmakers struggled to position themselves within ideological currents of social activism and oneiric withdrawal, not
all of them lucidly invoking progressive change. The thesis concludes with observations about the ways that these films, in their particular sociohistoric moment, democratized, confronted, perpetuated, or questioned conformist, dominant discourses and ideologies.

**Literature Review**

The American avant-garde, well before *Medium Cool* and the other films in this discussion, emerged as the vanguard during the Second World War when, as visual-arts theorist A.L. Rees (1999, 57) observes, facilitated by the new, portable equipment, economic conditions and influx of European artists witnessed an extraordinary ferment of experimentalism whose artists explored myriad thematic and generic avenues (Occult, psychodrama, and trance are only a few, as in the films of Anger, Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage). These developments soon surpassed comparable undertakings in Europe. Postwar avant-garde American filmmakers, with a booming economy, drew from Abstract Expressionism and Dada, but instilled cinema with remarkable resplendency, depth and personalism (Rees 1999). Although some films were somber and reflective, others celebrated, with extraordinary artistry, sexualities, childbirths and other facets of the human condition, representations that had been superficialized or elided from industrial mainstream cinema and the public sphere (Rees 1999).

James (1989, 133-4) observes that during the late-1960s, avant-garde cinema harnessed startling, new technologies to convey the drug-fueled sensibilities of the hippie counterculture:

In the late sixties, a spectrum of events and environments shattered the parameters of cinema: institutional extravaganzas like the multi-screen constructions at the New York World’s Fair and the Montreal Expo ‘67; John Cage and Ronald Nameth’s HSPCHD event at the University of Illinois in 1969, and Jud Yalkut’s presentation of *Festival Mix* at the University of Cincinnati in 1968...In their different ways, all of these produced transformations of optical experience that
mediate between parallel expansions in both the mental and social theaters. In place of the confining rectangle of the film frame and the closure of narrative or even the terminal truncations of the abstract film, light shows offered a three-dimensional visual field, matrixed neither spatially nor temporally, which dispersed rather than unified subjectivity.

In 1966, for example, the films of Ben Van Meter represented but also performed within the spaces of psychedelia, such as his S.F. Trips Festival: An Opening (1966) which focused on the Acid Tests of famed writer Ken Kesey (James 1989, 135-140). Such films evoked, and to an extent also enhanced, the hallucinogenic and theatrical “happenings” or street performances that had emerged in Haight-Ashbury and elsewhere during the mid-late 1960s.

In tandem with these spaces of technological development and evocations of the drug experience, avant-garde films explored with startling lucidity and creativity various interpersonal, sexual and subjective possibilities. Carolee Schneeman’s Fuses (1964-8) (Dixon 140-1), like Barbara Rubin’s Christmas on Earth (1963) which focused on sexualities, was filmed by the subject herself. Canadian filmmaker David Secter’s Winter Kept us Warm (1965), though earlier than the films in this discussion, in some ways augured a more profoundly human engagement with sexuality, as it explored friendship and a blossoming romance between two male students. The avant-garde, during the late-1960s, aside from this extraordinary personalism, social engagement and technological innovation, reflected a polarized society and a radicalized youth movement even as it began to experience the first throes of implosion. Newsreel’s Summer ‘68 (1969) and Columbia Revolt (1968) documented and agitated against the state and its narratives (James 228-9). Yet, as film theorist Walter Metz (2001, 265-6), observes, the cultural transformations far superseded the political contestation as the 1960s drew to a close. Two of the films in this thesis drew from the former.

**Methodology**

The thesis, in consideration of the legacies of the 1960s, through philosopher and historian Michel Foucault’s (Hall 1997, 46) concept of the interlinkages of truth, knowledge and power in a specific sociohistoric moment, examines cinematic artifacts that illuminate a turbulent era’s political and cultural tensions in ways that inform both modern society’s knowledge of the past and elucidate its transmission of ideology. As Foucault (Hall 1997, 49) observes, within each historical passage there emerges a “regime of truth” which naturalizes certain messages, an
economically and politically fraught sociohistoric arena in which nationness and other mythic constructions vie for hegemony, wherein “knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but has the power to make itself true.” All representations, including the cinema, are sites of discourse.

The thesis problematizes discourse and ideology in the avant-garde cinema during the late-1960s in the United States by focusing on how the selected films reflected, bridged or reproduced cultural and political divisions within the youth movement and observes that confrontation with the dominant social and national narratives varied considerably among the films. The 1960s avant-garde, also called experimental or underground cinema, to a great extent, as Dixon, Rees, Metz and others observe, constituted a significant challenge to dominant narratives of conformity, national conquest and racial, gendered or political exclusion. These four films exemplify the ineluctability of ideology in the avant-garde cinema, specifically as expressions of creative and discursive agency—choices on the part of each of these four filmmakers to confront, complicate or avoid the hegemonic national narratives, some of which entailed high-stakes cinematic or sociohistoric legacies.

Dixon (1997, 5) observes:

The experimental cinema in the United States in the 1960s was nothing less than a call to decisive action from the dreams of the state, from the Orientalist strategies then pursued by the government in the prosecution of the war in Vietnam, from the neo-colonialist sign/system exchange apparatus ruthlessly applied by the dominant media.

Dixon (1997) explores, with exquisite detail and cogent analysis, the extraordinary richness and expansive thematic and formal variety of 1960s avant-garde films, a great many of which innovatively engaged political, racial and other tensions of the period. However, the current thesis focuses on some of the discursive limitations as well as capacities of avant-garde cinema’s
confrontation with dominant narratives during the late-1960s. For example, *Invocation of My Demon Brother* and *Diaries, Notes and Sketches: Also Known as Walden*, in contrast to the other two films in this study, *In the Year of the Pig* and *Medium Cool*, films which boldly confronted “the dreams of the state,” pursued a reclusive, oneiric Neoplatonism that was prevalent in the Haight-Ashbury hippie counterculture. In doing so, they articulated an ideological position which stymied that other dream, the union of politics and culture, which comprised one of the youth movement’s most cherished goals.

Thus, while film theorist P. Adams Sitney (2002, “the Magus,” kindle edition), cultural critic and psychoanalyst Mikita Brottman (2012, 9), Hughes (2011, 11-12; 221-2) and film theorist Scott MacDonald (2009, 7-11) observe and, to varying degrees, normalize the intensely spiritual, mesmerizing qualities of *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, the current thesis questions Anger’s self-positioning vis-à-vis *Invocation’s* sociohistoric context. Hughes (2011, 2, 10, 17-20) argues that Anger’s work particularly *Invocation* must be understood in the psychedelia-infused countercultural context. He notes that “Anger was an integral – yet somewhat unseen – factor in the political considerations of the specific strain of the Sixties countercultural project to revolutionise consciousness (12).” And, he contends, that “as is the norm with Crowley’s rhetoric, it is clothed in dark language, but in essence the intent is actually liberatory, as the ‘Demon Brother’ of the title represents the authentic self” (222).” On another, yet related note, while Arthur (2005, 17) draws cogent links between Mekas’s *Diaries, Notes and Sketches: Also Known as Walden* and the New Left’s non-Marxist personalism, the thesis examines specific episodes of the film, such as the “To John and Yoko with Love” vignette, the film’s penultimate sequence (Reel Six), to observe how its discursive elisions constitute alienation from the
counterculture in its most contestatory dimensions and abandonment of history. As with Mekas’s Diaries, Anger’s Invocation articulates ambivalence and even hostility to the counterculture.

Brottman (2012, 9) argues that, “sadly, however, few filmmakers other than Anger been brave enough to acknowledge the rapturous, elemental possibilities of cinema for taking us beyond what is ‘real’ and ‘natural’ to the sacred, hermetic realm of mechanism and artifice.” However, Invocation intervenes ideologically in late-1960s discourse in ways that counteract the progressive impulses of the youth movement. And, while Anger was ambivalent in regards to Hollywood (James 1989, 149-50), his conflictedness also encompassed politics, namely the American counterculture and its antiwar protests.

In contrast to Diaries and Invocation, In the Year of the Pig and Medium Cool engage lucidly with the currents of transformation in the late-1960s youth movement. De Antonio’s In the Year of the Pig profoundly revisions American national consciousness. While media theorist and philosopher Douglas Kellner (Film Archives 2012) acknowledges De Antonio’s harmonization of politics and art, the current thesis explores how specific episodes in the film not only deepen our awareness about such melding but notes as well the sociocultural significance of such coalescence, specifically how Year of the Pig destabilizes and then dialectically undermines the bellicose national narrative in respect to Vietnam. Such realignment of hegemonic narratives is equally manifested in Medium Cool.

While film historian Paul Cronin (2013) and cinema theorist Michael Renov (2004, 32) contextualize Medium Cool’s Godardian breaking of the fourth wall in the Black Activists/Black Arts scene midway through the film, along with its legacy of black slavery, the thesis further situates the origins and legacies of such intervention in the ongoing struggle for racial and
creative equality. As Cronin (2013) suggests, *Medium Cool* changed the conversation on race, class and politics in America. Moreover, it merged political and cultural modes of contestation, the two conflicting realms of the counterculture in the 1960s. While *Medium Cool* was a problematically produced industry film (Cronin 2013; Renov 2004, 41) rather than avant-garde, in terms of its formal and thematic challenge to the industrial, cultural and political status quo, it emerged as one of the most contestatory films of the period and stands out as among the most progressive of the four films under discussion.

The four films in this thesis thereby inhabited a highly charged representational and discursive space within American politics that, as scholar and former Students for a Democratic Society co-founder Tom Hayden (2009, 45) notes of the decade’s political turbulence, wrought “lasting political consequences.” The thesis, by focusing on the filmmaker-spectator bond as one of the most central foundations of the communicative act and the bearer of discourse, observes the films both as historically relevant artifacts and ideological-discursive interventions into the national narrative. Among these transformations, the dynamics between the political and cultural realms, replete with disparate philosophical structures peculiar to the American 1960s counterculture, pose unique problems for an analysis of ideology in late-1960s avant-garde filmmaking.

The turn away from political contestation involved considerably high stakes:

Indeed, American society was characterized by the transference of social and political conflicts in society, beginning in the late 1960s, to the combat field of America’s ‘culture wars,’ which grew more passionate through the rest of the century... The New Left might have been dominant among those attending colleges and universities in the late 1960s, but lurking in the American political psyche was the equally rebellious voice of the ‘Young Americans for Freedom’ who had supported Barry Goldwater and his nomination for president in 1964. (Metz 2001, 265)
The films under discussion therefore serve as vital artifacts that reflect the era’s turbulence and volatility, between radical institutional progress and ensuing conservatism. The films also bear traces of the counterculture’s internal conflicts particularly those between art and politics; their creators worked discursively within and between those two spheres.

The thesis, vis-à-vis its analysis of ideology in films and the turbulent historical context which summoned them, engages both historical and media studies approaches. The selection of these four films is based upon their respective creators’ extraordinary aesthetic accomplishments, their shared historical situatedness within a period of remarkable cinematic, sociocultural and political ferment, their distinctiveness from the industrial Hollywood mainstream, and their disparate, formal and discursive attributes. It would seem that ideology in such independent industrial circumstances would entail substantive contestation to the status quo. However, such ideological confrontation was not categorically manifested.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1: Positioning the Filmmaker

The first chapter draws connections among the films and explores where they veer into disparate ideological realms. The study examines how the artists imagined their roles as observers, instigators of change or poets. The study, to better understand the ways these filmmakers created the bond with the spectator and hence their communicative positioning, explores the filmmakers’ political perspectives vis-à-vis the movement for cultural and political change at the end of the 1960s.
Together, these four films represent a precipitous social juncture. The late-1970s and 1980s, as noted by Metz, Hayden and other scholars, comprised a conflicted era of both rising inequalities and liberatory impulses that placed in question the efficacy of the United States counterculture. Wexler and de Antonio were among those American filmmakers that lucidly waged a symbolic confrontation against the social order and as such contributed to the questioning and transforming of the nation. While Anger and Mekas navigated conflicting threads of culture and politics, their works examined in this study did not so much contradict or intervene in “the dreams of the state” (Dixon 1997, 5) but rather tended to reinforce a strain of late-1960s Romantic Idealism that in some ways ran counter to the youth movement most broadly conceived. Chapter 1 notes how each filmmakers selected his topic, articulated his ideology and harnessed cinematic techniques with which to pursue his personal and political visions.

Chapter 2: Positioning the Subject

The second chapter observes the ways in which these films represented, reinforced and/or contested their social and cultural realities to spectators via choices and positioning of subjects or protagonists. The chapter, to derive insight into these choices, draws, to varying degrees, from intellectual and cultural history, critical studies, and film and media theory that focuses on the positioning of subjects. The topics in those studies include avant-garde and political films during the late-1960s and cinema generally.

The chapter notes whether racial, class- or gendered roles reproduced or challenged hegemonic representations; and examines how these in turn intersected with the late-1960s
counterculture. The chapter situates the filmmakers’ choices historically, socially and culturally. The filmmakers’ selections and positioning of their filmic subjects emerged from their own creative predilections, but also from the ways they responded to contemporaneous events that engulfed the nation and captured the imagination of America’s youth. These choices, in turn, influenced the ways they approached their spectators.

Chapter 3: Positioning the Spectator

Chapter 3 inquires specifically about the ways that these filmmakers appealed to, or positioned their audiences as either passively interpellated subjects or constructivistically active message-producers in regards to their film’s ideological contents. The last chapter touches on some of the philosophical and theoretical questions surrounding spectator-filmmaker relationships. The chapter, for these observations, draws from film and media theory that illuminates audience-interpellation and discourse-transmission that focuses on problems of spectator agency. It touches briefly on the production of narratives in classic cinema in contrast to those of the avant-garde, as well as political-agitprop films. The study explores the act of spectatorship as it relates to the texts under discussion, and contextualizes spectator theory within the historical period and the discursive legacies they engendered.

The chapter notes how the ideological self-positioning of the filmmakers explored in chapter one either supported or undermined their positioning of filmic subjects noted in Chapter 2 and the positioning of spectators in Chapter 3. The thesis will conclude with observations of the ways that the films serve as both vivid, historical documents and ideological interventions into some of the most significant tensions of the late-1960s.
Chapter 1

Positioning the Filmmaker

Like other convergences between political groups and countercultural activities—rock music, experimental theater, and the underground press ducked in and out of collaboration with SDS, National Mobilization, and other entities—divergent ideologies advocating societal change through the liberation of individual consciousness or through mass action coexisted uneasily. (Paul Arthur, 2005, 12)

Introduction

The filmmaker-artist existed in his historical moment, in respect to the 1960s and its contestatory response to American society and the dominant national narrative. Kenneth Anger’s Invocation of My Demon Brother (1969), Emile de Antonio’s In the Year of the Pig (1968), Jonas Mekas’s Diaries, Notes, Sketches Also Known as Walden (1969) and Haskell Wexler’s Medium Cool (1969) are surviving structures of a bygone era and ideological statements. De Antonio and Wexler’s films speak to the melding of political action and cultural-spiritual revivalism of the 1960s, discursive legacies which persist in Hollywood and in society. Political acts produced, however meager, the material societal transformation in ensuing years, such as women’s and gays’ rights, environmentalism and racial pluralism (Hayden 2009 17). Anger and Mekas, in contrast to De Antonio and Wexler, articulated the oneiric qualities of the hippie counterculture, which sought revitalization of the spiritual quest. Regardless of the direction these films took, the late-1960s were a time for radical decision-making. As journalist and media theorist Todd Gitlin (1993, 221) notes, “it was not a time for thinking small.” The four films under discussion point to some of the ways that avant-garde films, including politically and
industrially conflicted films, represented bivalent ideological positions operating within a radical social context at the end of the 1960s.

Arthur (1992, 29) notes these ideological characteristics via Mekas’s ambivalence towards politics: “Like other mentors of the counterculture such as his friends Allen Ginsberg and Julian Beck, whose first instincts were aesthetic rather than political, Mekas was forced to navigate between the promotion of independently produced art as replete experience and its use as an instrument of information, polemic, and agitation.” Arthur’s observation alludes to the divide between two philosophical orbits of the American counterculture, and the respective choices made by four, influential avant-garde filmmakers at the end the 1960s. The striving, on the part of the late-1960s counterculture, for a union of culture and politics, to which Arthur refers, provided the impetus for the historic gathering of the political and cultural “tribes” on January 14, 1967 in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park (Lee and Shlain 1998, 159-161).

Moreover, Arthur’s observation (2002, 46) that Medium Cool’s cameraman, Katsellas (Robert Forster), standing in for Wexler himself, “negotiating professional and political dilemmas he and other left-leaning media workers face as the idealistic bubble of Sixties optimism began to implode,” is relevant for the films under discussion.

Between the time these films were in production and the moments of their release, Richard Nixon had ascended to the presidency, Berkeley students and community members were attacked by three-thousand national guardsmen as they defended People’s Park (Gitlin 1993, 353-361), and two, national leaders, Senator and Presidential Candidate Robert F. Kennedy, and Civil Rights leader Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King were assassinated. While de Antonio and Wexler engaged politically through cinema, Anger and Mekas worked with an intensely personal
Romanticism that echoed the utopian Neoplatonist mid-1960s Haight-Ashbury hippie counterculture described by San Francisco historian Hank Harrison (1990, 2). The American counterculture, despite its cultural-political divisions, was in some ways, during the late-1960s, both at its pinnacle and its nadir (Roszak 1995, 47; Lee and Shlain 168-9; Gitlin 1993, 355-361). The films under discussion demonstrate interlinkages, often mythically imbued, of politics and culture in late-1960s avant-garde/independent cinema, with variable degrees of contestation with the national narrative.

Kenneth Anger’s Invocation of My Demon Brother: Counterculture as Counterceremony

Kenneth Anger’s *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, because of its occult material and Anger’s lucid intent to cast a spell upon the (Rayns 1969; Powell 2012, 100), is considered to be his most hermetic film. *Invocation* is reminiscent of the some of the psychedelia-infused films mentioned in the thesis’s introduction, such as those by Ben Van Meter who filmed parts of *Invocation of My Demon Brother*. These included the footage of Anger’s Equinox of the Gods ritual in Haight-Ashbury’s Straight Theater in September 1967. Therein, Anger appears onstage in ceremonial robes, along with other celebrants. *Invocation’s* footage is intercut with scenes of a hippie marijuana ritual and, in the film’s final sequence, scenes from the London Hyde Park Rolling Stones concert in July 1969. *Invocation of My Demon Brother* was meant to invoke the demon Lucifer (whom Anger termed “the bringer of light”) and herald the Age of Aquarius. While *Invocation* is reflective of the street “happenings,” psychedelic light shows that accompanied hippie gatherings or Acid Tests of the Merry Pranksters, it veers from the
celebratory impulses of psychedelia by its lucid engagement with the occult and its evocations of countercultural decay and spiritual malfeasance.

Invocation includes both Nazi and occult symbols, allusions to hell fires and a visit by Church of Satan founder Anton Szandor LaVey, the man with plastic horns and a cape who is ushered onto a pulpit around Invocation’s midpoint. Invocation is an eleven-minute film with a nontraditional narrative and a disturbing Moog-synthesizer track composed by Rolling Stones frontman Mick Jagger. Anger, in Invocation, escorts the spectator on a “magickal” journey that is historically rooted in cinema’s dual role as scientific curiosity and magic as inimical to Enlightenment rationalism.

As cinema and media studies theorist Tom Gunning (2004, 28) observes, “Cinema, understood as part of the centuries-old ‘great art of light and shadow,’ displays a truly dialectical and perhaps even contradictory relation to the project of the Enlightenment.” While men and women of wisdom harnessed the new “eighteenth-century visual devices,” illusionists could employ them to spellbind naïve audiences, or even elicit “superstitious beliefs (28).” Invocation of My Demon Brother exemplifies cinema’s legacy as a magical and performative art. But Invocation is also an ideologically laden film that values superstition, hermeticism and withdrawal from protest in an era where transformation in racial, class and gender rights was dependent upon such contestation.

Invocation of my Demon Brother, which navigates an ideologically conflicted trajectory, is ultimately a performance of national and countercultural despair. Anger, in his evisceration of the politically emancipatory quality of the counterculture most broadly conceived, destabilizes and ultimately also undermines the generational meanings of social change that emerged in the
1960s. *Invocation*, through complex layering of multiple superimpositions, anamorphic lens and rapid cross-cutting, along with the Moog-synthesizer track, conflates rather than sets in opposition, the US Marines in Vietnam and the American counterculture.

*Invocation*, in doing so, records and evokes the cultural-political schism that plagued the 1960s counterculture. Anger’s film, as an ideological product, abjectifies rather than valorizes the counterculture. Film theorist Carel Rowe (2002, 15) notes that “Anger, a romanticist, sees occultism as a source of hermetic knowledge.” While existing scholarship has observed *Invocation’s* use of sound and the subliminal Vietnam footage to mesmerize and undermine spectator agency (Powell 2012, 99-100; Rayns 1969; Hughes 2011, 218-221), as well as the film’s representing generally a death-knell to the counterculture (Goldsmith 2007; Powell 2002, 83), yet largely unexplored is how the sound is used to both represent¹ and celebrate countercultural implosion. Just as Rowe (2002, 31-2) observes in regards to sound in *Scorpio Rising*, Anger has always harnessed his scores for narrativistic purposes; the music is not meant as “merely the creation of rhythm.”

The final blast evoked by the Moog is that of explosions or gunfire. And the demise it connotes is not only of the Piscean Christian age that Anger believed had to capitulate to the Aquarian one, but as film theorist Anna Powell (2012, 99) notes in regard to Altamont, also Aquarius. Moreover, while Powell (2012, 121) contends that Anger’s films, including *Invocation*, “both glamorise and reinforce countercultural membership,” given Anger’s animus towards the hippie counterculture and the peace movement, together with his Crowleyan focus, *Invocation* records, enacts and celebrates the end of the counterculture.
Although in *Invocation of My Demon Brother* Anger engages with the Vietnam War and the counterculture, the film focuses not on countercultural integrity but the cult of Thelema (Allison 2005; Powell 2012, 103; Rowe 2002, 19), a religio-ideological construct founded by early-20th-century occultist Aleister Crowley that privileges individual self-fulfillment over communal bienestar, or, as writer Ed Sanders (qtd. Powell 2002, 88) expressed it, a “cruelty-streaked universe.” Crowley’s legacy in *Invocation* comprises both artistic and ideological influences, the former of which involves a meticulously arranged color scheme, iconographic signs and Symbolist imagery. Anger draws from French Symbolism and the synaesthetic forays of writers Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud, and explored in film by Sergei Eisenstein (Rowe 2002, 16). Rowe (2002, 25) elucidates that, “Romantic Idealization, poetic irony, lush exoticism, and the evolution of anti-classicist montage wherein the whole is subordinate to the parts all reflect Anger’s affinity with *fin-de-siècle* French literature.” Moreover, Anger’s themes of decay, the occult and Vietnam are significant in relation to the 1960s youth movement.

Anger’s focus on the occult emanates from his faith; he is a disciple of Crowley, a man who believed Hitler had borrowed his Thelemic principles to construct German Fascism (Sutin 2000, 376; Pasi 2014, 55), including the Swastika (Sutin 377). Although Nazi Germany approached the occult with ambivalence, Crowley concurred with Hitler’s idea of a “master class” but one that could be made moral and pure through the Thelemic faith (Sutin 377-9). Crowley’s encomia have emerged in some Libertarian quarters. One such website, noting Crowley’s Social Darwinian philosophy, commented that, “as elitist, Crowley regarded the discovery of one’s ‘true will’ as something only the special few were capable of achieving (Preston 2013, para. 4).” This elitist ideological position seems at odds from the communal ethos
of the counterculture. In *Invocation* the Magus (Anger), as leader, extends his will as he leads a ceremony to summon both the Christian devil via Anton LaVey and the Thelemic “bringer of light,” Lucifer (Bobby Beausoleil) surrounded by occult symbols including Swastikas.

While the Nazi symbols in other Anger films such as *Scorpio Rising* may, as James (1989, 153-4) contends, be “unstable,” due to the sexually ironic ambiguities that contextualize and, in a sense, define them, and wherein “the juxtaposition of the best and the worst of pop songs makes for a pervading ambiguity and polyvalence in any given image,” in *Invocation* these symbols are, in the context of Anger’s statements honoring the Hell’s Angels, his Crowleyan philosophy and antipathy towards the counterculture, anchored more firmly to Anger’s moral-ideological system. It is one which embraces not only bikers generally but specifically the Angels, whose role at Altamont in bringing forth “the end of the Age of Aquarius” (Gitlin 1993) gives further credence to the concept of ideological ineluctability in late-1960s avant-garde cinema.

As Powell (2002, 87) argues,

In the Kabbalah, the Swastika is an emblem of continuous spirit. Its symbolic use here as a flag is, however, difficult to dissociate from its historical deployment in the Nazi version of black magic.

Recent cinematic representations of the Swastika, such as *The Man in the High Castle* (David Semel, 2015), suggest continuing association thereof with Nazism. Its evocation in *Invocation* is death, and it is buttressed by the Moog synthesizer.

The Moog works up slowly to the death-evoking sounds. Its undulating beat starts in a steady, rhythmic intonation over the film’s two, opening lines of credits, “Images by Kenneth Anger, Sound by Mick Jagger,” with an upward-tracking shot of the dazzling blue, black and
gold image of the demon: Lucifer, in Crowleyan mysticism, is the one who brings the light, as opposed to the Christian devil. An albino, Haight-Ashbury youth (*Invocation of My Demon Brother*, director commentary, 2010), the Wand Bearer (Speed Hacker), is positioned against a background with a five-pointed United States Army symbol. This opening shot is the first visual conflation of the counterculture and the army. The Wand Bearer looks around perplexedly, to his right and left. Anger positions the Wand Bearer as spectator of an unfolding “spell” (Director’s Commentary 2010), explored further in the following two chapters.

Anger’s spell draws from Haight-Ashbury iconography—marijuana, nudity, and hippie dress—to valorize the cult of Thelema. A nude man, filmed from the neck down, possibly Bobby Beausoleil, or Anger, holds a knife to his armpit. Two other naked youths lounge on a sofa. A man in blue jeans is hanged by an offscreen entity. Presently, Anger’s hand, whose forearm bears the Mark of the Beast 666 (Anger, *Invocation*, Director’s Commentary, 2010), moves back against a violet background to reveal the film’s diegesis and begin the spell. A single shot of Vietnam-War Marines exiting a helicopter, after an initial appearance, loops continuously throughout the film, mostly subliminally, accessible only via infra-red glasses (Sitney 2002; James 1989, 149; Powell 2012, 100; Rayns 1969; Landis 1995, 171; Hughes 2011, 217-18). According to prevailing scholarship, this is done by Anger in order to provoke anxiety in the viewer, to cause “sensory derangement (Hughes 2011, 232).” Moreover, the Vietnam-War footage, in conjunction with the Moog synthesizer, subverts the counterculture vs. Vietnam War dialectic, to merge, rather than set in opposition, the two opposing forces in late-1960s American society.
The helicopter, with its five-pointed US Army star, matches the one that frames the Wand Bearer. The star is also like the occult symbol, the pentagram. Anger thus conjoins the national symbol with the occult and with the counterculture, to connote a merging of military and countercultural mayhem. While the Moog synthesizer has progressed on a steady rhythm, it begins to fluctuate at the start of a marijuana ritual with Lucifer (musician, composer and soon-to-be murder convict Bobby Beausoleil) (Landis 1995, 179-80; Powell 2002, 88), the Deacon (San Francisco Digger and soon-to-be Hell’s Angel, William Fritsch) and Deaconess (poet and Digger Lenore Kandel). The Moog’s monotonous riff ends on a flatter note just as Lucifer takes up the skull pipe of marijuana.

The halting sound in the Moog’s rhythm suggests the moral stumbling of the youthful celebrants, a mind-expansion ceremony in reverse. The Moog synthesizer continues to change pitch, speed and tone as Invocation progresses, culminating in explosions or blasts over the hippie, Lucifer as he, first overlaid with a Solar Swastika (Anger commentary 2010; Sitney 2002, kindle edition), then as a fallen angel in hippie garb and, in the penultimate shot covered with black stripes, outstretches his arms with finality. Invocation of My Demon Brother, prescient document of impending countercultural implosion vis-à-vis the Manson murders and Altamont, is at the same time, a ritual, specifically one of occult conversion.

While the hippie counterculture was not heavily occult-focused, it incorporated elements of mysticism, along with a historically rooted, diverse set of philosophical influences. San Francisco historian Hank Harrison (1990) observes:

The Haight-Ashbury cultural revolution was not sudden. It had roots stretching far back in history, both to Europe, where Medieval Socialism was based on an expanded hermetic Neoplatonism, and to New England where Ralph Waldo Emerson’s transcendental idealism eventually evolved into the 20th century music of Charles Ives and into other forms of
expression. Asian forms are also relevant. The Quakers, like the eventual San Francisco ‘rock and roll’ families, placed an emphasis on sharing and charity mixed with a strong community spirit, free thought and free speech. Both dealt with a kind of astral world, while maintaining integrity and self-sufficiency through barter of handcrafts, services and other commodities. (4)

The “expanded hermetic Neoplatonism” and “transcendental idealism” characterized much of the dreamy, idealist and utopian aspects of the hippie counterculture. One of the Haight’s most prevalent groups, the Diggers, who emerged from the San Francisco Mime Troupe, appropriated their name from a band of 17th-century British anarchists (Lee and Shlain 1992, 171-2) or “millenarians who, in the aftermath of the English Civil War, quixotically resisted the enclosure of the commons” (Doyle 2002, 79). The Diggers, comprised of writers, actors, painters and performers such as Peter Berg, Emmett Grogan, and Peter Coyote (Doyle 2002, 79), established a free store, while bands like the Grateful Dead played for free in the Haight-Ashbury community (Cavallo 1999, 159). The Diggers’ nonpolitical activities, such as food-distribution and guerrilla theater, were occasionally complemented by their antipolitical disruptions (Gitlin 1993, 222-8). They not only eschewed organized, progressive politics (Lee and Shlain 1992, 172), but a few of them, most notably Grogan, occasionally interfered with the New Left’s Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) (Gitlin 1993, 222-8).

Like the Diggers, Invocation’s avoidance of antiwar or other contestation to the American political establishment translates into a political statement. The film’s ideology is one that is predicated upon its redesignation of countercultural protest to the occult. The signifiers of the hippie counterculture such as Macramé banners, as carried by hippie revelers in the final sequence of Gimme Shelter (Maysles brothers and Charlotte Zwerin, 1970), are superimposed on the body of the Wand Bearer near the last few minutes of Invocation, but then, in subsequent images, overlap with an occult symbol, The Mark of the Beast 666. The Magus (Anger), who
waves a Nazi flag and holds before him an object, the occult symbol of Mercury (Anger, Director’s Commentary 2010), lowers it down before him with a ceremonial bow; the spell, accompanied by the Moog synthesizer, is complete.

In *Invocation* the Moog is an evocative narrational device that signals conflict, a battle, and eventual capitulation to the occult on the part of the American 1960s counterculture. *Invocation of My Demon Brother*’s spiritual quest was, like some of the New Hollywood films of its time such as the observational/cinéma vérité documentary *Woodstock* (Michael Wadleigh 1970), influenced by the nation’s well-documented Great Awakenings. These currents of spiritual revival, occurring in times of social and national crisis, according to historian William G. McLoughlin (1978), facilitated a deeper sense of national identity. The American Revolution derived from new concepts of nationness in the First Great Awakening, while the Second led to ideas of universal liberty and justice, imbricated in the meanings of the Civil War; the melding of democracy and science preluded the First World War, as in “‘to make the world safe for democracy (McLoughlin 1978, 1).’” The Fourth, that of the counterculture during the 1960s and early 1970s, influenced cultural transformations in racial, sexual and gender equality. However, conservative backlashes, including religious forms, also occurred during this period (Schulman and Zelizer 2008, 5) which suggest a troubling dimension of spirituality as represented and enacted in *Invocation of My Demon Brother*.

Spirituality in the 1960s drew from a legacy of the Enlightenment that was specific to Anglo America. While in Europe and especially France, the Enlightenment was tethered to rationalism, in the USA it was initially harnessed to “‘the politics of liberty,’ as against the French ‘ideology of reason’ (Himmelfarb, qtd. Berger, Davie and Fokas 2008, 18).” As part of
the Fourth Great Awakening (McLoughlin 1978), the hippie counterculture split off from scientific rationalism and political activism that had developed during the Third Great Awakening which McLoughlin (1978, 178) describes as “a revitalization movement...to use religion and science together to ‘uplift the masses’ rather than to leave them to the mercy of laissez-faire individualism (162-3).” In the 1960s, American society, again in crisis, pursued a new spiritual direction (McLoughlin 1978, 202) that in some counterculture arenas, untethered rationalism from faith. Anger’s commentary in *Lucifer Rising* speaks to his membership in the Fourth Great Awakening:

> Luckily and thank God we have mysteries in life and we always will. No matter how much science can explain, there will always be mysteries; and that’s what makes life fascinating to me. I certainly don’t want the answers to everything. Even if I did, I won’t have them. I mean, I have a few. (Kenneth Anger, Director Commentary, *Lucifer Rising* 2010)

Anger, to an extent, participated in the revival of the 1960s, in its turn from Judeo-Christian dualities and guilt to Eastern forms that celebrated oneness rather than racial, sexual, gendered or class-based divisiveness, forms which constituted a reaction against 18th-century Enlightenment rationalism. Meditation, a sense of being at one with nature and with the universe, to “make love not war,” the search for a ‘family of man’ (McLoughlin 201-3),” transcendence through marijuana smoking or LSD, manifested itself most famously at rock music gatherings such as Woodstock and the Hyde Park concert that appears in the final sequences of *Invocation of My Demon Brother*. However, Anger, in his relentless search for a “real-life demon (Director’s Commentary, *Lucifer Rising*, 2010),” and a flock that he sought to enlighten and also “control (Anger, qtd. Rayns 1969),” reinscribed the hippie marijuana ritual to exclusively occult purposes.
And, in doing so, *Invocation of My Demon Brother* articulates a conflicted yet ultimately hostile
gaze at the youth movement of the late-1960s.

Anger (qtd. Cotts, in Rayns 1982) explained the idea of *Lucifer Rising* as a youth
celebration:

> It’s a film about the Love generation, but seen in depth—like in the fourth dimension. It’s about
Love—the violence as well as the tenderness...There’s an invisible war going on. It’s of Miltonic
proportions and it’s a war between the forces of life and death, love and hate. *Lucifer Rising* is a
Prophecy. I see the embodiment of love among the children as winning. Lucifer is actually a
sunshine child—Little Sunshine...” (Anger, qtd. Rayns 1982)

The Moog soundtrack heralds the presence of such “Miltonic” struggle, one that will be resolved
when the hippie symbol, Macramé banner over the image of the Wand Bearer, in the final
sequences of *Invocation*, is superimposed with that of the Mark of the Beast, 666. Church of
Satan founder Anton Szandor LaVey’s entrance to the pulpit, accompanied by the Moog
synthesizer’s increase in volume, speed and intensity, is suffused with crimson light and images
of fire, that are in turn superimposed with the English Hell’s Angels at the London Hyde Park
Rolling Stones concert. While these are the English Angels, not those at Altamont, the Hell’s
Angels’ logo appear in the frame, signaling their presence generally.

Film theorist Leo Goldsmith (2007), alluding to *Gimme Shelter* (Maysles Brothers and
Charlotte Zwerin 1970), the observational, direct-cinema documentary that captured the murder
of an armed, black youth at the Altamont rock-music festival on December 6, 1969, notes that,

> Like Al Maysles’ *Gimme Shelter*, Anger’s film illuminates the demonic shadow of the late 60s,
the darker half of the Summer of Love in all its chaos and horror.

*Invocation*, Like *Gimme Shelter*, records countercultural despair and implosion but, moreover,
the submersion of the countercultural psyche into the occult at a vulnerable time. Anger’s
ideological system comprises primarily the Thelemic faith, devised by Crowley (Allison 2005) but also his friendships with “pro-police” sexual libertine LaVey (Landis 1995, 154-5). In Invocation’s final sequences, the Moog’s blasts are interspersed with tension-building helicopter-like sounds which become noticeable with repeated viewings. These aural and visual juxtapositions, along with the subliminal Vietnam-helicopter footage, construe the counterculture as ultimately conflated with, rather than positioned against, the War in Vietnam.

Anger has noted that Invocation expresses his “feelings about the Vietnam War...that works as a kind of spell (Anger, Director’s Commentary 2010).” Invocation embeds this war narrative through layers of human consciousness. Anger works his spell through a barrage of images: hell fires, a cat thrown into a pit of fire, and a Satanic Mass. The Vietnam War footage is interspersed subliminally with long takes of the youthful celebrants who conjure LaVey through the quintessentially countercultural ritual of marijuana smoking. The grafting of occult symbols— The Mark of the Beast 666 onto the hippie body—evokes a redesignation of 1960s American youth from protest to the occult.

A look at Anger’s ideological position, which has veered towards cultural and political conservatism in respect to the counterculture generally, can shed light on Invocation. In an Artforum article (Gronlund 2008) on his film, Ich Will!, an homage to his fallen, Hitler-Youth cousin, Anger expressed, in regards to his US Army film, Uniform Attraction (2008) his own proclivities towards “men in uniform.” The accompanying photograph features Anger in a business suit and red, white and blue tie, apposite to his views, in another article, of antiwar “cry-baby liberals of Hollywood (Bhattacharya 2004).” More recently, Anger, in his Magic Lantern
Cycle DVD dedication for *Scorpio Rising* (2010), lauded, among others, a white, male, quasi-paramilitary, criminal, motorcycle club: The Hell’s Angels (Di Rienzo n.d; Wood 2003, 343).

The Angels, noted by McLoughlin (1978, 203) as part of “the darker side of the counterculture,” are known for their hyperpatriotism (McNally 2002, 339; Wood 2003, 339), their attacks on antiwar protesters from Berkeley in 1965 (Kitchell 2000; Stevens 1987, 244; McNally 2002, 176-7; Wood 2003, 339), “apparently with the collusion of Oakland police (Gitlin 1993, 211),” and their violent disruption of the Altamont concert on December 6, 1969 (Matusow 2009, 304-5; McNally 2002, 344-349; Gair 2007, 176, 205; Hayden 44-6; Gitlin 1993, 405-7). Altamont, which Gitlin (1993, 406) dubbed “the end of the Age of Aquarius,” involved the Hell’s Angels’ beatings of concertgoers and musicians alike as well as the fatal knifing of an armed, black youth. Significant to Anger’s anticountercultural position is *Invocation’s* evocative and jarring Moog synthesizer track.

In an interview with film theorist Scott MacDonald (2006, 45), Anger noted,

> In the end, *Invocation of My Demon Brother* was something like a first rough sketch for Lucifer. Then when I moved to London, I showed that eleven-minute piece to Mick Jagger, and he volunteered to do an improvisation on his Moog synthesizer for the track, which is rhythmic but very disjunctive and dissonant--which is what I wanted. And I recast and re-formed the Lucifer project.

Germane to MacDonald’s interview, which, together with that of film theorist Kate Haug (1996), is the observation of the soundtrack being more assiduously worked than is generally observed by scholars or even acknowledged by Anger himself. *Lucifer Rising*, Anger explains, was actually “the second Lucifer Rising (commentary, *Lucifer Rising*, 2010).” The first became *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, whose stolen footage—according to Anger, by Beausoleil—stymied the film’s completion.
The interview also underscores Anger’s “frustration and rage from working with Bobby,” which shaped the film’s narrative:

**MacDonald**: When you made *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, was part of the motivation a desire to express your anger at Beausoleil? Were you sending in your ‘spiritual marines’ out of frustration with what had happened?

**Anger**: I did have a lot of frustration and rage from working with Bobby. I cut images of soldiers jumping out of a helicopter, which were from a newsreel of Vietnam, into the salvaged footage and my performances of the ritual. I’ve always considered *Invocation* my War Film; it reflects the feelings of the war—not the actual events but the kind of things that it had unleashed.

Anger expressed hostility towards Beausoleil as well as the counterculture’s peace movement.

Anger, in *Arthur Magazine’s* oral history of the historic March on the Pentagon of 1967, said,

There were a bunch of idiots there. I didn’t consider myself an idiot, but maybe other people would. [laughs] There were these hothead lefties, who, their idea was they would take over and kill the capitalists. Well, that’s not very practical. Then there were Hare Krishnas, peacenik idiots, saying peace peace, or something like that. I didn’t go for anything like that. It was so annoying. (Arthur Magazine: Oral History, 1967/2014)

Anger’s remarks about “hot head lefties” and “peacenik idiots” who were protesting the Vietnam War at the Pentagon, suggest anticountercultural animus rather than “Haight Consciousness.” Miller (2011, xx–xxiv) emphasizes the spirituality of the hippies as relevant to profound challenges to “the supremacy of reason (xxiii),” a pre-Enlightenment sensibility that for some characterized the hippie counterculture, a perspective echoed by Hughes (2011, 262), who observes that psychedelic drugs were seen by the counterculture as tools “to reverse the myth of progress.”

Hughes (2011, 262) observes that “Anger’s films—and indeed the spiritual strain of psychedelic art of the Sixties—are intended to function as ‘deconditioning agents’ …The authentic, idealised state—obtained by the use of such substances—is held to be that of
childhood.” However, as Hughes also notes, the “deconditioning” aspects of LSD or marijuana in the 1960s comprised a broader, socially engaged as well as oneiric purpose (Braunstein and Doyle 2002, 15; Hughes 2011, 205-209). Journalists Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain (1992, 129) observe that “smoking dope was thus an important political catalyst, for it enabled many a budding radical to begin questioning the official mythology of the governing class,” or, that which Hayden (2009, 17) terms “the national creation story” and Dixon (1997, 5) calls “the dreams of the state.” Thus, while spirituality reemerged in the 1960s, and “the old gods came alive,” it also constituted a realignment of meanings, a space of recognition for less represented peoples (Hayden 2009, 160).

As intrinsic to the revolutionary moment, the late-1960s, in some circles, witnessed the exploration of race politics in the context of spiritual awakening. In a review of influential Black-Arts poet Ishmael Reed’s Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down, the Chicago Tribune (10 August 1969) noted that, “Reed tells us that all gods of reason are dead, but he finds an artist’s solace in the dark and manic gods of long ago.” The Black-Arts Movement challenged the national master-narrative wherein “our expansion to the West—built on violence, exploitation, genocide, pollution—has always been the American romance, a legend.” While Reed wove a metaphorical narrative of Lucifer into the late-1960s political, cultural racial upheaval, Invocation omitted any lucid engagement with contemporaneous or nascent political discourses, be they racial equality or Third-World liberation struggles.

In such elision, Anger eviscerates the social component of countercultural deconditioning which was appropriated by political activists, including feminists in 1968, who harnessed such language to counter sexism and homophobia (Braunstein and Doyle 2002, 15, 253), as well as
“war, injustice, poverty, racism, and sexual repression.” Anger, rather than confront political tensions of the day, practiced hermeticism, and is to date known to avoid sharing explications as to his films’ religious meanings, either with his actors or his interviewers. As he told film critic David Cotner (2014), when he asked, “But does magick still mean anything to Anger anymore? ‘Well, I refuse to answer that question.’” Anger (qtd. Cotner) added, “‘Magick is...either you understand it and appreciate it, or it just passes you by. It isn't something you turn on and off—either it's there, or it's not. It's there for me because I've studied the subject all my life and I don't need to impress anybody or show them tricks or anything.’” This was the same refrain that Anger used when he sent actor Chris Jagger packing from the Lucifer Rising set when he asked too many questions (director commentary 2010).

In Invocation, aside from the hermeticism, Anger’s intent to bypass the rational mind constitutes a problematic intervention into audience agency at a time when cinema’s aim and theoretical discourse seemed precisely to encourage demystification, and viewed it as intrinsic to the era’s political contestation (Comolli and Narboni 2009, 688-692), wherein, “only action on both fronts, ‘signified’ and ‘signifiers,’ has any hope of operating against the prevailing ideology.” What is at stake with Anger, vis-à-vis his most hermetic film (Tinkcom 2002, 140; Allison 2005), is not only his spell-inducing intentions but also his use of the occult to reject wholeness, i.e. the counterculture’s capacity to protest politically as well as culturally.

At the end of the 1960s, a reuniting of the disparate and warring spheres of the 1960s movement, meant, in cinema, to articulate and define political struggle as a contestation of the national narrative at a time when, as Gitlin (1993, 220) notes, “by June 30, 1967, there were 448,800 American troops stationed on Vietnamese soil.” Hayden (2009, 44-6) observes how
celebratory enclaves including the Haight-Ashbury drug culture that Anger represents in *Invocation* may have suited reactionary elements in US society: “At the height of the counterculture concerts, be-ins, and festivals, a later de-classified CIA report optimistically viewed the mass spectacles as ‘a new political force that would be an alternative to street action for young people.’” For Hayden, “tolerance of cultural ‘revolutions’ and various forms of spiritual escapism was an old imperial tactic employed to siphon energy away from threatening political movements (44-6.).” *Invocation*, like the cultural ferment in Haight-Ashbury itself, suggests a reclusive rather than contestatory or politically progressive resolution.

Hayden (2009, 44-6) elucidates that, “the new drugs were reminiscent of the distribution of alcohol for American Indians, gin for the ‘gin mills’ of Irish and British workers, and Britain’s introduction of opium into China.” The “mass spectacles” to which Hayden refers, comprise Happenings, or street rituals of music and performance art such as the Diggers. The audacious group is represented by Anger in *Invocation of My Demon Brother* with the appearance of William (Bill, AKA “Sweet William”) Fritsch in the marijuana ritual. The website *Antiques.gif* notes in its advertisement for a photo of Fritsch, a rare photograph of future Manson Family associate Bobby Beausoleil, poet Lenore Kandel, and Digger/Hell's Angel Bill Fritsch, taken by Chester Kessler (1919-1979) on the set of the ill-fated 1967 San Francisco production of Lucifer Rising by experimental filmmaker and occultist Kenneth Anger. (Print is by Kessler.) Fritsch (shown wearing a motorcycle jacket) transitioned around this time from being a Digger to being a member of the Hell's Angels who figured prominently in the Altamont Festival. (*Antiques.gif* 2014)
Anger’s notes on the Magic Lantern Cycle DVD his Scorpio-Rising dedication to the Hell’s Angels.

Dedicated to Jack Parsons, Victor Child, Jim Powers, James Dean, T.E. Lawrence, Hart Crane, Kurt Mann, the Society of the Spartans, the Hell’s Angels and all overgrown boys who will ever follow the whistle of Love’s Brother.

Curiously, no mention is made either on the DVD notes or the Invocation director commentary of the actor whose first name only, “William,” is mentioned in the cast list—not the commentary—who in fact became a Hell’s Angel. Nor has Anger ever mentioned Altamont, the year Invocation was released. Anger does mention Charles Manson, however, and Beausoleil’s murder of Gary Hinman, also in 1969.

Film theorist Charlie Fox (2013), to this end, observes that, “Invocation of My Demon Brother... records the inevitable burnout: psychedelic California in the process of disintegration, fried by too many drugs, waiting for Charles Manson to arrive. (Its most potent symbol is Bobby Beausoleil, who appears nude, angelic, and would soon participate in the Manson family murders.)” Meanwhile, some journalistic narratives branded all hippies as occultists and drug fiends (Marshall 2003, 3-4), while the FBI’s Counterinsurgency program, or COINTELPRO, contributed to countercultural implosion (Hunt 1999, 150; Gitlin 1993, 413; Hale 2002, 146-156; Hayden 2009, 69-70).

While the 1960s challenged the master-narrative of conquest (Hayden 2009, 17), “a fundamental assault on this national creation story and its replacement by a more honest one,” Invocation represents and enacts the counterculture as an occult-based project, rather than a youthful contestation to the dominant discourse and its military incarnation in Vietnam. The hippie counterculture was absorbed into the mainstream culture while the political goals of the
youth movement have taken far more time to impact American society (Hayden 2009, 44-5), such that “the critical period between 1965 and 1972 was one of conservative advantage, with lasting political consequences.” Anger’s countercultural ceremony is one that is self-enclosed, limiting and, ultimately, more conservative than liberatory.

**Emile de Antonio: The Political Avant-Garde**

*In the Year of the Pig* was hailed by the *Chicago Tribune* (29 September 1969) as “a documentary with a point of view.” Film theorist Thomas Waugh (2004) notes of de Antonio’s aural technique, that “the dominant logic of the de Antonio film is verbal and the image often functions simply as a contrapuntal accompaniment to the primary current of the film, its voices arising out of the documents from the past, with voices from the present, echoing, interpreting, mocking, judging, analyzing, exorcising them.” *In the Year of the Pig* infuses its critical commentary with echoes of the past as well as the hopes of the present, to forge a new discourse of nationness.

Film theorist Dan Streible and media theorist and philosopher Douglas Kellner (2000, 75) contend that de Antonio’s aesthetic emanates from modernism: “Such an aesthetic strategy places his work in the tradition of modernism. It also puts de Antonio in a democratic documentary tradition that trusts popular intelligence to draw appropriate conclusions from complex work.” This contestation was meant to alter the status quo of US imperialism, to replace a triumphalist narrative with a newer one, meant to valorize freedom and justice.

De Antonio, to do this, intersperses images with commentaries by intellectuals, military personnel and politicians, to facilitate analysis and, ultimately, resistance to the war. *In The Year*
of the Pig records the United States’ involvement in Vietnam, and also contributes to the era’s protest. The ironized juxtaposition of sound and images provoke critique of the Vietnam War, in what De Antonio calls, “an organizing weapon, a collage/history of the people's struggle in Vietnam (Emile de Antonio, qtd. Nichols, 1978; Kellner and Streible 2000, 224-5).”

De Antonio’s use of cinema as “an organizing weapon” differentiates his use of cinematic weaponry from that of Anger’s “magickal weapon” as a mesmerizing vehicle. In the Year of the Pig exemplified agitprop as a creative intervention that entailed risk, including hostility from conservatives both in the US and abroad. The film begins with a reflective space, set forth through a series of images, including those of war drawings and soldiers beating drums, iconographic American Revolutionary and Civil War images (Kellner and Streible 2000, 37). These are followed by the sounds of sirens and weaponry involved in Vietnam including “whirring helicopter sounds” to allude to Vietnam as a very different kind of war than the founders imagined.

The narrative de Antonio presents is one that is new, yet mythically imbued with voices from America’s past. The opening sequence comprises static images of “Boston’s memorial statue of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the black troops of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment going off to fight the Civil War (Kellner and Streible 2000, 37), as well a quote by “Marquis de Lafayette, who fought in the American Revolution (de Antonio, qtd. Picard, in Kellner and Streible 2000, 217).” The introduction to In the Year of the Pig melds past with present, and includes youthful voices, an image of a young soldier with a helmet that says, “Make War Not Love.” This subversion of the famous Make Love not War slogan is, however, counterpointed
with its dialectical response by a young draft resister in the final third of the film, constituting a
cinematic, cultural and symbolic intervention into the national narrative.

_In the Year of the Pig_ augurs this contestation through its opening images, which
establish a reflective audiovisual space that poses contradictory imagistic and aural elements;
while the images are silent, they are soon followed by the sounds of missiles, helicopters and
other war instruments. These aural nondiegetic elements are the result of a composed piece, that
de Antonio calls a “helicopter concerto,” created by Steve Addis, because “the music of America
today is the helicopter in Vietnam (de Antonio, qtd. Kellner and Streible 2000, 217).” _In the Year
of the Pig_ comprises three main sections, evoking a dialectical structure of thesis, antithesis and
synthesis which facilitates contestation to the Vietnam War.

The first part of the film posits a conflicting national narrative wherein the founding
fathers clash with the Vietnam-War weaponry. What follows in part two is critical exposition,
including commentary from various experts and participants in the Vietnam War. The third part
includes new voices, such as the young war protester, John Towler. These are then followed by
the film’s final scene: American military loss, including wounded soldiers in the jungles of
Vietnam accompanied by “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.”

_In the Year of the Pig’s_ images and sounds, in contrast to those in Anger’s _Invocation of
My Demon Brother_, are clearly meant to evoke the inhumanity of the Vietnam War; its sounds,
introduced in the film’s opening sequence, are powerful, aural signs which meet their visual
counterparts in the film’s midpoint; the cacophony of destructive forces, including warplanes,
underscore the depth and scope of American brutality, in what many considered at the time to be
the nation’s most controversial war to date. While a helicopter sound reminiscent of those in
Invocation briefly plays over the beginning segment’s shot of a government man fingering the globe in his office, most of the sounds in Year of the Pig are louder and more disturbing than the tension-provoking, helicopter and static sounds of Invocation of My Demon Brother. In the Year of the Pig, in its lucid condemnation of Vietnam, melds avant-garde artistry with progressive politics.

The harmonization between these two values, culture and politics, along with spiritual yearning that defined the hippie counterculture, constituted one of the youth movement’s predominant goals. In the Year of the Pig underscores not only the loss in lives but also in morals. The film both records history of protest and participates in a lucid discourse thereof. The film’s final part, in dialectical opposition to oneiric withdrawal and “apathy” mentioned by the young protester, John Towler, harnesses sound and dialogue not to mesmerize or disorient the viewer, but to prod a radical rethinking of what it meant to be an American.

In the Year of the Pig’s challenge to the national narrative, lucid yet tinged with irony, is reminiscent of the contemporaneous avant-garde of Argentinean directors Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in their epic-agitprop documentary that same year, La Hora de los Hornos (The Hour of the Furnaces). These are filmmakers who, as film theorist Robert Stam (1980) observes, joined political struggle and art, as a discursive intervention to neocolonialism. La Hora de Los Hornos, one of the most quintessentially 1968 films, emerged the year that saw the college campuses explode with subsequent repression, worldwide, including New York’s Columbia University, Paris’s Nanterre, the Prague Spring, Tlatelolco in Mexico City and Buenos Aires.

De Antonio, as artist, is also an observer of a national moment whose solution is rational analysis and committed politics. Stam’s (1980, 159) observation of La Hora de Los Hornos
illuminates *In the Year of the Pig*. He notes that, “while drawing on a certain avant-garde, *La Hora* critiques what it sees as the apolitical avant-garde.” He elucidates that, “revolutionary art must first of all be revolutionary as *art* (Benjamin)—but avant-garde films are not necessarily revolutionary.” De Antonio, like Getino and Solanas in Argentina that same year, contributed to political documentary cinema by making revolutionary film under the auspices of the avant-garde. Yet with *In the Year of the Pig*, de Antonio creates a specifically American product that dismantles both US hegemonic narratives and Hollywood classicism.

As he told Kellner (Film Archive interview, 2012), “I’m an artist who makes political films.” Kellner commented that, “It’s this interrelationship of politics and art.” De Antonio replied, “I agree with you; I think that’s what my work tries to be.” It is precisely his striving to reconcile art and politics that renders de Antonio significant in terms of ideology in the 1960s American avant-garde. De Antonio’s contribution thereof is the collage method, a cinematic artistry which he accomplished through dialectical and ironic counterpositioning of images and sound.

For example, The French defeat at Dien Bien Phu is accompanied by an autoethnographic rendition, with regional, string instruments, of “The Marseillaise,” played over a cemetery (Kellner and Streible 2000, 37). Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Literature theorist Mary Louise Pratt (1991, 531) observes how the zones of contact between colonizer and colonized “involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror.” As the Vietnamese instruments play the French National Anthem, de Antonio connotes the injustice and inequality that underpinned French involvement in Indochina. These critical yet darkly humorous juxtapositions underscore the absurdity of the colonial project.
De Antonio’s ironic collage style was derived both from Soviet montage theory and “strictly American roots.” He notes that, “putting two elements together in the editing process, if you do it right, develops something greater than the sum of the two parts (de Antonio, qtd. Susan Linfield, Streible and Kellner 2000, 113).” As de Antonio told artist Lil Picard (2000, 219), “my essential method and technique is irony—it is the placing of one image against another, never with any explanations. This is my contribution to documentary film, in Point of Order and this one.” De Antonio elucidates that he also derived his collage technique from composer John Cage (Linfield, in Kellner and Streible 113): “The early Soviets had a kind of collage technique. This is what Eisenstein was doing, although I don’t think he ever used the word collage. But what the Russian theorists talked about is the thing that I feel I got out of strictly American roots.” *In the Year of the Pig* is thus a sui generis revolutionary art film, American in form as well as content.

De Antonio’s collagic critique reaches its apogee when, at a third of the way through the film, a US Army commander is interviewed by ABC as he supervises a makeshift concentration camp of captured Vietnamese. The commander, when asked by ABC how the Vietnamese prisoners will survive the cold night, quips that, “they’ll all huddle together and keep each other warm.” While the images focus on human beings struggling to maintain their composure and dignity in an inhumane situation, the dialogue suggests that for the commander, the prisoners are not really human beings. They will “huddle together” as if they were animals. Later, a television-newscast commentator says that the Vietnamese are being treated well, but the images show US soldiers beating and kicking unarmed Vietnamese civilians, suspected Viet Cong, the enemy. *In the Year of the Pig*, in an interview with Father Daniel Berrigan in the final part of the film, critiques the war and attendant mistreatment by drawing together faith, reason and social justice.
reminiscent of McLoughlin’s description of the Third Great Awakening (McLoughlin 1978, 162-3; 178). The scene with Berrigan welds art and spirituality with political awareness that inflected and underpinned some of the counterculture’s fondest aspirations.

Berrigan’s presence, in Year of the Pig’s final sequence, exemplifies how de Antonio viewed the counterculture as an active, not passive, love generation, and underscores how antiwar activism drew from faith to oppose a morally unacceptable war. Since the 19th century abolitionist movement, activists have drawn from a language of faith to renounce, at times violently, as did John Brown, a concept of nation that normalized human bondage. To illustrate such bondage, near the last third of the film, a Vietnamese family looks on helplessly as their trees are cut down. The sound of the saws is harnessed to connote the hostility with which a nation abjectifies its enemies.

The abjectification of the designated communist enemy brings to mind historian Federico Finchelstein’s (2010, 172) “fascist theory of the abject,” in which “besides its ideological ‘negation’ of socialism and Marxism, fascism involved the negation of the other as an object of dialogical political exchange.” Similarly, in the expository documentary Berkeley in the Sixties (Kitchell 1999), Governor Ronald Reagan at a press meeting over the Berkeley People’s Park struggle in the spring of 1969, when asked by a professor to negotiate with the students and community, replied “what do you mean, negotiate?” as if the very word were somehow preposterous. In the Year of the Pig’s commander answers, in response to ABC’s question in the concentration-camp scene, that he doesn’t know which of these are Viet Cong. The camera, whose filmic space comprises men, women and children, then focuses on a little baby in the arms
of its mother. This ironized juxtaposition of aural and visual elements exemplifies De Antonio’s collage in its most contestatory moments.

In the Year of the Pig’s avant-garde, while connected in form to political agitprop and collage harnessed by the Third Cinema in the films of Solanas and Getino, drew from that privileged space of US postwar prosperity and freedom to, in philosopher and literary theorist Walter Benjamin’s (1968, 242) terms, politicize art: rather than aestheticize war. In “politicizing art” (Benjamin 1968, 242), de Antonio illuminates the bellicose malfeasance of his nation signified by the Vietnam War, representing it as one of aggression, inimical to its opening images that invoke the American Revolution and the war to end black slavery, the Civil War.

Just as slavery was a moral as well as political problem in America, In the Year of the Pig’s interview with Father Daniel Berrigan, in the final sequence, explores the moral implications of the Vietnam War. Berrigan comments that the Vietnamese “trust their government,” led by Ho Chi Minh, who has supported their struggle against the US. He then adds,

Which is to say the war’s not working...it means the last days of Superman...to kill is not enough. He can raven and destroy but he cannot give life and as we know so bitterly he cannot live, himself. (Father Daniel Berrigan, qtd. In the Year of the Pig, 1968)

Like Invocation’s revisionist conflation of the hippies and the US military, In the Year of the Pig conjoins two adversaries. However, In the Year of the Pig’s combatants are not the US Vietnam War and the counterculture; they are the American and Vietnamese Revolutionaries. De Antonio accomplishes this ligature through “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” The US’s song of union patriotism written by Julia Ward Howe around the time of the Civil War was also drawn from camp revivals of the First Great Awakening and from the Civil War song, “John Brown’s Body”
(Kimball 1889). The song plays as the US troops carry their wounded and the film ends. While *In the Year of the Pig* begins with the sound of war, it concludes with the sound of revolution bathed in American national mythos.

De Antonio’s *In the Year of the Pig*, in its invocation of the startling thematic and formal contestation of the national narrative comprises an affront to what he views as the “empty films” of Hollywood:

> All my work is like *art brut*. It’s savage, brutal work in the sense that I don’t really care too much for great shots because Hollywood produces all those great shots and makes empty films, films that have no meaning. I don’t mind old black and white images. Of course, I prefer black and white to colour to begin with. (qtd. Jackson 1988, 2004)

De Antonio thus chose black and white film for aesthetic predilection, which connotes a war that is not pretty, a history and a critique that confronts the national narrative of triumphalism or Manifest Destiny. De Antonio, eschewing the aesthetic loveliness of mainstream Hollywood cinema, creates in the spirit of 1960s Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha’s “aesthetics of hunger” (1997) and Cuban filmmaker Julio García Espinosa’s (1997) “imperfect cinema,” in their preference for social and political criticism, not “empty” enjoyment. As Kellner (n.d), drawing from Foucault, notes, “pleasure itself is neither natural nor innocent. Pleasure is learned and is thus intimately bound up with power and knowledge.” De Antonio’s politicization of art is the militant artist’s response to, in Dixon’s (1997, 5) words, “the dreams of the state.” And De Antonio’s confrontation carried consequences.

He notes that the Paris theater showing the film was “stink bombed” because this was a film that contested the political status quo consonant with the political activism that defined the 1960s:
It was used as a tool by the Moratorium; it was a benefit for the Chicago Seven at the opening of their trial; the Australian antiwar movement used it as its primary film weapon; it played GI coffee houses; it played teach-ins. I still meet people who say, "Your film turned me to antiwar activity." And yes, it still plays colleges. (De Antonio, qtd. Nichols 1978; Kellner and Streible 2000, 225)

The fact that *In the Year of the Pig* continued to appeal to students, as well as the antiwar movement of the 1960s and ‘70s, signifies de Antonio’s progressive ideological position. De Antonio stated that, “In the Year of the Pig “was the first U.S. Marxist film to be nominated for an Academy Award.” (Qtd. Nichols 1978). However, a film that critiqued the Vietnam War proved controversial in the late-1960s.

*Time* (14 November 1969) called de Antonio’s new film, “a new kind of chiller movie:”

Audiences sit in helpless frustration watching scenes of unreeling historical horror. Producer-Director Emile de Antonio (Point of Order) has taken his ghoulish episodes from newsreels made in and about Viet Nam over the past three decades. The result is a slanted but devastating account of the spiraling American involvement in Southeast Asia...A powerful if oversimplified introduction to the political and moral morass of Vietnam.

Although the Marxist film emerged problematically, viewed by mainstream society as “a slanted but devastating account,” contradicting “the national creation story,” *Time* concedes what de Antonio intended to convey, “The moral and political morass of Vietnam.” De Antonio, in order to present the other side of the Vietnam War, used footage from both American and Soviet-Bloc sources (de Antonio, qtd. Nichols 1978; Kellner and Streible 200, 224-5). Yet, in doing so, he engages profoundly with American national mythos. De Antonio’s heroes were not Communists but “people like Tom Paine and Thomas Jefferson and Lincoln” (qtd. Film Archive 2012), the nation’s most revered founders. While De Antonio thus forges a connection between current events, the Vietnam War then raging, and the invocation of traditional signifying themes of nation, he also draws together the wisdom of youth. The film’s final section represents America’s youth in protest.
The introductory, static photograph of the young soldier with the war helmet is, in the film’s final segment, replaced by a moving, speaking image of John Towler, who rejects the Vietnam War:

I’m deserting the army because I’m protesting the US involvement in the Vietnamese conflict. The key is communication. And most of the American soldiers I know cannot communicate. They don’t really understand the Vietnamese way of life and its goals; and the only way they can communicate is through money or a gun. They mistrust the Vietnamese and they kind of despise them.

Towler’s interview contests the “make war not love” discourse of the image shown at the film’s opening. His interview authenticates and reinforces the youthful antiwar protest that was gathering force on US campuses and in the public sphere at the end of the 1960s. Here, the discourse of the “make war, not love” helmet is questioned, contested and ultimately superseded by the more progressive one.

Such manifestations of discontent and contestation, outside the spaces of political avant-garde cinema arose concurrently with discourse of intellectuals, artists and icons of the 1960s, as in philosopher Herbert Marcuse’s (1964, 63) “Great Refusal...the protest against that which is.” De Antonio’s comment to Kellner (Film Archives 2012) that, “nobody admires us, we have nothing to hold up” (Film Archive 2012), brings to mind Bob Dylan’s 1965 folk-rock anthem, “It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding),” in which he laments that, “I’ve got nothing, Ma, to live up to.” De Antonio, In the Year of the Pig, bridges the gap between cultural and political modes of 1960s rebellion and, like Hayden (2009, 16), contends that the US is not an exemplary City on a Hill. As film theorist Dave Saunders (2007, 141) describes the 1960s observational cinema, De Antonio, too, is “expressing the troubled nature of a great but tragically flawed nation” whose incursion into Vietnam severed the earlier dreams of the nation from its moral foundations.
In an interview with Kellner (Film Archive 2012), de Antonio commented,

People have to reinvent themselves all the time, and a country has to reinvent itself all the time. We should be making a new kind of life in this country. This is a world of many kinds of people, many different races, all in one place. It devolves on us to be experimental, to be radical, to be open, to risk our lives for the truth.

**Kellner:** You have done it.

**De Antonio:** No country’s ever done it.

Thus de Antonio’s *In the Year of the Pig*, a melding of politics and avant-garde cinema, speaks to the need for a continual process of reinvention and rethinking. The film, in doing so, celebrates a tentative amalgamation of culture and politics that was the impetus of the 1960s American counterculture.

**Jonas Mekas’s Walden: Correcting the Counterculture**

Arthur (2005, 4) notes that, “first, Mekas’s career in the sixties cannot be reduced to an unbroken aesthetic or political profile. Its determining features are complex and often avowedly self-contradictory.” Mekas’ striving for beauty in his art constitutes an ironic counterpoint to his statements about the New American Cinema. Mekas’s masterpiece, *Diaries, Notes and Sketches: Also Known as Walden* (1969) bears significant traces of the schism between cultural and political modes of contestation that accompanied, and problematized the 1960s youth movement.

Rees (1999, 64) observes:

Underground film in the USA at first encompassed a range of non- or anticommercial activities, which challenged Hollywood’s grip and commercialism….In 1960 the New York artists’ avant-garde joined with these other independents to form the New American Cinema Group: ‘We don’t want false, polished, slick films—we prefer them rough, unpolished, but alive,’ ran their manifesto. ‘We don’t want rosy films—we want them the color of blood.’

Yet Mekas’s *Diaries, Notes, and Sketches: also known as Walden*, while aesthetically complex, is, in its elision of political or any other form of human conflict, a strikingly lighthearted
depiction of late-1960s America. Mekas’s eschewal of politics derived from several disparate sources. While these influences have been observed by scholars (See, for example, James 1989; Arthur 1992), yet unexplored are the ideological-discursive and historical dimensions manifested in *Diaries*’s penultimate segment, “To John and Yoko with Love.”

The first influence was Mekas’s troubled political background, growing up as a war refugee first in German- and then Soviet-occupied Lithuania; the second included the creative insights that Mekas gleaned from centuries of individualist dreamers, and from America’s 19th-century republican traditions of Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and Ralph Waldo Emerson (Sitney 2008, Arthur 1992; James 1989, 1996, 2009). The third, and most germane to the current discussion, involved Mekas’s engagement of the hippie Zeitgeist that viewed progressive organizing as inimical to its utopian dreams of beauty and celebration.

*Diaries, Notes and Sketches: Also Known as Walden*, aside from its ideological valence, is an aesthetically vivid, formally innovative celebration of life in and around New York City in the mid-to-late 1960s. Mekas, through his use of single-frame cinematography, sound-image juxtapositions and blending of documentary and highly personal cinematic poetry, sought to infuse the profilmic world with a sense of joyful exuberance and celebration, and to avoid or contain all manifestations of political as well as interpersonal strife then transpiring in America. Mekas, in doing so, evokes the cultural-political divide of the 1960s counterculture, a conflict that is not traversed by *Diaries* but reproduced. Mekas records, but also redefines and tames, not only the city, but also the youth movement of the 1960s.

Mekas, in his shaping of life into a very personal poetry, effaces the struggles and unsightliness of conflict, power, and suffering. As filmmaker Alfredo Leonardi (qtd. Chodorov
and Lebrat 2009, 127) observes, “No images of ghettos, violence, exasperation, inequality, no scum. Jonas’s aspiration for purity extends to everything; it covers over and makes us forget even dirt and injustice. It weaves a tight and brilliant canvas with solid foundations, defending the integrity of his mind.” Mekas in *Diaries* creates the world anew even as it wracks with conflict, implosion and talk of revolution. *Diaries* exemplifies the Romanticism of the American avant-garde noted by film theorist Jan-Christopher Horak (2002, 27), but also the oneiric strain of its contemporary hippie culture that viewed progressive, organized activism as anathema. *Diaries* draws from a half century of avant-garde filmmaking that, in America, strived to create the world anew. In *Diaries*, Mekas, drawing from the intensely personal and Romantic artistic and cinematic traditions, creates a filmic world that is shorn of strife, conflict and inhumanity.

Mekas, who launched the New American Cinema Group in 1960, from the outset emerged as a cultural rebel, democratizing avant-garde film exhibition in New York City, challenging Amos Vogel’s selectiveness in Cinema 16 (Nichols 2014). Mekas is also a meticulous mediator of his own profilmic spaces. *Diaries* emerged in 1969, around the time that the black power, women’s and gay-liberation movements had first achieved public recognition.

Film theorists Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin (2009, 331) note:

Although sporadic protests and civil rights demonstrations in favor of gay rights occurred throughout the 1960s, the ‘birth’ of the modern gay and lesbian civil right movement is often associated with the Stonewall Riots...within months, many national newspapers and news magazines were announcing the birth of a new liberation movement similar to those being created by women, African Americans, and Latinos. Suddenly, a new minority group demanding fair and equal treatment came into mainstream America’s view.

*Diaries* bypasses all of these political, racial and social developments. The film engages with the Vietnam War only peripherally, its only signifier the Bed-In for Peace held in May 1969 in
Montreal. While Mekas, in *Diaries*, foregrounds the cultural at the expense of the political ferment taking place, the Ono/Lennon Bed-In segment carries especial sociopolitical significance in light of the Berkeley People’s Park Battle at the California campus concurrently transpiring. Mekas’s focus on the dreamlike, the joyful and the beautiful aspects of life in the 1960s stemmed from his feeling of vulnerability in a world of strife.

Mekas (1992) observes:

I shot all my *Diaries* out of self-defense, too, in order not to be crushed... in order to withstand the attacks on all of my senses... yes, out of self-defense. You could look at my *Diaries*, my film diaries, also as an attempt to correct the city, the land, to stress certain aspects and to suppress others...the stress is on celebration, because that’s what’s lacking here, today. I’m making corrections. (*Jonas Mekas Talks About Underground Cinema*, YouTube, 1992)

In the counterculture the war was on two fronts; while Mekas waged a cultural confrontation with established, industrial cinema, on the Berkeley campus, activist Mario Savio, who led the Free Speech Movement (FSM) had, in the mid-1960s, fought for freedom of expression, the right to speak about racism and other problems in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement in America. While in Mekas’s *Diaries*, “the stress is on celebrations, because that’s what’s lacking here, today,” one might well argue that “self-defense...in order not to be crushed” could equally apply to America’s political dissidents who underwent government harassment or repression for their efforts to liberalize political discourse. Freedom of speech, including the Berkeley FSM, and creative expression in art, are hallmarks of American democracy, and, according to Arthur (1992, 29), were imbricated with Mekas’s own confrontations when he faced arrest for exhibiting *Flaming Creatures* (Jack Smith, 1963) (James 1992, 11; Arthur 1992, 24, 29). Still, Mekas’s political engagement with the late-1960s youth movement, despite two earlier,
somewhat edgier films such as *The Brig* (1964) and *Guns of the Trees* (1961), remained at-best ambivalent (Arthur 1992, 24-30).

*Diaries* emerged in 1969, when such activists for free speech as Savio were being pursued recklessly by the FBI. Savio, because of his prolonged ordeal with the government, suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Hayden 2014), and at a time when the youth movement had begun to implode. But for Mekas, in *Walden*, there was only the public good, the dances, the weddings, the visit to filmmaker Stan Brakhage's cabin in Colorado, and other, creative and natural wonders. *Walden* represented a world of jubilant celebration and startling beauty.

While *Diaries* is a vivid, aesthetically significant historical document that illuminates as James (1996, 190) notes, “a radically democratic cinema as the means to populist social renewal,” it also sheds light on how the American avant-garde in the late-1960s navigated the tensions between culture and political modes of contestation. Mekas’s “populist social renewal” comprised a cinematic dance of harmony in a nation wracked by a wave of turbulence that journalists Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain (1998, 221-222) compare with the Civil War (Also see McNally 2002, 338-9). In response to that turbulence, a rightward turn ensued on the heels of a concerted campaign by the government’s COINTELPRO to destroy not only speech advocates like Savio and the New Left itself, but also the Black Panthers (Hayden 2009; 69-73; Gitlin 1993, 413; Hale 2002, 144-5) and, according to historian Jeff A. Hale (2002, 144-5) the counterculture in its broader, politically and culturally amalgamated forms, as well. These were conflict-ridden times that Mekas, in *Diaries*, sought to replace with beauty, peace and communal
celebration redolent not only of transcendental Romanticism of his forbears but the oneiric, utopianism of the hippie counterculture.

Mekas, in response to an interview question by Scott MacDonald (1984, 105) observes:

Not only Central Park. To me Walden exists throughout the city. You can reduce the city to your own very small world which others may never see. The usual reaction after seeing Walden is a question: ‘Is this New York?’ Their New York is ugly buildings and depressing, morbid blocks of concrete and glass. That is not my New York. In my New York there is a lot of nature. Walden is made up of bits of memories of what I wanted to see. I eliminated what I didn’t want to see.

Mekas’ “making corrections,” his elision of the strife, his elimination of “what I didn’t want to see” connotes not only the soot and conflicts of the city, but also the Montreal Bed-In for Peace’s political context. Therein are influences of Idealism and Romanticism.

Arthur (1992), moreover, links the late-1960s avant-garde with the sensuous, antirational and antiauthoritarian populism of the hippie counterculture:

Entreaties such as Timothy Leary’s ‘Get out of your mind and into your sense’ are indicative of a broad tendency in the sixties to regard inherited rules of argument and exposition (logical sequence, evidence, appeals to authority) as aligned with established structures of power and repressive of the individual’s firsthand experience. The animus against formal language is reflected by such diverse phenomena as lyricless rock music, the near-muteness of much experimental theater, and avant-garde film’s almost complete severing of the image from human speech. (37)

Arthur (1992, 41) elucidates of Mekas that “on a host of occasions he reminded himself and implored filmmakers not to ‘add to the ugliness’ of society by making works that conveyed anger or divisiveness, recommending ‘celebration’ of life and beauty over ‘protest.’” In one of the key moments in Diaries, and in the spring of 1969, the Bed-In for Peace vignette, the penultimate sequence in Reel Six, Mekas obliterates not only conflict generally but a key political-military theater that, of all battles between the US government and the American 1960s counterculture, constituted its last gasp of fragile, cultural-political unity.
Mekas’s “To John and Yoko, with Love” vignette differs starkly from avant-garde filmmaker and songwriter Yoko Ono’s documentary *Bed Peace* (2012), which she directed, filmed and produced with filmmaker Nic Knowland and Beatles star/songwriter John Lennon. Ono’s film documents the same event and subjects—herself and Lennon, along with her young daughter Kyoko—yet includes dialogue about the Vietnam-War and the Berkeley People’s Park Battle then raging. Mekas, by contrast, mediated the same footage via single-frame cinematography, removed diegetic sound, accompanied the vignette with “Give Peace a Chance” (sung by Lennon and guests during the Bed-In), and aestheticized that conflicted cultural and political realm to fit comfortably within his film’s compositional schema. *Diaries* comprises a unified set of sequences, a sense of democratic sharing. *Diaries*’ organization of vignettes, divided equally in time and attention, connotes a majoritarian art, where no one subject or sequence could hegemonize the film or undermine its utopian narrative.

In the Ono/Knowland/Lennon version of the Bed-In, the Len nons receive telephone calls from the protesters at Berkeley, while discussions ensue over antiwar strategies—peaceful media-driven campaign versus confrontational/direct action, nudity, and business matters. Ono’s (2012) documentary includes the dialogue spoken between her and Lennon, guests and critics, as well as the diegetic sing-a-long, with friends surrounding their bed, of Lennon’s antiwar protest song, “Give Peace a Chance.” Mekas’s version, in contrast, situates the Bed-In for Peace into a singularly celebratory, conflict-free segment of life. Mekas’s vignette, although richly woven and highly lyrical, belies the historical context of its production. During the Bed-In, which took place in May 1969, Berkeley was exploding with violence, hence the urgent telephone calls seen in Ono’s rendition.
Gitlin (1993, 357-361) observes in the People’s Park siege by the National Guard what may have been, aside from Altamont later that year, the final, decisive battle of the United States counterculture. The Berkeley People’s Park Battle was lost when “Governor Ronald Reagan sent three thousand rifle-bearing National Guardsmen into Berkeley,” attacking students, passersby and visitors, including James Rector, who was fatally shot in the stomach; another man, the artist Alan Blanchard, was “blinded by birdshot.” These repressive events were concurrent with, yet elided, in “To John and Yoko with Love.” The correction that Mekas accomplishes in his penultimate sequence is the effacing of history. Berkeley was a historical-ideological landmark which witnessed in the People’s Park campaign before its demise, the union of culture and politics (Gitlin 1993, 354-5), wherein “someone made seven-foot-high letters spelling KNOW, straight out of Yellow Submarine (Gitlin 355).”

Mekas in “To John and Yoko With Love,” consonant with the nonpolitical, oneiric Neoplatonism of the mid-1960s hippie counterculture and the Romanticism of the American avant-garde, evoked the tensions within the 1960s counterculture that both propelled it towards unity, yet ultimately stymied its success. The Yippies sought to unite the cultural and political wings of the movement (Arthur 1992, 41-2). But the dream that emerged at the Be-In of January 14, 1967 ended, at least for that decade, at Altamont on December 6, 1969. While Mekas represented beauty imagined by the hippies and dreamers that span centuries, or millennia, Diaries was not an agent of social change.
**Making History: Haskell Wexler’s Chicago**

Acclaimed cinematographer Haskell Wexler (Mike Nichols’ *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, 1966), in his first, directed feature film, *Medium Cool* (1969), violated the boundaries between documentary and fiction and, in doing so, also bridged dualities such as cinema and life, art and politics, and class and race. *Medium Cool*, which was set in the summer of 1968, in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention, was a problematically produced and distributed industrial (Hollywood) film (Schaefer and Salvato 1984 248). Wexler, for *Medium Cool*, braved teargas, FBI surveillance and a virtual halt to his film’s distribution via a “political X” rating (Wexler qtd. Cronin 2013).

Wexler, in his discussion of *Medium Cool* (Vice/Criterion 2014), delves into moral questions about the role of the filmmaker at a time of struggle. He notes that while “the cultural revolution got co-opted very easily,” *Medium Cool* is the political confrontation through cinema, and that “the audience was very, very small.” While few saw *Medium Cool*, it was acclaimed for its melding of fiction and documentary as well as its unabashed engagement with controversial themes of race, the mass media, counterculture and class, that had emerged but not yet pervaded with such uncompromising lucidity, mainstream, Hollywood cinema. Wexler’s contestation of media power is not merely era-specific but a historic legacy of discursive and political intervention by artists, intellectuals and activists in a nation that had, through 1865, practiced black slavery and which, in 1968, persisted in maintaining white and black poverty, as well as repression toward its most rebellious generation in history. Moreover, *Medium Cool*’s Godardian subject-to-camera confrontation involves a distancing mechanism which calls attention to both
the film’s constructedness (Cronin 2013; Renov 2004, 30-1) and, specifically, the racial and class-based discourse of the American media.

The direct-camera address suggests an industrial as well as formal and ideological dismantling. These attributes of reflexiveness were, for Comolli and Narboni, writing in the wake of the Paris 1968 student movement (2009, 688-692), the needed interventions for a revolutionary film, confronting and dismantling ideology through both the signifier and signified (form as well as thematic content). Wexler, in Medium Cool, intervened discursively into the national narrative of conquest that excludes, marginalizes and represses the voices and bodies of underrepresented peoples. And, in his engagement thus, Wexler contributed to an unfolding legacy of, in Benjamin’s (1968, 242) words, “politicizing art.”

In one of the most historically significant scenes in Medium Cool, Black Arts actors Val Gray Ward and Felton Perry each confront a news cameraman, John Katsellas (Robert Forster) in their uptown apartment. The artists contest the media’s representation of African-Americans but also face the camera, i.e. spectator, as polarized combatants in the era of Black Power. This scene in Medium Cool is not merely a copy of Jean-Luc Godard’s Brechtian-inspired direct-camera addresses, also known as breaking the fourth wall, but a confrontation with the American national narrative at a time of sociohistorical crisis.

As such, Medium Cool, which focused precisely upon the responsibility of the cameraman, disrupted the industrial as well as sociopolitical status quo. Renov (2004, 29) notes that the Gulf and Western Corporation held back Medium Cool because they feared political agitation in the streets.
Wexler, in an interview with film critics Dennis Schaefer and Larry Salvato (1984), notes how he has had to defend himself as an ideological filmmaker:

Well, I’d have to address myself to the phrase, ‘politically motivated.’ I mean suppose a guy says, ‘I make films where I make the best bucks. I make films where they pay me the most; I’m interested in entertainment and screw all this ideology stuff.’ Now you couldn’t find a stronger political statement than that, yet no one says that’s a political statement. (251)

_Medium Cool_, a film that dismantles Hollywood ideology by calling attention to the constructedness of narrative and form, also signifies a potent intervention into the national narrative at a time when politics and culture had begun tentatively to converge. And it did so in ways that underscored and valorized racial, class and other struggles. Wexler contributed to a narrative of progressive politics whose consequences continue to enervate American cinema as well as society.

_Medium Cool_ focuses on the politicization of Katsellas, a news photographer, who becomes aware of his human responsibility to his subjects. The film explores Katsellas’s romance with an Appalachian migrant named Eileen (Verna Bloom) and her thirteen-year-old son Harold Horton (Harold Blankenship). _Medium Cool_ received an X rating not only because Wexler portrayed the violence by police against protesters and bystanders outside the convention hall, his lucid engagement with poverty—both white and black—but also his positioning of African American subjects who spoke directly to the camera to voice their protest against media representation.

As Wexler stated of Paramount executives, “they knew they were in the presence of a film they had never seen before.” The shock was incredible, and the film had to be stopped, at least stymied, from wide distribution (Cronin 2013, Renov 2004, 41). Wexler’s role as
filmmaker, which included considerable risk, was to transform the national narrative, to contest a discourse of art as a realm essentially separate from politics:

Whereas if I say, ‘I make films that I feel are positive human statements that enlighten or enlarge man’s view of life and of the earth and of one another,’ well that becomes a political statement. Now that’s because our culture has adapted itself to accept consumerism, to accept the profit motive, to accept the personal selfish attitude as ‘nonpolitical.’ And to consider the things which are a basic part the Declaration of Independence as political statements. I maintain that every act that a person takes as a social human being is a political act. (251)

Renov (2004, 35-6) observes that, “a great deal of the effectiveness of Medium Cool’s attack on the brutal effects of a repressive state apparatus depends on its ability to contextualize violence within American culture and sensibility.”

Wexler (1988), to this end, noted how “Medium Cool was a test to the system.”

They used insurance companies, they used threats, and they gave the film an X rating. You’ll always be free to make Police Academy 5. You’ll always be free to make remakes of French movies; you’ll always be free to make certain kinds of movies. (Haskell Wexler, qtd. American Film 1988)

Wexler tested the system when he interrogated the boundaries between journalism and art, fiction and documentary, as Eileen, in the role of her fictive character, wandered into an actually occurring, military occupation in Chicago’s Grant Park in August 1968. These were high-stakes cultural acts which constituted a radical turn in the ways that Hollywood portrayed the late-1960s.

*Time* noted the film’s impact on Hollywood:

So strongly does it challenge the usual commercial film techniques and themes that Hollywood, ever wary both of stylistic innovation and contemporary politics, may never recover. Socially and cinematically, Medium Cool is dynamite. (“Dynamite,” 22 August, 1969)
In *Medium Cool*, Wexler does “challenge” conventional Hollywood form and politics, so much so that Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley, whom the film depicts as instigator of the police brutality against protesters, as well as Paramount’s parent company, Gulf and Western, preferred to forego the film’s release:

> Although it has been completed for five months, Cool has been held from release by a variety of intra-and extramural crises. Trade rumor has it that Mayor Daley’s office is displeased with the film. It is known that one member of the board of Gulf and Western, the conglomerate that owns Paramount, threatened to resign if the film were ever released. (*Time*, 22 August 1969)

*Medium Cool* confronted political power in Chicago, industrial, Hollywood cinema and a discourse of ideology that is imbricated with media production in the USA. *Medium Cool* underscored lucidly the film’s constructedness, but did so in the context of the contemporary sociopolitical landscape of Chicago’s Democratic National Convention, in which the nation’s contradictions and the filmic world coincided. The film’s juxtaposition of political and cultural spheres was encapsulated in a scene where Katsellas and his sound man Gus (Peter Bonerz) arrive at the apartment of the Black Arts activists who confront Katsellas and Wexler’s camera, i.e. *Medium Cool*’s spectator.

Val Gray Ward, playing herself, asks Katsellas to include her story, and tells him that “I’m a black actress and that I demand respect.” When Katsellas demurs and tries to leave, with a “Now, dear,” another artist, a male colleague, confronts Katsellas to say that, “you've got to start respecting our women.” The confrontation occurs in the politically charged era of Black Power (Wexler filmed the scene in 1968, in the wake of the Newark riots). Ward’s and her male colleague’s ire evokes a history of abject brutality of black slavery and rape by white
slaveowners, a subject taken up in detail by Lupita Nyong'o's interpretation of Patsey in *Twelve Years a Slave* (Steven McQueen, 2013).

As another Black Arts actor explains to Katsellas, “you came down here to shoot 15 minutes of what has taken 300 years to develop: grief.” Wexler confronts a narrative of white Anglo-American conquest and a history of slavery. And, in doing so, he situates himself into a persistent discursive unfolding of media contestation. *Medium Cool*’s legacy, along with *Twelve Years a Slave*, emerged, as well, in the film, *Selma* (Ava DuVernay, 2015), in which Oprah Winfrey, playing Annie Lee Cooper, an African American civil-rights protester, struggles for the right to vote in Jim Crow Alabama in the mid-1960s.

*Medium Cool*’s intervention in racial exclusion persists in these recent works, as well in the continuing, Chicago-based Black Arts theater with Val Gray Ward.

The *History Makers* website notes:

Now known as Val Gray Ward, Ward was recognized as part of Chicago's activist Black Arts Movement. In this context Ward founded the nonprofit Kuumba Theatre in 1968. Kuumba is Kiswahili for clean up, create, and build and was dedicated to the revitalization of the black community through the arts....When she is not producing, Val Ward performs one woman shows in the United States and abroad. Performances include *Harriet Tubman* by Francis Ward, *Sister Sonji* by Sonia Sanchez and *I Am A Black Woman* which includes the poetry of Mari Evans.

In *Medium Cool*, Wexler’s reflexive engagement with black agency emerged in the aftermath of the civil-rights movement and in 1960s New Hollywood films such as *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967). Ward, Felton Perry, and Jeff Donaldson, noted for his contribution to the Wall of Respect (Cronin 2013), represent the political and cultural ferment of the 1960s youth movement. *Medium Cool* emerged in the aftermath of the Newark riots and the Kerner Commission Report, which militated on behalf of egalitarian black representation on
television (Cronin commentary 2013). Wexler, in his melding of the political with the artistic realms of late-1960s America, contributed to progressive American history.

Medium Cool is about a change in political consciousness. Katsellias, although white, is also ultimately harassed by his network; he finds he’s being monitored by the FBI (Cronin 2013). Katsellias, by the end of Medium Cool, no longer perceives himself as entirely separate from the black activists or the impoverished white migrants like Eileen. Wexler viewed the cinema as intrinsically political, from the choices filmmakers made in subject matter to the industrial choices that reflect dominant and repressive ideologies.

He noted in American Film that,

An HBO ad for Gone with the Wind said, ‘the most memorable heroine ever, Scarlett O’Hara.’ Why a rich, feudal, slave-owning woman, Scarlett O’Hara and not Harriet Tubman?

Such questions during a time of upheaval were occurring not only with artists who made “political” films like Wexler and de Antonio but on campuses and in the streets, contestations to the national narrative, at a time when the cultural and political spheres of the 1960s youth movement had briefly coalesced.

Conclusion

Kenneth Anger’s Invocation of My Demon Brother, Emile De Antonio’s In the Year of the Pig, Jonas Mekas’s Diaries, Notes and Sketches: Also Known as Walden, and Haskell Wexler’s Medium Cool, speak to the varieties of ideological filmmaker positioning at the end of the 1960s, valences that evoked the cultural and political divisions within the United States counterculture. Mekas and Anger upheld the countercultural Romantic Neoplatonism consonant with the discourse and actions of the hippies and in doing so, illuminated their own, historical
and personal contexts. *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, as ritual and artifact, not only draws attention to the possibilities of cinema as a “magickal weapon,” but also bears witness to the most provocative ferment of the era.

Moving forward past the late-1960s, the films’ respective historical and representational legacies speak to the ways that each of their creators assumed their places in an unfolding American project, on either a quest for transcendence or ideological catalysts to challenge dominant discourses. *Selma* and *Twelve Years a Slave* derive from *Medium Cool*’s lucid, thematic confrontation with the “national creation story” (Hayden 2009, 17). At the end of the 1960s Wexler and de Antonio engaged with a national narrative of conquest. De Antonio, in his merging of progressive politics with postwar radical avant-garde filmmaking, exemplifies hope for a revitalization of American values. While Mekas lucidly created beauty and harmony in an era beset by confrontation, Wexler, in disrupting the classic Hollywood narrative to “implicate the spectator” (Renov 2004, 29) posed new possibilities for agency. While all four films, as artistic masterpieces, achieved aesthetically revolutionary legacies, changes in the national narrative were achieved by those that engaged the two, distinct and sometimes contradictory realms of culture and politics, as complementary values in the service of progressive, national transformation.
Chapter Two

Positioning the Subject

The filmmaker steps out from behind the cloak of voice-over commentary, steps away from poetic meditation, steps down from a fly-on-the-wall perch, and becomes a social actor (almost) like any other. (Almost like any other because the filmmaker retains the camera, and with it, a certain degree of potential power and control over events.) … What ties join the filmmaker and subject and what needs divide them? (Bill Nichols qtd. Delofski 2009, 3)

History is written by the people who own the pens, the typewriters, the printing presses, the movie cameras, the TV cameras. 1968 in America, history was being written by people who were ignoring history. It was a crazy, mixed-up time in America where the establishment, the status quo was ignoring a ferment and the people. (Haskell Wexler 2013)

Introduction

The filmmakers in this thesis, much like the divisive society in which they participated, ultimately gravitated, if at times ambivalently, towards certain ideological positions. Kenneth Anger’s Invocation of My Demon Brother, Emile de Antonio’s In the Year of the Pig, Jonas Mekas’s Diaries, Notes and Sketches Also Known as Walden and Haskell Wexler’s Medium Cool are vivid articulations of national consciousness. In the late-1960s, tensions between cultural and political spheres assumed especial significance. The purpose of this chapter is to better understand how the filmmaker chose and situated his subjects in the historical moment, a juncture between change and reaction, contestation, and backlash. The films represent and engage in discourses of power and constitute high-stakes cultural work.

A film’s ideology emerges through its reification of a social perspective, a racial preference, a class positioning, a valorization of heroes, and a structure of normativity that lies between the textual and social referents. The filmmakers in this discussion, to varying degrees, conferred upon themselves subject-status alongside their other subjects, whom they positioned as
communicators of the discourses they chose to convey. The subjects are surrogate models with whom the spectator is cued to admire, identify, fear or otherwise engage (Mulvey 2009, 713-15; Neale 1993, 18). De Antonio in *In the Year of the Pig* and, even more profoundly, Wexler in *Medium Cool*, in contrast to both *Invocation of My Demon Brother* and *Diaries, Notes and Sketches*, focused on African Americans and the white working class, along with themselves as critically reflexive subjects, to transmit a liberatory ideology.

De Antonio and Wexler, more than Anger and Mekas, participated in a contestatory narrative that opposed what Hayden (2009, 17) names “the national creation story” and which Wheeler Winston Dixon (1997, 5) terms, “the dreams of the state.” Of the two, Wexler engaged most reflexively with the mass communications industry, itself an integral component of, in philosopher Louis Althusser’s (1971) terms, the ideological state apparatus which, in tandem with the repressive state apparatus, supports the status quo in capitalist societies.

While Mekas focuses on women as well as men, multiculturalism and political conflict are practically nonexistent; the spokespersons he chooses to represent the youth movement or the antiwar/peace movement are shrouded in a panoply of beautifying formal correctives via rapid-fire single-frame progressions and melodic soundtracks. *Invocation*’s subjects, while representative of the hippie counterculture in some respects, are ill-fated harbingers of the chaos of Altamont and the Manson Murders. Thus, while Mekas and Anger dismantle industrial forms including classic narrational principles such as the three-act dramatic structure, continuity editing which seamlessly moves from shot to shot to give the appearance of natural progression of characters and scenes, and other techniques, their conversations with the national narrative fall short of their confrontative possibilities.
This does not mean *Invocation* and *Diaries* were devoid of contestatory content. Anger’s insertion of the Vietnam-War material prodded a profoundly revisionist contemplation of the counterculture vis-à-vis its imbrication with the national bellicose project. Similarly, Mekas’s refusal to Hollywoodize either his camera techniques or his narrative structure comprised an assault on the industrial status quo. However, these aesthetic and, in some cases, thematic, choices were ultimately overshadowed by Anger’s and Mekas’s elision of the struggles that defined the 1960s most broadly.

By the same token, *Medium Cool* and *In the Year of the Pig*’s multicultural discourses do not preclude ideological contradictions. De Antonio’s innovative use of collage melds with his reification of Anglo-American myths, including an exemplarism which he juxtaposes, at times problematically, against the Vietnam War’s malfeasant Jingoism. While *In The Year of the Pig* critiques the Vietnam War, including its imbrications of racism, sexism and neocolonialism it stops short of a more comprehensive interrogation of the larger trajectory of Manifest Destiny from which that war emerged. Both *In the Year of the Pig* and *Medium Cool*, while progressive overall, focus on males who drive the action. The women serve primarily as plot devices or foils to register the males’ transformation. *Medium Cool* bears traces of its industrial-studio/classic-Hollywood format: romance story, three-act structure and conventional editing. However, despite the respective, male-centric foci of these two films, they articulate authorial reflexivity rooted in social awareness.

Regardless of their ideological valences, the creators of the four films, to varying degrees of frequency and consciousness, designated themselves as both subjects and instigators. The films articulate competing, national myths which vie for hegemony. Media studies have shown
that representations often comprise warring discourses or “contradictions” that raise questions about the intricacies of textual ideologies in any given era (Kellner 1995, 7). *Medium Cool* and *Year of the Pig*, which focus on male power, still harness aesthetics to confront the political as well as industrial-cultural status-quo. Wexler and, to a slightly lesser degree, de Antonio, harmonized culture and politics, the youth movement’s most cherished impetus since the Be-In of January 14, 1967.

One result of such accommodation was to auger new ways of viewing the interface between the ideological and repressive state apparatuses. Moreover, the four films in this discussion intervened in the societies they represented, via their positioning of the filmic subjects. Film theorist Laura Mulvey (2009, 714) observes that, “the cinema has distinguished itself in the production of ego ideals as expressed in particular in the star system, the stars centering both screen presence and screen story as they act out a complex process of likeness and difference (the glamorous impersonates the ordinary).” The films, albeit mostly avant-garde rather than industrial-mainstream cinema, reflected, through their subjects, with whom spectators were clued to identify or fear, “a complex process of “likeness and difference.” The films, in documenting and engaging tensions of the late-1960s, also represent dualities of national consciousness. These include liberatory political or sexual forms versus repression, founding myths of exemplarism juxtaposed with Vietnam, oneiric withdrawal versus political activism, and carelessness versus social responsibility and communication, the latter of which *Medium Cool* lucidly engaged.

Wexler’s meta-narrative on communication brings to mind how, according to film theorist David Bordwell (1985, 32-47), in classic Hollywood films, spectatorship is a
constructivistic rather than a one-way experience of decoding. Therein, the spectator brings to a film her own schemata of expectations. However, whereas “every film trains its spectator” (Bordwell 1985, 45), such “that the spectator will initially act upon those assumptions which they use to construct a coherent everyday world” (47), in much of the avant-garde, the filmmaker opens a heuristic space for the viewer to navigate, rendering the text ripe for subjective interpretations. However, in films like *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, an intentional occult-conversion ritual that seeks to bypass spectatorial agency, the process is more complex.

Beyond the filmmaker’s choice and positioning of subjects, his own subject-positioning endowed him with a creative agency unavailable to the other subjects (Bill Nichols qtd. Delofski 2009, 3). However, in *Medium Cool* the filmmaker, in the potentially life-threatening space of the Chicago 1968 Democratic Convention police riots, rendered agency to Verna Bloom (Eileen) whose decision thereof rendered *Medium Cool’s* contestatory power at least as compelling as the director’s own self-insertion into the same, uncontrolled filmic space: a city under siege. The filmmakers, through their subjects, set forth the discourse, and clued the spectator as to the ideologies with which she or he was meant to identify.

*Invocation of My Demon Brother: Youth, Masculinity, and Race in the Age of Aquarius*

*Invocation* of My Demon Brother, Kenneth Anger’s “War Film” that he dubbed “The Last Blast of Haight Consciousness,” conflates the youth movement and the nation as doomed American projects. Yet the film consigns each to the dustbin of history while offering little if anything in their place. *Invocation*, in lieu of resistance, reinforces an amorality of neglect vis-à-vis the war and the sociopolitical status quo. While *Invocation* registers the “national creation
story,” it surrenders to an occult-based solution which posits the male-coded countercultural subject as amenable to improvement through Lucifer, an entity ill-suited to contest the very power structure that the film purports to condemn.

Film theorist P. Adams Sitney (2002, kindle edition) observes of Kenneth Anger’s *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, “the element of discovery,” wherein, he elaborates, “watching this film, one feels that the filmmaker did not know what the film was to be until it was finished...yet there is a point for the artist where revelation becomes the most important aspect of his work.” *Invocation*, while raising bivalent discourses, ultimately privileges oneiric withdrawal rather than confrontation. *Invocation* elicits, in Mulvey’s (2009) terms, an “idealised” identification in the spectator” who “takes his place” in a filmic ritual (Rebekah Wood qtd. Powell 2002) which, in turn, represents, conflates and enacts the fall of the counterculture and the American project in Vietnam.

*Invocation*, in doing so, imbricates race, masculinity and national consciousness at a time of war through its positioning of subjects, including the filmmaker in his role as Magus. Also relevant to the films under discussion are their choices of mostly-male subjects. Film theorists Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (1993, 3) draw from Mulvey to observe that “the male image on the cinema screen is therefore as significant a representational stake as the female; the apparatus puts him on screen, it hides him behind a screen for its ideological agenda, and it screens out socially unacceptable and heterogeneous cultural constructions of masculinity.” The racial and gendered representations, through the film’s subjects, take on significance in the context of the late-1960s and the era’s public discourses.
Of the subjects, the Wand Bearer (Speed Hacker), “the albino with glittering eyes” who appears in *Invocation’s* first sequence (Powell 2002, 88) is not only an “avatar” for Lucifer but also for *Invocation’s* spectator. The Wand Bearer’s perplexed gaze in the opening scene evokes the bewilderment of the film’s spectator, who will be subjected to *Invocation’s* unfolding spell. Anger also positions as interpellator the “horned and bearded devil (Sitney 2002, kindle edition)” who “at the end of the rite will fuse with the Magus in a rapid montage of similar body and facial features.” The Demon Brother (Sitney 2008, kindle edition), during this montage, menacingly grins at the spectator as his face in closeup is interspersed with the contorted one of the Magus (Anger). The latter, in turn, transfers the spell of occult conversion to the spectator (explored further in Chapter 3).

The conversion comprises a “culture of sex and death” (Powell 2002, 82-93) associated with the Hell’s Angels, which manifests itself partly through “Eisensteinian cross-cutting,” which “forces the clash of opposites, creating a dynamic structural force” (Powell 2002, 82-93). Moreover, the Hell’s Angels, in the shot at the Rolling Stones’ London Hyde Park concert on July 5, 1969, their logo in medium-close shot, are superimposed with Satanist Anton LaVey and the hell fires that menacingly enshroud a youth asleep, and thereby vulnerable. *Invocation* presciently adumbrates, through layers of visual text and a nondiegetic Moog-synthesizer track, the danger wrought by the Angels’ American counterparts of Altamont infamy.

The Rolling Stones at Altamont, California, five months after Hyde Park, with almost the same setlist (*The Archive* 2012; *Setlist.fm* n.d), experienced the transmogrification, courtesy of the Hell’s Angels, of hypermasculine eroticism into countercultural mayhem. At Hyde Park, exemplified in the footage of the film by Jo Durden-Smith and Leslie Woodhead (2013), the
song “Sympathy for the Devil” exudes youthful, erotic energies. The song is, in some ways, rendered liberatory in the post-1950s contestation of sexual, social and political conservatism. The demonic is playfully conveyed, shared, and subsumed under a banner of communal multicultural pluralism, with black musicians playing an energetic Samba backup onstage. “Sympathy for the Devil’s” ironized lyrics—“just as every cop is a criminal and all the sinners saints” or “I shouted out who killed the Kennedys when after all it was you and me”—harnessed a language of contestation even as the youth movement verged on the precipice of despair. 

*Invocation*, drawing its strength from both youthful exuberance and sociopolitical malfeasance, offers no such playful resistance to “the dreams of the state,” its misguided war or its social oppressiveness. *Invocation*, instead, subsumes and encumbers its youth-infused energies under a banner of hermetic withdrawal.

*Invocation*, an occult-conversion ceremony framed by the dual volatilities of the Vietnam War and its troubled young subjects, melds the countercultural, mainly masculinist, vitalities at the end of the 1960s with the national project in its most bellicose and anxious incarnations. Powell (2002, 83) notes, to this end, in regards to *Invocation’s* inclusion of the Hell’s Angels, that “their culture of sex and death has sufficient occult power as an apocalyptic catalyst.” Moreover, *Invocation* presages Altamont in the marijuana ceremony with the unnamed subject—Digger and transitioning Hell’s Angel’s member William Fritsch—who was present at Altamont the year *Invocation* was released.

Powell (2002, 82-3) notes of *Invocation* that “the film’s mixture of binaries: sacred and profane, politics and religion; ancient and modern; piety and black magick, effects a process of levelling down.” The subjects, especially those well-known, which Powell (2002, 87) notes are
“used in the film to intensify its impact on the spectator,” inhabit these binaries, as well as tensions between liberation and repression, and culture and politics. Powell (2002, 60-1) notes that for Anger “the films themselves function as ritual which the audience attend, either as spectators or as participants, wherein “Anger’s main aim is to induce affect at a deeper psychic level than aesthetic enjoyment.” She observes, quoting film critic Rebekah Wood, that, “they are ‘never the impersonal, exclusively esoteric product of the secret society, but an order in which the spectator take his place.’” The spectator is thereby positioned as participant in a ceremony.

Anger (qtd. Wood 1989, 51) noted the power of Invocation’s spell, its “alarming” effectiveness in regards to Beausoleil, who, upon leaving Haight-Ashbury after Invocation’s filming, joined the Charles Manson murder cult (Powell 2002, 88):

However, in some alarming ways, it became true. In some ways, it was like playing at something and having it become very real. When I met Bobby Beausoleil, he fulfilled, in many ways, the role of this demon in real life. Suddenly I was confronted with the very flesh and blood—a handsome Devil. (Anger, qtd. Wood 1989, 51)

Anger acknowledged the spell he performed as having tangible outcomes however unintended. He also stated his opposition to the Vietnam War.

He told Wood that,

When I put the film together, Vietnam was very much on my mind. It was happening. The helicopters and the troops jumping out- that was an image I wanted in the film as an underlying background of violence and chaos. (Anger qtd. Wood 1989, 51)

The Vietnam War in Invocation is not only imagistic but aural, via the nondiegetic Moog-synthesizer track. Anger interposed the images and the accompanying helicopter-like sounds, as well as blasts, upon the hippie participants. The film’s discursive tensions, between condemnation of the war and negation of the counterculture which opposed it, are resolved when
Lucifer is symbolically shot by the Moog’s final blast. Anger, in doing so, consigns to ashes both the counterculture as an oppositional force, and the American project in Vietnam.

As Anger told MacDonald (2009, 45) on the Vietnam War them in *Invocation*, “I’ve always considered *Invocation* my War Film; it reflects the feelings of the war—not the actual events but the kind of things that it had unleashed.” Anger construed the Vietnam War as a white, Anglo-Saxon project imbricated with countercultural masculinity. Of the latter, Powell (2002, 50-1) notes that “in place of political analysis, Anger uses montage to debunk Christianity’s emasculation of sexual energy…wands, frequent in Anger’s films, are emblems of will and creative energy traditionally gendered male.” Mick Jagger (himself), Bobby Beausoleil (Lucifer), William Fritsch (Deacon), all of them doomed to the ravages of either Altamont or the Manson murders, are iconic ciphers for rugged, white manliness in the Age of Aquarius, the incarnation of the traditional Anglo-American narrative, itself a ceremony beset with a legacy of sociohistoric contradictions.

Historian Dominick Cavallo (199, 83), to this end, notes how the counterculture bore the legacy of early Anglo-Americans, such that their “passion for risk” and “desire for adventure” linked them with “pioneers and explorers like Daniel Boone.” *Invocation’s* subjects, like those in the counterculture itself, are mostly white males. They are not only coded countercultural but also, vis-à-vis their traditional Anglo-American dress, as well as the Marines footage and helicopter-like sounds which, mostly subliminally, accompany their rituals of marijuana and rock concerts, also American. The Marines, whose five-pointed star matches that of the Wand Bearer, grafts the counterculture onto the occult, and merges its sacrality, via the marijuana ritual, with the US mission in Vietnam.
Invocation’s subjects would, like the Vietnam-Warriors signified most brutally by the My Lai Massacre, between the filming in the fall of 1967 and the picture’s release in 1969, witness or enact moral debauchery. Lucifer (Beausoleil) committed murder at the bidding of Charles Manson; Deacon (William Fritsch) would witness “the end of age of Aquarius” at Altamont; Lenore Kandel (Deaconess) would experience a horrific motorcycle accident with Fritsch in 1970 (Dutton 2011) and the Rolling Stones would play, terrified, as Hell’s Angels swarmed the Altamont stage and murdered a black spectator. Anger intersperses visual and aural symbols of the nation’s moral and military quagmire in Vietnam via mostly subliminal superimposition over the hippies and their ceremonies. National memory bursts through the present as a tissue of contradictions which are reawakened by a generation under threat.

In Invocation Anger not only documented, but also performed, a troubled countercultural masculinity to confront Judeo-Christianity (Powell 2002, 50-1). Anger, who sought to reach a flock of young people that he sought to enlighten, even “control,” found his subjects in the streets of a decaying Haight-Ashbury infested by hard drugs and criminals including Charles Manson. The hippie ritual, where marijuana passes from hand to hand, like Easy Rider’s (Dennis Hopper 1969) 360-degree pan of longhaired celebrants saying grace, is coded both as a countercultural and traditional Anglo-American ceremony, a faltering City on a Hill, whose celebrants Invocation slates for a dubious redemption via their melding with Lucifer. Lenore Kandel, Bobby Beausoleil and William Fritsch, clad in hippie adornment, signify Haight-Ashbury as well as rugged American individualism.

Hippie styles in the mid-1960s appropriated Edwardian and 19th century cowboy apparel. Top hats and buckskin coats were complemented by love beads or necklaces, flowers, peasant
dresses, rugged boots or sandals. One of the bands that epitomized acid rock in Haight-Ashbury, The Charlatans, marketing their image thus, clarified that “we didn’t want to be identified with the British groups; we knew we were American so we wanted to be identified as Americans” (George Hunter, qtd. Works 2005). Similarly, acclaimed writer and leader of the Merry Pranksters, Ken Kesey, draped himself, literally, in the stars and stripes (Intrepid Trips n.d). The counterculture’s appropriation of the national symbol is also exemplified by Easy Rider’s longhaired biker Wyatt’s stars-and-stripes motorcycle, helmet and jacket. One of Kesey’s Merry Pranksters, Ken Babbs, was a former Marine who employed military language to narrate the Acid Tests, while Kesey himself carried the LSD from a CIA-sponsored experiment to the emerging hippie counterculture (Brightman 1999, 22-4).

Aside from the Pranksters, surrounding hippie enclaves also articulated Anglo-American identity. The Red Dog Saloon in Virginia City, Nevada, created an old-Western community away from civilization and middle-class conformism where they could live communally, drop acid and begin “cleaning our rifles at dawn” (Chan Laughlin, qtd. Works 2005). The saloon’s manager, Luria (qtd. in Works 2005), noted of hippie-outlaw Chan Laughlin, that, “this guy came walking into the place looking like some gent from the Wild West.” Laughlin’s long, wavy hair, elegant 19th-century vintage Western style, was similar to the costume of Beausoleil who, as Lucifer, donned his playful top hat, long hair and colorful jacket in Invocation.

Lucifer appears in his hippie vestments in the marijuana ceremony, but also in Invocation’s final sequence as he walks down the stairs after his bandmates. A later image has him fitted with wings, grinning then sobering and startled at a gunfire-like blast from the Moog synthesizer. The Moog’s rhythm, which changes at the start of the marijuana ceremony from a
fairly even pace to a dull thudding, faltering sound, speeds up and grows louder at the entrance
of LaVey. The Moog later, in the film’s final sequence, resumes the flat-noted sound,
accompanied by static, helicopter-like noises and blasts as Lucifer appears superimposed with
the Solar Swastika and then again with his hippie garb before the penultimate shot. The
explosion-like sounds, which evoke death by blasts or gunshots, also suggest implosion, violence
from within.

Invocation brings to mind Hayden’s (2009) observation that in 1969,

Things would become worse. On August 9, 1969, the Charles Manson commune, with roots in
both the Haight and the Southern California dropout scene massacred the pregnant actress Sharon
Tate and four others in her Hollywood Hills home. Both Jerry Rubin and Bernardine Dohrn
separately made statements interpreted as sympathetic to Manson. Then on December 6, 1969,
the Hells Angels, long courted by many in the counterculture, beat to death a black man,
Meredith Hunter, in full view of the Rolling Stones and their fans at an Altamont concert. (44-6)

Anger in Invocation, via subjects such as Beausoleil and Fritsch, presages the missteps by the
youth movement in its most implosive (and impulsive) moments. At the end of the 1960s, the
movement found itself at a political juncture when the SDS was superseded by the Weather
People, whose discourse on white “skin privilege” (Gitlin 399-400) veered at times into
hyperbolic fanaticism. Some in the counterculture’s hippie communities of the mid-late 1960s,
particularly in Haight-Ashbury, not only eschewed but also interfered with the New Left’s
political organizing.

Of Invocation’s subjects, William Fritsch (Deacon in the marijuana ritual), along with his
fellow Diggers, disrupted an SDS meeting. The website Guitar Cave (para. 5) noted of Fritsch,
along with Emmett Grogan and another Digger, that, “in late June 1967, Berg, Grogan, Fritsch
and Murcott decided to travel to Denton, Michigan to attend—and disrupt—a meeting of
Students for a Democratic Society.” The disruption of the SDS meeting was disparagingly noted by Gitlin (1993, 227-9). While In the Year of the Pig revisions the nation embroiled in Vietnam, and reinforces countercultural resistance to it, Anger sought to ingrain in audiences his solution in the occult. He, like de Antonio, questioned the Vietnam War as an exemplary mission. But Anger, through his role as Magus, his visual and aural conflating of the Hell’s Angels, Satanism, eroticism and rock-music culture, ultimately brought not a progressive solution to the war but a hermetic withdrawal.

While Mulvey (715) observes that, “the determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly” such that “in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be looked-at-ness,” Invocation focuses on the white, American male, whose body constitutes a site of scopophilic pleasure and interpellative engagement. Invocation’s focus on both Lucifer and the nude male form enforces these values.

The man whose face is hidden in the opening sequence represents and enacts the sexually libertinist Crowleyan agenda when he holds a talisman and a knife, and is later overlaid by a superimposition of shadow, with other occult symbols. In one of these shots, only his lower bodily region appears, with his genitals emphasized. Their protrusion increases as they become further exposed by the effect of a receding shadow which swallows the remainder of his torso, along with an image of Saturn, in turn suggesting sexual and personal vulnerability as well as scopophilic objectification. The isolation of the genital region in this shot differs from New Hollywood films like Woodstock or Easy Rider, wherein nudity suggests wholeness and

73
celebration as well as censorship (Bell 1999, kindle edition). *Invocation*’s last sequence includes a brief, almost subliminal shot of Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards’s crotch superimposed with the head of Lucifer (Beausoleil) shortly before the latter, symbolically shot by the Moog’s final blast, vanishes from the screen. These images suggest the film’s conflation of sex and death noted by Powell in regards to the Hell’s Angels (2002, 83).

Anger’s website reinforces his mission to imbricate the masculine or would-be Übermensch viewer in Crowleyan mysticism:

> Are you not utterly bent spiritually under the Judeo-Christian American yoke, juicy prey, lamb of the fold of the slaves of the slave Gods? In short, is there manhood in you yet? Then watch these films, if you will, and meet the most monstrous moviemaker in the underground.  
> -The Official Site of Kenneth Anger, 2014

Anger, in his exclusive beckoning of the rugged, Crowleyan male, evokes the manliness redolent of the late-19th and early-20th century’s fascination with vaudeville circuit’s Eugen Sandow, Edgar Rice Burroughs’ *Tarzan* and the cult of “the perfect man (Kasson 2001).” Anger, in doing so, shapes a troubled filmic arena wherein representations of young, naked bodies generate a bivalent spiral of esteem and denial. The white male body in America has, at least since the turn of the 20th century, constituted a site of national and social identity in crisis. Historian John F. Kasson (2001, 19) notes in regards to Sandow, Burroughs and Houdini that, during that time “they tell us about how modernity was understood in terms of the body and how the white male body became a powerful symbol by which to dramatize modernity’s impact and how to resist it.” Just as popular-cultural artifacts and icons during that earlier turbulent era “tell us that hopes and fears, aspirations and anxieties are often difficult to distinguish,” Anger’s *Invocation* exemplifies some of the troubled trajectories of whiteness, nudity and maleness in the late-20th.
Anger noted (qtd. *Arthur Magazine* 1967/2014) his animus towards countercultural nudity:

The kind of energy that can be generated by a march can be dissipated by just turning it into a sideshow. And I see this happen over and over with American marches. Like people who try to protest in the nude: this is *not* appropriate for anything. Because public nudity happens to be against the law—and it probably should be, because most people are ugly! [laughs] The few Adonises and Venuses around, I’d love if they would parade in the nude. But most people could use a little concealment.

While the naked youth in *Invocation* could reasonably qualify as “Adonises,” Anger’s attitudes towards public nudity and his jeering of “ugly” naked people in his midst in some ways clashed with the counterculture’s New Hollywood and especially the New American Cinema which comprised a shamefree normalization of the human body, as in carefree nudity, hetero- and homosexuality and childbirth. *Invocation*, through the Magus’s flailing of the Nazi flag, conflates that symbol, in its notorious political-historical connotations, with the eroticism of the Rolling Stones, the aggressiveness of the Hell’s Angels and the ambiguous morality of Lucifer.

Anger, as if to underscore this amalgamation, represents the Stones at the London Hyde Park, concert superimposed with the Libertine-political conservative Satanist Anton S. LaVey. Meanwhile, the Vietnam War Marines appear, mostly subliminally, throughout *Invocation* to imbricate the Vietnam War with the counterculture at its most ardent yet vulnerable moments.

During that era, race, sexuality, and art were explored, questioned and partially transformed by the counterculture. The United States, at the end of the 1960s, was, in some ways, as racially conflicted as previous eras of social and demographic tumult. Countercultural discourse about the poor, the blacks, Native Americans, women, and gays, had begun to flower.
and in some instances also assume social materiality; these diverse coalitions had even begun to
fuse, however tentatively.

The *Chicago Tribune* (8 September 1970) reported how the Black Panthers had begun to
unite diverse countercultural factions in a call for social revolution:

The capitalist system, United States activities in other nations, the present treatment of women
and various minority groups, including homosexuals, all came in for attack yesterday as
spokesmen for 15 workshops presented their ideas for bettering society. About 6,000 persons,
most young and about 35 per cent white, shot clenched fists into the air and shouted ‘right on’
and ‘power to the people.’

By 1969, race had already emerged in the public sphere as one of the central problems facing the
country. College campuses were awash in antiwar uprisings. Black struggles permeated
mainstream society. Alongside the political turmoil existed countercultural withdrawal, which
worked against the creation of a more broadly based youth movement.

Notable hippie enclaves, like Anger’s in *Invocation*, avoided politics altogether. Journalist
Carol Brightman (1998, 27-8) notes how alienated the Merry Pranksters, central to the
burgeoning, San Francisco hippie counterculture, were from the Berkeley activists in the first
years of the antiwar movement. Carolyn Adams Garcia (AKA Mountain Girl) told Brightman
that “we were mostly interested in getting our piece of the turf where we could get in there and
maybe get some of these poor antiwar maniacs over here and have some fun… to subvert people
to our way of thinking” (qtd. Brightman 27-8).” Brightman notes that, “in Berkeley, the
Pranksters were on a recruiting mission.” In fact, “‘these poor antiwar maniacs’” were, during
some of the Pranksters’ most active moments, attacked by the Hell’s Angels at a Vietnam-Day-
Committee march in Oakland in October 1965.
Significantly, the Pranksters refused to confront the Angels, some of whose roots in the armed forces seemed compatible enough with one of their own, Prankster Ken Babbs,’ similar experience. Gitlin (1993, 209, 227-9), noting the Kesey-Pranksters Berkeley performance where he played “Home on the Range” with his harmonica and called for an end to anti-Vietnam-War protest, called Kesey, “a back-woods American boy to the end.” Gitlin’s perspective exemplified the cultural-political schism that had both plagued and spurred the youth movement.

Hayden (2009, 44-6) observes of the hippie counterculture that it “was most robust among a vast cross section of young people who were isolated from the black, Chicano, and Native American communities they revered at a distance.” What the Vietnam War had “unleashed,” for Anger’s Invocation of My Demon Brother, was spiritual, political and moral malaise. The Moog stops and starts, faltering at first in the marijuana ritual, not only to evoke the counterculture’s own missteps but those of the American nation’s as well.

The Vietnam footage appears to the naked eye once more near the end of the film, to the same flat-noted, stumbling sound as in the hippie ceremony. A series of blasts from the Moog synthesizer, interspersed with the helicopter-like sounds, plays over the shots of hippie celebration at Hyde Park, Beausoleil’s jazz band filing down the stairs and Lucifer in the film’s penultimate image. In the Moog’s final blast, Lucifer, minus the Solar Swastika yet overlaid with black stripes, disappears from the screen. While Invocation of My Demon Brother documents an abortive counterculture ceremony, Lucifer, the “life-acting” hippie subject of a decaying Haight-Ashbury, represents the morally compromised Anglo-American man.

Invocation, in its representing a faltering ritual, effaces discourse on racial strife and multiculturalism, including the growing pluralism among Vietnam veterans. The Chicago
The *Tribune* (Merryfield 1968) for example, reported that, “the returning Vietnam veteran, average age 23, is showing a marked social concern.” The *Tribune* noted a questioning of racist attitudes in a white veteran: “Before the service, I was prejudiced against my black brother...Now I accept any man on his own basis and judge him as a man, not a member of any race.” A black veteran concurred, and told the *Tribune* that, “This kind of brotherhood is based on the Golden Rule. It’s truly religious’ (Merryfield, 28 April).” *Invocation*, contradistinctively, depicts the counterculture as mainly white and oblivious to the clamor for social justice in their social and filmic worlds. Anger documents a latent racial isolationism in American culture but also symbolically reifies it as he amalgamates whiteness with his belief system, Thelema.

Anger, during the late-1960s, viewed himself as a minister whose nemesis, he imagined, lay in the Judeo-Christian, Piscean age of Christianity where good and evil are positioned as opposing ethical values. His Lucifer, Bobby Beausoleil, the “bringer of light,” participated in one of the most devastating darknesses of the 1960s, the Manson Family murders. That violence characterizes the moral vulnerability of the era, but also brings to mind some of the anxieties, the conflicts and the perceived threats to American manhood in earlier historical moments. The white male at the turn of the century felt threatened from rapid urbanization, immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe and technological changes which displaced him from his land-based livelihood and undisputed head of household (Kasson 2001, 10, 21-2). The late-1960s, in the context of racial tensions and uprisings reawakened racial fears, as well as desires to join in racial harmony. While *Invocation* revivified, like Renaissance painters and onward, the Greek and Roman celebration of the male form, and thereby contested the “Christian pursuit of spiritual perfection that denied the body” (Kasson 21-3), it reacted against, rather than reinforced, the
20th century’s narrative of progress, Enlightenment rationalism and multiculturalism. According to Powell (2002, 102), Anger’s work “refuses the modernist concept of alienation and loss by an alternative model, which pre-exists modernity.” As such, *Invocation* harnesses the primal energies of eroticism, violence and chaos, via subjects such as Lucifer, who embody those values, to convert spectators to Anger’s hermetic belief system.

Beausoleil was a reform-school survivor, talented musician, and actor in an exploitation film, *Mondo Hollywood*. Anger chose him for the title role of Lucifer, “the crowned and conquering child.” Beausoleil would soon, in the language of the Haight-Ashbury Diggers, be “life-acting the role of Lucifer (Landis 1995, 140-146).” Beausoleil replaced Anger’s original choice, the five-year-old son of “swingers” (a spouse-swapping couple), with flowing blonde locks, to whom Anger was drawn by the child’s telling a policeman to “’fuck off cops’ (Landis 140-1).” The youngster’s mysterious death by “falling through a skylight during a photo session” (Landis 140-1) prompted Anger’s search for young men that exhibited the ruggedly independent, anarchic manliness befitting the role, and who accepted Crowleyan ideology.

Beausoleil, in the months before he joined Charles Manson’s death cult, lived with his new mentor, Anger, wherein he learned about Thelema (Landis 144). Beausoleil readily imbibed one of its major tenets: the blurring of good and evil. “Beausoleil denies accepting Thelema as his personal theology, but he believes the Crowleyan principle that no absolute good or absolute evil exists” (Landis 146). Crowley’s world was one of collapsed binaries, wherein a “‘cruelty-streaked universe’” (Sanders qtd. Powell 2002, 88) and the Golden Rule were indivisible. Anger noted vis-à-vis good and evil (Director’s commentary, *Lucifer Rising*, 2010), that “you can’t have one without the other.” While *Invocation*’s challenge to the Judeo-Christian binary may be
refreshing in some ways, in the incipient context of the Manson murders and Altamont Thelemic ideology assumes troubling dimensions. Those who did not unquestioningly accept Thelema were dismissed.

Anger (2010) commented upon *Lucifer Rising* actor Chris Jagger, explaining that,

I had to send him home, because he kept asking me, ‘what does it mean? Everything had to mean something to him in his logical mind... the meaning is either too complex and deep, or simple if you’re an initiate; it’s all very simple, it’s almost like a childish fairy tale.

Anger sought to embrace the mysteries of life whose filmic focus is the demonic male. The moral faltering in *Invocation* includes Anger’s close friend LaVey, a devil-worshiper who embodied the conflation of sexual libertinism and political conservatism observed in the “‘swinging,’” or partner-swapping, community by journalist David Allyn (2001, 207). LaVey held conservative-Libertarian views, wherein “his denunciations of drugs, anti-hippie rants, and pro-police yammerings were reassuring to his middle-class constituency (Landis 1995, 154).” Susan Atkins, later to become one of the Manson family murderers, emerged at one of LaVey’s parties “nude from a coffin (Landis 1995, 155).”

Mick Jagger, Anger’s choice for the second *Lucifer Rising*, demurred, yet according to Anger (Rayns 1969; Landis 164) conceived his song “Sympathy for the Devil” as inspiration from Anger, who in turn settled on Leslie Huggins, who “was an authentic demon in human form; there’s no doubt about it (Anger, *Lucifer Rising* commentary 2010).” Anger, in his choice of subjects, sought those in whom he could detect anarchic qualities redolent of the rugged masculine frontier consciousness noted by Cavallo (1999). While Anglo-Americans if not indeed Western cultures more generally, have navigated a conflicted moral, sexual and spiritual terrain
since at least the Roman Empire (Allyn 2001, 211), Anger in *Invocation* navigates that dichotomous sphere in the American countercultural context.

Anger, in bringing to light conflicts of masculinity, race and nation, reinforces excesses thereof through his choice of subjects. Anger’s heroes, associates and friends such as Crowley, LaVey, Jagger, Beausoleil and Fritsch, embodied the hypermasculine and sexual auras he sought, and harnessed their images, energies and legacies not only to entertain or create, but also to “control” spectators. But the sexual revolution was only one aspect of the 1960s. Racial, social justice and war comprised the contestatory milieu in which the counterculture lived during the late-1960s.

In the late-20th century, racial and gender-based upheavals reemerged as troubling adjustments and incipient challenges to white, male, heterosexual hegemony. The Vietnam War itself was inextricable from conversations about African American conscription, ghetto uprisings, and both black and white-working class overrepresentation in the armed forces. Black power, secondwave feminism and other identity-rights movements challenged the social identity of the white middle-class male.

As early as spring of 1967, women’s challenges to the male hegemony of public office reached major newspapers. The *Chicago Tribune* (2 April) noted, for example, that “the totally male look of municipal councils in the northwest suburbs may end April 18.” And by 1968, black rights, including what was termed “bussing,” emerged as a divisive issue in American suburbs. The *Chicago Tribune* (Sibbet, 25 August 1968) commented that, “they listened for an hour and a half, sweltering in the windowless, brightly decorated hall. They listened after watching a film called “Confrontation in Black and White.”
Then, in 1970, in the wake of black power, black communities began to expel white officials. The Chicago Tribune (Herman 23 April) noted that, “three other white principals have been ousted this year from their predominantly black schools at the hands of disgruntled community groups.” Between 1967 and 1970 discourse of race and gender had seeped into American society and permeated the New Left and youth culture generally. The black civil rights movement informed and propelled the youth movement.

Gitlin (1993, 83) notes,

But without the civil rights movement, the beat and Old Left and bohemian enclaves would not have opened into a revived politics. Youth culture might have remained just that—the transitional subculture of the young, a rite of passage on the route to normal adulthood—had it not been for the revolt of black youth, disrupting the American celebration in ways no one had imagined possible.

Yet Invocation is bereft of racial discourse that characterized the era. As communication, culture and technology theorist Matthew Tinkcom (2002, 140) observes, even gendered references in the film are obscured, even superseded, by occultism wherein, in contrast to Anger’s earlier films, “in a sense, what is lost is the dialectic of modernity that camp seizes on in his earlier films, whereby the immense efforts for queer desire to signify as a form of work, made manifest through the appropriations of normative signs such as those of masculinity and popular culture, are lost to the hermetic world of the occult.” Invocation is led by The Magus (Anger), an alpha male, the one in control, of the filmic narrative and his young subjects.

While in Invocation Anger interrogates the themes of the counterculture and the American nation vis-à-vis Vietnam, provocatively melding their respective malfeasant missions at the end of the 1960s, he does so in ways that condemn both, without offering tools with which to resist the war and the sociopolitical status quo in America. A confrontation with the “national
creation story,” while present, surrenders to a troubled masculinity, a filmic-ritual space wherein “the perfect man” was someone who bore the veneer of Lucifer and refrained from contesting the power structure or its discourse.

**In the Year of the Pig: Race, Imperialism and Subjects as Critics**

De Antonio chose and positioned his subjects to reflect the current political and national tensions. *In The Year of the Pig* focuses on male power, and warring views about the US war grapple within the text. The few scenes with women include Madame Nhu (AKA the dragon lady), South Vietnamese advisor during the Diem years; scattered newsreel footage of the Vietcong guerrillas; and the unseen but reviled Vietnamese women on the beach in Saigon. Most significantly, de Antonio’s focus on the subjugation of the Vietnamese by the US army underscores a struggle between national myths. *Year of the Pig’s* almost complete elision of women’s voices, while at times problematical, does not preclude its monumental status as a document and instigator of antiwar resistance. De Antonio’s voice as subject/commentator, along with his sparse but significant positioning of the black soldier, contributes to the film’s critical, Vietnam-War narrative.

De Antonio’s *In the Year of the Pig* profoundly questions the American war in Vietnam, an analytical approach which features various diplomatic professionals who articulate their views concerning the US involvement in Indochina. The voices of the pro-war diplomats and defense experts serve to undercut their own arguments when juxtaposed with footage of US aggression. The opening shots withhold sound to focus on the images of the American Revolution and the Civil War. Slowly the sounds of the Vietnam War’s weapons emerge, followed by images. De
Antonio positions many of his subjects as engaged observers, such that even the prowar subjects, by dint of the film’s ironized juxtapositions of sound and images, provoke spectatorial reflection and analysis. Anger contradistinctively focuses on subjects who immerse themselves in the events, who perform without reflection. *In the Year of the Pig* proved effective in reaching audiences and hence contributed to the undermining of the war’s public support.

De Antonio’s subjects included not only found Vietnam-War footage and interviews, but also photographs of the American Revolutionary War and the Civil War. These images, war footage and interviews were, unlike *Invocation*, lucidly clashing discourses that, despite the film’s reinforcing of Anglo-American creation story vis-à-vis the founding fathers, by the film’s end surfaced as progressive antiwar interventions. The audience is cued to identify not only with the subjects per se but with the ideas they represent. While most of the subjects are white-male intellectuals, diplomats or war officers, women speak only rarely. However, de Antonio includes an interview with an African-American soldier whose words and presence serve to confront the racist and misogynist context of neocolonialism. De Antonio, in exploring such conflicts, rejected the 1960s-rooted direct cinema or cinéma vérité (qtd. Linfield 2000, 114-15), instead creating a documentary that “was/is an organizing weapon, a collage/history of the people’s struggle in Vietnam.”

De Antonio (qtd. Nichols 2000, 225) noted that, “no U.S. protest was shown in the film because it was the other addressing itself to us, frequently in our words and images. It was also the way we saw them from the mid-1930s to the Tet Offensive. It was a Marxist, historical line, not free from error. That *The Year of the Pig* was “the other addressing itself to us” through “our words and images” suggests how the social critic exposes the views of his own nation for the
purpose of subverting them. English scholar Zandra Kambysellis (1997, 141) observes that, “the people in Vera's Nehanda, Hove's Bones and Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah turned around the post-colonial manifestation of written language and made it work for them as a means of empowerment.’ the idea of using the colonizer’s own way of life as a tool to defeat him works wonders here (1997).” De Antonio, in Year of the Pig, uses the images and sounds of the “colonizer’s own way of life to defeat him” by revealing the latter’s contradictions; yet he does so by staking his claim as citizen of that same, colonizing nation.

De Antonio’s filmic voice, as authorial critic and subject, supports his symbolic resistance to the war, when he reads, around Year of the Pig’s midpoint, the Geneva Accords of July 20, 1954. De Antonio notes therein that Article 16 clearly stipulated that further foreign intervention in Vietnam “is prohibited.” The Geneva Convention also stated Vietnam’s plans to hold elections. These observations were, in 1971, documented in Daniel Ellsberg’s The Pentagon Papers. De Antonio iterates his historical knowledge of the Vietnamese conflict and then, as filmmaker, sets forth an ironic interchange of clashing viewpoints, sparking spectatorial reflection and analysis.

For example, De Antonio intersperses interviews with representatives who elucidate the US war as a flagrant violation and juxtaposes these with clips of a US newscaster, in contrapuntal irony, who bombastically announces that, “as it is, Vietnam seems ripe for Communist invasion.” Another newscast, with detective-show inflected music announces the rising, new puppet leader of South Vietnam. Sen. Wayne Morse, with measured sobriety, undercuts the hyperbolic anticommunism to explicate the war as a product of US national malfeasance. Morse notes how the US “used its power and its prestige and its influence really to
get its first puppet government under Diem” and refused to cooperate with the planned elections. Morse confronts the US war in Vietnam by naming and confronting symbolically its aggression and antidemocratic intervention.

Morse commented that Diem and Nhu invoked the “divine right to rule.” He noted, of Madame Nhu’s influence in the US-puppet regime of Diem, the “increase in corruption...by his brother Nhu and his wife Madame Nhu, both of whom had a drive for power that can only be described as pathological.” About halfway through the film Madame Nhu dismisses the Monks’ self-immolation, a sacred act of protest of what they experienced as a brutal invasion of sovereignty and livelihood, to assert that, “they burned themselves because they were incited to do it.” Morse’s somber, reflective presence militates against the frivolous tone of the TV newscasts as de Antonio positions the former as a credible surrogate, a subject with whom he expects audiences to identify as a catalyst for their own, reflective capacities.

While The Year of the Pig’s role of women was, aside from images of Vietcong civilians and guerrillas, limited to the villainous Madame Nhu, the encroaching women’s movement significantly altered the role of women in film and in public life such that by 1976, de Antonio’s Underground included strong, if controversial, female subjects. The film, with Wexler as cinematographer, was assisted by filmmaker Mary Lampson. In the Year of the Pig’s purpose, to engage a debate over US aggression and malfeasance in the context of the Vietnam War, despite its male-centrism, proved effective.

Gene Siskel of the Chicago Tribune (29 September 1969) contended that, “In the Year of the Pig is a documentary with a point of view: that United States military involvement in Vietnam is destroying Viet Nam physically and our country emotionally.” Siskel’s comments
refer to the documentary genre’s veering away from 1960s’s mode of observational cinema, which included the two practices of cinéma vérité and direct cinema. These practices, enabled by technological developments such as portable cameras and synchronous sound, aimed for the truth, or “what’s really going on,” in Albert Maysles’ (qtd. Saunders 2007, 139) words. Film theorist Dave Saunders (2007, 1-2) explores the observational cinema as a mode that was organically linked with the cultural upheavals of the era. However, in a differing observation, film theorist Thomas Waugh (1976) notes how de Antonio’s collage method served a more vital role in the political movement wherein “the pseudo-objective cinéma vérité of the sixties was ultimately bypassed by this cinema of open commitment, research, and analysis.”

Waugh suggests that the collage mode merged the best of exposition and observation. Year of the Pig, eschewing voiceover narration or talking heads, yet rife with appositely cogent interviews, creative image-sound juxtapositions and insertion of the directorial voice, forged important documentarist territory. De Antonio, while expositing via the voices of the subjects, yet including vital fragments of the past, represents the Vietnam War critically.

Year of the Pig’s subjects first appear with the images Boston’s memorial statue of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the black troops of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment on their way to the Civil War (Kellner and Streible 2000, 37), accompanied by a letter from Marquis de Lafayette, Revolutionary leader (de Antonio, qtd. Picard, in Kellner and Streible 2000, 217). Year of the Pig juxtaposes these cherished monuments with the Vietnam images to signify a morally and politically compromised nation from the French defeat in Indochina to the US involvement through 1967-8. However, Year of the Pig stops short of radical questioning of the “national creation story.” The film critiques Vietnam but dislocates the American project from its
longer historical trajectory. While de Antonio revered “people like Tom Paine and Jefferson and Lincoln” (Film Archives 2012), Native America historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2014, 3) situates the legacy of Thomas Jefferson in the context of colonialism and Manifest Destiny, of which the Vietnam War, in 1968, was only its most recent incarnation. Still, de Antonio engaged with national consciousness in ways that illuminated its contradictions vis-à-vis the Vietnam War. In the Year of the Pig prodded a reawakening of the nation’s most cherished ideals. The film simultaneously opened a space for those previously occluded from national narratives.

Historian Peter Novick (1988), in his exploration of the “objectivity question,” notes of colleague Howard Zinn, that

Another theme in Mannheim’s strategy for avoiding relativism was adopted by Howard Zinn, when he argued that ‘the closest we can come to that elusive ‘objectivity’ is to report accurately all of the subjectivities in a situation.’ Accounts from the slaveowner’s point of view should be complemented with a picture of the slave’s-eye view, and in practice, since historiography was slanted toward the former, the historian would be restoring balance by emphasizing the latter. (Novick 1988, 426)

De Antonio, in Year of the Pig, like the avant-garde generally, in the process of “restoring balance,” introduces an antiwar perspective not yet readily available in the mainstream cinema. De Antonio articulated the nationalistic Vietnamese perspective by bringing forth critical, marginalized American voices. A black serviceman, David K. Tuck, condemningly quotes his commanding officers, who said, “the only good gook is a dead gook. You can’t trust em; you can’t trust any of these slant-eyed bastards.” His interview underscores the racism of the Vietnam War. Moreover, Tuck’s presence as an African American provides especial qualification in noting racism not from the dominant, white perspective but one that is rooted in his own collective trajectory of a people enslaved on the basis of color; a sense of shared struggle
authenticates his words. The comments against the Vietnamese are subsequently echoed by white servicemen on the beach as they, in response to a reporter about their possible dates with Vietnamese women, quip that “they’re gooks; they’re slant-eyed; they’re no good.” The lines spoken by the US forces connote a dual imperialist discourse of racism and sexism.

These and other news clips bring to light slivers of the past, surviving structures that imbricate prejudice and imperialism, even as they shape a highly creative work. *In the Year of the Pig* evokes a pastness in which bellicose subjects are recast as traitors to an unfolding American consciousness.

Film theorist Rick Slye observes that,

De Antonio, using his collage technique combined with interviews, assembles the best documentary of the Vietnam War, as well as a benchmark for others who seek to illuminate the conflicts of their time...It is, if possible, even more impressive for being made in 1968, when the war was still raging, so that the film is an active part of the resistance. Today, swamped as we are with Personal Journalism, de Antonio's cold, clear look at causes rather than sensationalist effects strikes me as more important than ever, as antidote and model for those thinking of throwing their filmic shoulders against the machine.

That the “war was still raging, so that the film is an active part of the resistance,” coalesces with its ideological perspective, its matter-of-factness which underpins *Year of the Pig’s* effectiveness as “an organizing tool.” Yet it is de Antonio’s literal voice as subject that authenticates *Year of the Pig’s* argument. De Antonio’s voiceover track reinforces the reengagement of meanings vis-à-vis the myths of the American nation. The filmmaker’s voice is one among many. Hence, de Antonio, unlike Anger/Magus, is a subject/filmmaker/ideologue that distinguishes his part through his collaborative presence, rather than a leader striving, as did the Pranksters, or Anger, to “subvert people over to our way of thinking” (Mountain Girl qtd. Brightman). De Antonio,
as filmmaker-participant, uses his directorial power to resist Manifest Destiny in its Vietnam-War context by appealing to spectatorial agency, the capacity to reflect.

For de Antonio, a filmmaker’s role in contesting the status quo does not entail an unproblematic observation and recording of “the truth.” Yet he does convey, record and contribute to a moment of national reflection which, through its critical inclusion of the hated and feared Other, the Vietnamese and their nationalist leader Ho Chi Minh, augured transformations vis-à-vis public trust, in both media discourse and national leadership.

De Antonio, like Anger in Invocation, opens his film with static, painted images and sounds. Yet, while Anger’s introduction is meant to instill audience identification, pleasure or fear, De Antonio’s comprise clashing discourses of nation. Similarly, while in Invocation the protagonist shown is Horus, the demon Lucifer, “the crowned and conquering child,” Year of the Pig’s heroes comprise the American Revolutionary War and Civil War’s Union soldiers, which are, in the film’s later segments, conflated with the Viet Cong guerrillas as well as the Vietnam War’s American and foreign critics.

In Year of the Pig’s closing scene, “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” is played over the wounded, American bodies, symbols of a morally defeated nation that has abandoned its revolutionary goals in the interests of an ersatz Manifest Destiny. The suffering of the American soldiers, for de Antonio, a World Two veteran, was not something to enjoy, but rather to reflect upon, in the context of America’s youth sent to fight and die in the battlefields of Southeast Asia. De Antonio’s contention that the horror of war subjugated America’s youth, as well as the designated enemy they were sent to fight, was not lost on contemporary audiences. Neither was the way de Antonio situated the weapons, with its maddening sounds, as subjects.
The *Chicago Tribune* (Siskel 29 September 1969) noted that, “the missiles, the incessant and angry whirl of helicopters, such that “there are no human beings in the scene, and it seems as though the war machinery has been set in motion and has a life all its own.” De Antonio, in positioning the weaponry as an antagonistic and feared subject, established a visceral discourse of Vietnam as a misguided, failed project. The sense of dehumanization, a theme in countercultural discourse, is made clear. *Invocation* ends with the representation of a living, human demon covered first in a Solar Swastika and then black stripes, which is meant to serve as idealized surrogate and object of scopophilic pleasure. De Antonio’s closing scenes, instead of prompting the spectator to submerge his countercultural identity within a hermetic system, includes the American youth, John Towler, who calmly proclaims his opposition to the war and his desire to communicate rather than hate. If *Year of the Pig* inspires hope for the American collective psyche, it is one that de Antonio derived from reflection, criticism and a judicious reification of Anglo-American exemplarism.

*Diaries, Notes and Sketches, Also Known as Walden: Documenting a Dream*

Mekas’s subjects in *Diaries, Notes and Sketches Also Known as Walden*, in contrast to De Antonio’s Vietnam-War context, comprised his colleagues and friends in New York City, from whom he communicates a desire for peace and beauty at a time and space of extraordinary cultural and political ferment. Mekas, through the subjects, obscures the conflicts of the mid to late-1960s when racial and other contestation made subsequent transformations in political rights possible. Yet he also contests the dominant industrial cinema through his single-frame cinematography, his assault on continuity editing and his refusal to incorporate classic
narrational structure. *Walden* engages with the Vietnam War peripherally. The film is punctuated only rarely with subjects that struggle for peace, and then only to be defeated by police or ignored by their communities.

*Diaries* conveys its festive narrative throughout six reels of poetic-documentary footage from 1965-1969. Therein, Mekas mediates the profilmic with single-frame shots, painting splendorously with light and color, poetic voiceovers and music. In the film Mekas joins the other subjects yet also stands apart, sometimes eating, singing, playing the accordion, or reciting 16th-century literature. His image appears at the beginning and end, an authorial signature as testimony to what is in essence a contemplative, personal, and evocative work.

*Diaries* exudes its visually resplendent personalism through the images and intermittent voices of the subjects, many of them friends of Mekas. The sounds emerge in *Diaries* sporadically, snippets of conversation in which Mekas sometimes contributes. Mostly the sound, particularly Mekas’s voiceover track, is non-synchronously applied in post-production. The opening and closing images, which comprise the blonde, young women enjoying the park, touching blades of grass or smiling as the sun emerges, exemplify the rootedness that Mekas seeks as an exile from war-torn Lithuania (James 1992, 169). *Diaries* also articulates national consciousness at its most Romantic essence, “correcting the city” and the nation at a vulnerable and turbulent moment. *Diaries*, which, as Mekas noted, is a film “for myself and a few others,” aestheticizes sociopolitical references. *Walden’s* democratic segmentation of episodes and leveling down of subjects, exemplified poetic communication among likeminded colleagues rather than engagement with social change. Film theorist Paul Arthur (1992, 31) observes of two
of Mekas’s fellow filmmakers that, “when Barbara Rubin and Shirley Clarke got arrested at the Pentagon in 1967, he noted, ‘I am no longer with it, or with them.’”

Mekas’s role in Diaries was to create rather than contest politically. Mekas, in the opening, Central Park scene, pans from a subject, Bibbe Hansen, then unexpectedly stops; instead of panning to another subject as might be expected, the camera moves away from Hansen only to cut back to her in the same spot. Bordwell (1985, 164) observes how “the reliance upon an axis of action orients the spectator to the space, and the subsequent cutting presents clear paradigmatic choices among different kind of ‘matches.’…perceptible jump cuts and unmotivated cutaways are flatly forbidden.” While Mekas, through his formal innovations, confronted Hollywood classicism, his subjects did not evoke contestation in the larger sense.

For example, in an early sequence with filmmaker Barbara Rubin (Christmas on Earth, 1963), poet Allen Ginsberg and a reporter, Ginsberg mentions that “a whole new generation has grown up...The entire culture has moved and changed.” The new generation appears in the subsequent, Hare Krishna sequence. Chanting accompanies clips of Andy Warhol, his assistant Gerard Malanga and an insert of a Buddha statue. The film’s intertitles note it is September. Single-frame clips move at lightning speed. Young people play music amidst posters of Love and Peace, and Make Love Not War. A man bangs a gong, while people dance in the street and carry children. Barbara Rubin, enthralled, moves to the Hare Krishna tune, while another woman plays a flute, swaying to the music. A man in love beads, mesmerized by the melodic sounds, also dances blissfully. But here, as in the segments from the late-1960s, the peace movement is isolated from struggle, from black and working class resistance, and the upcoming March on the Pentagon which Mekas eschewed. Mekas documents and creates a richly sensual world framed
by youthful exuberance. Later, he represents a building-demolition crew with the title, “Black Power,” in a severing of the term from its sociopolitical context.

The film’s opening and closing shots, which set the culturally defined tone for Diaries, are of young, women friends, including Hansen, who exemplify youth, newness and the beauty of nature. Hansen, who reminded Mekas of his home in Lithuania (James 1992, 169), digs her toes in the fresh, spring grass. Moreover, Hansen, beaming in response to rays of sunlight, also evokes the ferment of a rising young generation, a postwar 1960s America as a nation of possibilities. These included postwar creativity of which Mekas himself proved a vital impetus.

When Mekas represents people strolling by with families in Central Park, and tells the spectator that “this is Walden,” he is drawing ideological sustenance as much from 19th-century republicanism as Thoreauvian individualism noted by James (1992, 16). In Diaries, self-improvement through one’s art and the integrity of one’s own mind (Emerson), not political militancy, emerged as key to the construction of a more perfect society (Arthur 2005, 16). Mekas, in Diaries, drew from European Romanticism’s more recent forms that were found in the hippies’ oneiric Neoplatonism. The hippies, in their desire to beautify a world that had ceased to provide solace and joy, sought out solutions in self-expression, human creativity, chemicals or joyous communal gatherings.

Mekas articulated such sensibility when he noted,

We used to march with posters protesting this and protesting that. Today, we realize that to improve the world, the others, first we have to improve ourselves; that only through the beauty of our own selves can we beautify the others. Our work, therefore, our most important work at this stage is ourselves. Our protest and our critique of the existing order of life can be only through the expansion of our own being. We are the measure of all things. And the beauty of our creation, of our art, is proportional to the beauty of ourselves, of our souls (Mekas 2002, 166; qtd. Chodorov 2009, 91).
Historian Loren Baritz (1964, 209) illuminates how, for 19th-century American-Renaissance poets, “the poet came to occupy for them the station of prophet and hero, because the poet could know the problem and could have the necessary equipment for its solution.” Mekas and other avant-garde filmmakers drew from the poet-inspired legacy (Sitney 2008) which had, by the mid-1960s, weaved its way into the hippie counterculture.

The focus on celebration was, for the hippies as for Mekas, not a philosophical problem but rather a mode of living, a parallel existence in response to a violent world. The world the young were given was seen as an arbitrary perceptual system created by an older, conformist and complacent generation. Hayden (2009, 45-6) observes that, “it was the elders, after all, who insisted on the straitjacket conformity, the delay and denial of blatant inequalities, the suffocating repression and waning of hope that drove so many of their own children into an alienated search for new identities...an opposing quest to drop out and destroy the ego altogether, to be gratefully dead instead of gratefully pacified.” Thus, while Mekas noted that, “in truth, I am filming my childhood, not New York. It’s a fantasy New York—fiction (Mekas, qtd. Chodorov 2009, 78),” his construction of beauty, of “making corrections,” also drew from the hippies in their striving through art, culture and communal celebration, to escape from a world they did not choose and in which they could not, in good conscience, participate.

For Mekas (qtd. Chodorov 2009, 92) “artists are correctors of their societies. They try to correct what the politicians and ‘social workers’ mess up.” Mekas in Diaries inserts his own image in the opening shots as a signature to a painting, at once attesting to his value as artist and positioning himself as a subject, whose personal vision of reality shapes the profilmic. Mekas’s
representation of the artist as the ideally suited corrector of society resonated with writer Ken Kesey, LSD guru of the Merry Pranksters when the latter said,

As I’ve often told Ginsberg, you can’t blame the president for the state of the country; it’s always the poet’s fault. You can’t expect politicians to come up with a vision; they don’t have it in them. Poets have to come up with the vision and they have to turn it on so it sparks and catches hold. (Edge 2015)

Diaries is thus redolent of the elevation of the poet that Kesey suggests. Diaries, in its idealism, drew from what Baritz (1964, 208) described as the American Romanticism in Emerson and Whitman in that “their desire to make the word one with the thing was a consequence of the anterior desire to destroy the gulf between the ideal and actual.” Mekas, in his privileging of the personal and cultural over the material and the political, speaks to the poet’s desire to rekindle art as intrinsically vital to yet-nascent American democracy. Mekas, in his creation of a beautiful, “fantasy New York” documents not only fragments of life but the dream of a poet whose personal and creative integrity provides Diaries with its most vital sustenance.

The sense of celebration in Diaries is both a reflection and an ideological intervention meant to valorize the poet “and a few others.” For Arthur (2005, 17) Mekas’s rejection of the Old Left (i.e. Marxism) was consonant with the New Left’s personalism, including “something of a distrust of rational argument, of language itself, and a corresponding belief in experience as an ideological benchmark.” However, the New Left’s stance differed significantly with that of the hippie community during the 1960s in terms of the latter’s rejection not only of Old Left ideology but of political organization itself. Mekas’s communitarian spirit flourished not only in terms of his “visionary guidance in avant-garde film and the communitarian ideals of adjacent movements” (Arthur 1992, 45) but also in Diaries via his egalitarian segmentation of his
vignettes, a republicanism that he imbricated within an ideologically fraught space of poetic integrity at the expense of social action.

Film theorist Fred Camper (1986) contends that,

Mekas, however, treats Jackie O. and John and Yoko no differently from anyone else in his film. He does not distinguish who is a celebrity from who is not. He does not stress the materially obvious, the external... Our awareness is instead focused on the filmmaker as autobiographer, on the particular view that Mekas has of each of these people.

*Diaries’* images, aside from their republicanism, speak to springtime, birth and rebirth, uplifting human and natural wonders. When Mekas portrays the Bed-In, a sequence that in Yoko Ono’s film (2012) contradistinctively shows Lennon and Ono arguing with critics such as conservative cartoonist Al Capp, or responding to the urgent telephone call from the activists at Berkeley, with the same filmic style as the flower garden, or the lighthouse also in single-frame, he positions Lennon and Ono not as spokespersons for peace but as objects of art.

The subjects in *Diaries* share filmic space with flowers, a circus, wedding parties, Velvet Underground music and breakfasts with friends. Mekas approaches the subjects as living monuments to beauty and hope, as alive and sonorous as the rustling leaves of the foliage in Central Park, as fragments of life, and monuments to the fragility of—and hence the impetus to protect—the artist and his creations. Hence, *Diaries’* clips of antiwar activism in New York’s Times Square are submerged by the film's beautifying correctives.

For example, in Reel 3, the “peace march in Times Square” is disrupted violently by police. Yet, it is rendered lovely via Mekas’s single-frame shots and melodic soundtrack. Here, Mekas’s “correcting” of the violence, of the police against protesters, albeit not quite, in Benjamin’s (1968, 242) terms, the aestheticization of war, did constitute an anaesthetization of
the countercultural struggle. The single-frame lens, while evoking commotion, enshrouds the event in a cornucopia of lights and melody, obscuring not only the violence of the police but also the activism and the clashing of interests which precipitated it. A face of a black man appears just before the commotion, yet he is left unidentified. Mekas is invoking an idealistic pattern of life within which the subjects abstractly evoke feelings of wonderment and beauty.

Camper (1986), to this end, observes that

Mekas is true to the ideology of his movement in stressing his characters’ presence as areas of light; in the relative “abstractness” of his filming compared, say, to a conventional documentary, he envisions each person as a pattern of moving shadows that burns itself into the spectator’s retina and brain, impinging actively on the viewer’s consciousness in the way that any encounter with another can change you. (Camper 1986)

Mekas, in the Vietnam-protest scene, as with his subjects throughout the film, situates “each person as a pattern of moving shadows,” thereby creating a radical democratization of subjects, themes and experiences. Yet this same, poetic egalitarianism simultaneously works to conceal the most ardent collective tensions, dreams and acts that were vital to the counterculture’s survival. Mekas, drawing from the energies of the American Romantics’ “rejection of material America in favor of an ideal America (Baritz 1964, 208),” imbues Diaries, in its most turbulent moments, with an unspoken mandate to observe without intervention. Mekas in Reel Two includes a segment of snowy winter scenes, a peace vigil wherein he observed without joining or interfering: “I stood on 42nd street. I watched them.” Mekas returns to that vigil later in the film, to elaborate that the women stood alone, with passersby paying little or no attention. “It was snowing, it was freezing.” He notes how no one stopped to join the demonstrators.
The avant-garde film generally, by virtue of its lucid disclosure of its own constructedness, militates against the normalization of screen reality. While Mulvey (2009, 721-2) contends that, “there are three different looks associated with the cinema: that of the camera as it records the profilmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion,” the peace vigil scene complicates the latter by Mekas’s dual self-positioning between his directorial/narrational role in which he comments on, even as he creates, the pro/filmic, and his subject-status as an unseen subject-observer of a failed peace vigil. Thus, in the “three different looks associated with the cinema,” while “the conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third (Mulvey 2009, 721-2),” in the peace-vigil segment of *Diaries*, Mekas’s offscreen presence exemplifies, and in a sense also naturalizes, both his ambivalence towards the peace-vigil subjects and his commitment to a film truth far more precious than any political event, a truth to which only he and “a few others” might hope to gain access.

James (qtd. Chodorov 2009, 89) notes Mekas’s “active support of militancy deflected by the roles of documentarist or entrepreneur.” For Mekas, the vigil for peace, like the Bed-In for Peace and the demonstration in Times Square, are but relatively insignificant fragments of the larger picture. The scenes of activism are but tiny particles of an idyllic natural world wherein all human endeavors are connected by the common striving for beauty. Therein, poetic reflection is the only possible intervention. The filmmaker’s struggle, between filming and intervening in a space that can be as dangerous and contradictory as the society itself, is one that Wexler lucidly explores in *Medium Cool*. 
Medium Cool: Race, Class and the Subject as Citizen

Haskell Wexler (qtd. Cronin 2013) said that, “I’ve been faced with the idea that I’m the creator of images and presenter of images and I wanted those images to reflect my view of life.” Film theorist Kristin Thompson (1986, 141) notes that a film that calls attention to its constructedness when, “once the narrative is recognized as arbitrary rather than logical, the viewer is free to ask why individual events within its structures are as they are.” Wexler, In Medium Cool, calls attention to the film’s constructedness while complicating the counterculture. The film engages whiteness, class, race and youth. And, it does so in ways that reflexively draw attention to the act of filmmaking as well as the interconnectedness of its economically and racially diverse subjects. Wexler explored the boundaries between journalism and art, fiction and documentary, as his actor, Verna Bloom, in the role of her fictive character, wandered into an actually occurring, military occupation in Chicago’s Grant Park in August 1968.

In Medium Cool, Wexler intertwined the social world of struggle and the fictional space of a cameraman coming to terms with his own moral and professional contradictions. Medium Cool’s focus on the news cameraman, John Katsellas (Robert Forster), is meant to engage spectatorial resistance to the status quo of apathy. The news cameraman is an everyman with whom the spectator, in his or her better nature, can identify. The film positions the subjects not only as actors, stars, and celebrities to idealize or emulate, but as social actors whose deeds carried material consequences.

In Medium Cool, the spectator is positioned just behind Eileen (Bloom) as she perplexedly ponders her surroundings. But her disorientation results in a confrontation with historical actuality. Wexler positioned the spectator as a witness and symbolic participant in the
police riots at Grant and Lincoln Parks in Chicago August 1968 at the Democratic National Convention. Wexler’s insertion of his fictional character into the space of the nonfictional profilmic was meant not only to highlight the process of filmmaking and the ways that fiction and documentary intermingle, but also to call attention to the artist’s participation within that uncontrolled field. Wexler’s exploration of the boundaries between fiction and documentary emerge as well in the Black-Arts scene halfway through Medium Cool, where a subject confronts the audience, and is followed by a white woman shooting a gun, in a reverse shot facing the spectator. The woman with the gun is thus positioned by Wexler as a threat to, rather than in dialog with, the spectator. The woman is a subject with whom the spectator is meant to fear, rather than identify. The Black-Arts subjects are, in contrast, lucidly positioned by Wexler as instigators of dialogue and communicators of social justice.

Marianna Hill (Ruth) explained (2001) that, “we were there for a higher purpose to tell the story of something that was really happening.” Hill reflects on the violent roller derby scene that, “people are warlike for some reason; they like battles.” Yet Hill, as Katsellas’ lover, Ruth, is positioned by the film as a foil for Katsellas’ conversion from “punchy cameraman” to concerned photographer. Medium Cool, through its central focus on Katsellas and his development from uncaring professional to a morally aware cameraman, is reflexively male-centric. Medium Cool ultimately contests, rather reproduces, misogyny or other, repressive ideology. Wexler commented (Medium Cool director commentary 2001) upon the accusation spoken by Ruth to Katsellas, that he was “an egotistical, punchy cameraman,” that “my wife thinks that’s what I am.” Wexler inserts himself, via the subject, Katsellas as an alter-ego. This is meant to critique, rather than merely convey, Katsellas’s machismo.
Wexler’s intent in *Medium Cool* was, aside from the character development of its stars, to play with the boundaries of fiction-documentary, wherein he allowed many of the subjects to speak and move as they desired. Wexler, in effacing the boundaries between reality and fiction, assiduously sought subjects who lived in Chicago’s most economically deprived neighborhoods. His subjects—aside from Hill, Peter Bonerz (Gus), Verna Bloom (Eileen) and Robert Forster—comprised Black-Arts activists and poverty-stricken Appalachian migrants. There Wexler met organizers like Charles Geary (Buddy Horton) and the boy, Harold Blankenship (Harold Horton) (Wexler commentary 2001; Cronin commentary 2013). The subject-search was predicated upon Wexler’s entrance into Uptown, which was facilitated, as Cronin and Wexler (2013) note, by Studs Terkel and activist Peggy Terry with whom Todd Gitlin, as an SDS leader, worked in the organization JOIN (Jobs or Income Now) (Todd Gitlin qtd. Cronin 2013).

While *Medium Cool*’s connection with Uptown organizers and the SDS bolstered its liberatory ideology, it emerged from the interstices of avant-garde and mainstream Hollywood. *Medium Cool*’s subjects comprise actors playing roles as well as actual artists or activists playing themselves. The subjects interact with each other, and blur their fictive and real personas, as Harold Horton (Harold Blankenship) did when he answered a welfare visitor’s questions in the first half of the film (Wexler 2013). Improvisation was ubiquitously applied, regardless of fictive or actual subject-status (Wexler 2013). Mulvey’s (2009) observation of the interplay between likeness and difference suggests new possibilities for the subject-spectator bond in *Medium Cool*, which is based not on gender, color or class but on a universal striving for social justice. Intrinsic to the justice theme is human communication, which Wexler conveys through his positioning of the Black-Arts subjects as they question the cameraman’s (Katsellas) “human-interest story.”
Black artist Jeff Donaldson, in that scene, tells Katsellas, “But you don’t do it black enough. You can’t because you’re not black; we are.” As Foucault (Hall 1997, 45) observes, discourses only generate meaning in their sociohistoric context. While half a century later, with racial perspectives characterized by some as color-blindness, Donaldson’s words, in the context of the late-1960s, are relevant for understanding the era and milieu. The speech in the Black-Arts scene contests the communications media, which, in its dehumanization of African Americans, denies, rather than facilitates, communication.

One of the black activists, in response to Katsellas, the news cameraman, improvises as he faces not Katsellas but Wexler’s camera, that is, *Medium Cool*’s spectator:

> When you come in here and say you come to do something of human interest, it makes a person wonder whether you’re going to do something of interest to other humans or whether you consider the person human in whom you’re interested... because when you walked in here you brought LaSalle Street with you, City Hall, and all the Mass Communications media. And you are the ones who are the exploiters, who distort and ridicule and emasculate us, and that ain’t cool.

The subject confronts not only Katsellas/cameraman, nor solely the spectator of *Medium Cool* but also the cameraman/director of *Medium Cool* who is shooting the film. Wexler himself is a representative of the white American middle-class news, television and “all the mass communications media.” Wexler’s own subject-position in *Medium Cool*’s final shot authenticates *Medium Cool*’s role as an instigator of social and political transformation. Wexler, as both unseen subject—as he films the final sequence of *Medium Cool* in a de facto war zone, thereby exposing himself to various exigencies—and filmmaker, navigates not only generic-industrial boundaries of fiction and documentary, but those that divide humans generally.

Hall (1997, 55) notes of Foucault that “the ‘subject’ is produced within discourse...It must submit to its rules and conventions, to its dispositions of power/knowledge.” In *Medium
Cool, when Wexler appears as filmic subject as he rivets his camera onto the film’s spectator, not only is the latter being interpellated as subject of the film’s discourse but Wexler is subjecting himself, as director, to spectatorial scrutiny, a process of “making a judgment on me (Wexler in Cronin featurette 2013).”

Film critic Roger Ebert (1969, Interviews, 10 August), who viewed Medium Cool at least four times in 1969, noted that Medium Cool is a film about communication:

In addition to being several other things, ‘Medium Cool’ is the best film ever made in Chicago except possibly, Arthur Penn's neglected masterpiece ‘Mickey One.’ But it is not a ‘Chicago film’ any more than it's a film about politics, hippies, cops, violence, sex, poverty, black militants or its other subjects. It is a film about the nature of communication, about the shades of meaning that can be superimposed on the face of ‘reality.’

Wexler, in his engagement with the problem of communication, introduced therein a discourse of change rather than reproduction of marginalizing silences, distortions and insults that enabled political repression. Medium Cool’s subjects represent the liberatory consciousness which is linked to that of Wexler himself.

His alter-ego, Katsellas, grows, morally and politically. Medium Cool’s opening sequence shows him and Gus taking photographs of the car crash. Only afterwards does Katsellas tell Gus, “We’d better call an ambulance.” However, by the middle of the film, Katsellas realizes he’s being watched by the FBI. Simultaneously, Wexler realizes that his camera cannot protect him from the reality of the events he films. Wexler clarified that Medium Cool was a film about “a cameraman and his conscience...I am that news cameraman.”

Wexler (2013), like Emile de Antonio, argued that, documentary is “just another kind of fiction.” Wexler, unlike the Maysles, who filmed without intervening in the Altamont disaster, strived to negotiate a balance between his filmmaking responsibilities and his pleasure in
shooting film (Cronin 2013). Wexler, like his subjects, divided, oppressed or struggling in a military-occupied American city, situated his body and his artistic dilemmas into the profilmic. 

Medium Cool, aside from its lucid engagement with the events outside the convention, could not have accurately represented Chicago’s oppressed whites had it not been for Wexler’s subject choices. As associate producer Steven North noted of Harold Blankenship, “there’s no way you could have brought a kid from Hollywood and put him in Uptown and made it work.” This echoed the view of the New York Times in 1969.

The most convincing performance in the film, however, is that of 13-year-old Harold Blankenship, who plays her small son. The child really is an Appalachian refugee and has the stunted look of generations of deprivation in his physique, in his eyes and in a profile that is as hard as a hickory nut. (Canby 28 August 1969)

Wexler’s efforts to “make it work” comprised a symbolic and, to a degree, social, confrontation, with the racial, class and generational issues that inflected the 1968 youth movement in America. The film’s aesthetic experimentation, Wexler’s reflexiveness and his delegation of subject-agency, constituted a formal amalgamation of culture and politics. Medium Cool discursively alludes to the repressive state apparatus as the material manifestation of the ideological state apparatus, which is the television news media. As Wexler (2013) noted, "if you're not on television, you don't exist.” Medium Cool illuminates and connects the media's marginalization of the Appalachian migrants, the blacks in Chicago and the protesters in 1968. Medium Cool, in its choice and positioning of subjects, intervenes in such representational elisions, hence advancing political pluralism in America.
Wexler noted of his directing of Bloom in the riots sequence that, “I said, ‘Verna, you’re there looking for your son; try to get out,’ cause the National Guard had encircled certain areas of the park; so she went through and she experienced it in character.”

Verna Bloom commented that,

Once I convinced him that I had to be there all the time, then they would just tell me generally where to go, where to walk, that’s all. I wasn’t directed to act in any particular way. Once I did start to shoot in the riots and Haskell saw that it really was a potential danger... and he didn’t want to expose me to that...but I told him it just wouldn’t work without me and that I had to be there and so I insisted on staying. I didn’t have that look about me in terms of the stereotypical troublemaker of the time. It was so unreal to be sitting down in the street in a major city in the United States of America and having these tanks come at you; also the juxtaposition of real stuff going on while I was playing a part. Knowing that the character I was playing wasn’t me, so I was playing a part in a make-believe story in a real situation.

Wexler not only delegated high-stakes decision-making to Bloom, but also risked his own life, noting that, “I was teargassed with Jonathan Haze, my producer and friend.” Wexler elucidated that with the teargas the police used, “you can’t breathe and your skin burns like hell.” And, although Wexler noted that, “I feel very indestructible particularly when I’m behind a camera,” he discovered that being behind the camera was “no barrier to your lungs, your eyes, to your face.” He found, as cameraman situated within the uncontrolled profilmic arena, that he was not immune from the exigencies of the actual world.

For Wexler (qtd. Cronin 2013), in this sense, *Medium Cool’s* message differed in some respects from that of other, significant films the same year such as *Easy Rider*, which he construed as being “about the cultural revolution,” whereas, “*Medium Cool* hit em where they live because it looked beyond the signs of the long hair, the hippie language... and that’s why *Medium Cool* had a problem being released.... the film almost didn’t come out.” While *Medium Cool*, in Wexler’s view, represented the political rather than the cultural movement, there is also
cultural contestation. In the film’s final quarter, the band, Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, play at a discotheque. The song’s lyrics, while seemingly isolated from the Black-Activists and Uptown segments, ironically imbricate the hippie movement which in turn eschewed the kind of confrontation that *Medium Cool* represents.

The song, “Who Needs the Peace Corps,” sardonically comments on the “Phony hippies who visit Haight-Ashbury, vis-à-vis their social withdrawal and drug-induced trance:

```
What's there to live for?
Who needs the Peace Corps?
Think I'll just DROP OUT
I'll go to Frisco
Buy a wig & sleep
On Owsley's floor
```

Gitlin (1993, 214) notes Owsley’s role in providing the Haight-Ashbury community with LSD including the First Human Be-In of January 14, 1967. “Who Needs the Peace Corps,” aside from its humorous denigration of the transitive hippie counterculture, refers to the Be-In, where the political and cultural “tribes” of the youth counterculture were to meet and coalesce for the purpose of building a stronger movement.

```
GO TO SAN FRANCISCO
    You know I'll have a psychedelic gleam in my eye at all times
    I will love everyone
    I will love the police as they kick the shit out of me on the street
FREEZE HIPPY
    I will sleep…
```

Significantly, the discotheque scene ends with the third line of this last stanza. The allusion to “the police as they kick the shit out of me on the street” adumbrates the penultimate sequence where actual police beat protesters at the Chicago National Convention. But it also refers to the earlier part of the decade when hippies were targeted by the police, sometimes beaten merely for
having long hair and a nonconformist lifestyle (Cantoral 2011). Police brutality against the counterculture was hence not confined to political antiwar protesters.

Regardless of the equanimity with which police attacked countercultural youth of disparate levels of political involvement, society quickly absorbed the cultural revolution, which Wexler notes (2013) was co-opted, with “long hair, sandals and beards.” By 1970 advertisements sought to cash in on the new. The Chicago Tribune (26 October 1970) heralded the new fashions: “the hippie dress is a dramatic statement for everyone to express his own personality through the language of the clothes one wears.” The new clothing was meant to be purchased by wealthier clients who could afford “a hippie fringed vest over a high-fashion pantsuit, or a $3 tie-dyed T-shirt circled with a $30 belt.” As Hayden (2009) and Metz (2001, 265-6) observe, the culture of the hippies was more readily appropriated by the mass culture than the political developments.

Yippie activist Jerry Rubin (1971, 254) in his memoir lamented how

They are trying to rip off our culture. They are smoking our dope, wearing our clothes and talking like us. They are selling us our culture. They are trying to take the revolutionary sting out of our culture by making it a style. They refuse to admit the truth: that our culture is an affirmation of Life, and the negation of the Death Culture.

Optimistically, Rubin added that, “we cannot be bought off. We want too much.” Yet law professor/writer Charles Reich (1970) similarly warned of implosion. The United States, at the turn of the 1970s, was at a juncture between conservative backlash and the overturning of what Reich (1970, 91) called “the corporate state.” It was a time when the Black Panthers had briefly begun to gain notoriety for their children’s breakfast programs, their opposition to war, and their plans for comprehensive social and racial justice in America.
A Panthers gathering in Washington D.C. proposed, among other things,

A people’s militia, including women and homosexuals. End of a standing army; dismantling of
genocidal weapons...no national, secret or plainclothes police...an end to pollution. An end to
prosecution of users of marijuana, LSD and mescaline. Heroin and ‘speed’ condemned. (Chicago
Tribune 27 November 1970)

An earlier Panthers gathering, in Philadelphia’s Temple University similarly brought social
justice to the fore. The Chicago Tribune (8 September 1970) reported how the Panthers had
begun to unite diverse countercultural factions including women, gays, whites and blacks, for a
profound, socioeconomic transformation, i.e. revolution.

Although during this time, and in subsequent months and years, black, Native American,
gay and lesbian, gender and women’s-studies programs surfaced in universities, plans for
profound reorganization of American society have been slow to materialize. Hard drugs entered
black communities in the 1980s, along with gangs and gun violence. Music critic Jonathan Eisen
(1970, 241) wrote after Altamont that, “Altamont or America is still up for grabs.” In 1969,
Medium Cool engaged in a conversation about America, its advertisement a depiction of the stars
and stripes with the caption, “From the Age of Innocence to the Age of Awareness,” over the
bodies of Katsellias and Ruth in profile. Wexler intervened in a politically as well as culturally
contestatory space that had opened in America.

Wexler explained, to this end, that, “I want our audience to know that there is a machine,
everyone is in somebody’s reality and we’re all a part of it.” Medium Cool, through the
filmmaker’s choice and positioning of subjects—including himself as both subject and catalyst—
confronted the national narrative. Wexler, while making a film that critiqued filmmaking and the
communications industry, simultaneously traversed the line between director and subject, culture
and politics. Wexler, in doing so, contextualized the counterculture at its core.

109
Conclusion

*Medium Cool* addresses the spectator with questions about the responsibility of the filmmaker, ones that are inextricably linked to Wexler’s self-insertion into the profilmic in a moment of major, national crisis. Wexler, in doing so, augured a lucid, reflexive conversation about the communications industry, melding that discourse with the events of 1968. The current thesis chapter has observed that Haskell Wexler and, to a degree, Emile de Antonio, comprise the most effective, albeit mostly symbolic, contestations to “the dreams of the state.” Jonas Mekas and Kenneth Anger, while documenting and performing some of the most precious moments of the mid-late-1960s in America, reinforced a disengaged Romanticism that contested industrial mainstream Hollywood while opposing efforts to resist the very socioeconomic system that supported it.

To be outside Hollywood is to disclose and create previously occluded realms of human experience but also, at times, to reproduce ideologies that, in the context of the era, militated against a refutation of “the national creation story.” Artists, at the end of the 1960s, envisioned anew their social and individual roles, which they in turn communicated to their audiences. The four filmmakers in this thesis, through their placement and choice of subjects, distinguished themselves as much from one another as they did from the industrial terrain they contested.
Chapter Three

Positioning the Spectator: Power, Ideology, and Legacies

The film’s intent was to fix as representation that moment of polarized confrontation in such a way as to implicate the spectator, to force her or him to occupy a position within the politicized landscape. The next step beyond the arousal of consciousness was intended to be social action.

Michael Renov, “Medium Cool” (2004, 29)

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to better understand how Kenneth Anger in *Invocation of My Demon Brother* (1969), Emile de Antonio in *In the Year of the Pig* (1968), Jonas Mekas in *Diaries, Notes and Sketches, Also Known as Walden* (1969) and Haskell Wexler in *Medium Cool* (1969), situated the spectator in the historical moment. The thesis, in doing so, takes the position that art is never for itself but inextricably bound with power, ideology and discourse. Dixon (1997, 5) observes that “the experimental cinema in the United States in the 1960s was nothing less than a call to decisive action from the dreams of the state, from the Orientalist strategies then pursued by the government in the prosecution of the war in Vietnam, from the neo-colonialist sign/system exchange apparatus ruthlessly applied by the dominant media.” The thesis, which began with an inquiry about the contestatory function of late-1960s avant-garde films, concludes with the observation that confrontation during that period involved not only outsidedness to established culture or to the Hollywood industry, but the desire to alter the course of history in the direction of social justice. The filmmaker-spectator dyad in each of the four films in this thesis comprised a communicative dynamic that cued the spectator, at times provoking her or him to respond and co-construct the narrative as a socially engaged participant. The communicative act in turn both emanated from and engaged deeply within a turbulent
sociohistorical context that comprised tensions between the political and cultural spheres of the youth movement, a troubled yet hopeful negotiating space that has continued into recent years.

Film theorist Bill Nichols observes (125):

If the historical world provides the meeting place for the processes of negotiation between filmmaker and subject in the participatory mode, the processes of negotiation between filmmaker and viewer become the focus of attention for the reflexive mode.

Just as in the documentary, in the fictional genre, it is not only the filmmaker’s act of communication that is at stake, but the incitement to civic consciousness, or as film theorist Michael Chanan (2007, 7) notes, the construction of viewers as social subjects. Nichols (2001, 129-30) observes that in the politically reflexive documentary the idea is not simply to acknowledge the film’s constructedness but to set in motion a questioning process that “provoke our awareness of social organization and the assumptions that support it.” This chapter explores briefly the legacies of this bond between filmmaker and spectator, and notes links between history-making and ideology. The tension between culture and politics, which comprised the 1960s generation’s impetus, permeated the films in this study as well as their legacies.

De Antonio tapped into those tensions. He did so by harnessing collage to represent a speaking, moving draft resister in cinematic contestation to the static, photographic image of the young soldier with the “Make War not Love” slogan in the film’s opening credits. De Antonio, like his contemporary colleague in Argentina Fernando Solanas, lucidly recognized cinema truth as not an entity for itself but rather a politically motivated, industrially and economically influenced representation. Wexler in Medium Cool, like De Antonio in The Year of the Pig, positioned his viewer as aware citizen, not only receiver but co-constructor of meaning and social actor for change. Wexler pushed even further by lucidly implicating the spectator,
confronting the mass-communications industry, and challenging the boundaries between fiction and documentary to harness a new aesthetic organically melded with strivings for truth as an expression of social justice.

Jonas Mekas, in contrast to De Antonio, Wexler, and Anger, poetically documented and represented quotidian moments. He continues on his website (2015) to amiably beckon the viewer. Mekas, in contrast to Wexler, considers his work and life as isolated from the counterculture of the 1960s. Yet he, along with De Antonio and the other creative exemplars in this set have inspired young artists to pursue their creative goals. These four films touched scholars and audiences alike well into the early 21st century.

While some scholars view the end of the counterculture as inevitable, a result of “the aging process” and “little left to demonstrate against” (Danesis 2010, 93), the end of the counterculture in its 1960s form was not inevitable, nor was youthful protest destroyed, as the relatively recent Occupy Movement’s films exemplify; yet it was impacted negatively, not only by Charles Manson and Altamont but the government’s repressive counter-intelligence program. This chapter explores how these films tapped into a window of creative and social transformation to both document and impact history.

The era, indeed the entire postwar period lent itself to remarkable innovation. As historian Terence Ripmaster (1990, 45) observes, “In many ways Emile de Antonio was the right man in the right place at the right time.” The same can be said about the other three. This was a period not only of intense artistic and political ferment but of deep divisions between those two energies. The films emerged in the aftermath of an unprecedentedly prosperous postwar era which enabled new forms and practices, and with these, new possibilities for seeing the nation.
With these opportunities was the option to narrate the American story, and with it, the history of the American 1960s counterculture. All the films except *Invocation of My Demon Brother* are, to varying degrees, documentaries which, by definition, make truth claims to the spectator. The four films are powerful mythic constructions entailing ideas of nation and the generation that challenged, in Tom Hayden’s words, “the national creation story.” The films, imbricated with dynamics of power in the late-1960s, exhibited as a set widely disparate engagements with the politically reflexive film according to Nichols (2001, 129-30) wherein reflexivity works not just for itself as a transparently represented aesthetic construct but also for imagined or denoted others, in the service of social consciousness.

The documentary genre itself stands as an organizing tool, as film theorist Michael Chanan (2007, 7) observes, such that “a film may speak in the first-person singular but imply a first-person plural, and this has implications for the way the viewer is situated, as one of the ‘us’ who are pictured on the screen, or as the other from whom this ‘we’ wishes to differentiate itself.” The filmmaker’s gesture for mutual awareness, for a shared social consciousness also comprises the avant-garde or fiction film. The thesis explores to what extent the four filmmakers in this thesis either reinforced or rejected *Medium Cool’s* invitation to a shared ethical responsibility at a time of crisis in America.

**Kenneth Anger: *Invocation of My Demon Brother*: The Spectator as Subject**

*Invocation* articulates an ambivalent reflexivity that is consonant with the ideological tensions present in the counterculture. The era comprised a struggle not only between the counterculture and the establishment, Hollywood and society, but between the cultural and
political spheres of the youth movement itself. While a single, recurring shot of the army helicopter and United States Marines is present and continuous in *Invocation*, both consciously and subliminally, the counterculture emerges amidst these images not as a contestative force but one that turns its back on protest. The film both distances and hails the spectator, not as a socially active subject but as a spiritual recruit. The viewer, drawn into a ceremony, initiated into the occult and away from action, is in this sense moved further than those in the other three films, beyond the illusionary Hollywood spectacle.

The Hollywood spectacle, to paraphrase film theorist Laura Mulvey (2009), includes the illusion of renaissance space which entails the locking of the gaze between subjects at the expense of the gaze between subject and camera i.e. the film’s spectator. In *Invocation*, the subject-to-subject contact is momentarily disrupted by the subject’s, the Wand Bearer’s initial, faltering gaze into the camera, yet is subsequently recouped with the subject’s subsequent retreat from, and ambivalence towards the camera. It is not only the Wand Bearer but also Lucifer (Beausoleil) and the Demon Brother (uncredited) who glance at the spectator. While *Invocation* is not a Hollywood spectacle but an occult ritual in cinematic form, *Invocation* normalizes its own narrative and its own illusory space. This is because the communication from the filmmaker, via the gaze from the subject to the spectator, is unsustained; in addition, potential reflexivity in the filmmaker-spectator bond is overwhelmed by the disorientation-inducing Moog track in the interests of spectatorial-occult conversion.

As noted in chapter 1, Anger’s attitude towards the counterculture was less than laudatory, an ambivalence which is manifested via the equivocation of his subjects’ looks towards the film’s spectators. Anger’s *Invocation* is not for contesting the sociopolitical status
quo in America but for resisting the Judeo-Christian Piscean Age. Anger in 1967 asserted the old, staid order would be superseded by the Aquarian Age wherein “‘man will become as a child again’ (Anger qtd. Lester 1967).” Spiritual belief, as old as humankind, sometimes welded to contestation in the larger sense, was in Invocation, in 1969, a retreat from sociopolitical confrontation.

By then, hippies had already begun exploring alternative spiritualities; some joined religious communes. The acid-rock song “Spirit in the Sky” by Norman Greenbaum (1969) was part of the new discourse about God, not because its songwriter was a serious evangelist but because he wanted to cash in on the burgeoning market for Christian-themed rock music (Genius.com n.d). Young people in a painted school bus are featured in one of Woodstock’s opening sequences. A shot reveals of a school bus lettering reveals the terms “Sunday School” and “Even God Loves America.” The second shot pans from the bus to the Christian hippies in front, dancing at their campsite. Historian Lisa McGirr (2001, 242), in explication of these developments, explores how hippies were drawn into the church in the early 1970s when “the burgeoning counterculture of the late 1960s pointed to deep dissatisfaction among the nation’s youth with the empty materialism, affluence, and pragmatic middle-class lifestyle of their parents.” While McGirr (2001, 243) describes the rise of the Religious Right, the turn to the occult shared with the former “a search for authenticity, the rejection of liberal rationality” also noted by McLoughlin (1978, 201-3). Evangelist Chuck Smith capitalized on the “‘spiritual hunger’” he witnessed in the drug culture, where “‘their experimentation with drugs was almost a gospel, almost a religion’ (Chuck Smith qtd. McGirr 243).”
The Fourth Great Awakening drew from much earlier forms of spirituality but also in the late-1960s and early-1970s integrated a disaffected youth into various spiritual organizations. Anger (Director’s commentary, Invocation 2010) claimed that Aleister Crowley was a proto-hippie who felt that “the artist should be left alone to do what he wants.” Anger’s statement attests to Invocation’s conformance with the oneiric ideological spaces of Haight Ashbury in contrast with Berkeley’s social activism that sought not only to “do your own thing” but to effect, often at great sacrifice, substantive structural changes in regards to civil rights, the environment and ending the war.

The youth movement, throughout 1968, and in the spring of 1969, had begun to meld the two ideological poles of culture and politics in its battle for People’s Park, a countercultural Waterloo that was brutally crushed by then-Governor Ronald Reagan and the National Guard. The FBI’s counter-intelligence program (COINTELPRO) (Hunt 1999, 150; Gitlin 1993, 413; Hale 2002, 146-156; Hayden 2009, 69-70) was also instrumental in weakening the youth movement. As legacy of Invocation’s focus on the occult rather than countercultural élan more broadly conceived, a recent film by Anger and his protégée Brian Butler (2014), Kenneth Anger by Brian Butler, is the closest allusion to Altamont yet provided by Anger.

In the film the voice of Hell’s Angel Sonny Barger emerges nondiegetically over a shot of a dapper and elegantly clad Anger as a cover of the Rolling Stones song “Sympathy for the Devil” plays, its first line being, “Please allow me to introduce myself; I’m a man of wealth and taste.” Another line in the song suggestively notes, “But what’s puzzling you is the nature of my game.” Those familiar with the documentary Gimme Shelter (Maysles Brothers and Charlotte Zwerin 1970) will recognize Barger’s call-in to the KSAN radio station to defend the Angels and
verbally castigate Mick Jagger and the hippies the day after Altamont in the film’s introductory sequence. One of Butler’s performances was noted by the *LA Weekly* (2011) which mentioned *Invocation* as “a ‘cinematic spell’ that may, in fact, have summoned Butler himself (Christian 2011).” Butler and Anger’s film suggests that *Invocation of My Demon Brother* continues to resonate with a sector of disaffected young people, whose “search for authenticity” noted by McLoughlin (1978) of the Fourth Great Awakening, includes an obsession with the sinister, the libertine and the occult.

*Invocation of My Demon Brother*, Like *Gimme Shelter* a year after the disastrous concert it documented and represented, emerged at a time of extraordinary countercultural turmoil, one of whose issues was the struggle to accommodate its cultural and political camps. Anger in *Invocation* harnessed the power of cinema not as art for itself, but rather art for the occult, via the cinematic medium as his “magickal weapon.” *Invocation* interpellated audiences through mesmerizing rhythms to construct as well as document an emerging, youth-based identity at odds not only with the American mainstream but with the peace movement as well.

This is not to infer that religious faith is essentially anathema to political consciousness, whether in the late-1960s, traditionally or in the present. The Third Great Awakening’s Social Gospelism in late-19th-century America tethered religion to rationalist strains to clamor for social justice (McLoughlin 1978, 162-3). The Fourth Great Awakening included the liberation theology of the Berrigans and others. In the case of the occult, deep spiritual engagement, magical thinking and ancient Egyptian cosmology predates Thelema, yet the latter surfaces as the main narrative in Anger’s *Invocation* as well as more recent films. They hail the spectator as both witness and ritual participant. The youth movement of the 1960s, a mainly white, Anglo-
Saxon middle class demographic, is positioned by Anger in *Invocation* to identify with the Wand Bearer (Speed Hacker) of Haight-Ashbury, who serves as surrogate as he lifts the glass wand in the film’s opening sequence.

*Invocation* positions the Wander Bearer in a series of shots that suggest spectatorial bewilderment and subsequent immersion in the occult. The first shot is interspersed with Anger’s hand and forearm, which is tattooed with the Mark of the Beast 666/Seal of Lucifer as he pulls it back from a violet panel to reveal the film and work its spell. The Wand Bearer is an “avatar” not only for Lucifer as Powell (2002, 88) notes, but specifically for the film’s youthful audience that is cued to identify with both him and the young, flamboyant hippie (Beausoleil) who plays Lucifer. While *Invocation’s* first post-credit shot is a close one of the Wand Bearer gazing directly but briefly into the camera, in subsequent shots he faces away from it in a timorous pose. The composition suggests that the Wand Bearer is threatened by the ritual that unfolds, as well as cowered by the camera’s spectatorial gaze.

In these opening shots the Wand Bearer glances at the camera, then peers at the nude youths on the couch. The Wand Bearer’s confused gaze and the direction of his eyes suggest his watching of the images which *Invocation’s* audience, as spectator, sees as well. What follows is a shot of the US Marines filing out of the helicopter in Vietnam. The Wand Bearer is subsequently shown in diminutive form in a composition overpowered by the filmic frame as he and the film’s spectator succumb to the occult-conversion ritual that is the film’s purpose. The opening sequence is accompanied by a hypnotic rhythm of the Moog synthesizer.

The Moog, in *Invocation’s* final sequences, emits the sound of explosion-like blasts as the Wand Bearer is fitted with a Macramé (hippie) banner superimposed upon his head which in
turn is doubly superimposed with the Mark of the Beast 666/Seal of Lucifer. However, a subsequent image of the Wand Bearer reveals that the Macramé is gone; only the Mark of the Beast remains, hence sealing the occult-conversion spell. The Wand Bearer, standing in for spectator, his image now dwarfed by the frame, is confronted by and transformed by Lucifer who will be his savior yet is symbolically shot by the Moog’s blasts as he, minus the countercultural symbol and recoded as a Thelemic convert, gazes briefly one last time at the camera.

The same blasts, interspersed with the helicopter sounds, which begin earlier in the film with a shot of the army helicopter and the Marines filing out of it, plays over Lucifer and his band mates as they too form a file, ceremoniously down the stairs in the film’s final sequence. Invocation progressively draws the spectator into a naturalized occult space to connote similarities between the army men emerging from the helicopter, an image continually (mostly subliminally) replayed throughout the film (Ch.1) and the hippies. Invocation in this sense both observes the latter’s ambivalence towards the antiwar movement and reproduces it.

As Mulvey (2009, 721-22) notes, of the Hollywood film, “the camera becomes the mechanism for producing the illusion of renaissance space,” which involves “flowing movements compatible with the human eye, an ideology of representation that revolves round the perception of the subject; the camera’s look is disavowed in order to create a convincing world in which the spectator’s surrogate can perform with verisimilitude.” The gaze between camera and spectator is, Mulvey observes, “disavowed” in favor of that between subjects. In Invocation the spectatorial “surrogate” looks fleetingly and insecurely at the camera, an ambivalent and unsustained gaze that works not so much to undermine the film’s illusionary
narrative but rather to transfer the threat of occult-conversion that he experiences as filmic character to the film’s spectator.

In *Invocation* the “dominant ideology” that is reinforced is not that of American mainstream society but Thelema, a religio-ideological system devised by British occultist Aleister Crowley which, noted in Chapter 1, recognizes supreme selfhood for the few, yet for the masses denies agency and, as a recent interview with Anger’s Thelemite protégée Butler (LipTV 2014) suggests, also intellectual ambition. *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, via the ambivalent filmmaker-spectator bond, welds together the counterculture, signified by its hippie subjects, and the repressive state apparatus it opposed. *Invocation*, by ritualistically conflating not the movement’s two alienated poles, art and politics, but rather the youth and the army, and by positing the occult as a solution to the War in Vietnam, drove further the wedge between the movement’s two ideological spheres. *Invocation* reinforced the duality of culture and politics by forging a troubled spectatorial dynamic via the Wand Bearer.

In the opening shots the Wand Bearer’s eyes, as Anger noted in the commentary (2010), as part of Speed Hacker’s albino characteristics, involve a jiggling reflex to light, such that in subsequent shots, including an extreme close-up, looking into the camera, there is no sustained or lucid contact between himself and the film’s spectator. This ambivalent address contrasts profoundly with *Medium Cool*’s Black-Artists scene where the activists look directly and consciously into Wexler’s camera to confront the mass-communications industry’s marginalization of blacks. Instead, the Wand Bearer’s gaze is mediated by his twitching eyes and shifting gaze, via the editing and composition, toward and away from the camera. These images
are meant to transfer psychic, spiritual and political disorientation vis-a-vis the Vietnam War footage from the Wand Bearer to the spectator.

The direct-camera gaze of the Demon Brother, clad in horns and beard, in contrast to that of the Wand Bearer, towards the end of *Invocation*, is not one of bewilderment but rather that of amused malevolence which articulates fear. The Magus (Anger), flailing the swastika and gyrating madly in the film’s last sequences, takes on the Demon Brother’s identity. The latter then transfers the spell to the spectator, to whom he grins in close-up. A trick-lens image in *Invocation*’s midpoint of multiple Lucifers gazing in fear at the mayhem encountered—Hell’s Angels at Hyde Park superimposed with Satanist LaVey—is later replayed but this time with a broad grin. These shots, in turn, are followed by the rapid-fire montage of the Rolling Stones footage at Hyde Park. These images, countercultural power codes which aimed to fascinate a youthful and politically unengaged underground-film audience, are accompanied by the Moog’s undulating rhythm to “bind the spell” of occult conversion.

*Invocation*, arising out of the hippie subculture and centuries of faith-based movements, was an occult-focused alternative to the peace and love rock festival that defined the counterculture and mythically represented by *Woodstock* the documentary. Historically, *Invocation*, in its representing the counterculture at a critical moment, is as much a document of the late-1960s as *Woodstock*. The performance of occult ritual in *Invocation* coincided with the counterculture at a sensitive juncture. Radicalism during that year reached a crescendo. The militant Weatherman emerged from the SDS. People’s Park, in its coalescence of cultural and political activism, was the opportunity of the decade. The Woodstock festival at Max Yasgur’s farm in upstate New York emerged, in the wake of the failed People’s Park campaign in June, as
the long-awaited “prefiguration of the cooperative commonwealth (Gitlin’s 1993, 406).” This was the same time that *Invocation* emerged, a film that rejected the counterculture in its broadest aspects.

Anger, in his most hermetic film, veered from the youth movement’s activist style as well as mainstream religious forms. Anger, in doing so, also opposed the classic Hollywood narrative but not its mystifying process. As James (1989, 151-2), quoting film theorist P. Adams Sitney notes, “For even as it proposes itself as the subversive alternative to Hollywood, Anger’s cinema is constantly traversed by Hollywood, ‘both his matrix and adversary.’” Moreover, Anger’s “War Film” transpired not in the battleground of counterculture and establishment but in the former’s tension-wrecked theater of culture and politics. *Invocation* weaved its way into the cultural transformation of American society, including the revival of spiritual practices among artists and spectators influenced or mentored by Anger. Some have enjoyed notoriety on the World Wide Web.

Along with the popularity of the occult, the counterculture as a comprehensive, contestatory force, despite Altamont, the brutal defeats in the Oakland antiwar protest, Columbia University, Chicago, People’s Park, Charles Manson and the Hell’s Angels, has continued in new forms well into ensuing decades. One need only glance at *Occupy Nation* (Gitlin 2012) written by the former SDS leader himself, or view the documentary *Occupy L.A* (Bondani 2011) to verify the persistence of countercultural activity well into the early 21st century. While the schism between culture and politics has continued to permeate youthful energies, racial inequality is addressed by young rappers such as Azealia Banks. The pop star, according to the *Guardian* (Doyle 2015), like some of the late-1960s Black-Arts poets in their accommodation of
occultist forms and political engagement (Ch. 1), aims “to identify with persecuted ancestors, to reclaim lost ways of seeing the world.” While such holistically inspired artistries pose challenges to an end-of-counterculture narrative they also raise questions about the ideological legacies of occult-focused films like *Invocation of My Demon Brother*.

The film’s preoccupation with Thelema and its ambiguous reflexivity are imbricated with its problematical spectator-positioning. Therein the spectator, as is the subject who serves as the former’s surrogate, is denied an agentic role. The latter, quite unlike the draft resister John Towler in *Year of the Pig* or the black artists in *Medium Cool*, are silent and ambivalent towards the camera. Ideologically, *Invocation’s* pretense to a do-as-you-please hippie veneer belies its conservative politics when it presumes ownership of the spectator’s thoughts, emotions and critical faculties to instill aversion to action at a time when critical structural changes were predicated upon that struggle.

Phenomenologist and film theorist Vivian Sobchack (1997, 53) contends that agency occurs in films generally, such that “I am never so vacuous as to be completely ‘in-formed’ by even the most insinuating or overwhelming film...The film’s vision and my own do not conflate, but meet in the sharing of a world.” *Invocation* does not involve “the “sharing of a world” but is a one-way sensory bombardment intended to direct youthful energies towards a hermetic world.

Film critic Robb Baker of the *Chicago Tribune* (1969), in reporting *Invocation of My Demon Brother’s* world premiere at the Cinematheque 16 in Los Angeles, noted of Anger’s films generally that

They’re hard movies--hard to understand [elusive, enigmatic [and, as he says in the credits of one, ‘dedicated to the few’] as well as hard to take--even to stomach at times...Other critics insist on finding all sorts of moral ‘messages’—on everything from Nazism to Christianity—in the works. Both approaches seem to be headed in unnecessary directions. Anger as pervert or Anger as
preacher is far less relevant than Anger as artist. And his art is chronicling the obsessions he sees around him in life: Whether he is involved in them or horrified by them [or neither] is not the point.

Baker’s contention that Anger in *Invocation* is only “chronicling the obsessions he sees around him” is a valid perception. Yet it is, in hindsight, only partially correct. Anger is also reinforcing the diabolism, the occult and most significantly, countercultural submersion thereof. As film theorist Leo Goldsmith (2007) observes, *Invocation* is not solely an entertainment product but also a religio-ideological rite performed upon the film’s spectator:

As an ‘invocation,’ the film both documents Anger’s performance of this rite and enacts it, which is to say that the film itself is the rite that invokes the ‘demon brother.’ Not only do we view Anger as the Magus performing the mass--ritualistically burning Aleister Crowley’s Laws of Oz, brandishing a false goat’s head, and waving about a Nazi swastika flag--but also his film performs these incantations directly upon us. (Leo Goldsmith 2007)

For film theorist David Melville (2008) *Invocation* bears remarkable similarity to the films of Walt Disney or Leni Riefenstahl:

Invocation of My Demon Brother? It’s not often one can go from Disney to Riefenstahl - from the Magic Kingdom to the Third Reich-with barely a hiccup in between...All three create images that bypass our conscious mind and enter, direct and perhaps unbidden, into the depths of the id. We are aware, with other filmmakers, of a voice and a vision beyond our own. Disney, Riefenstahl, Anger… they speak from within.

Moreover, *Invocation*, as a religio-ideological rite which emerged in a national context of extraordinary social turbulence and creative ferment, stands in stark contrast to organizing films for the New Left. *The Murder of Fred Hampton* (Mike Gray 1971) confronted racism, while Newsreel’s *Summer '68* and *Columbia Revolt* (1968-9) contested anti-youth police violence. *Invocation*, in sharp contrast to Newsreel Films’ roughly hewn aesthetics and communitarian, contestatory élan, was a meticulously crafted work nurtured and conceived by its renowned...
Anger took great care to instill occultist themes that would mesmerize audiences, and he did so by way of the Moog synthesizer. Film theorist Charlie Fox (2013) observes that, “Mick Jagger supplies the abrasive, insistent Moog score, a proto-Industrial lock-groove that takes on an incantatory effect: this is a film meant to induce a trance.” Authorial reflexivity in Invocation is rendered at best ambivalently.

Invocation according to film and sound theorist Elisabeth Weis (2006) relies heavily upon sound as a mesmerizing agent:

The sound track of this film is aggressively loud, repetitious music (performed by Mick Jagger on a Moog synthesizer)... a sound track that by virtue of its rhythmic repetitiveness and loudness seems to leap off of the screen and invade the viewer’s body and nervous system. Sound, in other words, is used to suggest that the images are more than merely images, but are meant to have the power to effect changes in physical reality. (375)

And, as historian and theorist of film music and film sound Kevin Donnelly (2005, 5) observes, “Sound and music have been regularly used as components of psychological warfare and brainwashing techniques.” While Anger harnessed the Moog synthesizer ”to effect changes in physical reality,” he also positioned the Wand Bearer as surrogate for the film’s spectator.

Invocation, in doing so, tapped into religious declension and incipient revival, and posited the occult as a natural, a priori outcome of the filmmaker-spectator bond. It was through those interstices that ideological content was to be consumed rather than debated.

An interview with photographer Jack English (qtd. Hughes 2001, 7) ran thus:

Jack English: Do you set out to subvert the audience?
Kenneth Anger: Well, ‘subvert’ is the wrong word. ‘Subvert’ is like I’m trying to do something dirty to them. I’m not ‘trying to do anything dirty to them. I’m trying to open their minds. (Jack English and Kenneth Anger qtd. Matthew Hughes 2011)
MOCA Curator Bennett Simpson notes that “Kenneth Anger channels a world of magic, ritual, darkness, and desire—quintessential ingredients of Hollywood.” He added, “His films are legendary and yet always contemporary.” What is most at issue with *Invocation* is its harnessing of the “quintessential ingredients of Hollywood” to normalize an ideological system at considerable odds with the counterculture’s broader-based, social justice-derived activism.

The filmic spectacle, through its cacophony of compositions, symbols, and the startling, clashing superimpositions, prod the spectators to glue their eyes to every frame so as to miss nothing. Meanwhile, the music is meant to hypnotically engross the spectator, “to forget that they are watching a film.” For Hughes, Anger sought to decondition people’s ingrained conformism, in the spirit of the 1960s hippie counterculture, for spiritual enlightenment. He notes (2011, 232) that “the predominant methodology that Anger utilises in his attempt to achieve an altered state of consciousness within the spectator is that of sensory derangement.” This strategic “sensory derangement,” like the drowning of youthful rage by psychedelic drugs (Hayden 2009), is at once a document of despair and an intervention meant to disorient and redirect youthful rage for occult purposes.

At stake in America at the end of the 1960s was a generation that believed itself to be on the verge of profound sociopolitical transformation, one that imagined and intended full civil and human rights, freedoms and transformations in infrastructure including massive redirection from military spending to inner cities, education and the arts, in Gitlin’s words, “not a time for thinking small.” In ensuing years, both reactive and progressive forces intervened that would, by turns, both consume and vindicate that generation’s youthful energies. *Invocation* as a historical document records this catastrophic moment. The film, in doing so, enacts and performs the
chasm between culture and politics, activism and oneiric withdrawal. In 1969, Altamont loomed as the last great hope, for those like Gitlin (1993, 406) who had missed Woodstock: “And so when the Rolling Stones announced their own West Coast free concert, or Altamont, near San Francisco, I had to go.” Invocation’s circumvention of spectatorial agency, its troubled reflexivity and its ideological intent reinforced the counterculture’s turn from politics which accompanied the despair found at People’s Park, Altamont and Charles Manson’s Spahn Ranch.

De Antonio’s In the Year of the Pig: The Spectator as Social Critic

If Anger’s intent is to subvert spectator agency, “to forget that they are watching a film” then Emile de Antonio’s appeal to spectator’s rational ability to analyze words and images is a firm ideological counterpoint. De Antonio, in The Year of the Pig calls into question the idea of objectivity, the purpose of documentary filmmaking itself and the notion that one can extricate art from politics. De Antonio in doing so, distances the spectator, asking her or him to analyze rather than immerse himself in the spectacle. In the Year of the Pig’s opening sequence, as Renov (2004, 35-6) observes in certain scenes in Medium Cool, meticulously juxtaposes images and sound in the opening sequence, reflexively positioning the spectator by disclosing the film’s constructedness. De Antonio’s artistry is one that addresses the counterculture as a contestatory force against rather than in league with the Vietnam War.

The film’s Brechtian-Godardian distancing mechanism approaches the film’s spectator as an educated and active citizen rather than a consumer of entertainment or ritual attendee. The first sequence’s isolation of sound and images calls attention to the filmic process, denaturalizing
the Hollywood format as a commodity spectacle. These first shots cue the intended spectator to reorganize his receptive mechanisms towards active participation.

_In the Year of the Pig_, touted as a remarkable work, and while avant-garde, was embraced most notably not by the art-house theaters but by the student movement on college campuses and even “GI coffeehouses” according to De Antonio. While de Antonio in the _Year of the Pig_ limits his film to the parameters of the documentary genre, as opposed to Wexler’s rethinking of the generic barriers between fiction and documentary, De Antonio prods the spectator to question documentary film’s claim to truth. De Antonio, in doing so, consonant with the cultural and political re-evaluation that defined the era, provokes the active spectator to rethink the national narrative and the Vietnam War. _In the Year of the Pig_, unlike the expository documentary, juxtaposes the words and images of experts, diplomats, intellectuals, ironically clashing viewpoints, music and the irrationality of war to question documentary’s omniscient truth claims.

De Antonio, in his discussion of film truth, told journalist Susan Linfield (2000, 115-16):

_The great philosophical weakness of vérité is to ask: Whose vérité? Whose truth? Truth is a fugitive thing. Every time you look through a camera and every time you cut a piece of film you impose a point of view. Pretending not to impose a point of view is to impose the view of the state, or of whatever society you work in. You simply reinforce it._

This is where reflexivity and power converge in their ideologically reproductive functions.

De Antonio notes his audience’s sophistication:

_People were sophisticated; they were all looking at TV and movies, so they could get the point. You didn’t have to explain everything and that way you could treat the audience as if the audience were you. The audience was just as sophisticated as the maker of the film because the audience had all that experience._ (De Antonio, qtd. Jackson 1988)

That de Antonio expected such a response based on his attitude that “you could treat the audience as if the audience were you” represents a significant shift between _In the Year of the_
Pig and Invocation of My Demon Brother. While De Antonio approached his imagined spectator as a colleague capable of analytic reflection, the latter approached his young audience as potential recruits to Thelema, his religious belief system as he strove to “open their minds.” The collage method provided not only a formal rendering but together with its sound-image juxtaposition, prodded viewer participation.

De Antonio noted:

The collage theory I thought was uniquely left wing because it bore a close relationship to the early Soviet films which were essentially films in editing. The collage is a more sophisticated form of editing. It makes no difference where the material comes from, that was Andy’s point and I agree with it. It can be a piece of film you find on the ground or it can be something you shoot.

The collage method was not a purely formalistic exercise. Instead, it was imbricated with de Antonio’s ideology, wherein he promulgated a critical anti-Vietnam-War position in collaboration with the spectator. Sobchack (1997, 53), to this end, elucidates that, “my experience at the movies is never lived as a monologic one, however easy and even often lazy my participation (or the film’s) seems to be...there are always two embodied acts of vision at work in the theater, two embodied views constituting the intelligibility and significance of the film experience.” De Antonio in The Year of the Pig, unlike Anger in Invocation of My Demon Brother, to paraphrase Sobchack, shares a world, a way of seeing the world, with the spectator.

In the Year of the Pig, consonant with the “dialogical” viewing process that Sobchack observes of film watching generally, also appeals to the spectator as empathic citizen. In Vietnam, the lives of actual, suffering human beings are at stake. This is, unlike Anger’s Invocation or Jonas Mekas’s Walden, not a fantasy world but a site of military invasion into a sovereign nation during the Cold War’s anti-Communism. The implements of this neocolonialist
war are, unlike the symbols and images in Anger’s *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, far from subliminal. *In The Year of the Pig* not only combats Hollywood illusion of Renaissance space by the isolating and ironical juxtaposing of sound and image but also utilizing commentary as dialectical argumentation. The war and government experts, when they appear, are not the talking heads of expository documentaries; nor do their voices of knowledge coalesce into a unified, concluding statement. Instead the narrative is a blend of opposing views, images and sounds that provoke analysis rather than visceral submersion.

The voices and images in turn do not speak for themselves but are constructivistically approached in concert with the spectator as intellectual-analyst. *In the Year of the Pig* also provokes an empathic rationalism that entails affect as well as criticism. Dixon (1997, 5) notes that “the experimental cinema in the United States in the 1960s was nothing less than a call to decisive action from the dreams of the state, from the Orientalist strategies then pursued by the government in the prosecution of the war in Vietnam, from the neo-colonialist sign/system exchange apparatus ruthlessly applied by the dominant media.” *In the Year of the Pig*, unlike *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, exemplifies the refutation of these “neo-colonialist” strategies.

The film represents the hope of the antiwar movement when it animates the young draft resister John Towler. The image, cinematic rather than static, refutes the photographic image of the “make war not love” soldier’s helmet and provides agency to the critical, young voice. De Antonio positions not only Towler as countercultural subject but also the film’s spectator who is moved by Towler as surrogate, in Mulvey’s term, to reflexive consciousness. Therein, America’s youth are prodded to resist the Vietnam War and its inhumanity for which they are sent to fight. Streible and Kellner (2000, 75) to this end contend that de Antonio’s aesthetics emanate from
modernism “that trusts popular intelligence to draw appropriate conclusions from complex work.” *In the Year of the Pig* constructs with spectators, the mythic national context that for the first time in the United States was questioned by a generation in revolt. *In The Year of the Pig* is not about instilling an eternal truth but of contextualizing historical acts whose Vietnamese subjects undergo neo-colonial conquest.

De Antonio contended that truth and objectivity in cinema, putative functions of the camera and technical apparatus, were ahistorical aims:

> The great flaw of our culture is this adoration of technique. The myth is that through some kind of fake technological objectivity we can reach an objective statement or image of society, or even of people. Untrue. Because those people caught in that second of time have history. And history is what destroys the very concept of cinema vérité.’ (De Antonio qtd. Linfield 2000 215-16)

*In the Year of the Pig* positioned subjects historically and appealed to spectators as critics, who, equipped with context and argument, were solicited as citizens in the service of sociopolitical change. De Antonio noted that, “No U.S. protest was shown in the film because it was the other addressing itself to us, frequently in our words and images.” If *Year of the Pig* was “the other addressing itself to us,” de Antonio, as interlocutor, interprets “the other” to “us,” the “we” of which Chanan (2007, 7) speaks. It is the student movement to which the film speaks, for and with a generation in solidarity with a people whose revolution and theirs shared a fleeting but genuine passion. *In the Year of the Pig* conjoins countercultural and Vietnamese visions when such ideals were reified by massive street actions.

To this end de Antonio (qtd. Georgakas and McIsaac 2000, 292) said in discussion of his film *Underground* (1975), “we’re asking people to understand how white, middle-class people, who went through the civil rights movement and the pace movement, ended up as revolutionaries
who went underground on March 6, 1970, and have been there ever since.” Two years before the radical SDS-offshoot Weatherman went underground, *In the Year of the Pig* appealed to the counterculture in its political as well as cultural dimensions. The film addressed America’s youth and reached a segment of the American public at a time when the Vietnam War had just begun to lose favor in the public eye with the Tet Offensive; for the first time, a Vietnamese victory was deemed possible.

That *In the Year of the Pig* was “was a Marxist, historical line, not free from error” speaks to its compatibility with both the formal experimentalism of the 1960s and the “imperfect cinema” started by Cuban filmmakers of the 1960s. The imperfect cinema, nearly devoid of gloss and glamour, and redolent of their artists’ creative passions and years of professional training (Italian Neorealism in Italy or New Wave in France) as well as, in some cases, economic hardship, set an example internationally of what democratic art could be and in fact was during that era. The quintessential ‘68 film, *The Hour of the Furnaces* (Solanas and Getino) which agitated against neo-colonialism and cultural imperialism, represented for its filmmaker-activists the socially engaged Third Cinema which, like De Antonio, used a collage method. In the United States, avant-garde/political films found their way into the political spaces of a student movement, which in turn was globally interconnected. Rebellion and subsequent repression had emerged in Paris, Czechoslovakia, Mexico, and Argentina (almost a decade before the Dirty War of the late-1970s), as well as the United States (Katsiaficas 1987, 40, 49). *In the Year of the Pig*’s aesthetics, like *Hour of the Furnaces*, was inseparable from its political commitment.

In de Antonio’s view, truth in cinema was ideologically based. As part of *Year of the Pig*’s film’s reflexive strategy, it harnessed aural elements to both distance the spectator and
interpellate her or him as a person of conscience, a public citizen. That it was used as “an organizing weapon” differentiates its deeper purposes from Anger’s Invocation. “Its audience was varied, intense, in some places even wide. It played European television but never U.S. Not even now.” In the Year of the Pig emerged and persisted as an oppositional intervention both formally and thematically. De Antonio noted that “It played the U.S and Europe theatrically. Theaters were attacked. Screens were painted over with hammer and sickle (Los Angeles, among others); bomb threats to the theater in Houston; in Paris during a long, successful run, the cinema was systematically stink bombed.” The theater was attacked because this was a film that contested the political as well as cultural status quo via activism that defined the 1960s. The film intervened by soliciting the spectator as a social subject in a country where white, middle-class youth distrusted their government and sought a new way of seeing the nation.

Year of the Pig’s collage style acted in opposition to the status quo most broadly conceived, in confrontation to what Dixon (1997, 5) termed of the 1960s avant-garde more generally, “the dreams of the state.” The fact that In the Year of the Pig succeeded in the academic milieu as well as wielded by the antiwar movement signifies the film’s and de Antonio’s ideological position vis-à-vis the Vietnam War, the movement, and the counterculture in its most comprehensive dimensions. That the film distanced viewers in the Godardian sense—and thereby supported resistant rather than dominant readings—did not preclude its appeal to emotional affect, as the wounded American servicemen in the film’s closing scene allude. These were young men sent to the battlefields of Southeast Asia for dubious political reasons, suffering in the film’s final scene as they had themselves been used by the government to inflict on others. In the Year of the Pig presents a collage that strives to humanize putative enemies.
Slye (2004) observes:

De Antonio, using his collage technique combined with interviews, assembles the best documentary of the Vietnam War, as well as a benchmark for others who seek to illuminate the conflicts of their time. His search for archival footage is indefatigable; his juxtaposition of images to produce new meaning from existing film, television, or photographic sources is deadly and consistently amazing.

To “illuminate the conflicts of their time” is to prod questioning of the very system that, through its media representation, enabled the Vietnam War. Slye notes that, “Today, swamped as we are with Personal Journalism, de Antonio’s cold, clear look at causes rather than sensationalist effects strikes me as more important than ever, as antidote and model for those thinking of throwing their filmic shoulders against the machine.” For de Antonio, a filmmaker “respects history” yet does not unproblematically observe and record the truth. De Antonio’s role as he saw it was to tell his side of the story, to provoke political responses to the Vietnam War. De Antonio’s visual and aural juxtapositions not only underscore only the contradictory American project, but the capacity of the spectator to analyze those contradictions.

He told historian Dan Georgakas and actor Paul McIsaac (2001, 292-3) that,

Most people go to films and are lulled into a filmic experience—the whole business of synchronized voice and image….the idea is to force people to look at a film in a different way. Ordinarily, film creates an atmosphere of passivity. You sit in the seat and it washes over you, like All the President’s Men. We make demands on the audience. We may fail at times, but we try to force them to think about all of these things that have gone through their lives—the things I think the government and the media do their best to make us forget.

Emile de Antonio in The Year of the Pig facilitates spectator agency, to construe an active and critical subject in the spectator. Cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall (1980, 136-8) observes three kinds of readings: dominant, negotiated or resistant. The Year of the Pig, via its ironized sound-image-discourse juxtapositions, engenders resistant readings in lieu of hegemonic ones. Year of
the Pig is not about enforcing ideological discourse but encouraging spectator’s capacity to reflect and critique.

De Antonio’s aural presence in his reading of the Geneva Accords joins with that of the spectator as critic. The film’s meticulously crafted entreaty informs and presumes spectatorial sophistication. In the Year of the Pig’s emergence denotes countercultural hegemony however fleeting as the 1960s drew to a close. In the Year of the Pig, as ideological intervention, draws the spectator into position of reflexivity that augurs rather than merely responds to, a transformation in sociocultural production.

According to Nichols (2001, 127-8),

The reflexive mode is the most self-conscious and self-questioning mode of representation. Realist access to the world, the ability to provide persuasive evidence, the possibility of indisputable proof, the solemn, indexical bond between an indexical image and what it represents--all these notions come under suspicion. (Nichols 2001, 127-8)

In the Year of the Pig, as a reflexive political documentary, not only represents the era and engages critically with the Vietnam War, but also suggests the ways in which an artist can appeal thoughtfully to the spectator, with the latter as conscious co-creator of meaning.

Mekas: The Spectator as Poet

Jonas Mekas, as a documentarist, portrays life not as it unfolds but how it evokes celebration of life. And he positions the spectator through gorgeous imagery, music and single-frame quotidian spectacle that prods the viewer to look closely at a world that will not survive without the camera. Diaries, Notes and Sketches, “dedicated to Lumiere,” is also in the tradition of Alain Resnais in Night and Fog (1955) and Patricio Guzmán in Chile, Obstinate Memory
(1997), whose acts of bearing witness implicate the spectator within the role of cinema as a site of memory. Mekas’s bearing witness however is not the political weapon of struggle, but a Romanticist prelude to an imagined strife-free world. In *Diaries* Mekas contributes aesthetically without seeking to alter the status quo more generally.

*Walden* is, in Nichols’ (2001) nomenclature, a poetic documentary. Mekas in *Diaries*, while he creates a world of beauty, also reflexively and subjectively specifies himself as that creator, and his film is in that sense also of the performative mode. *Diaries* implicates the spectator as fellow artist, one of the few who will bear witness to the artist’s dream, but also perhaps create one of her or his own.

Mekas narrates, in Reel Five’s Hannelore’s Stilt Party segment:

> And now, dear viewer, as you sit and as you watch and as the life outside in the streets is still rushing... maybe a little bit slower but still rushing, from inertia... just these images. Nothing much happens. The images go, no tragedy no drama, no suspense. Just images for myself, and for a few others. One doesn’t have to watch, one doesn’t. But if one feels so, one can just sit and watch these images which, I figure, as life will continue, won’t be here for very long. There won’t be small, peaceful cities on the shores of oceans - there won’t be. No boats in the morning, and maybe not even trees, nor flowers, at least not in such an abundance. This is Walden, what you see… (Also qtd. Chodorov and Lebrat 2009, 109). (Hannelore’s Stilt Party)

Mekas in *Diaries* construes his spectator not as a social or political force but as a fellow poet, one that is moved emotionally by resplendent images and sounds, a world that “won’t be there for very long.” *Diaries* constitutes a world that requires attention, nurturing, and appreciation, a world of fine culture and glorious nature. In this sense Mekas addresses the cultural wing of the youth movement rather than the counterculture writ large. His work in the Filmmakers’ Cooperative contributed more generally to the development of avant-garde culture of the 1960s:

> Thereof he notes:

> The Film-Makers’ Cooperative will distribute any film presented to it. It will not refuse a film. The Film-Makers’ Cooperative is to be directed by filmmakers themselves, by a delegate elected
once a year...the filmmaker signs no contract with the Cooperative. The filmmaker remains owner of his film. It will not judge on the quality or the content of a film distributed...all films are equal at the Cooperative. No film is preferred over another. (Mekas qtd. Chodorov and Lebrat 2009, 93)

The artistic pluralism that Mekas worked into the Filmmakers’ Cooperative is legendary of both the 1960s and of American democratic traditions. At the same time, Mekas’s republicanism extends to his own film, Diaries, where he represents friends, fellow artists, children, poets and passersby. This outpouring of popular sentiment is exemplified by the vignette “Peter’s Wedding.” As film historian and writer Dominique Noguez (2009, 110) observes, the wedding segment exudes a childlike playfulness within the celebratory space where Mekas’s friend Peter married an heiress. The wedding sequence entails a difficulty in Mekas’s uncritical stance towards his subjects and their “extravagant party in Newport:”

How are we to watch Peter’s Wedding, this extravagant party in Newport, at a residence right out of The Great Gatsby, with guests in evening wear, and a young groom who looks like Bobby Kennedy? Mekas films without hatred or even criticism. Is it a sign of underground cinema’s ambiguous political stance, reduced, impecunious, to sucking on the upper class? No, it is not. Noguez contends that while Mekas is not critical, that which might be viewed as a “sucking on the upper class” is actually submersion into a creative and youthful sensibility that gestures to the viewer. While Diaries is reflexive, it is not so politically, in the sense of hailing spectators to a position of action. Mekas, instigator of art, creator of beauty, gestures to the viewer as a creative agent. The wedding sequence captures a sense of childlike playfulness, a dance between Mekas with the camera and a child with hers- and wants the spectator to join in that playfulness:

We see the same vision at work in Peter’s Wedding. Mekas carefully films the newlyweds circled by bridesmaids as they strike a pose for a photographer, but suddenly he swishpans in another direction, towards a child who is taking a photograph of him. He pans back to the married couple, back to the child. A playful relationship is created between Mekas and child; both are on the same level as the filmmaker shoots from a low angle, even laying on his back. He sees everything as the six or eight year-old child does, as the child he is, enjoying himself however he can at this ceremony for grownups (Dominique Noguez qtd. Chodorov and Lebrat 2009, 110).
In *Diaries* an appeal is made to see “everything as the six or eight year-old child does.” The child is meant to instill admiration, joy and fun. Mekas addresses the youthful spectator whose freshness, even social naiveté, will, bring his own aesthetics into fruition in a world besought with conflicts created by adults. With *Diaries* Mekas sought to “correct” that violent world with startling beauty.

Chanan (2007, 16), in contrasting the Hollywood cinema with the documentary genre, observes that the latter “speaks to the viewer as citizen, as a member of the social collective, as putative participant in the public sphere.” Mekas in *Diaries* is communicating to artists like himself, to youth and the young at heart. Mekas’s spoken address in *Diaries* to “a few others” by curtails the youth movement most broadly defined. Chanan (2007, 16) contends that politics do not need to be specified in the documentary “because what the documentary can do is to call public attention to its subjects and concerns sometimes just by bringing them to light, without being wrapped in the narrative plots of fiction and drama, but turning stereotypes back into real people with their own names and in their own living environment.” For Chanan, documentary by definition is liberatory by dint of its putative representation of the real. However, Mekas’s intent in *Diaries, Notes and Sketches* was to avoid the real and to elide confrontation in a fraught sociopolitical arena wherein American youth and other activists clamored for the rights of underrepresented peoples and against the Vietnam War. *Diaries* represents, in Stam’s (1998, 263) term, “the apolitical avant-garde.” *Diaries*, in this sense, like *Invocation of My Demon Brother*, stands in contrast to *In the Year of the Pig*.

Stam (1998, 263), in his discussion of *The Hour of the Furnaces* (Solanas and Getino 1968), notes that, “an apolitical avant-garde risks becoming an institutionalized loyal opposition,
the progressive wing of establishment art.” He elucidates that, by “supplying a daily dose of novelty to a satiated society, it generates surface turmoil while leaving the deep structures intact.” But then, Mekas never claims to be documenting reality. Mekas’s New York is “a fantasy New York” wherein celebration was, for him and the “apolitical avant-garde” an oneiric cinematic poem meant to stimulate the senses and give rise to an idyllic rendering of the late-1960s. Walden engages with the Vietnam War peripherally, not only foregrounding the cultural ferment rather than the political, but in its beautification of even the most strife-infused vignettes, lucidly recoding the political as cultural.

Yet Diaries, however fantastical in its effacement of tensions that consumed the era, unlike Invocation of my Demon Brother, points to itself as a poetic construction, and thereby construes the spectator as a conscious collaborator. Mekas disrupts the Hollywood format of dramatic three-act structure, continuity editing, and the “illusion of renaissance space” so dear to the Hollywood-fiction format. However, while Mekas breaks the fourth wall in his “dear viewer” address, his intent is a personal rather than social gesture; it is not meant to implicate the viewer on behalf of social change.

The viewer-filmmaker relationship, as in documentary generally, is a central defining feature of the reflexive mode but also the poetic as in Diaries. While Arthur (1992, 45-6) concludes that Mekas drew from the aperture of the counterculture to create community out of estrangement, Diaries comprises as well a strategy for “correcting.” Diaries corrects without concluding, ending without triumph either the national project and its misguided adventure in Vietnam or the counterculture which opposed it.
Documentary film regardless of poetic value is by definition also a historical genre. It records, documents, represents and comments on what it sees. The dramatic structure of *Diaries* is one that comprises rapid, single-frame shots, musical accompaniment, recorded moments of friends and family. The human forms captivate, as do the aspirations that they embody. Mekas’s website (24 April 2015) announces, “Welcome friends.” The amiable voice exudes celebration, happiness and friendship. On the website are films by friends, links to family, interviews and reminiscences. One feels as a guest in his home. Here is a man of extraordinary gifts, with the capacity to touch viewers. Mekas, who perceives himself as an outsider, lives at peace with himself. However, the bearers of memory, the receivers of his friendly invitation, are miniscule in number and special in vocation.

Neither is there significant social content in *Diaries*. The drama, if any, is represented by the film itself, as embodiment of that which arose in contrast to the industrial cinema with its denial of democratic decision-making, its reification of movie stars, and its crisis-infused narratives. *Diaries*, however, with its utopian vision of tranquility and celebration amidst the strife of a nation in turmoil, by rejecting drama entirely, conceals the dynamic actualities which both enshrouded America in the late-1960s and augured the institutional changes in the treatment of blacks, Native Americans, women, and gays that transpired in the 1970s and beyond. Mekas, in eliding the stressful sociopolitical space that catapulted the nation, also rejects the idea of politically conscious “underground cinema” that his German colleague Gideon Bachmann sought to document on his visit to the USA.

Mekas notes in Reel One, as he plays the accordion, speaks then sings,

I live—therefore I make films. I make films—therefore I live. Light. Movement. I make home movies—therefore I live. I live—therefore I make home movies. They tell me I should be always
searching, but I am only celebrating what I see. I am searching for nothing, I am happy.” (Also qtd. Chodorov and Lebrat 620).

Mekas in Reel Five renews his intent to celebrate when he speaks about the German TV crew:

It looks all very foolish now, when I am looking back. We found some kind of dugout, and Adolfas said, ‘Now I’ll make, I’ll show how a socially engaged movie is being made. Don’t show them the surroundings, just show them this dugout. Tell them that I am shooting a movie in the South, against exploitation of the black people. You can put, you know, some kind of narration, you know, Underground Cinema is a socially engaged cinema, that’s what Europe wants to know about us, so give that to them-’ and the German television team moved in, moved in. (Mekas 1969; qtd. Chodorov and Lebrat 2009, 111-12).

Mekas’s tone is dismissive. It is here that he veers sharply from his contemporary colleague Emile de Antonio whose raison d'être was “socially engaged cinema.” Mekas remarks of Gideon and his German film crew, that “he could use some real underground footage, he said.” Mekas talks about how “foolish it was” for the German television crew to look to Mekas for an example of “socially engaged cinema.” Mekas derides the option of looking for something along the lines of “black exploitation in the south,” after which “I got tired of it all and just started shooting, just for myself.” Mekas, in dichotomizing the political and the personal or aesthetic spheres, speaks directly to the spectator about the 1960s as a conflicted sociocultural terrain. And, it is within that schism that he situates the spectator as confidant to an unfolding poetic intervention, one that, in contrast to de Antonio, and Wexler, posits activism as anathema to the poetic project.

If Mekas’s cinema has nothing to do with “socially engaged cinema” neither is it solely art for art’s sake; it is art for celebration. Mekas addresses his “dear viewer” to seal the bond of identification with him or her as he, Mekas, both artist and subject, looks only at the tranquility, the energy of people and nature, and the quotidian beauty that he so meticulously created. Mekas further develops his views on cinema in Reel Six’s Skating Rink segment, his portraiture emerging in his sharing with the spectator the origins of his inspiration: humanity at play.
In the background—these are the steps of the filmmaker, as he walks the city, day and night, day and night. In the background—the music of the people...In the background—those are the voices of the children of the people—(clicks)—in the foreground—those are the cameras of the filmmakers.) (Mozart music begins to come in), (1969; qtd. Chodorov and Lebrat 116).

These scenes, accompanied by stirring music, draw the spectator into a myth of joyful exuberance, a democratic sharing in “a fantasy New York.” Mekas, in celebrating the people in the skating rink and elsewhere, simultaneously abjures not only politics and the Hollywood industry but the counterculture as a discursive entity. Mekas, in a reply to artist Penny Arcade (Jonas Mekas.com 2003), who asked him about the making of the counterculture, asked rhetorically, “What do you mean: counter culture?” He resists the term through his voice’s emphasis, testily asking not once but twice, accentuating the words that have been united almost since historian Theodore Roszak coined the term in 1968.

For Roszak (1995, 47) counter culture was, in the context of Vietnam War, racism, social and political conformity, “that healthy instinct which refuses both at the personal and political level to practice such a cold-blooded rape of our human sensibilities.” The counterculture was heralded and in some ways augured by philosopher Herbert Marcuse’s (1991, 63) Great Refusal defined as “the protest against that which is.” Marcuse (1966, xv) also noted that “today, the fight for life, the fight for Eros, is the political fight.” Mekas insisted to Arcade that it is “not counterculture” but “street culture” in which he participated and in many ways also created. That the term counterculture is anathema to Mekas’s correcting of the city, the nation and cinema itself derived from Mekas’s outsidedness to both American culture and the counterculture.

Mekas elucidated his cultural role as opposed to political in an interview with journalist Randolph Carter (2005):
The sixties in the United States, there were two streams. One was the artists. It was very inventive, a lot of activity, a very intense period in the arts. And then there was another stream interested in the various liberation movements. Some artists were supporting them, but usually it was a separate group of young people who protested against Vietnam or whatever. I was more involved in the art side.

Mekas, as Arthur (2005) observes (ch.1), navigated the gulf between politics and culture, the “two streams,” and identified with that of “the artists.” Diaries is not the appeal of the “we” that Chanan (2007) and film theorist Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1998) note, i.e. that which hails spectators as social subjects. Mekas’s approach to spectators is one that confines the bearing of witness to the personal, artistic realm. Diaries, Notes and Sketches, divorced from the political contestation which, alongside artistic and spiritual ferment, defined and propelled the era, not only stands against a “socially engaged cinema” but denies a world in the making.

Wexler’s Medium Cool: The Spectator as Historical Actor

Medium Cool, in contrast to Walden, is a politically reflexive film. Nichols (2001, 129-30) observes that in the politically reflexive documentary the idea is not simply to acknowledge the film’s constructedness but to set in motion a questioning process that will “provoke our awareness of social organization and the assumptions that support it.” Wexler, after Medium Cool, continued to engage with history and protest. During the Occupy Movement in 2012 for the NATO-Summit protest, Wexler, in the short documentary “Medium Cool Revisited,” juxtaposes clips from Medium Cool to underscore protest that unites the two eras. In “Medium Cool Revisited,” Wexler conveys people's’ dissatisfaction not only against the NATO Summit but also poverty, the Iraq War and the marginalization of social-justice activists.
An Iraq-War veteran announces that although he is invested in making the US a better place, Iraq was not an admirable war: “What I did in reality on the ground I am not proud of.” The veterans then ceremonially toss their medals. In “Revisited,” protesters shouted “the whole world is watching,” just as people do in Medium Cool’s documentary clips. While in “Revisited” the musical score is updated, the police attacks on protestors emerge in both filmic, historical spaces. Wexler’s message is that the counterculture, in its most contestatory aims, continues, however inchoate or subdued by the defeats of the late-1960s, well into the early-21st century. The protests and repressive acts were, in 2012, suppressed by the mass media, whereof Wexler noted “the national media never put this story on TV—I guess they didn’t find it interesting enough.” This is something Wexler seeks to correct, not in Mekas’s sense of historical effacement of conflict but in the politically reflexive gesture extended to viewers, to draw people of the disparate time periods together in a continuing movement.

Wexler, in his discussion of the earlier, 1968 antiwar movement in Medium Cool (Vice/Criterion 2014), reflects on his position as observer and historical actor. This role emerges as inextricable from his view of his spectator. At the end of Medium Cool, Wexler stands in for Katsellas, the news cameraman. Wexler (2013) noted that,

everybody is in somebody’s movie... and we’re a part of it...I suspect that there’s somebody else, perhaps in this case my alter ego or my conscience, who is watching and making a judgement on me. (Wexler qtd. Cronin 2013)

Those “making a judgment” were Medium Cool’s spectators. As such, Medium Cool exhibits traits of the politically reflexive documentary. In doing so, the film pushes past In the Year of the Pig by not only treating the spectator as a viewer capable of rational analysis but also as one invested in the immediately visceral potential for revolutionary response. Medium Cool’s politics
therefore are rooted in the contestation of the period when as Renov (2004, 15) notes of the Newsreel agitprop films in 1968, “the culture of protest was it its confrontational zenith; there could be no middle ground.” Wexler interrogated the boundaries between journalism and art, fiction and documentary, as his actor, Verna Bloom as Eileen, remaining steadfastly in the role of her fictive character, wandered into an actually occurring, military occupation in Chicago’s Grant Park in August 1968. Eileen’s position in the frame’s foreground suggests that of the spectator, striving to navigate the hazardous historical space as a socially engaged subject.

Wexler, in the intertwining of the fictional and actual narratives discloses the film’s constructedness. *Medium Cool* exemplifies how a story about “a cameraman and his conscience” (Wexler 2013) culminates in a meta-narrative about a mutual responsibility between filmmaker and spectator for a meaning-making as discursive intervention in historical events. The film was so deeply in opposition to the classic Hollywood format that Paramount and especially its parent company Gulf-Western sought to block its exhibition. *Medium Cool*, however limited its distribution, changed the views of Americans. *Time* (1969) commented that “socially and cinematically, Medium Cool is dynamite.” The subjects, protesters in the demonstration outside the Chicago Democratic Convention hall, appealed to passersby. The demonstrators’ hailing of passersby to “join us!” and their calls to television viewers that “the whole world is watching,” links the subjects of a real-life unfolding drama with the film’s spectator and, in doing so, hails the latter as social subject and potential historical actor. Wexler’s choice, not only to meld fiction and documentary, but also to unite his filmic and spectatorial subjects, constituted a political as well as cultural act with legacies and consequences, especially since coverage of the
demonstrations and subsequent police riots were poorly covered by the news media (Wexler 2013).

Wexler’s approach to the spectator as a critically engaged subject is expressed as well in Medium Cool’s first scene with Katsellias and Ruth when the latter says to Katsellias, “how about a movie?” but the following scene is a roller-derby game, not a film. This is a direct gesture to Medium Cool’s spectator, who is prompted not only to question how films naturalize events, narratives and discourses but also to question his or her own participation in constructing those narratives. The scene adumbrates the film’s final interpellation in the final scene when Wexler turns his camera onto the spectator. The articulation is one of political reflexivity, as the film situates the viewer as complicit in the narrative that melds a fictional story with the filmic actuality. The images therein were fortified by the use of sound, which in turn augmented the reflexivity of those images.

Renov (2004, 35-6) observes how the soundtrack contributed to Medium Cool’s blending of documentary and fiction, as well as the Brechtian distanciation, a form of reflexivity that Wexler and De Antonio applied to encourage spectatorial criticism. Renov notes that “Brecht emphasized the need for the ‘radical separation’ of formal elements so that neither music nor text nor setting would be degraded in the service of a hypnotic theatrical experience.” Thus, Medium Cool’s use of sound, like de Antonio’s in Year of the Pig, is the opposite of Anger’s in Invocation of My Demon Brother whose melding of formal elements, music and image are “degraded in the service of a hypnotic theatrical experience” specifically a “hypnotic” ritual-occult experience. Moreover, Medium Cool’s ironized image-sound juxtapositions contributes, in contradistinction to Invocation of My Demon Brother’s hypnotic strategy but consonant with In
the Year of the Pig’s critical reevaluation of the Vietnam War, to the political reflexivity needed for the formation of a socially conscious spectatorial subject.

The latter, in both De Antonio’s and Wexler’s films, is constructivistically hailed not as a passive convert but rather as an active participant in the film’s viewing of itself as an ideological product. Medium Cool’s aim in doing so is not only socio-political but also intrapersonal. Wexler’s identification with Katsellas and his own tear-gassing by Chicago police in 1968 were indicative of the era and the filmmaker’s choices within that “politicized landscape (Renov 2004).” And, as Renov notes, the irony and humor of the roller-derby scene prods a distanciation rather than sentimentalized interpellation of the spectator wherein “The unexpected sound/image mix serves to defamiliarize the staged event, enforcing a tangible distance between spectator and profilmic spectacle.”

This reflexivity, like that of In the Year of the Pig, is designed to distance the viewer and thereby destabilize the normalization of narrative and spectatorial immersion that would otherwise occur. Wexler, who won the best-documentary Academy Award for Interview with My Lai Veterans (qtd. Schaefer and Salvato 1984, 248) and the Academy Award for best cinematography for Who’s afraid of Virginia Woolf (1966), noted (qtd. Schaefer and Salvato 1984, 252) that “I actually wanted to go to Vietnam with Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden to learn Sure, I was against the war but I learned a lot of things there that I couldn’t have learned otherwise.” Medium Cool sympathizes with anti-Vietnam-War protest. Therein, moreover, the filmmaker physically a well as symbolically, confronts his own responsibility.

Rees (1999, 64), quoting Mekas, observes:

Underground film in the USA at first encompassed a range of non- or anticommercial activities, which challenged Hollywood’s grip and commercialism….In 1960 the New York artists’ avant-
garde joined with these other independents to form the New American Cinema Group: 'We don’t want false, polished, slick films -- we prefer them rough, unpolished, but alive,’ ran their manifesto. ‘We don’t want rosy films - we want them the color of blood.’

Medium Cool, albeit not an avant-garde film of the New American Cinema, moves farther in terms of its melding of aesthetic and political contestation—not least of which is its collapsing the barriers between time-periods via the Chicago and the NATO Summit demonstrations—into the oppositional cinematic realm than Mekas proposed in his New American Cinema manifesto. Film historian David Sterritt (2013) notes that Medium Cool, a studio film, was moving past “the gloss” of Hollywood. In Medium Cool the cinematic gaze takes place not only between the subjects of the film but also between the filmmaker and his audience. Wexler in Medium Cool’s final shot rivets his camera on the latter not to interpellate her or him as a passive ideological recruit but to engage his or her cooperation as a socially aware subject and meaning-maker.

While not all the subjects in Medium Cool are complex characters, they connote the ways that ordinary people might find themselves implicated in the ferment of their times. Eileen, for example, albeit serving as a foil for Katsellas’s initial selfishness, serves as “surrogate” in Mulvey’s term, for the film’s spectator. There is confusion on her part in the demonstration and unfolding police riots, yet earlier in the film, as Eileen watches and listens to Martin Luther King on television, she is positioned as a socially aware viewer, much like Medium Cool’s spectator who is also watching critically the developments of Chicago and the nation. Katsellas, standing next to her, remarks, “Jesus, I love to shoot film.” Eileen gives him a withering look, a gaze that is meant not to normalize the film’s fictive representational pace but rather to represent and elicit the spectator’s own, critical reaction to Katsellas’ remark.
As Katsellas, like Wexler himself learns, shooting film is not only an enjoyable act; it is also one that may entail teargas, FBI surveillance and possible beatings. *Medium Cool* at these moments exudes a sense of shared experience, as Renov (2004, 38) notes, that “by the film’s end, the spectator has been prodded toward a recognition of social forces in conflict, much in keeping with the Brechtian prescription.” Flitterman-Lewis (1998, 215), in reference to these themes in her discussion of Alain Resnais’s documentary *Night and Fog* (1955), observes that, “in a stunning demonstration of the inescapable social and historical consequences of film making and viewing, the very end of the coda replaces the interlocutory structure of ‘I-You’ with the all-encompassing ‘We’…Thus presence, responsibility, and active engagement make both viewer and filmmaker witnesses to history (and to historical representation), projecting the film’s implications beyond the theater and into the future, binding them in the social processes and moral obligations of human culture.” As part of the legacy of *Medium’s Cool’s* construction of the filmmaker as social actor, at the Woodstock Film Festival Wexler noted this shared responsibility. The intent on Wexler’s part is not merely to eviscerate the walls between fiction and documentary, history and narrative, but to tether both to a vision of inclusive and engaged citizenship in a society at war with itself and its ideals. *Medium Cool’s* storytelling is in the service of a pluralistic national memory.

Tom Hayden at the Memorial Day speech in Washington D.C (Goodman 2015) spoke about historical memory as “the battlefield of memory” in which the peace movement may not only be remembered but reconstituted by way of its surviving historical actors and the younger generation alike. In Studs Terkel’s words in *Medium Cool*, “these kids want a better world.” At the end of the 1960s Wexler documented and explored such aims as part of the sociohistorical
context consonant with a generation that sought to meld artistic or cultural values with those of politics.

Wexler in the 2008 Woodstock Film Festival similarly extended the task of narrativization to his fellow filmmakers, beginning with his appraisal of younger colleague John Sayles, “I think that storytelling is what determines a culture. He was telling stories that illuminated the human condition.” Such was Medium Cool’s purpose as well. Wexler continued, “I also think that now so much of what we get visually and information is untruth; it’s based on distortions of history, distortions of what issues are important to the American people.” Most significantly, Wexler contended in his acceptance speech, his appeal to fellow artists to assume an ethical responsibility in their filmmaking:

I think that we as communicators as artist we have a responsibility to work from some ethic, to go around the language and the definitions of the words we are fed through the media and our feature films too… I think it was Orwell that said in a time of deception telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act …The Woodstock festival stood for more than girls were walking around without bras, or guys smoking grass…revolutionary words at that time that talked about peace and love…a generation that had some idea of what humanity should strive for…fellow artists… get out there and use your art to express good human things and denounce and expose all the lies and deceptions that have become part of our life.

Wexler continues his cultural work for change, invoking the spirit of Woodstock’s message of “peace and love,” a message of hope for substantive societal transformation, an invitation that went well beyond the cultural changes that became so quickly absorbed by the establishment. His calls for “fellow artists” to engage with cinema truth as inextricable from social meaning and actual lives, emerged in Medium Cool, wherein Renov (2004) observes,

The film’s intent was to fix as representation that moment of polarized confrontation in such a way as to implicate the spectator, to force her or him to occupy a position within the politicized landscape. The next step beyond the arousal of consciousness was intended to be social action. (29)
Moreover, Wexler becomes no longer just the creator, image-maker, or message-maker when he suddenly appears in the profilmic space with his camera. As Wexler rivets his movie camera onto the spectator, he not only transforms himself into the subject of the film but symbolically converts the spectator into a filmic subject. The offscreen reporter from the actual police riots says: “People are really getting hit.” *Medium Cool* in its melding of the real and the fictive, and overlapping of the subject and spectator, hailed the latter as citizen, social subject and potential historical actor.

The camera in *Medium Cool* in doing so also undermined the boundaries between art and politics, or in Renov’s (2004, 38) observation, “its attempts to integrate an uneasy mixture of aesthetic, commercial, and political concerns.” Moreover, *Medium Cool* in doing so articulates the United States counterculture’s most outstanding dilemma and its fondest impetus for profound sociocultural and political transformation. Such striving for political-cultural amalgamation was, at the end of the most turbulent decade in recent history, limited not by the imagination of activists or the confrontation by artists, but in terms of the avant-garde cinema, the latter’s ability to successfully distinguish itself as an alternative not only to the dominant industrial apparatus but to the ideologies and structures which enabled it.

Mulvey (2009, 721-2) notes that,

There are three different looks associated with the cinema: that of the camera as it records the profilmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion. The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience.

This move to “prevent a distancing awareness in the audience” is precisely what *Medium Cool* opposed, as, in that moment, as in the Black-Arts scene, it contravened both the Hollywood
illusion and the “dreams of the state.” As Peter Bonerz (Cronin 2013) noted, “It’s you becoming the object of photography...essentially it’s about you.” Wexler noted in “Medium Cool Revisited,” as part of that ongoing struggle, “What we do is tell stories and make pictures that may not be out there if we didn’t do it.” Medium Cool, in its confrontation with the national narrative in a time of change, augured a constructivist space where artists, spectators, and subjects share in meaning-making, within the interstices of history and its filmic representation.

**Conclusion: Positioning the Spectator and the Filmmaker in a Time of Change**

Cinema at the end of the 1960s comprised a reflection not only of the tensions between avant-garde and Hollywood or counterculture and the establishment, but also culture and politics. The four films in this thesis, as historical documents and discursive interventions, exemplify the tensions between protest and withdrawal, culture and politics that accompanied the youth movement of the late-1960s in the USA. To be outside the industrial status quo at the end of the 1960s was, in The Year of the Pig and Medium Cool, not only to oppose formal classicism and to reject the industrial system but to rework national consciousness in a time of change.

At a time when political and cultural activism convulsed the nation, de Antonio and Wexler harmonized innovative aesthetics and political consciousness. The latter, in Medium Cool, the only studio film in the set, wove into a classic-fictional narrative an aesthetic and political confrontation to the mass communications industry, implicated the spectator as a social subject, and spoke truth to power. The closing years of the 1960s were accompanied by an accommodation of, as well as tension between cultural and political energies that propelled the most contestatory generation in our nation’s history. Medium Cool and In the Year of the Pig, by
coalescing those robust energies, both represented and enabled that generation’s confrontation with the status quo in America.

Notes

Abstract

1 The thesis uses the term counterculture more or less interchangeably with youth movement in its political as well as cultural or spiritual dimensions, as does historian Theodore Roszak (1995, 47) when he observes “that healthy instinct which refuses both at the personal and political level to practice such a cold-blooded rape of our human sensibilities.” So, too does media theorist Matthew Hughes (2011), 44.

Chapter 1: Positioning the Filmmaker

1 I explore the Moog track as well in “‘The Last Blast of Haight Consciousness’ or ‘The End of the Age of Aquarius?’ A Historical Analysis of Invocation of My Demon Brother.” (2014, Google Docs Files).

Bibliography


____ 1985. “Sound and Silence in Narrative and Nonnarrative Cinema.” In Film Sound: Theory
and Practice, edited by Elisabeth Weis and John Belton, 369-381. New York: Columbia University Press.


____ 2012. “History and Film/Pastness and Memory: Documentary and Dramatic Films as Complementary Historical Records of the Late-Nineteen-Sixties and Seventies and Memories Thereof.” Google Docs Files.


___ “Woman Seeks to End All-Male Rule.” 2 April.
___ “Bias Found in Unskilled Jobs.” 30 July.
___ “The Danger of Trying to Generalize.” 11 December.
___ “Another Decision on Racial Mixing.” 21 June.
___ “Panthers Gathering to Write Constitution.” 27 November.
___ “Socialist Plea Ends Panther Convention.” 8 September.
___ “Manson Clan Member Guilty in Death Trial.” 19 April.


___ “Midnight Rambler.” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4TAqBUiJXc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4TAqBUiJXc) (accessed 29 March 2015).


March 2015).


Halter, Ed. 2007. “Pro-Life: Artists return to the Vietnam protest model with For Life against
the War.” *Village Voice*. 1 May.  


*Harvard Film Archive*. “Emile de Antonio: Emile de Antonio’s America.”  


Kane, Daniel, ed. 2009. We Saw the Light: Conversations between the New American Cinema and Poetry. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press. 13-50; 207.


Koehler, Robert. 2006. “‘In the Year of the Pig.’” Cineaste (Spring): 64-6.


TheLipTV. 2014. Art, the Occult, and Neurological Realignment with Brian Butler. 10 October. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFtV0jW8Bn0 (accessed 23 May 2015).


175


___ “Contempt in Chicago.”

___ “The Risk of Mockery.” 10 October.

___ “Ethics: the Wrong Occupation. 14 November.


