



## EDITOR'S NOTE

I am troubled by a recurring question: Why do so many of the countercultural films of the 1960s and 70s end in the violent deaths of their protagonists?

Let's survey a few of the most obvious: in Arthur Penn's 1967 *Bonnie and Clyde*, for instance, the iconic antiheroes, played by Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway, drive their getaway car into an unsurvivable maelstrom of gunfire (just as the real-life pair had thirty years earlier). George Roy Hill's 1969 *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* features the remarkably similar demise of its titular outlaws, played by Paul Newman and Robert Redford, who aren't so much shot down at the film's close as frozen in the cinematic ether by the barrage they face when they decide to go out in style. And in Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider*, from the same year, Wyatt (played by Peter Fonda in his star-spangled Captain America regalia) and Billy (Hopper, in fringed buckskin) succumb similarly, mowed down as they ride through the American South by a shotgun-wielding redneck in a pickup.

I have taken to collecting examples of this primal scene in US cinema. (I'm sure any film buff can think of others.) Kirk Douglass' cowboy drifter in *Lonely are the Brave* (1962) is an early one. (Based on a novel by Edward Abbey and adapted for the screen by Dalton Trumbo, the film is an excellent dramatization of the conflict between the Old West and the New, between the ideal of the rugged, freedom-loving individual and a techno-

cratic state in the service of the military-industrial complex.) In one of my personal favorites, Robert Altman's slow-burning mood piece *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971), Beatty's cowboy outsider McCabe catches his fatal gunshot wound while crouching in a snowbank while Julie Christie's brothel madam Mrs. Miller, his one-time business partner, lies in the throes of her opium addiction. Terrence Malick's *Badlands* (1973) and *Days of Heaven* (1978)—two of the period's most iconic films—both end with their protagonists' violent deaths, and Stephen Spielberg's early film *The Sugarland Express* (1974) ends in similar disaster when Lou Jean (Goldie Hawn) convinces her husband, petty criminal Clovis (William Atherton), to kidnap their son from foster care. Likewise, Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) ends with the betrayal and shooting of Sonny, Al Pacino's magnetic, crowd-baiting bank robber hero. The period even manages to recast F. Scott Fitzgerald's curriculum-essential novel *The Great Gatsby* in its own image, with Jack Clayton's 1974 adaptation ending on the scene of Redford's Gatsby floating in his own swimming pool, less the oblivious innocent of Fitzgerald's novel than a countercultural hero who can't help but recall the rockstar excess (and swimming pool death) of The Rolling Stones' Brian Jones. And Robert De Niro's Travis Bickle, from Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), is a late example of the trope, rounding out this cast of doomed outsiders as Bickle's antisocial rage, attributed explicitly to his experiences in Vietnam, leads to his violent death.

How to explain this serially reproduced scene of the outsider-hero's grisly end? The history of film itself provides some possibilities. One explanation runs that the replacement of the Hays Code, which had policed the film industry's dissemination of morally questionable content for over thirty years, by the Motion Picture Association's rating system in 1968 untied the hands of

filmmakers, who could now represent sex and violence as they pleased, as long as their films were accompanied by the necessary ratings. In addition, the sixties witnessed the breakup of the studio system and the flourishing of independent filmmakers such as Hopper, Altman, and Malick, who embraced and celebrated a maverick ethos in their filmmaking and saw themselves in the mold of the cultural outsider as hero. And let's not underestimate the influence of European auteur-style filmmaking on US filmmakers; Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960) and François Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* (1962) both end similarly, after all.

Yet this almost pathological repetition of the antihero's violent demise resonates beyond these changes in the history of film production. The countercultural hero was an outlaw, and the outlaw's end is a sacrificial one, a final triumph of law and order over anti-establishment bravado. It's as if such forms of revolt represented a confluence of cultural factors too strange and beautiful to last, and all the period's films could do was to mourn the passing of this ideal in an endless, elegiac feedback loop, a reprisal *ad infinitum* of bullet-riddled death. We could thus read the phenomenon as an allegory for the containment of the radical energies of the counterculture itself, with Bonnie, Clyde, Wyatt, Billy, Butch, Sundance, and all the rest—and the hedonistic excess they represent—sacrificed on the altar of business-as-usual, of rampant suburbanization, of the creeping influence of Richard Nixon's "great silent majority," wary of the period's unrest, its antiestablishment values, its sex, its drugs, its rock 'n roll.

Of course, I am aware that this romanticized narrative of the hero's demise is a white, middle-class, (mostly) male one; for people of color, the poor, and sexual minorities, the sixties were about anything but excess. They were about demanding redress, about forcing the nation to

reckon with its history of violence and repression and to make good on its rhetoric of democratic inclusion. And the counterculture has always been easy to parody; as the poet John Ashbery put it in a 1968 lecture, "[p]rotests against the mediocre values of our society such as the hippie movement seem to imply that one's only way out is to join a parallel society whose stereotyped manners, language, speech and dress are only reverse images of the one it is trying to reject."<sup>1</sup> No wonder the period imploded, a victim of its own self-indulgent excesses.

If the sixties had never happened, we'd have needed to invent them. Which is to say that every generation recreates its own version of the sixties, the sixties it needs. The 90s had its revamped, corporatized Woodstock; the current moment has the techno-libertarian spectacle of Burning Man, where, earlier this fall—in rich irony—a caravan of top-of-the-line SUVs carrying hordes of Silicon Valley bros to a week of excess in the desert was held up by a few climate protesters and had their fun cut short by a freak rainstorm, itself likely traceable to climate change. Even the romantic countercultural narrative of the individual's need to confront the bogus social controls imposed by "the Man" becomes co-opted. If the counterculture taught us anything, it's that rebellion needn't reject a capitalist society's drive toward a rampant accumulation of profits; rebellion itself can be rampantly profitable. One could even say that the ultimate legacy of the sixties is a politics of self that was fully in sync with emergent neoliberal values. Our current generation of tech billionaires (and would-be billionaires) attests loudly to this.

As such complicated legacies show, "America"—as a shorthand for a wide range of historical and contemporary ideologies, affects, values, and

1. "The Invisible Avant-Garde," in *Reported Sightings: Art Chronicles 1957-1987*, ed. David Bergman. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989, 393.

experiences—is itself a paradox; as the methodology best suited to its object, American studies—as the articles and reviews gathered here show—continues to aid us in understanding the paradox.

The current issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia* presents three superb articles that return us to the novels and films of the Postwar period, with its fulcrum in the 1960s, to contribute to our understanding of the many ways in which cultural artifacts become emblematic, whether intentionally or not, of their historical moments. Thorsten Carstensen's article "Is It Really Happening? The Postmodern Horror of Roman Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*" kicks off this issue, returning us to the claustrophobic horror of the 1968 film. Carstensen situates the film within its cultural moment, when the "paranoid horror" of Polanski's film, and others like it, allegorized cultural fears similar to those indexed by the films I list above: individual alienation and disorientation; the bankruptcy of bourgeois family values; and racial, generational, and ideological division. As Carstensen's analysis of *Rosemary's Baby* perceptively suggests, the "evil" threatening the US-American nation in the 1960s was to be found within the once-cosy confines of the neighborhood, the home, the family, and even the self.

In his contribution to this issue, titled "The Dark Comedy of the Courtroom: Norman Jewison's *And Justice for All*," Mikkel Jensen lends his scholarly attention to Jewison's 1979 film to show us the ways in which post-1960s skepticism of the system (in this case, the criminal justice system) lent itself to the production of this courtroom drama in which Pacino's lawyer-hero fails to bring about justice, and—as in the paradigm I identify above—immolates himself in the process of his failure, committing professional (if not actual) suicide. Jensen makes the highly convincing case that the film is by turns dead serious and darkly funny in its indictment of the systemic failure of criminal justice to protect the

most vulnerable and threatened—in this case, sexual minorities.

Johs Rasmussen's article "Ralph Ellison Travels to Denmark: *Invisible Man/Usynlig Mand* and the World Location of American Literature" rounds out the issue. Rasmussen is concerned with the way literary texts travel; as Rasmussen makes clear, Ellison's quintessential 1952 novel *Invisible Man*, translated into Danish in 1969 as *Usynlig Mand*, comes, in the post-Civil Rights period, to represent an entire realm of US-American cultural experience. Ellison's protagonist—another of the period's existential outsiders—becomes a stand-in for the experiences of Black subjects in the mid twentieth-century United States, as well as an unlikely ambassador for American literature itself as a cultural export and discursive construction of the Cold War period. Rasmussen adeptly weighs the novel's dual reception—in both the United States and Denmark—to suggest that *Invisible Man/Usynlig Mand*, in its "high cultural pluralist" use of modernist technique to render minoritized cultural experience, becomes a defining text in an emerging "world literary space."

The current issue also contains timely reviews: the first, by Julie K. Allen, focuses on outgoing editor Anders Bo Rasmussen's recent book *Civil War Settlers: Scandinavians, Citizenship, and American Empire, 1848-1870*. The second, by Nancy Coggeshall, focuses on the collection *Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America: Rethinking Finnish Experiences in Transnational Spaces*, edited by Rani-Henrik Andersson and Janne Lahti. Taken together, these two contributions to American studies complicate our assumptions concerning Scandinavian and Nordic complicity in the violence of settler colonialism and its legacies.

I am looking forward to carrying on the commendable editorial efforts that have made this journal vital to the thriving of American studies research in the Nordic countries and beyond for

so many years as I assume editorial responsibility from Anders Bo Rasmussen. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincerest thanks to Anders for his mentorship and support, as well as to Lene Johannessen, Jørn Brøndal, and Alf Tomas Tønnessen. I would also like to extend my heartiest thanks to Aurora Eide, the journal's editorial assistant, without whom this issue would still be somewhere in the planning stages, in addition to the various readers who contributed their insights to these articles as they developed. All were indispensable in making this issue happen. I am thrilled to have this opportunity to engage with—and learn from—such a vibrant scholarly community.

Justin Parks  
Tromsø, Norway  
7 December 2023