

IMAGES AS TEMPLATES FOR COLLECTIVE MEMORY: SYMBOLISM AND
PERFORMANCE IN ICONIC AND POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHS
OF WOODSTOCK 1969, 1994 AND 1999

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the School of Journalism and Communication
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

June 2010

“Images as Templates for Collective Memory: Symbolism and Performance in Iconic and Popular Photographs of Woodstock 1969, 1994 and 1999” a thesis prepared by Dora R. Valkanova in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the School of Journalism and Communication. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:

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June 3, 2010

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An Abstract of the Thesis of

Dora R. Valkanova for the degree of Master of Arts

in the School of Journalism and Communication to be taken June 2010

Title: IMAGES AS TEMPLATES FOR COLLECTIVE MEMORY: SYMBOLISM
AND PERFORMANCE IN ICONIC AND POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHS OF
WOODSTOCK 1969, 1994 AND 1999

Approved: _____

Dr. Julianne Newton

This thesis explored the significance of the 1969 Woodstock festival and its anniversary festivals as indicated through media use of iconic and popular photographs. The literature review examines the role of iconic and journalistic images in the collective memory of historic events. The dynamic interplay of collective memory and images forms the theoretical backbone of the thesis, which applies semiotic analysis to interpret the meaning and significance of three significant photographs from the festivals. Results indicate that photographs from the original festival are icons forming the template against which photographs from later festivals can be understood and read. Images from

anniversaries of the festival reflect a ritualistic repetition of themes from the original festival, as well as its increasing commercialization.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Woodstock music festival has been described as the “defining moment” (Marsh, 2009) of the 1960s. In 2009, a *New York Times* columnist went so far as to liken the festival to the inauguration of President Obama (Hale, 2009). Critics have described it as a “symbolic resource, a way of thinking about the ‘good life’” (Street, 2004, p. 33).

It drew an estimated 400,000 people who endured inclement weather and a lack of basic living necessities over the span of three days without being driven to rioting or violence. Since then there have been attempts to recreate the festival. The first attempt at Woodstock II was in 1989, and it ultimately fell through in the planning stages. The 25th and 30th anniversary concerts, however, took place in the summers of 1994 and 1999 respectively. Although the 1994 anniversary remained loyal to the theme of peace and music, the 1999 festival broke up in rioting and arson.

The popularity of the festival has spread internationally as well. A Polish Woodstock festival in Kostrzyn nad Odra, Poland started in 1995 and continues annually. The festival’s motto is “Love, Friendship and Music,” borrowing from the themes of the original festival. It has been branded as “Europe’s largest open air festival” (Parkinson, 2010). According to latest news, the plans for Woodstock Brazil are under way, with the festival scheduled to take place October 7 – October 9, 2010 in São Paulo.

Since it first took place in 1969, the festival has produced a trail of memorabilia that continues to change hands on the market. Among the most widely circulated are photographic images that resurface at each anniversary of the festival as well as two major documentaries – *Woodstock: Three Days of Peace and Music*, *Woodstock: Now and Then*, and the feature film *Taking Woodstock*, released in 2009.

The festival has a significant online presence as well: video excerpts of the performances by Woodstock artists are splashed over YouTube, and a model of the iconic Woodstock bus can be found and purchased online for \$250. Among other memorabilia that can be purchased online are posters, copies of periodicals that reported on the event in 1969, as well as a *Life Magazine* Special Edition dedicated to the festival. The 40th anniversary of Woodstock provoked a “worldwide media frenzy” (Israel, 2009), which included reprinting of iconic photographs from the festival.

In view of Woodstock’s continuing significance, this thesis seeks to examine how the collective memory of the festival has been preserved in iconic and popular photographs from the original festival, its 1994 and 1999 anniversaries, and the Polish Woodstock by focusing on one type of medium – photographs from the 1969 festival and popular images from its anniversaries. The thesis adopts the tools of semiology to investigate how photographs draw their meaning from the collective memory of the event and serve to shape it. The study aims to contribute to literature on the role of popular and iconic photographs in collective memory and shed light on reasons for the persisting popularity of the Woodstock festival both within the United States and abroad.

Meaning and Significance of the Woodstock Festival

On its face, the significance of the Woodstock Music Festival could be difficult to estimate. It took place within the span of three days in August – the 15th to the 18th – in which festival goers had to withstand inclement weather, poor sanitation, and lack of food. It had rained during all three days of the festival, and front pages around the country were splashed with headlines such as “The View From the Mud” (Lombardi, 1974, p. 611), and “Hippies Mired In A Sea Of Mud” (Goff, 2009).

According to reports, apprehensions about the festival preceded even the selection of venue. Concert organizers Michael Lang, John Roberts, Joel Rosenman, and Artie Kornfeld had originally planned to stage the concert on the 300-acre Mills Industrial Park in Wallkill, New York. When news came out, however, that a hippie fest was being planned for their environs, residents rejected the idea and city authorities banned the festival, citing organizers’ failure to meet the city codes (Lang, 2009).

The selection of the final venue – Max Yasgur’s now famed dairy farm – did not go without a wave of protests either. Residents put out signs reading “Stop Max's Hippie Music Festival. Buy No Milk.” (Shepard, 1969) in an effort to block the festival. Despite the opposition, the Attorney General of the town of Bethel (where Max Yasgur’s farm is located) gave the festival organizers the green light – a fact which Bethel residents did not embrace until many years later (Bennett, 2004).

The organization of the festival itself was loose. Organizers had assured authorities that they expected no more than 50,000 people, but their estimate proved to be too humble (Lang, 2009). The festival was attended by a crowd that numbered anywhere between 300,000 and 500,000 people. Although it was originally announced that ticket purchase was necessary to gain entrance, the festival quickly became a free event after the crowd cut holes in the fence around the site.

The havoc of the festival marred artists' performances as well. Richie Havens was the first artist to appear on stage since everyone else was stuck in the massive traffic jam caused by the masses of incoming concert goers. Once on stage, he continued playing beyond the routine planned for the event, urged by festival organizers to play on since there was no one to follow his act. He eventually ran out of songs to play and started improvising. Other performers were also criticized for their performance: "Okay, you might do that in a café somewhere, but Jesus Christ, the whole world was looking at us!" (Lang, 2009, p. 189). The Grateful Dead's performance was remembered as one of the worst performances of its career. It took place during an intense rainfall that made the stage and sound equipment wet and Grateful Dead guitarist Bob Weir reported mild shocks from his electric guitar. Organizer Michael Lange recounts fears of electrocution, the stage sliding into the mud, or being swept away as a gust of wind turned one of the screens tied to the stage into a sail.

Despite the adversity, the festival proved to be what it branded itself as: three days of peace and music. With the enormous number of people, jammed roads to and from the

festival, and poor weather conditions, it was expected that it would turn into a riot with a high number of casualties. Contrary to these expectations, however, the festival came to be known as one of the most peaceful in the history of rock and roll. There were three fatal incidents: one involved a man being run over by a tractor while he slept in a nearby hayfield, one heroin overdose, and one burst appendix. There were also two births – one in a traffic jam and one after a woman was airlifted to a nearby hospital (Lang, 2009).

Critics of the festival agree that although all the conditions for a disaster were on hand, it defied expectations and passed as a violence-free event (Brustein, 2009). Accounts of those who lived to attend the festival and tell stories about it are centered on its peaceful and communal spirit (Street, 2004). It is against those accounts – captured in oral histories and unofficial interviews – that the significance of Woodstock can be read. It exists, Street argues, “not as a single historical entity, but as a multiplicity of symbols and signs” (Street, 2004, p. 30). Musicians who participated in the festival have described it as an “affirmation that we were part of each other” (Melanie, in Lang, 2009, p. 191), “like plugging into a whole bunch of hearts,” (Santana, in Lang, p. 207), “a great social experiment,” (Paul Kantner of Jefferson Airplane, in Lang, p. 212), “a way of life,” (Lang, 2009, p. 226). Lang succinctly summarized the popular essence of Woodstock when he wrote in his book: “Against all odds and despite the infrastructure being stretched almost to the breaking point, we were living – at least for the moment – in the kind of world we had envisioned” (Lang, 2009, p. 193).

Of the atmosphere at the festival, Friedman says:

We walked around and we weren't on acid or any drug, but it was like being on a drug, just feeling the total relaxation of this entire huge group of people. Everybody was relaxed. There wasn't any tension, there wasn't any stress, there wasn't any anger, there weren't petty squabbles. Probably it was all the drugs, but at the same time, it was this big mass of wonderful serenity. And the artists were really cool. Everybody was proud to be there. (Lang, 2009, p. 205)

Friedman's account is consistent with that of Miriam Yasgur – the wife of Max Yasgur, who described the attitude of concert goers:

Kids were running motorcycles through our fields planted with corn right across from our office plant. They were breaking corn stalks, and Max promptly called Michael and said, 'Do you know they are destroying this field, which is not part of the land which I rented to you at all?' It didn't take very long until the whole group of young kids came out and put signs all around the field: DON'T RIDE THROUGH THIS FIELD ... THESE ARE MAX'S CROPS. Nobody ever rode through the field again. They kept going around it. People were camping along the sides of the road and they started coming up my driveway and I went out and said to the young people, 'Look, we cannot have people camping along the driveway. Our men are working, they have to get in and out.' They moved. Nobody camped near the driveway. Nobody camped near the dairy. (Lang, 2009, p. 197)

According to many, it was the spirit of volunteerism that made Woodstock what it was (Lang, 2009). That idea comes through in Abbie Hoffman's definition of "Woodstock Nation" as a "a nation of alienated young people . . . dedicated to cooperation versus competition, to the idea that people should have better means of exchange than property or money" (Fornatale, 2009, p. xvii). In defense of Hoffman's description come accounts of the distribution of food at the festival. Lange tells of people in front of the stage starving because they feared they would lose their spot if they went to get food. When organizers realized that, they brought cans of granola bars, which they

started giving out to those in the proximity of the stage. Max Yasgur, the owner of the plot on which the festival took place, hung a “free water” sign over his barn when he heard that someone was trying to sell tap water to people at the festival. He went on to give away milk, cheese, and butter and asked a relative to donate bread.

It is the spirit of communal living, of giving without worrying whether you will receive something in exchange or whether what you receive in exchange is of equal value to what you give, that seems to have been shared by a large number of those who attended the festival. This is also reflected in accounts of festival goers: “There was a feeling of community, a spirit of cooperation that touched everyone who was there. It may only have existed for a few days, but it lives on in some form in all of us” (Street, p. 31).

What becomes clear from Lang’s book *The Road To Woodstock* is that in terms of organization and preparation everything – from the stage to the tents for treating those having bad LSD trips – was makeshift and improvised. What makeshift means in the case of Woodstock 1969, however, is the absence of a corporate stamp. One wonders if the stage would have slid in the mud when the wind blew into the screen and turned into a sail if its foundations were bolstered up with sponsorship money from Coca Cola, Pepsi, McDonalds, etc. Instead, the broken fence around the festival rose as a solid barrier between Woodstock and the world in which exchange of goods and services between people was regulated by market forces.

It is a matter of speculation whether similar accounts of “a feeling of community, a spirit of cooperation” would have been reported if Woodstock had passed under the banner of corporate sponsorship, if instead of the generosity of Max Yasgur and some West Coast communes, food had been sold and everyone in attendance had purchased a ticket. It is worthwhile, however, to look at subsequent anniversaries of Woodstock 1969 for comparison. A *Philadelphia Inquirer* article on Woodstock 1994 calls the festival a “masterpiece of marketing,” “carefully market-researched” (Moon, 1994) and driven by nostalgia for the original Woodstock 1969. What is even more suggestive, however, of a perceived gap between Woodstock 1969 and Woodstock 1994 is Moon’s question: “Well, the music can be bought - though for a higher price this time (bands are getting up to \$350,000, quite a change from the first Woodstock, when the highest-paid performer, Jimi Hendrix, is said to have earned as little as \$15,000). But how do you manufacture spirit, much less sociological significance?” (Moon, 1994).

Woodstock 1994 was thus less “makeshift” and more padded by corporate sponsorship, but the spirit of a communal living that marked the original festival was not replicated, perhaps partly because it was no longer “us” versus the commercial establishment.

Woodstock 1999 appears to have been even further in spirit from Woodstock 1969. Similarly to the 1969 concert, the 1999 festival was marred by poor weather conditions – it took place during a heat wave that sent about 1,000 people to seek treatment for heat exhaustion and dehydration. Contrary to the original festival, however, Woodstock 1999

was also marked by price gouging with bottles of water reportedly being sold for \$4 (Doyle, 2001). What came as the definitive break from its 1969 counterpart, however, was the rioting and arson into which Woodstock 1999 devolved. Adding to that are at least two reports of rapes. Writing on the events surrounding Woodstock 1999, Doyle says: “Nearly all of the sensationalized news coverage contrasted this debacle with the more pacific, although equally stressed crowd at the original Festival” (Doyle, 2001). A similar sentiment is clear in Laing’s comment: “If Woodstock II retained some of the aura surrounding the 1969 event, despite its entanglement with the corporate rock, the 1999 festival (Woodstock III) was almost free from the idealism of 1969” (Laing, 2009, p. 3).

Woodstock in the Media

Woodstock has been described as “the starting point for modern music journalism” (Brustein, 2009). That shift, however, did not happen without initially running into barriers. Early coverage of the event focused on the festival’s negative aspects. Referring to the initial coverage, Lang (2009) explains:

With radio reports about traffic jams and a lack of supplies coming in, rumors about food and water shortages, chaos and misery were rampant in the ill-informed media. To the press, it was a disaster area. (p. 196)

...

More important than politics was *community*. All these different people coming together and getting along, sharing. The Hog Farm kept several food lines going, and though crowds were queued up at the Portosans and phone banks, no one seemed to mind. People were calling their friends and

telling them how great things were. Word started to get out that the picture was quite different from what was being printed by the media. (p. 199)

New York Times reporter Barnard Collier's pitch to cover the festival was turned down. Other media outlets were similarly uninterested in covering it. Without the endorsement of his editors, Collier decided to attend the concert and write a story that he then submitted to the newspaper for publication. By that time it had become clear that Woodstock could not be ignored. Arguments over the specific angle of the story followed immediately, with Collier's editors reportedly insisting on the "disaster area" aspect as its main focus (Koppel, 2009).

A 2009 *New York Times* article on the coverage of Woodstock recounts the ambivalence of the journalistic world over what the story was:

The confusion over what to make of Woodstock was also evident on the editorial page. An editorial dated Aug. 18 denounced the event, saying that 'the dreams of marijuana and rock music that drew 300,000 fans and hippies to the Catskills had little more sanity than the impulses that drive the lemmings to march to their deaths in the sea.' The editorial did acknowledge, however, that 'the great bulk of freakish-looking intruders behaved astonishingly well.' The next day, there was another editorial: Woodstock was 'essentially, a phenomenon of innocence,' it read, even if 'by adult standards, the event was clearly a disaster, an outrageous upset of all the normal patterns.' (Brustein, 2009)

In retrospect, Woodstock became recognized as the "moment when the news media first recognized music and entertainment as a cultural and commercial force" (Newseum, 2010). According to the same *New York Times* article, Woodstock made anthropologists

out of journalists as they found themselves explaining to their general audience words like “groove” and “rapping.”

Woodstock 1994 was promoted as “the Woodstock what would make money” (Doyle, 2001), and that invariably meant a heavier media presence. Audio and video rights were sold in advance. This time, however, the event was transmitted through syndicated television to an audience of 290,000 pay-per-view customers. The recorded version was sold to 26 foreign networks in 98 countries. Reflecting on the extent to which Woodstock II was a media event, Laing (2004) notes: “The fans in the muddy field were extras for the PPV coverage” (p. 2).

What also becomes clear with the PPV coverage is the increased deterritorialization of Woodstock. Excerpts from the 1970 movie *Woodstock: Three Days of Peace and Music* have been and continue to be available on YouTube. As of May 4th, 2010, a search of Santana’s famous performance of “Soul Sacrifice” comes up with 87 hits, the most popular of which boasts 485,000 views. Joe Cocker’s “A Little Help From My Friends” shows up with 108 hits and 3,229,953 views, also as of May 4th, 2010.

Numerous Web sites have been dedicated to preserving the memory of Woodstock or to cashing in on the nostalgia for it. One of the biggest online archives with information about Woodstock is www.woodstockstory.com. The Web site brands itself as “committed to providing the latest news surrounding Woodstock.” It is a resource for online and print articles, photos, videos, memorabilia, posters, and links. Those who

would like to share a personal story or memory of the festival have the option to submit it under a “Woodstock Stories” banner.

A similar Web site: Woodstock.com, seems to be intended to bridge the gap between Woodstock 1969 and contemporary rock music. The Web site creators describe their mission as:

Rooted in the live music, community and sustainable living aspects of the original Woodstock Festival, Woodstock.com is an all inclusive online community of fans and artists that celebrates the Woodstock Festivals and all Live Music Events from all generations, all genres and all levels of artists from anywhere around our beautiful green planet.

The Web site’s content and organization promote a view on current music through the lens of the original Woodstock festival. Visitors can subscribe, share stories and pictures, join a Woodstock forum, and buy Woodstock merchandise. Once subscribed, visitors also receive feeds about upcoming concerts and artists, tours, and tickets.

Thus, what becomes clear from this overview, is that Woodstock still holds a place in collective memory. As Street (2004) suggests, however, it is *how* the festival features in collective memory that needs to be examined more closely. This thesis will seek to address this question by concentrating on a specific medium: iconic and popular photographs of Woodstock 1969, 1994, and 1999 and the Polish Woodstock (as the Kostrzyn nad Odrą Woodstock has come to be known).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies on photography and collective memory have found that one way popular photographs feature into the memory of events of wide social significance is as “lived” images (Coonfield & Huxford, 2009). Coonfield and Huxford’s investigation examines specifically the role of photojournalistic images of September 11 as “lived” images. The study focuses on images from two events: a Cub Scout float in an Independence Day Parade and two photographs of the ruins of a Michigan Technological University fraternity house destroyed by a fire that took the life of a student. In his analysis of the parade photograph, Coonfield and Huxford stipulates that parades are performances that “produce ‘a set of symbols’ which make visible and tangible a range of influences which may normally go unnoticed” (p. 467, see also Goodwin, 1998, p. 215).

Although they do not explicitly formulate their approach to reading the photographs as semiology, they do focus on interpreting “the flurry of symbolism” (p. 469) within the photographs. For example, analyzing the image of the Cub Scout parade, Coonfield and Huxford claim: “By juxtaposing the represented World Trade Center and the Memorial Wall with the civilian victims – inscribing on the latter ‘PEACETIME’ so as to linguistically assert that connection – the float links dying in 9/11 with the rituals of patriotic memory reserved for military veterans” (p. 469).

Their argument for a specific “connection” and “links” suggests that their analytical lens adopts the tools of semiology (outlined further in this thesis), specifically Sussure’s concept of signifier (in this case, the representation of the World Trade Center and Memorial Wall) and signified (dying in 9/11, the rituals of patriotic memory). A similar use of the tools of semiology can be recognized in the two photographs of the ruins of the fraternity house at Michigan Technological University: one capturing a shrine at the site and one of a flag raised over the ruins. The “artifacts” organized within both photographs “mark ... performances of grieving and mourning” (p. 472) and move the viewer, semiotically, towards Thomas Franklin’s image of the flag raising at the World Trade Center.

Zelizer (1998) observes a similar semiotic transition in her examination of Holocaust images. She speaks of the haunting resurrection of Holocaust images during visual reportage of the atrocities in Rwanda and Bosnia. Surpassing their earlier evidentiary functions, Holocaust images became the “backdrop or context against which to appropriate these more contemporaneous instances of barbarism” (p. 13). Holocaust photographs thus came to hold a larger symbolism that transcends their referentiality to a specific event in history. It is through this and similar practices of storing, re-cycling, and re-appropriating images that they become indispensable pieces in the fabric of culture (Cloud, 2004; Hariman & Lucaites, 2007; Huxford, 2001; Rose, 2005; Zelizer, 1998).

Scholars analyzing the role of iconic photographs in collective memory have used different approaches to their studies that have been tailored towards the specific line of analysis. For their study, Hariman and Lucaites (2007) devise an elaborate analytical lens

for reading iconic photographs that cuts across a range of visual methodologies. Broadly, they define five different perspectives through which they read the icon: aesthetic familiarity, civic performance, semiotic transcriptions, emotional scenarios, and contradictions and crises. The rationale for employing these five categories is that “the iconic photograph is an aesthetically familiar form of civic performance coordinating an array of semiotic transcriptions that project an emotional scenario to manage a basic contradiction or recurrent crisis” (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007, p. 27). It thus becomes clear that the crux of their frame of interpretation is semiotics.

Semiotic undertones, for example, can be found in the interpretation of a photograph’s aesthetic familiarity. Iconic photographs are meaningful for an entire group of people because they are conventional and simple and “draw on stock images and ideas of war and peace, poverty and the distribution of wealth,” etc. (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007, p. 30). A good example of an iconic image that possesses an aesthetic familiarity is Dorothea Lange’s *Migrant Mother*. The image’s configuration of a mother and her two children refers the viewer to earlier depictions of the Madonna and Child template, which has been a popular theme within Western art. *Migrant Mother* could thus take the viewer to such paintings as William Adolphe Bouguereau’s *Charity*, 1865 (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007) or earlier religious art.

Another interesting example is the popular image *Accidental Napalm*, which captures a naked Vietnamese girl running towards the camera and screaming from the napalm burns on her skin. In an extensive study of Vietnam War images, Hariman and

Lucaites (2003) trace the evolution in the narratives surrounding that photograph as it kept reconnecting to current events. The most popular narrative of the image, they argue, is the story about the friendship that emerged between the girl in the photo (Kim Phuc) and the photographer (Nick Ut), who also helped her relocate to Canada. A more recent narrative chronicles Phuc's personal odyssey of recovery: "she felt as though the journalistic hounds would make her into a victim all over again" (Chong, 1999, p. 6). The shift in the rhetorical frame of the napalm image is complete with the publication of Joe McNally's *Portrait* in 1996, which captures an intimate moment of Kim with her infant. Referring to this later image, Hariman and Lucaites (2003) argue that concerns about justice that have surrounded the *Accidental Napalm* image have been displaced by a "rhetoric of healing" (p. 46).

Hariman and Lucaites' (2003) discussion of *Accidental Napalm* is similar to Edwards's (2004) analysis of John F. Kennedy Jr.'s salute image. Originally associated with JFK's funeral procession, the image resurfaced in the media in the summer of 1999 when it was reported that JFK, Jr., along with his wife and sister-in-law, had died in an accident. "The pathos and remorse," Edwards notes, "prompted by the 'salute' picture readily transfer to the apolitical tragedy of the 1999 plane crash and translate to a national regret over a promise denied" (p. 184). It is through similar routes of "emotional analogy" (p. 181), rather than rational reasoning, that images attach to events and in the process become charged with a new layer of symbolic meaning.

The JFK salute image is also an example of iconic photographs' quality as props for emotional management of traumatic events (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007). Summed up

succinctly, “iconic photographs provide the viewing public with powerful evocations of emotional experience” and similarly to what Roland Barthes (1981) called “primitive theatre,” they “activate vital repertoires of social behavior” (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007, p. 35). Another powerful example of that quality of iconic photographs is the image of the Kent State student shot during a protest against the expansion of the Vietnam War. In a cogent analysis of the photograph, Hariman and Lucaites argue that its blunt display of emotion ruptured conservative codes of decorum that regulate public life and “redefined citizenship as an emotional practice that requires individual expression of social energies and collective values” (p. 145).

The role of popular photographs in encountering traumatic events has also been highlighted by Zelizer (1998) in her study of Holocaust images. Holocaust photographs, according to Zelizer, serve as a counterpoint to the initial state of disbelief triggered by the news of the traumatic event. Thus, as news of the horrors that took place in German camps during World War II made headlines, the public’s desire to doubt, to believe that the reports were somehow not a true reflection of what actually took place, was countered by the visual truth of the images that were published days later. The photographs, Zelizer argues, marked the transition from trauma to recovery; they were “a tool for easing post-traumatic dissonance” (p. 65). The central concept in the analysis that serves as a juncture between the photograph and the collective is the concept of “bearing witness.” Bearing witness, Zelizer claims, “helps individuals cement their association with the collective as

a post-hoc response to the trauma of public events that, however temporarily, shatter the collective” (p. 52).

The role of Holocaust photographs in collective memory extends even farther than bearing witness. Since the advent of photography in the 1800s, it has become a way of “encountering events” (Zelizer, 1998, p. 52). What scholars have observed is that photographs of specific events become imbued with the significance of the event and, from that point on, assume their own history that runs parallel to the history of the actual event. An example are World War II photographs of concentration camps, which became “the original template” against which later traumatic events were read and depicted; they became “a standard of coverage of trauma for journalists” (p. 54). Thus, subsequent atrocities in Cambodia, Bosnia, or Rwanda were witnessed against the backdrop of Holocaust images that inundated the press.

The most recent example is coverage of the September 11th terrorist attacks which dominated television and print. Similar to World War II concentration camp photos, the September 11th photographs assumed a role “in moving people through the grieving process” (Zelizer, 1998, p. 55). Parallels between the depiction of the two events can also be traced through the content of the photographs. Zelizer talks about the “four main parts” of the coverage: “the site of the attack – primarily the World Trade Center; people witnessing the site of the attack; people witnessing the site of the attack without depiction of the site itself; and people viewing depictions (primarily photographs) of the site of the attack or taking photographs themselves” (Zelizer, 1998, p. 57). Thus, in the case of

traumatic events, photography works against earlier precedents in the depiction of trauma and serves to prop the collective transition into the post-traumatic.

The concept of performance is also at the core of Coonfield and Huxford's (2009) analysis of news images and public trauma. Although they does not use the term "collective memory," preferring instead Turner's (1968) definition of "ritual," their analysis concentrates on the role of journalistic images as vehicles of the collective through time, the connective tissue of the social:

Such examples of the ideological and symbolic properties of the news photograph move the focus away from the issue of indexicality and open up an alternative approach to the study of images in the news. The move highlights the *ritual* work of journalism in cultural life and its special role in the creation and maintenance of collectivities and identities. (Coonfield & Huxford, 2009, p. 459)

Journalistic photographs therefore play a crucial role in the negotiation of meaning of events on a collective level. The same could be said of iconic photographs because they are often subject to the same rules of representation as journalistic photographs and reach a wide audience. The present study would therefore turn towards iconic and popular photographs of the Woodstock festivals to seek an understanding of their continuing significance and appeal. Since images of popular events become symbols of the recollection of those events (Zelizer, 1998) and draw on that recollection for their reading and interpretation in the present, we next turn to theories of collective memory and photographs' role as its vehicle.

CHAPTER III

THEORIES OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

One of the themes in Ridley Scott's 1982 cult classic *Blade Runner* addressed the relationship between photographs and memory. Based on Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the movie follows protagonist Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) on his task to find and "retire" four replicants produced by the Tyrell Corporation. One of the ways of identifying replicants is through a specific test that measures emotional responses of respondents. The assumption is that since replicants lack a reservoir of emotional experiences to draw on, they fail to respond emotionally to the test questions, revealing that they lack the human element. When Rachael – the assistant at the Tyrell Corporation – takes the test, however, the results are inconclusive. The reason, we later find out, is that Rachael, a replicant, has been given photographs that have implanted in her memories of a past she never had:

Tyrell: We began to recognize in them a strange obsession. After all, they are emotionally inexperienced, with only a few years in which to store up the experiences which you and I take for granted. If we gift them with a past, we create a cushion or a pillow for their emotions, and consequently, we can control them better.

Deckard: Memories! You're talking about memories! (Deelay & Scott, 1982)

The movie provides an overview on the micro level of the web of interdependent meanings among photography, memory, and identity. This section creates a similar

account on the macro level through the examination of theories of collective memory and the relationship between collective memory and media.

Blade Runner provides an account of memory that falls within one of the two concepts of collective memory defined by Olick (1999), that of socially framed individual memories and that of collective commemorative representations or, what Nora (1996) famously coined “lieux de mémoire” – sites of memory. Olick defines the first type as “collected memories.” The locus of interpretation is the individual and the individual mind because that is where the remembering takes place. Following this logic, publicly available symbols rely on the group’s mind for their remembrance and interpretation. In the second concept, the emphasis lies on the collectivist perspective. Proponents of that perspective argue that “symbols and their systems of relations have a degree of autonomy from the subjective perceptions of individuals” (Olick, p. 341).

Both of these strands of collective memory converge in the work of Halbwachs. His volume *On Collective Memory* (from French *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* or *The Social Frameworks of Memory*) originally published in 1925, first articulated and problematized the term collective memory. A student of Durkheim and Bergson, Halbwachs draws on the former’s work on *Society* (Durkheim wrote *Society* with a capital “S”) and the latter’s writings on matter and memory. Although Halbwachs follows in their footsteps for a while, he eventually takes a turn in a different direction from both of them. In contrast to Durkheim, Halbwachs is careful not to overly collectivize the social in a way that brushes over difference and conflict. Instead of *Society* with capital

“S,” Halbwachs posits group membership with the provision that groups produce the frameworks within which individual remembering takes place.

His position differs from that of Bergson in that instead of studying memory as property of the subjective mind, Halbwachs is concerned with the dynamic between individual and group memory (Olick, 1999; Hirst & Manier, 2008). He is most often quoted for saying, “It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, organize, and localize their memories” (Halbwachs, 1925, p. 38). He reaches that conclusion after a prolonged examination of his own dreams in which he sought to determine whether, when removed from its social environment, the mind can produce a coherent sequence of memories. It was in regard to his analysis of remembrance in dreams that he concluded that coherent recollection can only take place within a social context, specifically, that of the group. Groups provide cues for individual remembering in some cases, even creating memories in group members who have had no direct experience of a reminisced event. This is best demonstrated by Halbwachs’s example of childhood memory, in which, he argues, we are often uncertain if a remembered event is our own recollection or a memory we constructed from the cues our families give us. He therefore does not concern himself with the specific cognitive mechanisms through which memory is stored and recalled in the mind, claiming that what matters is that memories “are recalled to [us] externally and the groups to which [we] are part at any time give us the means to reconstruct them, on condition that... [we] turn toward them and adopt, at least for the moment, their way of thinking” (Halbwachs,

1925, p. 38). It is this latter part, the adoption of the group's way of thinking, that forms the social framework within which individual remembering occurs.

While Olick focuses on Halbwachs's examination of individual remembering within social frameworks, he overlooks the second part of *On Collective Memory* in which Halbwachs takes collective memory to the supra level and provides a broad and sophisticated account of the role of collective memory in the evolution of society. That account goes beyond the two cultures that Olick defines since it transcends the "lieux de mémoire." It instead adopts a Marxist perspective on history and uses the idea of collective memory as a backbone of his analysis of social paradigm shifts, thus providing an organic version of history. For example, in regard to the shift from feudal to bourgeois society, Halbwachs (1925) explains:

At a time when the renewal and the enlarged recruitment of the noble class was the order of the day, the whole society had to accommodate itself to these infringements and to find a way to legitimize those men who entered the nobility by breaking in, without title, without sponsors, without kin. It was therefore necessary for society to reorganize and to modify to some degree the frameworks of its memory.

Society could achieve this goal in two ways. First, it could deliberately distort the past. (p. 134)

While Halbwachs's argument in the above paragraph may appear convincing, the breadth that the term "memory" seems to assume in that context should be viewed with caution. It is perhaps in reference to that context of its use that critics of collective memory claim that it only replaces older established terms like "political tradition" or

“myth.” Gedi and Elem (1996), for example refer to the use of collective memory as “an act of intrusion... forcing itself like a molten rock into an earlier formation... unavoidably obliterating fine distinctions” (p. 43). Others are concerned about the implications of “a concept of collective consciousness curiously disconnected from actual thought processes of any particular person.” Indeed, the kind of reasoning that is present in the quoted paragraph does not posit a single individual at the root of the argument. It veers instead more towards a notion of shared consciousness and shared memory, placing the act of social remembering, forgetting, and willful distortion of memory at the epicenter of the course of history. Although the term “tradition” does seem to be soldered within his broader concept of collective memory, the present society emerges from Halbwachs’s account as the workings of memory, carried forward from generation to generation and continuously reformulated under the pressures of the present society.

The idea of reformulation or “touching up” the memory of events under the pressures of the present is key to Halbwachs’s conception of collective memory. It is what distinguishes it from Barthes’s (1972) idea of myth. While in Halbwachs “the pressures of the present” are understood as the workings of a Marxist notion of power, Barthes understood myth as “depoliticized speech” (Barthes, 1972, p. 145). In that sense, the dominant collective memory framework is that of a dominant class. When seeking membership in that dominant class, an individual would have to “touch up” his/her memory of an event/the recent past so that it complies with the collective memory framework of the dominant class (Halbwachs, 1992).

Another point that becomes clear from the quoted paragraph is the importance of collective memory for cultivating a sense of belonging to a social group. Not only does the social memory of a group need to be re-inscribed in order to accommodate the inclusion of new members, but new members themselves have to position themselves in respect to the collective memory of the group in order to share their sense of belonging. In his introduction to the 1992 edition of *On Collective Memory*, Coser gives an excellent example of that argument from his own experience:

I came to this country as an immigrant shortly before Pearl Harbor. It did not take me long to establish friendships, or at least contacts, with young people of roughly my own age. But I felt for a long time that there was something in my relations with native Americans that blocked full communication, and that there was a kind of impassible barrier between us. It was only after I remembered Halbwachs's work on memory, which I had read at the Sorbonne, that I was able to put a finger on the reason for this mild estrangement between us. I then realized that they and I did not share enough collective memories. (p. 21)

The importance of collective memory for facilitating an experience of belonging is also emphasized by Assmann (2008), who wrote:

Remembering is a realization of belonging, even a social obligation. One has to remember in order to belong [...]. Assimilation, the transition of one group into another one, is usually accompanied by an imperative to forget the memories connected with the original identity. (p. 114)

Similarly to Olick, Assmann distinguishes between “collected memories” and “collective memories,” though Assmann defines collected memories as those memories that are held by members of a community but do not hold a deep significance for them.

Collective Memories, on the other hand, become lodged as nodes in the collective identity web. Thus, to use Hirst and Maier's (2008) example, while Spaniards probably remember the fact that Princess Diana died in a car accident, that knowledge is collected memory since they do not have much bearing on the Spanish collective identity. The memory of the 2004 terrorist attack in Madrid, however, is collective memory since it placed a deep imprint on the Spanish collective identity.

It should be noted, however, that although Halbwachs's work that is at the core of theories of collective memory was translated as *On Collective Memory* (1992), the original French title is *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1925) or *The Social Frameworks of Memory*. That should not be surprising since the concept of "social frameworks of memory" is central to his arguments. What is interesting, however, is the consistency between Halbwachs's description of the "social frameworks of memory" and memory schemata – the cognitive mechanisms through which the mind processes cultural knowledge. It was already mentioned that, according to Halbwachs, collective remembrance requires the adoption of the group's way of thinking. To that he later adds that "collective frameworks are ... precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society" (p. 40). Although both of these descriptions only vaguely sketch out what Halbwachs means under "social frameworks of memory," his description seems to overlap with the findings of cognitive sociologists of the mechanisms of memory.

Research in cognitive sociology has pointed towards the existence of mental schemata through which we understand the past. A mental schemata is described as “knowledge structures that represent objects or events and provide default assumptions about their characteristics, relationships, and entailments under conditions of incomplete information” (DiMaggio, 1997, p. 269). Hence, Halbwachs’s social frameworks find a counterpart in the “knowledge structures” on which everyday cognition relies. DiMaggio’s description of schemata however, goes into further detail than Halbwachs’s description of social frameworks: “Schemata are both representations of knowledge and information-processing mechanisms. As representations, they entail images of objects and the relations among them” (DiMaggio, 1997, p. 269). Schemata thus emerge as a direct link between memory and images, although in this specific context the word images seems to be used in the sense of image-thought.

Halbwachs’s idea of a past that is recalled and “touched up” under the pressures of the present has also found empirical articulation in the work of Schacter (1996). “A neural network,” Schacter (1996) argues, “combines information in the present environment with patterns that have been stored in the past, and the resulting mixture of the two is what the network remembers. ... When we remember, we complete a pattern with the best match available in memory; we do not shine a spotlight on the stored picture” (p. 71).

The importance of mental images in cognition has been confirmed by neurological data. Damasio (1999) speaks of mental images that include not only “visual” images but

a broader set of “depictions” in the mind of sensory data, temporal relationships between entities and actions (p. 318). Furthermore, research findings show that schemata fall within automatic cognition which is “implicit, un verbalized, rapid, and automatic.” Parallel to that is a study by (Bolls, Lang, & Potter, 1999), which showed that the encoding of visual information such as television messages is “a mostly automatic process” while “the encoding of audio information from television messages [is] at least somewhat resource limited” (p. 160). It thus appears that we can at the very least draw a comparison between the cognitive processes that produce schemata that define the past and the cognitive processes that encode visual information – they are both automatic and thus precede, and sometimes bypass, more conscious inscription of information. This comparison becomes even more significant in the face of cognitive sociologists’ conclusion that “in schematic cognition we find the mechanisms by which culture shapes and biases thought” (DiMaggio, 1997, p. 269). It is at this point that cognitive theory on the mechanism and retrieval of memory connect with theories of culture. Before we move to the cultural theories of memory, however, one last and important point should be made about schemata and knowledge structures. These knowledge structures are not uniformly available to all culturally related individuals. In fact, there is a “systematic discrepancy” (Beim, 2007, p. 17) in their availability which in turn would limit the synchronization (i.e. “collectivization”) of schemata across individuals. By implication, the discrepancy in the availability of knowledge supports a fragmented view of culture (Beim, 2007; DiMaggio, 1997).

As was noted at the beginning of this section, Olick distinguishes between two cultures of collective memory. One is positioned at the individual level of remembering and accents the role of individual mind and memory in the formation of collective memory. The other, located on the collective level, focuses on “collective commemorative representations and the mnemonic traces” (Olick, 1996, p. 336). That level of analysis relies on the tools of cultural studies since at the core of investigations is the symbol and its system of relationships, which are presumed to possess a level of autonomy from individual perception (Beim, 2007; Olick, 1996; Schwartz, 1982).

The second culture of collective memory is more aligned with the Durkheimian roots of Halbwachs’s work, specifically, his notions of a collective memory that transcends the aggregation of individual memories. In this sense, however, the discovery of collective memory is not unique to Durkheim and Halbwachs. Although he did not use the term collective memory, Benjamin’s (1968) examination of the layers of history accumulated in the material world adopts the same organic view of history. Benjamin’s material objects thus become charged with the memory of events, which also sheds light on the relationship between commodities (in the Marxist sense) and history. A significant volume of literature on collective memory has sought to distinguish between history and memory (Beim, 2007; Olick, 1999). *On Collective Memory* treats history as the past to which we no longer have an “organic, experiential relation” (Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 110). The past that we remember, on the other hand, is the past that we project ourselves onto, the past that we are still able to empathize with and thus has direct bearing on

individual and shared identity. Scholars writing on history and memory have often posited the two in opposition with history, understood as historiography, criticized as an enterprise to “truth” and collective memory favored as the “process of natural selection” through which “certain memories are winnowed out, repressed or simply discarded” (Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 110).

Schwartz (1996) describes intellectual currents that provoked interest in collective memory as the social construction of the past and as opposed to the objectivism of historiography. First, the advent of multiculturalism brought about an awareness of a cultural domination bias in historiography and challenged prominent historiographic accounts in favor of repressed groups. Second, post-modernists rejected the notion of a linear history that told the objective truth and turned, instead, towards the role of power and its role in the shaping of history and memory. Third, and similar to Halbwachs’s argument in the chapter *Social Classes and Their Traditions*, hegemony theorists provided a class-based account of collective memory, adding a new layer of challenges to the treatment of history as a series of objective facts.

Such broad views of collective memory, however, beg the question of what is not collective memory and where the limits of the concept lie. Delimiting the field has indeed proved challenging in part because the vehicles of memories – objects and symbols – seems to be everywhere around us. One way to impose structure for the purpose of studying a specific collective memory could be to limit the objects under investigation. Historians of memory thus have focused on the role of various forms of recording of both

individual and collective memory. A photograph, for example “extends the capacity to ‘remember,’ not simply by providing storage space outside the brain but by stimulating our neurological storage processes in particular ways; in this manner, we have become genuine cyborgs with ... ‘prosthetic’ memories” (Olick, 1999, p. 342). In regard to the notion of “prosthetic” memories, Assmann credits Warburg as one of the pioneers who studied images as vehicles of collective memory.

Numerous scholars have since then recognized the importance of photographic images for collective identity and memory. In an essay on photography and cultural memory, Trachtenberg (2008) noted: “As much an interpretation of the present as the past, and an anticipation of a future, the framing of visual memory can have major consequences on how people identify shared historical culture” (p. 125). Photographs become mementos to which an experience is tied and thus come to capture aspects of a particular experience at that particular time. Barthes claimed that photography brought about an “anthropological revolution in man’s history” in the way it creates an awareness of a thing “having-been-there” versus its actual presence (in Ruchatz, 2008, p. 370; see also Trachtenberg, 2008).

In collective memory, Zelizer (1998) argues, “one specific image of the event has come to symbolize its broader recollection” (p. 6). This argument is similar to what Huxford (2001) calls the indexical role of news photographs – they become visual evidence of a specific event in history. A photograph therefore is a very specific referent to a moment in time but, paradoxically, it also serves to “isolate the appearances of a

disconnected instant” (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 91). Therefore, on another level of interpretation, an image’s connection to an event is “arbitrary” (Zelizer, 1998, p. 6). It is the quality of photographs to arbitrarily attach to events that turns them from references of a specific event to symbols of abstract meaning. It is this dual nature of photographs that Trachtenberg was referring to when he stated that photographs raise a “double question of comprehension: how they were understood at the time and how they should be understood today” (Trachtenberg, 1989, pp. 72-73).

Photographs are also icons in Peirce’s sense of the term: they are “likenesses, ... which serve to convey ideas of the things they represent simply by imitating them” (Peirce, 1998, p. 6). Peirce also describes the iconic sign as a “representamen” since it “refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own and which it possesses, just the same, whether any such object actually exists or not” (Peirce, 1955, p. ii). Nichols (1981) builds on Peirce’s definition of the iconic sign by further describing it as “motivated” (p. 45). In motivated, or iconic signs, he argues, there are two loci of interpretation – the level of signifiers and the level of signifieds. On the level of signifiers, signifiers “blend into one another or refer primarily one to another” (p. 45) and so do the signifieds on their own level. How meaning between the signifiers and signifieds of a motivated image is pinned down, according to Nichols, is through widely shared codes or ways of seeing. The importance of codes in the construction of meaning has also been articulated by Julia Kristeva (1980). Kristeva referred to texts in terms of two axes: a horizontal axis that connects the author and the reader of a text and a vertical

axis which connects the text to other texts. What unites the two axes is shared codes: “every text and every reading depend on prior codes” (Chandler, 2003). Kristeva’s definition of intertextuality would apply to photographs to the extent that they can be understood as texts. In that respect, we can talk about the relationship between the photographer and the audience on the horizontal axis and the relationship between the photograph and previous photographs on the vertical axis.

It is in view of photographs’ property as an index, an icon, and a symbol, as well as an image of social symbols on which collective memory relies, that the present study turns towards semiology as a method for reading how Woodstock features in collective memory.

As it was explained in the previous section, “social ideas are represented in symbolic form in collective memory” (Beim, 2007, p. 10). That argument corresponds to the second (collectivist) culture of collective memory, as articulated by Olick (1999), in which symbols and symbol systems are treated with a fair degree of autonomy. The idea of symbol systems, on the other hand, charged with the “aura” of the past could serve as a conceptual bridge between the collectivist and individualist cultures of collective memory. On the individualist level, cognition of culture operates through schemata (“knowledge structures that represent objects or events and provide default assumptions about their characteristics, relationships, and entailments under conditions of incomplete information;” Beim, 2007, p. 7), which seem to be a similar construct to symbol systems

if we agree that “objects or events” in schematic constructions can also be understood as symbols.

CHAPTER IV

METHOD

The centrality of symbols and symbol systems in collective memory calls for a study approach that recognizes their significance and attempts to untangle the layers of meaning invested into objects. One such approach is Rose's (2005) semiological analysis. In her book *Visual Methodologies*, Rose introduces a comprehensive method of semiological analysis of visual images that draws heavily on Williamson's book *Decoding Advertisements*. Williamson, on her part, cites works by major critical theorists such as Althusser, Barthes, Benjamin, Berger, Brecht, Foucault, Freud, Gramsci, Lacan, Levi-Strauss, Marx, and Sussure.

As Rose notes, semiology offers a degree of analytical precision similar to content analysis, which is why some semiologists classify it as scientific. There is, however, a crucial distinction between semiology and any analysis that claims to be scientific: semiology's strength is partly in contrasting scientific knowledge with ideology: "Ideology is knowledge that is constructed in such a way as to legitimate unequal social power relations; science instead is knowledge that reveals those inequalities" (Rose, 2005, p. 70).

Ideology plays a prominent role in Judith Williamson's deconstruction of advertisements. According to her, advertisements evoke "false categories" that serve the interests of power: they obscure the "real" social relations and supplant them with "imaginary" ones that are aimed at eliciting identification with consumption goods. Advertisements, therefore are ideological tools that embody social assumptions and present them in a way that reifies social inequalities.

In contrast to Judith Williamson's work, however, the present study concentrates on popular photographs documenting a specific pop culture event. Williamson's assumptions, therefore, on how ideology works through advertisements does not transfer readily onto the artifacts under examination – photographs of the Woodstock festival were not produced with an explicit intention to promote the purchase of a product. Ideology, therefore, works differently in images as visual documents than it does in advertisements. The assumption here, instead, is that "the constructions of social difference are articulated through images themselves." This point was articulated by Normal Bryson (1991) in *Semiology and Visual Interpretation*:

The social formation isn't, then, something which supervenes or appropriates or utilizes the image so to speak *after* it has been made; rather painting, as an activity of the sign, unfolds within the social formation from the beginning. And from the inside – the social formation is inherently and immanently present in the image and not a fate or an external which clamps down on an image that might prefer to be left alone. (p. 66)

With respect to photographs, then, the image itself is an imprint, a trace of the ideology at work. That being said, however, deconstructing ideology inherent in images

could turn to be a double edged sword. As Rose and Nichols point out, the process of untangling the ideology woven into images could end up as an act of “double exposure” (Bal & Bryson, 1991) where the ideology of the image is replaced with the ideology of its reader. The deconstruction of an image in this case can claim legitimacy based on the social implications of the substituting ideology (Rose, 2005; Nichols, 1981). An ideological analysis could thus gain validity if the reader is positioned towards an image so as to:

[discover] the causal complexes of society/unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who rule it/writing from the standpoint of the class which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human society is caught/emphasizing the element of development/making possible the concrete, and making possible abstraction from it.

Ideology is the larger framework in relation to which the meaning and purpose of semiology as a method is shaped; the outermost layer of its analysis. At the core of it is the sign. For analytical purposes the sign is viewed as a structure that consists of two parts – the signifier and the signified. The signified is the actual perception of an object or a concept; for example a number of blank pages bound together. The signifier is the label – the word or image that corresponds to the signified. The implication of that distinction according to Saussure is that the signified and the signifier are independent of each other i.e. “there is no necessary relationship between a particular signifier and its signified” (Rose, 2005, p. 74). We perceive a stable relationship between the signified and the signifier not because there is one in reality but because there is a stable relationship between the signs in a system. The idea becomes even clearer when we

distinguish between the sign and its referent – the actual physical object to which a sign is attached.

Once it has been established that the relationship between a signifier and a signified (both with the sign) is arbitrary and not the result of some inherent connection between the two, the question becomes what rules and conventions influence its present configuration.

To apply this approach to images, according to Rose, we begin by identifying the “building blocks” (Rose, 2005, p. 75): its signs. The next step follows the argument that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary. If that is the case, then this relationship is unstable and the meaning between signifieds and signifiers within the signs in an image is in flux. This transference of meaning, critics argue, is particularly significant in ads where the intention is to create relationships between humans within an image and brands.

Dyer provides an example of how Saussure’s concept of the sign is used in the deconstruction of advertising photographs. An image he uses is that of an ad for gold. The photograph captures a man and a woman in profile who are about to kiss. The woman’s hand is on the man’s shoulder and on it one can see a gold wedding ring and a bracelet. A caption between the two figures reads: “The strongest links are forged in gold.” Thus, one of the signifiers in this ad is the gold bracelet. Its corresponding signified is that “this piece of jewelry is long lasting and a sound investment” (Dyer,

1982, p. 118). As we know from Sassure, however, the relationship between signifier and signified is unstable and a signified called up by one signifier within an image can attach itself to other signifiers within that same image. Therefore, as Dyer points out, there is a second narrative within the ad for gold: “He has given her a gift, she is rewarding him with a kiss. Their relationship is founded on this transaction: gold is the basis of their ‘link.’ Their (and by implication your) relationship will therefore be strong and durable” (Dyer, 1982, p. 118).

The noted shift of relationships between signifier and signified is not, however, limited only to advertising photographs but applies to images per se. Therefore, the transference of meaning between objects and humans within advertising images could be observed within documentary images as well. The reasoning is that documentary images are snapshots of objects in society which have been imbued with social meaning.

Dyer (1982), for example, has created a useful checklist for decoding signs of humans. Although initially created for advertisements, the list aims at untangling broader social stereotypes encoded in images.

1. Representation of bodies:

- Age. What is the age of the figures in the photograph meant to convey? Innocence? Wisdom? Senility?
- Gender. Adverts very often rely on stereotyped images of masculinity and femininity. Men are active and rational, women are more associated with the domestic.
- Race. Again, adverts often depend on stereotypes. To what extent does an advert do this? Or does it normalize whiteness by making it invisible?

- Hair. Women's hair is often used to signify seductive beauty or narcissism.
 - Body. Which bodies are fat (and therefore often represented
 - Size. Adverts often indicate what is more important by making it big.
 - Looks. Again, adverts often trade on conventional notions of male and female beauty. Susan Bordo's book *Unbearable Weight* (1993) is an excellent discussion of, among other things, how adverts picture bodies in ways that depend on cultural constructions of race, gender and beauty.
2. Representations of manner
 - Expression. Who is shown happy, haughty, sad and so on? What facial and other expressions are used to convey this?
 - Eye contact. Who is looking at whom (including you) and how? Are those looks submissive, coy, confrontational?
 - Pose. Who is standing and who is prone?
 3. Representations of activity
 - Touch. Who is touching what with what effects?
 - Body movement. Who is active and who is passive?
 - Positional communication. What is the spatial arrangement of the figures? Who is positioned as superior and who inferior? Who is intimate with whom and how?
 4. Props and settings
 - Props. Objects in adverts can be used in a way unique to a particular advert, but many ads rely on objects that have particular cultural significance. For example, spectacles often connote intelligence, golden light indicates tranquility, and so on.
 - Settings. Settings range from the apparently 'normal' to the supposedly 'exotic,' and can also seem to be fantasies. What effect does its setting have on an advert. (Rose, 2001, pp. 75-77; see also Dyer, 1982)

Saussure's theory of the structure of the sign, though useful in the deconstruction of images, was originally intended to elucidate the relationships between linguistic signs. Visual signs, however, are inherently different from verbal/written signs since an image of a sign carries with it an imprint of the referent. A photograph, specifically a documentary photograph, has the quality not only of a proof of an object "having been there," but also of making 1/250th of a second immortal.

In view of these and other distinctions between visual and written/verbal signs, scholars supplement Saussure's theory of signs with that of Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce posited three kinds of signs: the iconic sign, the indexical sign, and the symbol. The iconic sign often draws on conventions from popular iconography. The example of Lang's *Migrant Mother* cited earlier is instructive here as well. The implication is that one of the blueprints of *Migrant Mother* could be found in Bougeurau's 1865 masterpiece *Charity*.

In indexical signs, Rose (2005) explains,

there is an inherent relationship between the signified and the signifier. 'Inherent' is often culturally specific so a current example familiar to Western readers might be the way that a schematic picture of a baby soother is often used to denote a room in public places where there are baby-changing facilities. (p. 73)

Similarly to the indexical sign, the relationship between signified and signifier within a symbolic sign is shaped by cultural conventions but is much more arbitrary than that of the indexical sign. A flag is thus a symbol of a country (or an entity such as the Olympic flag), a dove is a symbol of peace, etc.

Signs can also be read as paradigmatic and syntagmatic:

Syntagmatic signs gain their meaning from the signs that surround them in a still image, or come before or after them in sequence in a moving image. ... Paradigmatic signs gain their meaning from a contrast with all other possible signs. (Rose, 2005, p. 78)

On another level of interpretation signs can be denotive or connotive. Denotive signs describe an object while connotive signs “carry a range of higher level meanings” (Rose, 2005, p. 82). Connotive signs in themselves can be classified into metonymic and synecdochal. A metonymic sign “is something associated with something else, which then represents that something else” (Rose, 2005, p. 82). An example would be the name (or an image of) Wall Street, which is a metonym for the financial system of the United States. In synecdochal signs, a part of something stands for the whole. Thus, in “these lands belong to the crown,” the word “crown” stands for the king.

The method outlined thus far will be applied to three iconic photographs of the Woodstock event: the image of Nick and Bobbi Ercolite used for the cover of Woodstock music albums as well as the 1970 film *Woodstock: Three Days of Peace and Music*; the Associated Press photograph of Ricky Peters and Trudy Morgul on top of a Volkswagen Bus and a Charles Harbutt photograph of two individual bathing that appears on the sleeve of the Woodstock record and CD album. The images were selected based on Hariman and Lucaites’s (2007) definition of photographic icon: “photographic images appearing in print, electronic, or digital media that are widely recognized and remembered, are understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional identification or response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics” (p. 27). The image of the Ercolites and the bathing images satisfy these criteria by virtue of being printed on the sleeve of the record and CD of the Woodstock album. The AP photo of Ricky Peters and Trudy Morgul has appeared in

print and features widely on the web (as evidenced by results from reverse image search engine TinEye.com).

Similarly to Hariman and Lucaites's (2007) study of iconic photographs, the three images from the 1969 festival are juxtaposed to photographs from the 1994 and 1999 anniversaries of the festival as well as photographs from the Polish Woodstock. The main considerations in selecting those images were their popularity, availability, and ease of access. For the purposes of this study it was assumed that those images most easily accessible to a wide audience are images retrieved from an online Google image search for the key terms "Woodstock 1994," "Woodstock 1999," and "Polish Woodstock." Google was selected over other search engines based on reports that it is the most popular online search engine (UC Berkeley - Teaching Library Internet Workshops). The search was limited to images from the first page of results. Based on the literature on Woodstock 1994 and Woodstock 1999 cited in the introduction to this thesis, the content of those images was examined for signs of the commercial character of the two anniversaries of the festival. For the purposes of this study, a "sign" of the commercial character of the festival is defined as a brand, or a branded consumption good. Images including such signs were included in the analysis. Since no reports describing a corporate involvement in the Polish Woodstock were found, this criterion was not applied in the selection of photographs from that festival. Images 1, 2, and 3 were deemed to satisfy this selection criterion.

The second selection criterion was informed by literature on photography and collective memory (Huxford, 2001; Hariman and Lucaites, 2007; Zelizer, 1998): from the first page of Google image results, those images were selected that appeared to be referents to themes from Woodstock 1969. Since more than one image appeared to refer to the same Woodstock '69 theme (i.e., mud sliding), the first selection criterion (“signs” of the commercial character of the festival) was applied to further constrain the pool of images. Images 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 were deemed to fulfill this criterion.

The third selection criterion was images within the first page of results that are a representation of the same scene from the respective festival. Thus, for Woodstock 1994, six out of the 13 photographs on the first page were photographs of mud sliding. Applying criteria one and two limited that number to two photographs, one of which was image 3. For the purposes of simplicity, image 3 was selected. For Woodstock 1999, the riot was a repeating scene within three of the 15 photographs on the page. Since the three images were compositionally similar and appeared to be depictions of the same setting, one was selected at random and included into the present thesis (image 4).

Full retrieval information for images 1 through 6 is given in the Appendix.

CHAPTER V

WOODSTOCK AND ME

My selection of my topic is strongly influenced by my experience as a Bulgarian in the United States. One of the first things I became aware of after I arrived in Bloomington, Illinois for the first time in summer 2003 was the difficulty of having a sense of shared experience with female students on my college dorm floor. All floor meetings were filled with obscure references to cultural icons popular mostly within the confines of the United States, jokes were based on a “value added” use of language that I was not familiar with, and simple day-to-day conversations only cued the vast differences between the system of moral codes I had been a part of and the one I was presently in.

It was after reading Halbwachs’s *On Collective Memory* that I realized the importance of collective memory in forging a sense of belonging to a collectivity. Theories on collective memory have strongly reverberated with me and guided my interest in the subject. Once aware of the presence of collective memory as the glue that holds society together, my question became how this collective memory is articulated and communicated.

With my introduction to semiotics and Saussure’s concept of the sign, it became clear to me that to understand collective memory and become a participant in it, I had to decode the symbols of exchange: words, images, specific daily rituals and performances;

what words meant in one context to specific people and what memories images evoked. From my observations as an International student, I learned that widely shared meaning emerges from shared culture-specific rituals and relies on media for storage and distribution.

Woodstock was then selected as the focus of this thesis partly since I perceived it as a culture-specific ritual that has in recent years transcended its cultural boundaries and partly due to my interest in the 60s in the United States.

CHAPTER VI

RESULTS

Woodstock 1969 in Iconic Images

The tagline of the 1969 Woodstock Festival was *An Aquarian Exposition*. The term “Aquarian” in this tagline refers to the much fabled coming of the Age of Aquarius that became a popular theme of 1960s and 1970s hippie culture. The association between hippie culture and the Age of Aquarius was solidified with the song “Aquarius” from the 1967 musical *Hair*. In astrology, the sign of Aquarius is associated with an unwillingness to follow the beaten path and a resistance towards old and outdated ways of thinking. It promotes a reformist vision of the world with an emphasis on equality and individual freedom. The word “Aquarian,” therefore, in its popular 60s meaning and as used in the tagline of the Woodstock Festival, taps into the transformative character of the 60s, the “passion for change [that] affected governance, legal and political rights, and the distribution of wealth and power among and within regions, nations, races, ethnicities, and classes” (Foley, McMillian, & Varon, 2008, p. 1). Furthermore, in a true “Aquarian” fashion, broader social norms and abstract meanings such as the construction of identity, the role of family, sex and sexuality, attitudes towards work, pleasure, art and the way we perceive “reality” were called into question. In the words of Richard Flacks, the founder of Students for Democratic Society, “the great personal hope of the Sixties was that one would be able to live a life of ongoing self-examination, a life of scrutinizing the social

content of one's actions, a life grounded in principle and social responsibility, a life of service, care, and commitment to justice and social betterment” (Flacks & Whalen, 1989, p. 2).

Flacks’s formulation was written in retrospect in 1980 and captures a prominent and widespread view of the 60s as a time of an idealism that probed and pushed the boundaries of what was thought possible. Such a view of the 60s, according to Varon, Foley, and McMillian leads us “to the ultimate horizon of speculation: what was and was not possible in the historical moment, and what are the powers and limits of human aspiration?” Addressing that question, however, requires, in part, detangling the different strands of memory of the 60s, making sense of the “memory wars,” waged over the meaning of the period and understanding how representations of the past could be a tool in the hands of power. Since Woodstock has been defined as the moment that captured the spirit of the 60s generation, it provides us with a concrete opportunity to seek answers to these questions in its legacy.

As it was mentioned earlier in this thesis, studies of collective memory and images have overwhelmingly focused on public trauma. That is so largely because “public trauma – wars, major disasters, or other large-scale cataclysmic events – rattle default notions of what it means morally to remain members of a collective” (Zelizer, p. 49). Woodstock clearly does not belong to that category. It, on the other hand, falls within the “moments of transcendence,” (p. 4) which Varon, Foley and McMillian define as “epiphanous and frequently ineffable, often intensely private, and leaving a largely

subterranean legacy in contemporary sub- and countercultures” (p. 4). Undoubtedly, the “epiphanous” air of Woodstock emanates not only from the music but also from the heavy use of drugs that marked the event. Marijuana and LSD were freely exchanged among strangers at the festival, and organizers had to set up a tent specifically for treating those suffering from bad LSD trips. Whether they were drug induced or not, however, accounts of the “epiphanous” quality of the experience continue to survive, shrouding Woodstock in a mythical aura and elevating it to the status of a one time transcendental ritual.

This aspect of the festival is articulated in the feature film *Taking Woodstock*, based on Elliot Tiber’s book by the same title. In the film, Tiber meets two hippies – a young man and a young woman who offer him LSD and invite him into their van. Tiber accepts and the three of them succumb to a promiscuous LSD trip. The film uses advanced graphics to recreate the experience of an LSD trip. The characters step into a magical wonderland with bright colors where one dimensional images become three dimensional moving objects. When they leave the van and look at the Woodstock crowd, it is an undulating blanket of people with beams of colored light projecting out of its center and into the sky.

It is images like this one that breathe life into the memory of Woodstock and draw those who were not yet born into the collective recollection of the festival.

Nick and Bobbi Ercoline

The most iconic image of the Woodstock Festival is Burk Uzzle's photograph of Nick and Bobbi Ercoline, which became a poster for the 1970 Woodstock film and the cover of the LP record and compact disc. The photograph has a significant presence on the web – according to reverse image search engine TinEye.com, the image appears on 135 websites among which are French, Danish, Japanese, Hungarian and Russian URLs.

The photograph features Nick and Bobbi Ercoline embraced under a blanket amidst a sea of people lying on the wet ground. The image is reportedly a candid snapshot of the couple who was not aware of the presence of the photographer. They did not find out about until months later when some friends of theirs brought them the album: “Five of us were sitting around and one of the guys had brought the album and we were listening to it, and we passed the cover around. And all of a sudden somebody said, ‘Whoa! There’s Herbie’s butterfly. Whoa! There’s Bobbi and Nick!’” (Evans & Kingbury, 2009, p. 156). The two of them were 20 at the time of the festival and married two years later. Contrasting the iconic status of the photo are the couple’s memories of the festival. In an interview for the *New York Daily News* Bobbi Ercoline says that what he remembers is “the rain, the lack of toilets and the body odor” (Farber, 2009). That explains why the couple was taken aback when at the 20th anniversary of the festival they found themselves in the spotlight of world media.

What one would notice from a brief glance of the photograph is that all characters – the two huddled together at the second third of the image as well as those stretched out on the ground in the foreground and in the background – all appear to be in their late teens or early twenties. That piece of visual truth conforms to what we know about the festival – it was the coming together of the young generation, the harbingers of *The Age of Aquarius*. After Woodstock, the phrase “The Woodstock Generation,” became part of the common lexicon as a reference to everyone who was in their late teens/early twenties at the time of the festival. On one hand their age conveys innocence – Woodstock became also known as “The Garden of Eden” (Lang, 2009) – a name symbolic of the innocence of the young generation. This, when Joni Mitchell wrote in the lyrics of her song *Woodstock* that “We’ve got to get ourselves back to the Garden,” the return to the Garden was the return to innocence. On the other hand, it was the generation of Aquarius that rejected the values of their parents and sought to substitute them with its own better values of peace, love and music. Referring to the reformist character of the Woodstock generation, Michael Lang wrote: “For me, Woodstock was a test of whether people of our generation really believed in one another and the world we were struggling to create. How would we do when we were in charge? Could we live as the peaceful community we envisioned? I’d hoped we could” (Lang, 2009, p. 265).

The couple that is the focal point of the photograph is clearly a heterosexual couple. It is a curious fact that the most iconic photograph of a festival remembered for turning social norms – especially those related to sex and sexuality – onto their heads, is an

image of a heterosexual couple. It is a testimony to the widely shared belief that in the battle of ideals that pitted the Woodstock Generation against the older generation of their parents, the established norms of the older generation won. And although tolerance towards homosexuality might have been a defining trait of the late 60s and the Woodstock festival, the most popular visual record is a tribute to heterosexual love. Furthermore, what is visible of their embrace conforms to traditional gender roles: he is standing upright with a blanket, draped like a mantle over his back and arms which are locked around her body. Her body, gently tilted forward succumbs to the support and warmth of his body. It is a stereotypical pose of the man as the protector who provides warmth and support for his woman.

The Woodstock couple is also a white couple. The woman is clearly white and while the man's face cannot be seen because his back is turned towards the camera, his hands reveal that the color of his skin is white. Right behind them, however, is an individual whose skin color appears darker than the color of the couple in the foreground. Be that as it may, his head is tilted forward and he is wearing a grayish hat that conceals more than half of his face. Another individual to the far left of the image also appears to be darker skinned, although he as well is looking down and his face is completely concealed from the camera. Both of the dark skinned individuals captured within the frame of the camera might have looked down for no longer than a second, yet it was the very second in which the eye of the camera snapped shut, immortalizing their head bents and thus relegating them to the status of two faceless black men in the background.

True to the stereotypical female look in the 1960s, Bobbi is sporting long, straight blond hair that can be seen unfurling along her back until it reaches the hands of her lover. His hair is dark, short and wavy; not tightly trimmed yet a lot shorter than the hair length with which men of the counter culture came to be associated.

The overall atmosphere of the photograph appears to be serene. The light and the figures laying on the ground under blankets or in sleeping bags suggest that it is early morning. Those who are awake – most of them sitting – are looking at something outside and to the left of the frame of camera. The only face that is turned towards the camera is that of Bobbi. The viewer, however, can only see the upper half of it since her head is nestled in Nick's shoulder. The expression of her face is not clear since she is also wearing red glasses. Huddled as she is, however, in the arms of her male protector, she looks peaceful. It is this peacefulness that emanates not only from the two lovers' embrace but also from the scene around them that, according to Nick was one of the reasons why the photo was chosen for the cover of the album: "It's peaceful, which is what the event was about," he says. "And it's an honest representation of a generation. When we look at that photo I don't see Bobbi and me. I see our generation" (Farber, 2009).

While the primary marker of the theme of peacefulness that the photograph communicates is an embrace of a heterosexual couple that falls neatly within representational conventions, it is not the only carrier of that idea. The peaceful atmosphere is conveyed through the expression of the other festival goers around them.

From a first glance, it is hard to say that the setting of this image is rock music festival; there are no signifiers within the image to suggest that. According to Bobbi, the two of them were so far from the main stage that they could barely see or hear the music, all they saw was an orange haze from the glowing lights on the stage. A young man, lying right next to Bobbi and Nick's feet, is sleeping and so are a couple of others strewn across the landscape of the image. Those who are awake are either sitting and looking in the direction where the stage probably is or talking to their friends in a relaxed manner. One would more likely guess that this is a slumber party out in the open than the crowd at a rock concert. The scene therefore captures a pastoral peacefulness for which Woodstock was remembered: a kind of peacefulness that "never happened again" at a rock concert according to ABC reporter Greg Jackson (Kopple, 2009).

The uniqueness of Woodstock in that respect is often brought out in contrast to Altamont – the concert that took place the following year and which was anticipated as "Woodstock West." During the one day of the concert, Hells Angels' Alan Passaro killed eighteen-year-old Meredith Hunter after the latter pulled a revolver on Passaro.

Describing the general atmosphere at Altamont, Todd Gitlin (1987) writes:

But by the time I left in the late afternoon, Altamont already felt like death. Let it sound mystical, I wasn't the only one who felt oppressed by the general ambience; a leading Berkeley activist told me he had dropped acid at Altamont and had received the insight that "everyone was dead."

...

Afterward everyone was appalled and filled with righteous indignation. But exactly who or what was at fault? On a practical place, there were movie rights squabbles; greed had played its part in preventing adequate

preparations. But the effect was to burst the bubble of youth culture's illusions about itself. (pp. 406 – 407)

In contrast to the scene Gitlin describes is the image of Bobbi and Nick's quiet embrace in the midst of a mellow crowd; this is what "three days of peace and music" look like.

The scene is made all the more ethereal by "Herbie's butterfly," positioned on the first third of the frame. It is a kite-like butterfly that seems to be made of the same translucent material of which kites are made. It is attached to the end of a long wood stick that is protruding from a plastic bag. The colors of the butterfly are dark orange, green, and yellow, and it stands out from the rest of the composition because of the way the morning light shines through it. From interviews with Bobbi and Nick we know that it belongs to a person named Herbie to whom Bobbi and Nick "latched that day because he was having a very bad experience. He was tripping pretty heavily and he had lost his friends" (Farber, 2009). The photograph, however, does not suggest that the butterfly belongs to anyone. It works as a synecdoche: it suggests the presence of a child at the scene. The butterfly is a further testimony of the innocence of the scene. If Woodstock is the Garden of Eden, the sacred ground of the innocent, Herbie's butterfly stands as its flag, a signifier of the colorful mindscapes inhabited by those at the festival. Its life of transformation is synonymous with the transformative quality for which the Woodstock experience has come to be remembered. According to Udo's (1994) *Continuum Encyclopedia of Symbols*,

... even in antiquity the butterfly was a symbol of the soul, which cannot be destroyed by physical death (its Greek name is *psyché*); in later times though, the butterfly's pleasant nature, its flighty, wandering character, and its relation to Eros, the God of love, were emphasized. – In Christian symbolism the butterfly is sometimes a symbol of resurrection and immortality, but also a symbol of empty vanity and nothingness, due to its short lifespan and ephemeral beauty. – In the psychoanalytical interpretation of dreams, the butterfly is sometimes encountered as a symbol of liberation and new beginning. (p. 50)

What is common across the different interpretations is the meta-theme of deep transformation and renewal. The butterfly is therefore a symbol of the liberation from the values of the older generation and the advent of the *Age of Aquarius*. It holds the promise and hope for a brighter future built on the communal values embraced at the festival. From the interview we learn that it belongs to a person – Herbie – who was having a bad trip and who had lost his friends which was why Bobbi and Nick “latched” onto him. In other words, the reason the three of them appear in this configuration within the frame of the image is because Bobbi and Nick cared about Herbie and his wellbeing at the festival. Thus, to those privy of this detail, the butterfly is a signifier of the care of one human being for another. It stands as a proof that human beings do not always act propelled by their narrow self-interest as the liberal economics canon of mainstream America preached; it stands for the compassion and our ability to extend ourselves and empathize with those outside of our immediate circle of friends and relatives.

A prop that further reinforces the peaceful and quiet feel of the setting is the blanket covering Nick's back and part of Bobbi's body. It is the kind of blanket that one would expect to find in any middle class American home: patterned with small pink and brown

blossoms on a white background and a wide pink stripe along all four edges. The lower part of it is soiled with mud from the heavy rains during the festival. On a more abstract level, a blanket signifies warmth and comfort. This specific blanket, however, looks like a common household item that we would find in an average American home or in the local mall. It looks as American as a white picket fence or an apple pie. Wrapped around the bodies of Nick and Bobbi, it sends a clear message to the viewer: these are not some West Coast hippies from Wavy Gravy's commune; these are *our* kids. They are warm and comfortable because a piece of the very America against which the festival proclaimed itself is draped on them. From this perspective, the image also works on a metaphoric level: the subversive values and lifestyle for which the festival came to be known were born and lived under the mantle (blanket) of the mainstream culture they sought to reject.

Perhaps the strongest signifier indicating that the two youngsters in the foreground of the image identify themselves with the counterculture of the 1960s are the red sunglasses on Bobbi's face. It is a curious fact that Bobbi is wearing sunglasses given that it is clear from the image that the sky was cloudy at the time and the photo appears to have been taken early in the morning. It suggests that Bobbi was wearing the sunglasses more as an accessory than a necessity. As a signifier, the sunglasses call up the memory of John Lennon since they strongly resemble Lennon's signature sunglasses. This specific style of sunglasses was cemented as a counter culture item with the poster of the 2000 film *Almost Famous*. It features a close-up of Kate Hudson, who plays a rock band

groupie, wearing the same round, thin-rimmed sunglasses with which Lennon became synonymous. In 2006, the same style of sunglasses was featured on the poster and DVD cover of the film *The U.S. vs. John Lennon*. That poster makes an even more direct reference to the counter culture since the sunglasses are positioned on the folded fingers of a hand that waves the peace sign and on their reflective surface one can clearly recognize the American flag.

Bobbi's sunglasses are therefore signifiers of what was "cool" and "hip" in the 1960s, endowing those qualities to her and informing the viewer that that is who she likes to be seen as.

What could also indicate that the scene in Uzzle's iconic photograph captures a moment of the young counter culture movement is a red bandana on the head of one of festival goers in the far right of the frame. In the United States and in Western Europe the red bandana is an old symbol of the labor movement. Huber (2006) writes that "such neckerchiefs have long served as a form of protection for railroad men, miners, roughnecks, cowboys, loggers, and other American workingmen" (p. 195). That interpretation is corroborated by what we know about the counter culture's attitude towards communism.

Forty years later the Ercolines huddled together again under a blanket to commemorate the anniversary of Woodstock and the iconic image. The photograph is a vertical portrait of the two of them that reveals very little of their surroundings. They are

standing on a bright green lawn which one would guess is right around their house. The lawn borders an asphalt road – a further confirmation that they are not in the Garden. In the place of the muddied blanket from the original photograph, is a spotless upscale white comforter. They are both sixty and their hair is trimmed short. Instead of the red hip sunglasses, Bobbi is wearing spectacles. The overall message of the second photo is that moment lives on: the two of them are still together and their love, immortalized by the original image, has withstood the test of time. But *how* does the moment live on?

On one hand, the image of Bobbi and Nick's enduring relationship signifies the enduring legacy of the festival – a potent symbol of love captured at the festival continues its existence 40 years on.

On the other hand, although the second image communicated by asking the viewer to remember the original photograph, it also carries with it new information. There are no signs in the 2009 photo that relate the couple to Woodstock or the values and lifestyle for which Woodstock has become symbolic. The only prop on which a judgment about their lifestyle could be made is the comforter around them, which seems to be a highly priced item or, at the very least, more expensive than the one in the original photograph. Juxtaposing the two images together, as many articles published on the 40th anniversary of the event did, it becomes clear that although their love captured in that wet morning in August of 1969 may live on, the cultural moment of ferment, of communal idealism, remains only within the bounds of the original image. Somewhere along the forty-year line between 1969 and 2009, the momentum of the Woodstock Generation dissipated and

dissolved into the very main stream culture that it aimed to eschew. Thus, while the older image captures the idealism and hope of the young generation, the 2009 photo is a testimony of a return not to the Garden but to normalcy and the resumption of life as usual.

On Top of the Volkswagen Bus

Another iconic image of the Woodstock festival shows a man and a woman sitting on top of a Volkswagen bus. The image is an Associated Press photograph taken on August 1st, 1969 – about two weeks before the start of the festival and published on August 12th. According to reverse search engine TinEye.com, the image can be found on 19 websites on the Internet. One of its most recent publications was along with a report on a Pew Research Center study which found that the generation gap in the 1960s, “glorified and exacerbated” by the festival was more pronounced than the generation gap measured in 2009 (Morin & Taylor, 2009).

In the photograph, Ricky Peters and Trudy Morgul sit atop a bus named “Light” painted by Bob Hieronimus – an artist and a muralist. The bus was named after the band “Light” since it was owned and commissioned by Bob Grimm – one of its members. Discussing his now famous artcars, of which the Woodstock Volkswagen is an example, he writes on his website: “My purpose for painting vehicles was to develop movable ‘billboards’ carrying certain teachings linked to the ageless wisdom teachings, or the

perennial philosophy” (Hieronimus). The Woodstock bus was painted a year before the festival, thus ruling out the possibility that the artist created the design with the festival in mind. Referring to the status of the bus as a Woodstock icon, Hieronimus says that “it is interesting that the symbols I painted on this bus (or moving billboard) were very much in harmony with the theme of this powerful event” (Hieronimus).

Peters and Morgul are both in their early 20s which, similar to the photograph of the Ercolines, indicates that they both belong to the “Woodstock generation.” He is staring intently at the camera, she is biting her lower lip while gazing at the distance. Both of them are white and slim. Her hair appears to be short and light colored and neatly combed; his hair is a light color as well but it is disheveled and it goes down to the top of his neck. She is wearing a sleeveless shirt, another one casually rested on her shoulders. He is wearing a denim jacket with seemingly nothing underneath, his bare chest clearly visible before the eye of the camera. The gender configuration between the two captured by the image subtly conforms to stereotypes for masculinity and femininity: he is not embarrassed to bare his chest in front of the camera, she is daintily holding a white umbrella, resting its stem on her shoulder. She seems gently withdrawn, looking away as if shy to stare back at the camera. His eyes, on the other hand are unabashedly, almost menacingly fixated on the camera.

Gender is articulated also through the manner in which both of them are sitting on top of the bus. His body is slightly bent forward and fully facing the camera, both of his legs are stretched out in front of him. She is slightly turned sideways and tilted backward,

seemingly supporting herself with her right arm which is not visible in the photo. Her right leg is neatly tucked under her left leg in a way that reinforces the impression of coyness and withholding. With her left hand she is holding a white umbrella propped on her right shoulder. The umbrella and the way she carries it is reminiscent of renaissance paintings (ex., Robert Reid's *The White Parasol*, Claude Monet's *Woman With a Parasol*) thus giving the scene a dreamy feel. Both Peters and Morgul are barefoot, which is an indication to the viewer that they are both hippies.

The two of them are positioned on the top third of the vertical portrait. In the lower two thirds of it is the Volkswagen bus. The microbus was introduced in the United States in the 1950s and over the following decade became a favorite mode of transportation for hippies and an icon of the American counter culture movement (History.com). This photograph, however, made Hieronimus's "Light" bus synonymous with the Woodstock festival, some even calling it the Woodstock bus.

Each side of the bus tells a different story through esoteric and mythical symbols and motifs. The succinct version of story inscribed into the front of the bus – the only part of the bus visible in the photo – is that "As we enter the age of Aquarius humanity will once again become conscious of the builders and hierarchies of the universe by aligning themselves with the divine plan through cosmic vibration" (Hieronimus).

At the center of Hieronimus's intricate composition is an astrological wheel with seven planets around its rim and an encircled heart at the wheel's center. Each planet is

depicted with its astrological symbol. At the top of the wheel is the Sun, which represents the ego or the higher self. Counter clockwise after the Sun comes Saturn – planet of karma, structures, practicality and limitations. After Saturn is Jupiter – planet of expansion and growth, followed by Venus – planet of harmony, beauty and balance. Next is Mars – associated with one’s energy, strength and ambition. Following Mars is Mercury – planet of mentality, rationality and communication. Between Mercury and the Sun is the Moon which is interpreted as the emotional self, the unconscious and moods. The seven planets are also known as “classical” planets since they are visible with the naked eye and thus were known to ancient astrologers before the advent of the telescope. They are also known as personal planets since they are believed to represent the basic elements that comprise an individual (Lewis, 1994). The heart at the center of the circle, according to Hieronimus represents Love – “the cohesive force of the universe” (Hieronimus). The photo thus associates hippies and the counterculture of which the bus is a sign with astrology and its view of the human being. The astrological motif also signifies the iconoclastic streak of the counterculture since the Roman Catholic Church, revered by a majority of Americans at the time has rejected astrology since the Middle Ages.

Closely surrounding the astrological wheel is Ouroboros – the serpent that bites its own tail. The origin of Ouroboros as a symbol has been traced to the Egyptian pyramids where it has been interpreted as the regeneration and continuity of the universe. Despite its Egyptian roots, Ouroboros is considered a Gnostic symbol of eternity and the cycles of

time. The Gnostic Society defines Gnosticism as “the teaching based on Gnosis, the knowledge of transcendence arrived at by way of interior, intuitive means” (The Gnosis Archive). Therefore, as a signifier, Ouroboros works on a couple of levels: it calls up the idea of eternal recurrence and of Gnosticism and the personal religious experience. These two signifieds attach themselves to the 60s counterculture since Ouroboros features on the front of the hippie bus. The symbol could be interpreted on a metaphorical level as well: youth of the 1960s counterculture aimed to reject the ascetic teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, prescribing instead trust in the individual religious experience.

Ouroboros bites its tail right above the Sun in the astrological wheel and right under a Sun cross, also known as the Celtic Cross. The Sun cross is a pagan symbol signifying the four seasons or the four elements – air, water, earth, fire. It is also known as a symbol of Gnosticism thus echoing Ouroboros’s theme of cyclicity. The Sun Cross is also the astronomical symbol for the Earth, thus working as a signifier of the counterculture’s relationship to the Earth. Many counterculture environmentalists, and hippies in particular, eschewed technological innovation in favor of a more “down to Earth,” environmentally friendly lifestyle.

The Sun Cross is depicted at the center of a pair of wings. According to Hieronimus, the wings are intended to symbolize the spirit. They are one of two the symbols on the front of the bus that hold significance for Christianity. The depiction is similar to that of the wings of angels in Christian iconography, although in configuration

with the rest of the symbols on the Volkswagen, the Christian connotation is replaced by a more inclusive pagan interpretation.

To the right of the astrological wheel is depicted a fish with its mouth open, seemingly devouring a wavelike substance. According to Hieronimus's interpretation, the fish is "swallowing cosmic vibrations from the urn of an unseen Aquarius, a symbol for first 10 degrees of Aquarius, "Piscis Austrailius" meaning the dissemination of spiritual teachings (waters from Aquarius) given to the multitudes (fish) assuring regeneration or a rebirth of soul consciousness" (The Gnosis Archive). Heronimus's depiction borrows from the popular representation of Piscis Australis or "The Southern Fish" – a small constellation south of Aquarius. It is considered to be an incarnation of the Greek goddess Aphrodite (Venus) and is usually depicted drinking the water from the urn of Aquarius (Kippax, 1919).

From the left side of the astrological wheel is protruding a hand holding an Egyptian sistrum. The sistrum is a music instrument that has been depicted in ancient Egyptian art. It is associated with Hathor – the goddess of dance, music and personal love. According to Applegate's (2000) *Egyptian Book of Life*,

Not only does the sistrum produce a melodic sound but the ankh shape of the sistrum implies a "life" enhancing quality to the instrument. Possibly this has to do with the generation of *qi* [the life-force] that may be a by-product of hand shaking as well as the purification of the environment by its resulting sound. (p. 43)

On the front of the Woodstock bus, sistrum stands as a signifier of the popular counterculture expression “good vibes.” The notion of “good vibes” was central to the 60s counterculture which, according to Tipton (1982) acted on the principle that “everybody should always do that act which will produce the greatest amount of love and awareness for all beings – the most good vibes” (p. 15).

Underneath the entire composition on the front of the Volkswagen bus is a UFO, which Hieronimus interprets as “extraterrestrials, inner-terrestrials, inner dimensionals and spiritual hierarchies of the universe.” Apart from signifying belief in extraterrestrial life, the UFO also marks a lack of allegiance to a single master-narrative. As the above interpretation indicates, the symbols on the front of the microbus have been borrowed from a variety of traditions – astrology, Gnosticism, Christianity, and paganism. The UFO at the bottom of the composition adds to the impression of intermingling systems of meaning from which the individual symbols have been derived.

Bathing Image

Another popular Woodstock photograph that appears on the inside of the record sleeve as well as the CD is Charles Harbutt’s of two individuals bathing. It captures a moment of the now famous “skinny dipping” at the pond of Max Yasgur’s farm. The gender of the two individuals is not clear from the photograph. They could be a male and a female or two males. The camera captures them in profile, their backs slightly turned

towards the viewer, their faces turned in the opposite direction from the camera. The water reaches almost to the waist of the individual to the right and it is clear that he is not wearing any clothes. His left arm is stretched out so that the individual to the left can hold it to support himself/herself while examining his/her foot. From what we can see from the individual to the left, it appears that he/she is not wearing any clothes either. The nakedness of the two individuals in the water bears connotations of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the original sin was committed. It reinforces the representation of Woodstock as “the Garden” where people run free under the reign of innocence, oblivious to the world outside. The photo is a visual proof of the disillusionment of festival goers with another social norm: that people should feel embarrassed by their naked bodies in public. The image is therefore symbolic of the association of Woodstock with the creation of an alternative lifestyle, with the aspirations of the new generation to dispense with the social norms and rules inherited from their parents and live by those social norms and rules they themselves created.

It is an icon of the young generation’s endorsement of sex, or “free love,” at a time when the sexual revolution was only starting to gather momentum. The setting oozes with intimacy partly due to the way the camera positions the viewer: the maple tree branches running along the sides of the frame suggest that the photographer is peeking from between the trees on the bank of the pond. The audience is thus given a voyeuristic glimpse into a performance that must have come as fuel for the ongoing sexual revolution. In this chain of signification the role of the photographer as the purveyor of

meaning (Kristeva's horizontal axis) is indispensable. This image, printed on the LP sleeve and CD album, which would embed itself in the memory schemata of the viewer, was a single instant sought out and captured by the photographer. To the extent that this image along with the image of the Ercolines and the Woodstock bus become established as the dominant collective memory framework, the individual memory is ignored, "touched up" or subsumed into the icon. In this process the photographer has a central role. He/she is an author (in Kristeva's sense of the term) that provides a text (the photograph) upon which future texts and future readings depend.

Woodstock Images in Perspective

When considering the role of images in the collective memory of Woodstock, it is important to note that images of the original event have found their counterpart in images from anniversaries of the festival. Some of the most conspicuous similarities have been observed between photographs from Woodstock '69 and the 2008 Woodstock in Kostrzyn, Poland. A Getty Image blog has reported on the similarities of images from Woodstock 1969 and the Polish Woodstock in 2008. One of two sets of juxtaposed images appears within the first page of results from a Google image search with key terms "Polish Woodstock." In one set is a *Life Magazine* image titled "Wade in the Water, Children" which shows a man and a woman, both seemingly naked, sitting in the foam of what seems to be a small cascade waterfall. Right above that image is a 2008

photo of two couples lying in a large puddle. In the second set of images a black and white photo from Woodstock 1969 of a woman seemingly swaying to the music is positioned right next to a color photograph from Kostrzyn of a woman dancing in a similarly entranced fashion. The Kostrzyn photographs are clearly referents of the earlier Woodstock images, and the way the blog juxtaposes them suggests an intent to draw parallels between the two photographs and, by implication, between the two events. Yet, some differences between the images should be noted. The couple in the image titled “Wade in the Water, Children” is naked. As a signifier, the word “children” calls up associations of innocence – one of the defining traits of Woodstock 1969. The theme of innocence is reverberated by the couple’s nakedness. The two of them could be Adam and Eve sitting under a cascade in “the Garden” as Woodstock came to be known. By comparison, the couples in the image from the Polish Woodstock are only partially naked. Next to the naked innocence of the 1969 image, their clothes become symbols of the absence of innocence. Yet, from what we know about the relationship between signifier and signified, we could conclude that the signified innocence associated with the first image attaches itself to the second image.

What also becomes clear from the juxtaposition of the two sets of images is the reenactment in the Kostrzyn festival of motifs from the original festival, specifically motifs captured in images. This observation echoes Huxford’s observation that “news images [are] taken up, adapted, lived. They [are] articulated into cultural performances that associate them with other, older rituals” (Coonfield & Huxford, p. 474).

A reenactment of moments from the original festival is also evidenced by an image from Woodstock 1994 of people lounging in a large puddle. After three days of heavy rains, the festival ended with some festival goers sliding in the mud – an episode enshrined in the 2009 film *Taking Woodstock*. At the center of the photograph is a man, sitting in a broken sun bed and waving the peace sign at the camera, seemingly enjoying himself. To his right are a woman and a child who seem to be playing in the mud. To his left are two figures wading in the puddle. What one would also notice in this image, however, are plastic bottles of soft drinks in the lower right corner of the photograph. While the mud obscures any identification with a specific brand, the shape of bottles can be associated with that of soft drinks such as Coca Cola and Pepsi. As a synecdoche, therefore, the bottles stand for the brands and corporations behind them. Thus, while the image asks the viewer to remember Woodstock 1969 and the range of associations of which it is a symbol, it also points towards the corporate involvement reported at the festival.

Another image of Woodstock '94 that was selected for fulfilling the second criterion of selection – it features a sign of the commercial character of the festival – is that of three young women waving the peace sign at the camera. One of the women is holding a bottle with the barcode turned towards the camera. Similarly to the previous image, the bottle works as synecdoche for a manufacturer, signifying a commercial presence at the festival. What is interesting about this specific image is that it reads as an ad. The woman at the center of the photograph holds the bottle with the barcode towards

the camera in one hand and waves the peace sign with the other. Visually and symbolically, it bridges the two narratives: Woodstock as a festival of peace and music and Woodstock as a marketing event. Yet, as it was mentioned earlier in this thesis, Woodstock 1969 became symbolic of peace, of a communal spirit of sharing and equality that is antithetical to the corporate culture of which a barcode is a symbol. Thus, while these two contradictory themes were present at Woodstock 1994, the photograph provides them with an explicit articulation, freezes the moment and places it on the web where it is available for viewing to a wide audience.

Similar parallels can be found between an image of Woodstock 1969 and the 1999 anniversary. The first image fetched by a Google search on “Woodstock 1999” which fulfills first and second criteria for image selection is of a shirtless young man lying in a puddle strewn with empty plastic bottles of Coca Cola, Sprite, mineral water, and a converse shoe. Similar to the 1994 photograph of mud sliding, the 1999 photograph is a tribute to the “moment of muddy grace” with which the original festival came to be associated. The moment captured by the 1999 photograph is similar to the one from the Polish Woodstock of two couples lying in the mud. Both photographs are evidence of the ritualistic repetition of motifs from the original festival in later festivals. They work as signifiers asking the viewer to remember the joyous mud sliding during the three days in August of 1969.

While capturing the recreation of a performance from the original festival, however, the 1999 image also brings with it new information. Read as metonymic signs, all the

plastic bottles bearing the labels of Coca Cola, Sprite, Gatorade, etc. stand for the corporations that were heavily involved into the 1999 festival. Symbolically, the brands and the corporations behind them represent capitalism, the free market spirit of competition, and profit seeking. Thus, while the 1999 image recreates a moment from the original festival, it also negates it since it points to the presence of that culture of competition and self-interest which the original festival sought to eschew.

What also becomes clear from the images in perspective is the establishment of the photographic template or the intertextuality among images from the Woodstock festival and anniversaries. The 1999 image of a man lounging in a puddle strewn with garbage, the 1994 image of mud sliding and the 2008 Kostrzyn image are all referents to 1969 images, specifically, the bathing image and “Wade in the Water, Children.” If the photographers sought to repeat the template of the original festival, the resulting images turned out to be vastly different: while the 1969 photographs appear to give a sympathetic and at times voyeuristic look into the festival, the 1994 and 1999 images seem progressively dismissive.

With the rioting image, the template dissolves. The photograph is taken from afar and the faces of individuals in the image are not distinguishable. What is distinguishable is that they are throwing large objects, presumably props from the staging of the festival, into a bonfire surrounded by a seemingly cheering crowd. Similarly to the Ercolines image, the rioting image is a look at a generation unaware that it is being observed. In contrast to the themes of innocence and peace imbued in the 1969 photograph, however,

the 1999 image is a portrait of rage thus denoting a fundamental break with the original festival.

That while “Woodstock [1994] retained some of the aura of the aura surrounding the 1969 event, despite its entanglement with the corporate rock, the 1999 festival was almost totally free from the idealism of 1969,” (Laing, 2004, p. 3) becomes clear also from the theme of the photographs. As it was mentioned earlier, six of the 13 photographs within the first page of results of Google images of Woodstock 1994 were photographs depicting the mud sliding. Three of the 15 photographs from Woodstock 1999 depict a seemingly the same scene of rioting.

Last but not least, the first page of Google image results for a search with key words “Woodstock 1969” was examined for photographs satisfying the first criterion of selection – presence of a sign of commercial culture at the festival but no photographs were deemed to satisfy that criterion.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The Woodstock festival has been described as a “symbolic resource, a way of thinking about the ‘good life’” (Street, 2004, p. 33). Its popularity persists not only among those who lived it but also among those who were not born yet. Given its prominence, the present thesis sought to examine how the collective memory of the festival is preserved in iconic and popular images from Woodstock 1969 and its anniversaries.

Previous investigations into the role of photographs in the collective memory of popular events have found that popular photographs of societal events become “lived” images – not simply viewed and interpreted but also appropriated. On another level, they become templates against which images of similar events come to be read.

The theoretical backbone of the present study is Halbwachs’s (1992) theory of collective memory. Collective memory, according to Halbwachs, uses the instruments of “collective frameworks ... to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord in each epoch with the predominant thoughts of society” (p. 40).

The 1969 images analyzed in this study are freeze frames of the 1960s. Woodstock has become the condensation symbol of that tumultuous decade and iconic photographs

documenting the event capture that symbolism within a single frame that is reprinted at anniversaries and strewn across the internet.

The three photographs from the original festival are icons forming the template against which photographs from later festivals can be understood and read. This is particularly true for the production side of the process where photographers seem to seek to repeat the photographic template of the 1969 festival.

Juxtaposition with photographs from later versions of the festival suggests that the tropes of the original festival are being ritualistically repeated in subsequent anniversaries. In that sense the Kostrzyn photographs emerge as a validation of Huxford and Coonfield's (2009) notion of popular images as "lived" images: they are not simply seen and interpreted but also appropriated in a way that they become cues for performance at following festivals.

Yet, as Laing (2004) notes, "if Woodstock [1994] retained some of the aura surrounding the 1969 event, despite its entanglement with the corporate rock, the 1999 festival was almost totally free from the idealism of 1969" (p. 3). Google images of 1994 and 1999 reflect the progressing commercialization of the festival: while images from Woodstock 1994 contain a clear reference to the mud sliding at the original festival, that is less true of images from the 1999 festival which document the rioting and corporate involvement.

To the extent that these images “reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord in each epoch, with the dominant thoughts of society,” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 40) the individual memory, none of which is represented, is ignored. This is particularly important in light of Street’s (2004) finding that Woodstock exists as a symbolic resource for thinking about the good life. As Woodstock becomes more commercialized and evolves into a brand, the individual memory is further pushed into oblivion.

One of the limitations of the present study is its narrow focus on iconic photographs from Woodstock 1969. A more expanded analysis would also include photographs from *Life Magazine* published in the 1969 *Life Magazine* Special Edition dedicated to Woodstock which also appear online on Life Magazine’s website.

Furthermore, the conclusions of the present thesis are informed by a semiological analysis of photographs. To establish the extent to which these conclusions reverberate with the audience’s response to the images would require projective interviews that aim to elicit the meaning and memories people associate with them.

Another avenue for future research would be ethnographic studies of festival goers – not only in the United States but also in countries that adopt the Woodstock formula – that would span over the course of subsequent festivals and aim to find out the meaning the current generation assigns to it.

APPENDIX

IMAGE CITATIONS

Image 1.

Loster, R. (Photographer). (1994). *Mud Family* [Photograph], Retrieved from:
<http://cosmikdebris.com/Quickstart/ImageLib/WSIIB.jpg>

Image 2.

[Untitled photograph of Kristina McGinnis and friends at Woodstock 1994]. Retrieved from:
<http://www.woodstockstory.com/images/gallery/w/700/532.jpg>

Image 3.

[Untitled photograph of a man at Woodstock 1999]. Retrieved from:
http://z.about.com/d/classicrock/1/0/F/G/woodstock_99_pd.jpg

Image 4.

[Untitled photograph of rioting at Woodstock 1999]. Retrieved from:
http://media.photobucket.com/image/woodstock%201999/nick_dagan/woodstock_1999-1.jpg

Image 5. (top)

Heimann, T. (Photographer). (2008). *Young festival visitors enjoy a bath* [Photograph], Retrieved from:
<http://blog.gettyimages.com/2008/08/02/woodstock-east/>

Image 5. (bottom)

Eppridge, B. (Photographer). (1969). *Wade in the water, children* [Photograph], Retrieved from:
<http://blog.gettyimages.com/2008/08/02/woodstock-east/>

Image 6. (left)

Gallup, S. (Photographer). (2008). Woodstock festival [Photograph], Retrieved from:
<http://blog.gettyimages.com/2008/08/02/woodstock-east/>

Image 6. (right)

Three Lions/Stringer. (Photographer). (1969). Woodstock festival [Photograph], Retrieved from:

<http://blog.gettyimages.com/2008/08/02/woodstock-east/>

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