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Radical Scavenging Revisited

Emile de Antonio and the Culture Jamming of Compilation Film

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The Bill of Rights was written with a quill pen and beauti-
fully, so that every word of it needs to be made operational
today. More views, more access, more community control,
less corporate profit. One specific need: a national elec-
tronic archive where nothing is thrown away because it costs
money to store it (our history), whose retrieval and indexing
systems are electronic and instant, where everything is made
available for us for use, free.
—Emile de Antonio (1971)

Emile de Antonio made his case for a "national electronic archive," which
could be accessed and used for free, in the early 1970s. At this historical
moment, the importance of the legacy of television as an audiovisual
archive with national significance was not widely recognized. De Anto-
nio was considered to be a radical documentary *film*maker, yet much of
the material for his compilation films had come from television archives,
such as the footage of the Army-McCarthy hearings that formed the
basis for the widely acclaimed, critical investigation of Senator Joseph
McCarthy in *Point of Order* (1964).[1] De Antonio was keenly aware of
a shift taking place in American culture, which linked the aspiration
of gaining political power with the process of image-making. Televi-
sion as an institution was crucial in this development. Aesthetically,
TV once seemed to be of little interest, but it was amassing an audio-
visual archive of contemporary life that de Antonio considered to be
invaluable. However, as he pointed out, the networks were discard-
ing this footage because it was too costly to store. In contrast to their

practice of destroying "the raw history of our country, and our world and our times" (Firestone 2000, 257), de Antonio's vision of a "national electronic archive" called for a democratic notion of access and use: It was the dream of the compilation artist hoping to draw on any material available to create alternative interpretations of the country's history.

One might argue that de Antonio's vision was realized with the advent of the Internet and websites such as YouTube or Flickr. Mark Dery (1993), in his influential essay on culture jamming, mentioned the promises of the Internet for less passive and more interactive modes of communication, and since the early 1990s the Internet has indeed grown into an incredibly rich field of exchange, making available a vast array of audiovisual images, clips, and files. Yet, arguably, it has not turned into the democratic and noncommercial space of access and use that de Antonio had envisioned. My focus in this essay will lie on compilation films from the predigital era. In the realm of moving images, the re-editing and recompiling of archival or "found" footage can be seen as the primary form of using material in a deconstructive and mocking spirit that has come to be called "culture jamming." I argue that the history of compilation films represents an important reference point for the emergence of culture jamming in the late twentieth century. In particular, the 1960s and 1970s marked an influential stage in the transition toward a critical as well as a playful practice of working with archival footage.

My case in point will be *Millhouse: A White Comedy*, Emile de Antonio's satirical attack on Richard M. Nixon from 1971, which is a prime example of an aesthetic practice of "radical scavenging" that de Antonio championed in his work—"revisiting existing footage to construct out of it an alternative and maybe even directly oppositional narrative from that which it inherently possesses" (Bruzzi 2000, 24). De Antonio assembled audiovisual material from different (legal and illegal) sources documenting Richard M. Nixon's political career, and he rearranged it to playfully undermine the documentary genre of the political biography as well as to damage the public image of the president as the most important representative of the political establishment. Practicing culture jamming *avant la lettre*, de Antonio established a mode of using preexisting footage that combined a critical reexamination of the dominant meanings and ideologies encoded in the material with the playfulness of comic effects to create a unique convergence of documentary representation and media activism.

On the History of Assembling "Found Footage"

The practice of re-editing existing footage goes back to the earliest days of cinema, when exhibitors in nickelodeons would change the order of films to be shown or assemble the most exciting and spectacular scenes from a film.[2] In the political and aesthetic modernist avant-garde movements in Europe or North America, this practice was likewise employed, albeit to different ends. Some filmmakers were interested in bringing out new and hitherto undetected formal qualities; others used the footage from newsreels and other sources to make political arguments (Arthur 1999). The Second World War was instrumental in professionalizing the rhetorical uses of found, stock, or captured footage as "semiotic attack" and propaganda. Fascist leaders, most notably Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, were ridiculed in films by Len Lye and Alberto Cavalcanti, who re-edited captured enemy films; on the other side of the Atlantic, Frank Capra supervised the *Why We Fight* series—seven films drawing on all kinds of sources including Hollywood fiction films and explaining (as well as promoting) US reasons for entering and fighting the war. Jay Leyda's (1964) seminal study *Films Beget Films*, in particular his comprehensive filmography, underlines the rich and complex pre-1960s history of assemblage and compilation films, which here can be mentioned only in passing.

In its most basic form, the making of compilation films, videos, or digital files consists of two phases. First, the maker gathers existing footage from fiction, nonfiction, industrial, governmental and science films, or from television coverage, newsreels, art projects, web cams, home movies, and various other sources. Then he or she takes it apart and reassembles individual scenes, images, sequences, and sounds to create a new audiovisual object. The unity and wholeness of pre-existing footage is thus destroyed, and from this act of creative—sometimes joyful, sometimes aggressive—destruction, or "surgical operation" (de Greef 1992, 81), emerges a new object of meaning. The compilation aesthetic, more than anything else, acknowledges that the crucial stage of creating audiovisual meaning lies in the process of assembling individual fragments into a larger whole and thus in the practice of selecting fragments and editing them into a network of relationships.

As many authors have pointed out, the new object emerging from this act of creative destruction—or as William C. Wees (1992) puts it, from

this assemblage of "visual quotations that have been ripped out of context" (47)—may have various functions.[3] In mainstream television reportage, using archival footage usually serves to illustrate what the verbal logic (in voice-over narration) establishes as the dominant interpretation of visual historical or political events. In more experimental works, the process of re-editing existing footage inevitably includes reflecting about the origins and status of this footage. In Bruce Conner's (1958) *A Movie*, for example, old Hollywood films (among many other sources) are playfully reassembled to highlight the conventions of fictional storytelling and continuity editing by combining chase scenes from different genres. The new film, then, not only creates humorous and surprising juxtapositions of shots that play with audience expectations; at a more abstract level, its deconstructive form also invites a reflection on the prevailing norms of storytelling and entertainment. For works of nonfiction, this critical function of interrogating the "essence" of the archival or found footage—in particular its mode of production, institutional context, style, and rhetorical claims—is an important element of compilations. Reflexivity implies that a new assemblage may investigate the "embedded ideology in extant materials" (Arthur 1999, 62) and, as William C. Wees (1992) has argued, this suggests that compilation films have the potential "to critique, challenge, and possibly subvert the power invested in images produced by, and distributed through, the corporate media" (39).[4]

The desire for, and delight in, playfully taking existing aesthetic objects apart to use them for a "semiotic attack" has characterized the history of compilation movements from both the formal and the political avant-garde. Many of its artists and activists—in movements such as Surrealism or Dada—may be seen as culture jammers *avant la lettre*, who, as Carrie Lambert-Beatty (2010) writes, "combine incisive ideological critique with distinctly playful action" (101). They often created their work from a culturally marginalized, nonindustrial "outsider" position, giving expression to an oppositional or subcultural point of view. And they shared, indeed in many cases shaped, the antiauthoritarian stance of rewriting and redefining official mainstream symbols against the dominant culture. Willem de Greef (1992) aptly summarizes the pleasure of dehierarchizing the process of media communication: "By abandoning the original hierarchies between images, an originally intended meaning can be subordinated by a derived, opposed or hidden logic; implicit

meanings and dimensions can be brought to the forefront: Found footage celebrates the triumph of the illogical, of libido and anarchy" (79).

In terms of its artistic strategies, subcultural practices, and political functions, the long history of compilation film (particularly since the 1950s) can be seen as an important phase in the historical development of culture jamming. And yet, the story of the compilation genre's potential to challenge powerful media institutions and their ability to shape the public sphere aesthetically and ideologically is more complicated. The growing number of compilation films, particularly in the field of documentary, has managed to cast doubt on the evidentiary status of sounds and images. It has made the notion of audiovisual history more complex both by implying that "a piece of archive material becomes a mutable rather than a fixed point of reference" (Bruzzi 2000, 12) and by casting doubt on the historical "truths" it purportedly reveals. Furthermore, the emphasis on the notion of "found footage" in the compilation discourse also tends to overrate and romanticize its own contestatory power. Apart from footage that is literally "found"—such as home movies hidden in a forgotten trunk—many restrictions apply to accessing, obtaining, and using archival material (Beattie 2004, 125–45). The cultural arena in which the subversive practice of re-editing takes place is therefore delimited by commercial, legal, and political barriers that may or may not be affected by local acts of culture jamming.

The questions at the core of this practice—who may access what type of archival material and use it at what price and for what purposes?—were precisely what concerned Emile de Antonio, who was not just a radical filmmaker but a shrewd businessman. With his "national electronic archive," he envisioned open and free access to everything the television networks were putting into their archives. Yet the reality in the late 1960s was different, and inherently paradoxical. For *Millhouse: A White Comedy*, de Antonio chose two approaches to obtain his archival footage: On the one hand, he drew on material that had been stolen from an NBC archive; on the other, he approached "rich liberals" to finance his film, thus enabling him to officially buy stock footage from the networks (Weiner 1971, 7).[5] The making of his film therefore required either illegal acts of stealing footage or participating in the commercial acquisition of audiovisual material—both of which diametrically opposed de Antonio's utopia of free access and use.

The President as an Object of Satire

Emile de Antonio has variously been described as a "courageous maverick," a "colorful and indefinable radical" (Wexler 2000, xii), and a "self-described anarchist" (Rosenbaum 2000, 341). He called himself a "Marxist social critic of the existing social system" (Weiner 1971, 14) and almost single-handedly came to define a partisan form of documentary filmmaking. About *Millhouse*, he said, "There was never any pretense of objectivity," adding, "I'm proud of my point of view and I flaunt it" (quoted in O'Brien 2000, 241). This stance of media activism distinguished him from the 1960s movements of observational or direct cinema, which de Antonio loathed. It established him as a "culture jammer" whose provocative and outspoken attitude paved the way for more popular—and populist—on-camera performances of documentary filmmakers. In 1989, Michael Moore, the most influential and notorious of these younger generation of filmmakers, appeared on-screen in his first successful film, *Roger and Me*. While de Antonio made his last film, *Mr. Hoover and I*, in the same year, also appearing on-screen, he chose a very different, direct and personal form of addressing the camera. He died a few months after the film's completion.

De Antonio called his style of assembling archival footage "radical scavenging" (Weiner 1971, 3). It consisted of looking at hundreds of hours of television material in order to, as Bernard Weiner (1971) puts it, "locate the one short sequence necessary for the development of the didactic message" (3). De Antonio (2000) was convinced that the "audiovisual history of our time is the television outtake" (350), but he saw it as a contested object of competing historical interpretations that had to be rearranged since the networks were biased and driven by their financial interests. In typical provocative fashion, he stated in an interview from the early 1970s: "The true castrati of our age are the networks who can't afford to offend the sponsors" (O'Brien 2000, 241). De Antonio shared the desire of avant-garde filmmakers such as Bruce Conner to interrogate the nature and origins of archival footage.[6] Yet, as a documentary filmmaker and social critic, he was ultimately less concerned with aesthetic considerations and more interested in the question of how the re-editing and assemblage of television (and film) outtakes could be used for the construction of alternative histories.

To be sure, the history of the documentary genre up to the 1960s had been shaped by movements of social critique, but with *Millhouse* the spirit and practice of culture jamming compilations entered the American scene. The film attempted to reframe and resemanticize footage that the mainstream media had shot of Richard M. Nixon, such as news conferences and party conventions, and thus turn the media messages against themselves. And it did so by means of satire and comic juxtapositions—a new development in the American context. Nixon had been a prominent target for famous political cartoonists such as Herb Block and David Levine. The cultural climate in the 1960s was generally characterized by new forms of satire that were "more direct, more savage, and more explicitly cruel, without fear of censorship, stigma, or punishment" (Whitefield 1985, 114). Thus de Antonio's combination of playfulness, humor, and critique constituted one of the first instances of culture jamming against the "discourses of sobriety" (Nichols 1991, 4) of American documentary film. As de Antonio stated upon its release, "The Nixon film is, I think, the first attempt at a real documentary comedy" (Weiner 1971, 4).

Because *Millhouse* was an early popular example of culture jamming in the presumably "serious" genre of documentary film, de Antonio was also taking real risks. As Jonathan Rosenbaum (2000) observes, the film "had the nerve to shower Nixon with abuse and scorn when he was at the height of his power as president" (336). De Antonio knew he was under surveillance by the FBI (in *Mr. Hoover and I* he recalls his long struggle with the government agency), and although the comedy did not lead to his inclusion on Nixon's infamous "enemies list," de Antonio was clearly identified as a political opponent and subsequently harassed by the White House. Nixon and his aides leaked embarrassing information, presumably from FBI files, on de Antonio to the press, as well as initiating IRS investigations of Daniel Talbot's New Yorker Films Theater where the film was being shown (Lewis 2000).[7]

An Attempt to Attack the "System"

Although the production background of *Millhouse* is shrouded in "subversive mystery," it seems certain that de Antonio obtained some of the archival footage illegally from "anonymous sympathizers" (Kellner

and Streible 2000, 42, 43), while the majority—70 percent in his own assessment—had been legitimately acquired from television archives.[8] The film followed the basic structure of Nixon's memoir *Six Crises* (1962) and provided a wealth of biographical details interspersed with achronological "flashbacks." It ended on a critical indictment of Nixon as a war president. At the height of the anti–Vietnam War protests, Nixon appeared to be an arrogant and hypocritical representative of the political elite, oblivious to the younger generation and its demands for peace. Contemporary reviewers found the film to be partly confusing and "hastily patched together" (Weiner 1972, 113), yet in this new mode of jamming the documentary form de Antonio was juggling with three different ambitions: to sketch the biography of a typical representative of the political establishment during the Cold War, to satirically deflate a public image created by television, and to intervene in the ongoing struggle over the Vietnam War. The result was a "scathing satirical attack" and "mischievous portrait" (Kellner and Streible 2000, 42) which sympathetic reviewers felt sometimes descended "to the level of easy derision" (Cocks 2000, 243), and hostile reviewers regarded as "an insult to the intelligence" (Buckley 2000, 245).

De Antonio's way of undermining and playing with the rhetorical conventions of documentary biography by means of comedy had clearly hit its mark. Despite negative criticism from both conservative and liberal reviewers, the film was widely seen. Indeed, as Bernard Weiner's (1972) review indicates, it was a popular success, a "smash hit" that was "playing to packed houses in at least 30 major cities" (113).[9] At the same time, de Antonio was trying to counter the prevailing notion that it was primarily a personal attack on the president. He saw Nixon as a representative of the larger forces at work in American politics and tried to emphasize the more general implications of the biographical approach. As he stated, "This film attacks the System, the credibility of the System, by focusing on the obvious and perfect symbol for that System" (Weiner 1971, 4). De Antonio used Nixon's middle name "Milhous" for the film's title, but deliberately changed it to "Millhouse" to conjure up more general connotations of a political mill grinding away (Lewis 2000, 133). He added the subtitle of "A White Comedy," probably to suggest the comic degeneration of the White House or the whiteness, the "WASP-ishness," of the ruling class. But despite these efforts it was obvious that

his film was primarily a caricature of the reigning president, and thus in tune with a widespread trend of ridiculing political leaders in the late 1960s.[10]

In this "new climate of creative irreverence" (Lewis 2000, 118), the film engaged in a political and historical analysis depicting Nixon as a crucial protagonist of the Cold War as well as a curiously unsympathetic individual who nevertheless managed to have several political comebacks. De Antonio presented Nixon not only as a cunning and ruthless politician who had built his career on anti-Communism, but also as a self-made man in the tradition of Horatio Alger: full of ambition, upwardly mobile, yet driven to desperate measures by the will to succeed. Famously, the film opened with the placing of Nixon's wax figure in Madame Tussauds and the final addition of its head. This not only highlighted the act of constructing a figure—literally in the wax museum, figuratively through the public image of the politician and the construction of a film biography; it also introduced one of the recurring themes of Nixon as a bland character with no personality and a 'waxen' appearance. He had been in politics since the 1940s and was now made to look like a relic from a bygone era. In line with this opening, de Antonio proceeded to use comic techniques that treated Nixon more like a type than an individual and highlighted the generational divide.

Techniques of Culture Jamming in *Millhouse*

One technique of culture jamming on which *Millhouse* drew was a critical form of "underground intertextuality" (James 1989, 140–43). De Antonio employed it to stress the generation gap and to present Nixon as an anachronistic politician trapped in the past of the Cold War and the dated images of American popular culture. In one scene, as Nixon was addressing the audience of the Republican Party on his nomination for the presidential election in 1968, he promised to "win for Ike" (Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower was hospitalized at the time). De Antonio immediately cut to a deathbed scene from the 1940 Warner Brothers' production *Knute Rockne, All American* in which the former American football player and coach Knute Rockne calls out to "win one for the Gipper," while George Gipp, one of the team's players, is dying. As this juxtaposition implies, Nixon took his cues from the history of sports and

old movies (a technique perfected in the 1980s by the actor who played George Gipp in 1940, Ronald Reagan).

Other sections of the film supported the notion of a generation gap, too. For instance, the opening credits included a photograph of Nixon hanging a coat over his wife Pat's shoulder, with both of them smiling into a mirror while "A White Comedy" was superimposed in an ornate and old-fashioned typeface (figure 6.1). Another public relations photograph showed the Nixon family on bicycles in Washington, the young congressman smiling, while a superimposition announced, "Millhouse goes to Washington," a reference to Frank Capra's depiction of a naive and idealistic politician from the 1930s, Jefferson Smith (played by James Stewart), in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939). What followed was a sequence on Nixon's role in the hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee, in particular his strict anti-Communist stance in the questioning of Alger Hiss. Nixon modeled himself on public images of optimism and youthfulness, yet, as the transition implied, he acted like the old deceitful elite in Capra's dystopian vision of Washington.

The effect of these examples was to paint Nixon as a representative of the old (white) establishment who, in the late 1960s, appeared hopelessly out of date and out of touch with the younger generation. One particular aspect of this gap, the dominant visual "whiteness" of the political rulers, was ruptured by de Antonio on the soundtrack. At the Republican National Convention, Nixon's speech on the progress and order of the "American Revolution" was intercut with Martin Luther King's voice speaking passages from his "I Have a Dream" speech. Briefly de Antonio cut to "battle footage" which showed violent protests and street fights between the police and demonstrators. The accompanying voice-over was the African American radio announcer Milton "Butterball" Smith describing what happened during the riots that accompanied the 1968 convention. Toward the end of the film, the black peace activist Dick Gregory was (visually) seen addressing the crowd at a demonstration, but for the most part the "whiteness" of the political establishment that Nixon represented was subverted by brief interruptions of black voices only in audio.

A second technique in de Antonio's film was to reveal the credibility gap that Nixon's career seemed to signify by creating comic juxtapositions. As Whitfield (1985) indicates, from his earliest days as a congressman, Nixon's style and personality had provoked political caricatures of his

Figure 6.1. "A White Comedy" in old-fashioned typeface from the opening sequence of *Millhouse*.

"priggishness and stiffness that invited deflation" (120). Similarly, de Antonio highlighted the awkward poses of Nixon's public persona for comic effect. Several scenes showed him smiling broadly and rapidly raising his hands in a typical, yet curiously mechanical and artificial, gesture of triumph and thankfulness. This was juxtaposed with a David Levine cartoon of the same gesture in which Nixon had grotesquely shortened arms that reduced his overblown posture, and a literally faceless vice president Spiro Agnew stood at his side (de Antonio also used this cartoon for the advertising campaign of the film). Furthermore, to reveal the "unoriginal quality of Nixon's political rhetoric" (Lewis 2000, 136) and to emphasize the doubts over his sincerity and credibility, de Antonio assembled material, without major changes or comic exaggerations, that evidenced Nixon's repeated attempts to shape his public persona. As Kellner and Streible (2000) put it, "To simply show Nixon performing politically was enough" (44), and the image emerging from these scenes was that of a political hustler using television to mislead the public.

The most important segment in this respect was the "Checkers speech" from 1952, which was included in the first third of the film.

Figure 6.2. Scenes from the "Checkers speech" with an added iris-like frame.

While a candidate for the vice presidency in 1952, Nixon had been charged with unethical practices in the financing of his political work and decided to address the American public via television to explain his actions. Although Nixon professed to answer the attacks on his person with "honesty and integrity" in the broadcast, his gestures and performance style gave him a hypocritical and unbelievable air. Using conventional postures like half-raised hands to appeal to his audience, he came across as a bad actor. Nixon's wife sat next to him in an armchair, creating the peculiarly hybrid setting of a television studio, office, and model home, while Nixon went on to give a "complete financial history" of his family before switching to the more conventional political rhetoric of driving the "crooks" out of Washington. During the course of his speech, Nixon smugly defended his right to keep one particular gift: a black and white dog his children had named "Checkers."

As Lewis (2000) points out, in the early 1950s, "The Checkers speech was television genius," and it "saved Nixon's career" (134). Yet, in the 1970s, given the anachronistic look of footage from the 1950s, it was

sure to draw laughs. In this instance, then, de Antonio's jamming lay in the clash of political and cultural connotations encoded in the archival material. By combining footage from the beginnings of television campaigning with scenes from later decades and sequences discussing the manipulation of televised debates, de Antonio could ridicule Nixon's public persona and point to his long history of trying to use television to his personal advantage.

Of even greater urgency, however, was the Vietnam War, and another element in *Millhouse* to be considered through the culture jamming lens was the creation of hybrid ruptures. The final minutes of the film included a brief "flashback" to the history of US involvement in Indochina and footage from peace demonstrations. In contrast to the comic variations on the generation and credibility gaps, here de Antonio decided to create subversive counterpoints by implying that Nixon's rhetoric was cloaking the imperialist interests of the American government. One passage in particular stands out. While Nixon was giving a speech stating that the United States was not gaining anything from its actions in Vietnam and that even as the most powerful nation, it had refrained from conquest and domination, a scroll appeared superimposed over his face (figure 6.3). Titled "The US in SE Asia," it listed more than eighty companies and economic interests that appeared to be profiting from the

Figure 6.3. "The US in SE Asia," the superimposed scroll in the final sequence of *Millhouse*.

war. Conservative reviewers like William F. Buckley, Jr., were enraged by this insinuation, yet it was clearly de Antonio's most explicit non-comic technique of jamming with archival footage. He included Nixon's official statement that the United States was primarily interested in "peace and freedom" in Vietnam, but used the subversive technique of writing over the top of the president's face to create an irrevocably hybrid image. It was an image of rupture and disjunction that juxtaposed the dominant political discourse, authorized by the iconic image of the president addressing the public, with the counterhistorical claims of its opponents.

Evaluating the Efficacy of Culture Jamming

Emile de Antonio's early form of culture jamming in *Millhouse* belonged to a larger social and cultural movement aiming for empowerment of disfranchised groups in the 1960s and 1970s. The film had primarily a political motivation, yet the ultimate political efficacy of its practice was sometimes viewed critically. In his review, Bernard Weiner (1972) remarked that de Antonio's "essentially anarchistic outrage at the American political process" (113) kept intruding on Nixon's portrait. In a similar vein, reviewing de Antonio's work after he had died, Jonathan Rosenbaum (2000) suggested that his films were probably "more meaningful as potent contemporary gestures than as lasting works of art" (336). One assumption about culture jamming, then, is that it may be merely a gesture, a brief but essentially fleeting expression of political or moral outrage.

Undeniably, many practices of comic or subversive jamming in de Antonio's film seem to be addressing a young countercultural audience that was able to share and delight in his sense of "outrage." The film was designed as an intervention into an ongoing political conflict over the Vietnam War and the build-up to the general election of 1972 in which Nixon was going to run. Yet from today's perspective, the historical assessment of what may have appeared like a "gesture" at the time and its significance as an instance of media activism has changed. To garner attention as an explicitly political film, *Millhouse* made strong, partially overblown statements. But, as my analysis has shown, de Antonio was also making a collage of different materials and voices, which intervened creatively in the aesthetic tradition of compilation films, and he pre-

sented a historical interpretation that went beyond the current moment and is still relevant today. For instance, Michael Moore's widely seen documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) developed a very similar argument about the United States having entered the Iraq War due to strong economic interests in a specific geopolitical region, and it also engaged in similar techniques of ridiculing President George W. Bush.

A related concern with culture jamming has been that it does not reach the people whose attitudes and opinions would have to be changed to effect genuine political transformations, even though it may find large audiences by being critical and entertaining at the same time. As Carrie Lambert-Beatty (2010) asks, "Do small, symbolic rebellions really contribute to social change, or do they merely let off steam that might otherwise propel more practical endeavors?" (101). In a similar vein, Douglas Kellner and Dan Streible (2000) assert that the final segments of *Millhouse* with sections on Vietnam and the peace demonstrations merely "preach to the converted" (45).

Just like the claim that culture jamming may simply represent a "gesture," the assessment that it is only preaching to the choir is often made in hindsight, when the political battles have been fought and a new historical consciousness supersedes an earlier, seemingly more naive point of view. We should keep in mind, however, that at the time de Antonio released his film, the Watergate scandal was still to come. Culture jamming may therefore seem outmoded from a later stage but at the time of its production, the political goals—as seen in public demonstrations for peace—probably needed to be reaffirmed, and preaching to the converted was an important aspect of consciousness raising or of supporting political activists (see Bratich, chapter 14). Evaluating the efficacy of culture jamming, therefore, requires close attention to the synchronic field of cultural relations rather than the diachronic relationships that are usually called upon to gauge the value of "classic" or timeless works of art.

A final reservation about culture jamming to be mentioned here is that its creative energies and aesthetic objects may be seized by its opponents and used for the wrong ends. To be sure, this was a constant debate in the avant-garde movements of modernism and postmodernism, but in a culture increasingly dominated by advertising and public relations, the danger that "the very entities culture jammers are trying to

fight can take up their techniques and ideas so easily" (Lambert-Beatty 2010, 111) may pose an even greater threat. If the creativity of culture jamming can be modified for yet another stage in the commodification of culture, its dissenting energies may be appropriated and its political efficacy thwarted (see Serazio, chapter 10). To avoid falling into this trap, de Antonio's technique of radical scavenging and assemblage was not just predicated on "jamming" with archival footage or television out-takes, but also attempted to find ways of using the material that could not be easily appropriated by mainstream media.

In more than any other passage in *Millhouse*, this aspiration lay at the center of the hybrid audiovisual image of Nixon proclaiming America's nonimperialist, peaceful intentions in Vietnam and the superimposed list of companies written over his face. It condensed de Antonio's claim of imperial expansionism cloaked by the official rhetoric of peace and thereby expressed an alternative, materialist con-ception of historical change—a counterhegemonic historical point of view. In this case, then, trying to create cultural forms that could not be easily appropriated for commercial purposes relied upon an unmis-takable oppositional interpretation of history that was encoded in the visual superimposition of text and image and was sure to be rejected by the media establishment. De Antonio's unique form of "democratic didacticism" (Beattie 2004, 135) in *Millhouse: A White Comedy* may serve, therefore, as an important example of jamming *and* resisting, of playfulness *and* risk taking in a critical interrogation of archival footage as the audiovisual history of its time. It emerged in the specific political constellation of the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly the culmination of the Vietnam War and the legacy of the Cold War, yet it should be acknowledged as a bold and courageous instance of media activism that marked a significant transition in the history of compilation film.

NOTES

1 De Antonio's first film developed from a close collaboration with Daniel Talbot who was running the New Yorker Films Theater and had the initial idea of using the television footage; see his reminiscences in Talbot (2006).

2 On the various practices of producers or exhibitors editing films in the early period of cinema, see Musser (1990).

3 On the theory and history of compilation films see Beattie (2004, 125–45); Bruzzi (2000, 11–39); Arthur (1999); Peterson (1992); Peterson (1994); Wees (1992); de Greef (1992); Decker (2012).

4 On the notion of inscribing power relations into the film material, see James (1989, 3–28).

5 For an extended discussion of the production background, see Kellner and Streible (2000, 42–48); Lewis (2000, 113–54).

6 On the history of assemblage art and West Coast filmmaking, see Peterson (1986).

7 Randolph Lewis (2000) claims that de Antonio "was not technically on the enemies list, though he believed his name appeared there" (151).

8 See O'Brien (2000); Kellner and Streible (2000, 42–48); Lewis (2000, 113–54).

9 Lewis (2000, 113–54) gives a detailed description of the successful theatrical runs of the film.

10 See Whitfield (1985) for a more extended discussion of Nixon and other presidents as targets of satire.

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