

**UNIVERSIDADE DE CAXIAS DO SUL  
ÁREA DO CONHECIMENTO DE HUMANIDADES  
CURSO DE LICENCIATURA EM LETRAS-INGLÊS**

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**THE AMAZING 1960'S: A TALE OF COUNTERCULTURE'S IMPACT ON SPIDER-  
MAN**

**CAXIAS DO SUL**

**2020**

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MAN**

Trabalho de Conclusão do Curso apresentado como requisito para  
obtenção do título de Licenciado em Letras – Inglês à Universidade de  
Caxias do Sul.

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**CAXIAS DO SUL**

**2020**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my mother, Marta Inês Soares Costa, for instigating my curiosity and imagination for as long as I can remember;

To my father, Valdecir Costa, for being the first image of a superhero in my mind and for being an important role in teaching me the importance of responsibility;

To my girlfriend, Giorgia Pettenati Cavagnoli, for being supportive beyond the realm of possibility, for believing in my ideas and lastly for her love and care in every step of the way;

To my grandparents, all of them, for the various displays of support and of a kind and silent love that helped me during trying days and nights;

To all my friends who shared an affection for all kinds of heroes and works of fiction;

To my thesis advisor, Douglas Ceccagno, for providing paramount guidance and for his patience with my delays during the writing of this project;

To the writers, illustrators, directors and creators of the fictional and surreal worlds I got lost in through the years, in multiple mediums, those that helped me nurture this love for fantastical stories, specially superhero ones;

Thanks for everyone I've met and that contributed for me to be who I am and to be able to enjoy the journey so far.

## **ABSTRACT**

This research intends to investigate if Spider-Man's comic books made him representative of Counterculture in the 1960's. The object of analysis is contextualized in the decade that it was created, the social circumstances present in American society during that time are presented, and finally an analysis is done on the repercussions of both Spider-Man's comic books and Counterculture on each other and on society as a whole. The method used is a bibliographical research, with studies on the hero's journey, on social imaginary and cultural studies about the development of technocracy and on the role of comic books as social commentary. Our main references are Bronislaw Baczko, on social imaginary; Joseph Campbell, on the hero's journey; and Theodore Roszak, on Counterculture. The conclusion indicates that Spider-Man comics, in fact, did represent values of Counterculture.

**Key-words:** Comic Books. Spider-Man. Social Imaginary. Counterculture. Hero.

## RESUMO

Essa pesquisa tem a intenção de investigar se histórias em quadrinhos do Homem-Aranha fizeram dele representativo da Contracultura nos anos 60. O objeto de análise contextualizado na década que foi criado, as circunstâncias sociais presentes na sociedade Americana durante essa época apresentados e finalmente uma análise nas repercussões que ambos – o Homem-Aranha e a Contracultura – tiveram um no outro e na sociedade como um todo. O método usado é uma pesquisa bibliográfica, com estudos sobre a jornada do herói, estudos sobre o desenvolvimento da tecnocracia e no papel de histórias em quadrinho como comentário social. Nossas referências principais foram Bronislaw Baczko, sobre o social imaginário; Joseph Campbell sobre a jornada do herói; e Theodore Roszak, sobre a Contracultura. A conclusão indica que histórias em quadrinho do Homem-Aranha, de fato, representavam valores da Contracultura.

**Palavras-chave:** Histórias em quadrinhos. Homem-Aranha. Imaginário Social. Contracultura. Herói.

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Comic books have a long history with workers in the American society, from the comic strips found in newspapers, to the first comic books centered around stories of cowboys versus indians or science horror-fiction, they were always a source for entertainment in the everyday life of Americans. In the beginning of the 1960's a period on comic book history known as The Silver Age, when superheroes started appearing on the magazine stands more often than the aforementioned genres. Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, great contributors to the comic book industry during this period changed completely the archetype of the typical comic book superhero and created the first superhero who was also a teenager, victim of a science experiment that goes wrong, who had insecurities, bills to pay, love interests, school and work to worry about, all at the same time. His debut was made in July of 1962, and due to its reliability the title became popular really quickly.

Not only the comic book industry but also American society was going through a shift during this decade, the youth of the United States was greatly displeased with the state of its society, with questions like civil rights, the war in Vietnam and the social values disseminated throughout newspapers, their parents and the propaganda on TV and radio stations. This culminated in the emergence of a denial of American society as a whole, a movement known today as Counterculture.

This paper intends to answer if in such a controversial time in the United States of America's history, a comic book hero such as Spider-Man became representative of Counterculture in the 1960's. We analyze the United States' social, political and cultural aspects that contributed to the creation of Counterculture and influenced the journey of what would become a timeless hero, since its creation, in the 1960's.

### **1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Was Spider-Man representative of counterculture in the 1960's?

### **1.2 OBJECTIVES**

#### **1.2.1. Main objective**

Identify if Spider-Man became representative of counterculture in the 1960's using myth studies, social imaginary and cultural studies.

#### **1.2.2 Specific objectives**

a) Set the state of the comic book industry in the time of Spider-Man's creation.

- b) Contextualize Peter Parker's journey in *The Amazing Fantasy #15, The Amazing Spider-Man (1963) #1 - #33, The Amazing Spider-Man Annual (1964) #1* by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko using studies about myth.
- c) Investigate American society and culture during the period of Counterculture.
- d) Analyze the connections between Spider-Man's comic books and Counterculture in the 1960's.

### 1.3 JUSTIFICATION

My journey as a reader of stories came somewhat late in my adolescence, so the primary way that my creativity expressed itself was through imagining beyond what I saw on TV, my primary source for acquiring culture. Beyond the ending, playing with concepts introduced to the mind bursting with ideas, hundreds upon hundreds of 'what ifs?'. As time passed, it became harder to get into traditional books, at first because of a lack of vocabulary. A problem that the academic life sorted it out in due time. A second problem, as consequence of a busy life as a student and full-time worker was the lack of time. But human beings are creatures hungry for stories, as they always were, since the beginning of time. Stories have always been told and listened by everyone. About the past, ambitions, dreams, about the unknown, about the future, about travels to foreign lands and unbelievable sights. What changed during our collective history through time is the way those stories are transmitted to one another. Therefore, I found one format that suited my lack of time and the need of a visual aid in the storytelling: comic books.

Comic books are propelled from subtleties that are not always written, subtleties that are left out completely to interpretation of images. This is something that other genres of readings also offer but in comic books they present it in a unique combination between images and words offering a different kind of immersion in a story. The unique nature of this made them a fascinating object of research.

While many researchers cannot agree on a date of where Counterculture started or ended, none of them can negate its relevance in the United States of America's history. A country that had been through so much – an economic depression like the world had never seen, multiple wars – was finally established as the world greatest, and yet, in the 1960's to a great portion of the nation, things seemed unsatisfying. The state of society was unacceptable, the political leadership of the country did not care about every one of their citizens, only the white ones. Freedom, a principle in which the country was founded seemed like nothing more than a



distant memory to those hurt by prejudice and who had to fight to have the same rights as everyone else had.

For decades, since comic strips existed, the medium of comic books always had strong possibilities for social commentary. Among comic books, superhero comics are very popular nowadays and they have been since their initial advent in the end of the 1930's, furthermore because of the multiple movie adaptations in theaters every year their reach has never been so high. I leaned towards Spider-Man as a subject because I found an interesting piece of information that showed that in 1965, in a poll conducted by Esquire Magazine in college campuses, Spider-Man ranked third in the poll as the student's most important revolutionary characters, losing only to the singer Bob Dylan and South American revolutionary Che Guevara (ASHBY, 2006, p. 357). So while his popularity is well known by now, the groundbreaking nature of its creation and the impact it caused, provided more than enough interesting topics to research one of the most controversial periods of American history and to shed new light in one of comic book's most classic superheroes.

#### 1.4 RELEVANCE

History is a tool for mapping the rights and the wrongs of our kind in the past. Acting as a very important source of knowledge. In the 1960's, a movement known today as Counterculture began to stir a revolution to American society. This revolution was a passionate one, not only in its protests but in its desire for change. The desires of the youth who did not identify with their elders' ideals for society was heard around the world.

The Counterculture movement had lasting effects on the social and cultural battlefield. Such as in the fight against segregation, culminating in the Civil Rights Movement. The fight against the war in Vietnam, against the gigantic pollution that came from the industrialization of almost every facet of the 1960's society, massive disparity and poverty were all problems of this society that only the young seemed to care. Roszak (1969, p. 13) points out that during that time the parental generation was severely damaged by the Great Depression, by war and fear of another one. These were the elements that made them so numb to any need of change. What they wanted above all was security. Something that the rise of Technocracy made sure they would have.

A change that had no support from any wing of the government party or from any type of parental or older institution. The American youth – who at the time was mostly the campus students in universities – had to create a movement on its own. Roszak defines this as:

[...] the young stand forth so prominently because they act against a background of nearly pathological passivity on the part of the adult generation. It would only be by reducing our conception of citizenship to absolute zero that we could get our senior generation off the hook for its astonishing default. The adults of the World War II period, trapped as they have been in the frozen posture of befuddled docility – the condition Paul Goodman has called “the nothing can be done disease” – have in effect divested themselves of their adulthood [...] (ROSZAK, 1969, p. 22).

And in its search for inspiration, countless influences could be attributed, such as the Beats literature, also Bob Dylan and The Beatles songs for example, bands who were new and whose lyrics had spoken to this youth craving for change.

The comic book industry was booming finally, after a few decades, so it could have been a possible source of inspiration for the Counterculture, especially since Spider-Man’s creation was something that happened during that decade too. Spider-Man being the first young superhero protagonist, a superhero to a generation which while rejecting the roles society had prepared for them, struggled to find its path, made mistakes and fought for what they thought was right. All things they had in common with the character.

A new society needed new symbols, Baczkó (1985, p. 297) had presented signs that dominance in the imaginary and the symbolic were huge strategic points for governments. And while the circumstances did change since then, some of the problems American society had, still are problems around the world today. Therefore, this paper shows how in the past real life heroes and leaders were needed and how the inspiration for the change expected from those leaders and heroes could be found in unexpected of places: the inner world of imagination and its creations.

There are still discussions that started in the 1960’s that are relevant today, as seen in the Black Lives Matter protests that happened after the murder of George Floyd in May 25th of 2020, after a white police officer needlessly killed the black citizen who was already arrested without resisting. Racism was and still is just one of the many problems that Counterculture brought awareness into the forefront of American society. There are sentiments that can still be echoed today with many of the world greatest’s leaders not addressing the concerns of the younger with problems such as climate change and the effect of man practices on the environment such as wild fires, the gigantic amount of waste in the oceans and so on. The world of tomorrow might need a reminder that youth can take a stand as it did in the past and where it found its motivations and inspirations for doing it. The lack of dialogue between generations could be examined and retraced back to the rise of America as the world greatest potency, in the comic strips of its newspapers and comic books of the time until it reached the boiling point that was Counterculture.

It is possible to see how symbols in the cultural mediums of mass media played a big role – both positively and negatively – in the dissent that happened in the 1960's. And it is by researching those relations and how they achieved change in society during that time that this paper gains significant value in the present day.

## 1.5 METHODOLOGY

This paper was developed through Bibliographical Research, as defined by Connaway (2010, p. 254-255) “the compilation of systematic or enumerative bibliographies are concerned with the book (and other materials) as an intellectual entity”. Their purpose is assemble, she proceeds “information about individual works into a logical and useful arrangement” (CONNAWAY, 2010, p. 254-255). Following this definition, *The Amazing Spider-Man* (LEE; DITKO, 1962-1966) comic books will be examined as object of research. Going through the main aspects of American society which could have contributed to make Spider-Man a representative of Counterculture in the 1960's. To do so it will be necessary to delve into Spider-Man origins, as a literary creation and the myth influence in its journey.

In this first chapter authors and researchers such as Campbell (2008), Howe (2013) and Eliade (1963) will be used. This first part will explore what makes Spider-Man one of the most special superheroes since its inception and how myths of old compare to him in his journey as a hero in fiction, in the 1960's specifically.

Afterwards, a chapter about the state of American Society in the time of Spider-Man's creation. It will be touched on various social, cultural and even political situations that the youth of the 1960's were experiencing. To assist in providing a detailed description of such a time and its complex subject matter, the research will be supplemented by Roszak (1969), Hoggart (1917), Brownell (2011) – all of whom wrote about Counterculture – and other cultural and social experts on the subject.

Lastly, as Eaton (2019, p. 43) says “bibliography is not so much an end in itself as it is an acillary investigation to the study of the text (be it literary, historical, or scientific);” so in following this on investigation of the subject proposed using materials by Wright (2001), Ashby (2006) and others already mentioned. This part will focus on complementing with theoretical foundations the connections made on the research of Spider-Man as a hero representative of Counterculture in the 1960's.

## 2 WEAVING A WEB: THE CONTEXT AND THE CREATION

The presentation of the object of research alone would not sufficiently display the magnitude of its nuances and innovations, therefore before actually presenting the Spider-Man comics, the state in which the medium of comic books was before his creation will be shown to understand what the comic books of the time reflected of society and how society reacted to the impact that comic books created in it. Thus, as lightning struck the imagination of Stan Lee and Steve Ditko (1962-1966), their inventiveness and, as one can see, the similarities to myths hopefully can kindle more appreciation in their part on this web of concepts as it reaches the next chapter.

### 2.1. THE COMIC BOOK INDUSTRY IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, comics started as strips in the newspaper since almost half of the nineteenth century. They often portrayed in their strips little stories of satire, social and political comments of what was going on in society at the time. After World War II, comic books started to have a more prominent purpose of telling bigger stories. Therefore, they were moved away from the newspapers to a book entirely their own in the stands of magazines. The first comic books told stories of cowboys versus Indians as the cowboy were the Western hero of the frontier, a metaphor for the world of old, before industrialism (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 10), it also already imbuing the country with racism as well, as the Indians were always people of color and the villains in the stories (ASHBY, 2006, p. 105). The other genre of stories told at the time in comic books were science fiction horror stories, stories which were also probably fueled by things like paranoia and the dread of science after its display of atomic chaos and destruction during the last World War, something that Eliade (1963, p. 72) explains as “today there is an ever more intense fear of a catastrophic End of the World brought about by thermonuclear weapons.” Horror comics also served as the greatest advocates for portraying the grey morality and the problems that existed in American society (ASHBY, 2006, p.303-304) before a self-inflicted form of censorship – The Comic Magazine Association of America (CMAA) – by the greatest publishers of comics ended this, leaving the successful comic books in America almost exclusively in the pages of superhero stories (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 181).

It was 1938 when the publisher National Periodical Publications (known today as simply DC Comics) made the debut of the world’s first superhero *Superman* in the pages of *Action Comics #1* (SIEGEL and SHUSTER, 1938). Due to its success, more superhero characters such

as *Batman*, *the Flash* and *Wonder Woman* were created and began to be published alongside the already established Wild West stories and science fiction, horror monster comics that existed in the same era.

This marks the advent of myths and hero stories going back to mass culture, even if the myths were camouflaged, according to Eliade (1963, p. 97). A more subjective use of myth in comic books, as Hoggart (1917, p. 29) talks, is about breaking the use of aphorism in constructions that are not intellectual to the working class:

They persist not in a racy or lively but in a formal manner: the phrases are used like counters, 'click-click-click'. If we listen only to their tone we might conclude that they are used simply by rote, flatly and meaninglessly, that they have no connexion at all with the way life is lived, are used and yet somehow do not connect (HOGGART, 1917, p. 29).

Comics presented the opportunity for the working class to become connected once again with the internal world of the imaginary through simplified and camouflaged myths, making them stop or at least reduce the use of oral traditions that were merely reproduced but never given thought because "The working classes have a strong natural ability to survive change by adapting or assimilating what they want in the new and ignoring the rest", as Hoggart (1917, p. 32) states. This contact with their imagination, heroes and symbols mostly had no effect in the generation that was already exhausted from events such as The Great Depression and World Wars I and II. This dialogue with their imagination, heroes and symbols did in fact happened, but to a more specific audience as Eliade argues:

The characters of comic strips present the modern version of mythological or folklore Heroes. They incarnate the ideal of a large part of society, to such a degree that any change in their typical conduct or, still worse, their death, will bring on veritable crises among their readers; the latter react violently, and protest by sending thousands of telegrams to the authors [...] (ELIADE, 1963, p. 185).

With the success of superhero stories and the myths embued in them, Magazine Management Company and National Periodical Publications (today the companies are called Marvel Comics and DC Comics, respectively) would become the most prolific makers of superhero comics in American Society from 1938 onwards.

## 2.2 THE FIRST TEEN SUPERHERO IN THE WESTERN WORLD

In 1962, Spider-Man was created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. In the last couple of pages of *Amazing Fantasy #15* it was introduced the first truly relatable superhero. Spider-Man was full of innovations. It was the first superhero who also was a teenager, a trope which belonged exclusively to *sidekicks* since 1940 when Robin was created in Batman stories by DC Comics. Stan Lee wanted to *do the sidekick right* as he said during New York Comic

Convention in 2007. Like any teenager Peter had problems with girls, with money, with those around who bullied him and those who he had to lie about his powers to. Shifting the focus of the stories from the hero Spider-Man to the person Peter Parker helped make him more relatable. His costume design also had innovation, he was the first superhero to have a mask fully covering his face, something planned so that everyone could immerse themselves more in the story imagining themselves to be the ones behind the mask as elaborated by Ditko (1990) in an article for *The Comics* magazine:

I wasn't sure Stan would like the idea of covering the character's face, but I did it because it hid an obviously boyish face. It would also add mystery to the character and allow the reader/viewer the opportunity to visualize, to 'draw,' his own preferred expression on Parker's face and, perhaps, become the personality behind the mask (apud SCHUMER, 2007, p. 1066).

Spider-Man was a creation that came in the right time, as readers belonging to the working class at the time identified with the character's struggles. Something Eliade (1963, p. 186) stated as "an obsession with 'success' that is so characteristic of modern society and that expresses an obscure wish to transcend the limits of the human condition", a worker in the capitalist America of the 1960's, in general, wanted nothing more than to live a life with all the luxury portrayed in the TV commercials and propaganda. So when Peter Parker had a win in its stories, no matter how small or temporary it might have been, it gave its readers hope to achieve that same resilience and agency in their lives. Also present in Spider-Man stories, was the fact that his deeds as a superhero did not impact his status as a person once he is without the mask, thus having someone completely anonymous capable of extraordinary things. This is the base of the *monomyth*, as Campbell affirms "The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in rites of passage; separation – initiation – return; which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (2008, p. 23).

However, if what Campbell calls *the monomyth* is to fulfill its promise, even if subversed in comic books, it should speak to us not in human failure or superhuman success, but in human success. Something that as mentioned before Stan Lee and Steve Ditko delivered sporadically in Peter Parker's adventures. His victories were not as cheered in his conflicts with his supervillains, but the personal triumphs of the character are the ones that resonated more loudly with readers. Further strengthening that connection to its audience which identified with his victories. Spider-Man stories spoke a universal language, one that, as Campbell predicted, would translate the inner symbols of old into new light, as he explains:

The hero-deed to be wrought is not today what it was in the century of Galileo. Where then there was darkness, now there is light; but also, where light was, there is now darkness. The modern hero-deed must be that of questing to bring to light again the lost Atlantis of the co-ordinated soul (CAMPBELL, 2008, p. 334).

Those symbols of the stories of old echo in the pages of Spider-Man because he does not shy away from what has been accomplished by the modern revolution of our world, but

give back its spiritual significance giving to readers of all ages, sex and races the means to achieve human maturity with the conditions of contemporary life.

### 2.3 PETER PARKER'S JOURNEY ACCORDING TO MYTH

In the 15th of August, 1962 on a short tale in the pages of *The Amazing Fantasy #15* the iconic character of Peter Parker was created. He is introduced as an orphan living with his uncle Ben and his aunt May, he also is an outcast in his school, a bookworm mocked by the athletes and undesirable by the girls. Then, one day as he goes to a science exhibit of experiments in radioactivity, for a moment during the experiment a spider goes between the machines conducting the experiment and becomes infected with radiation. The spider lands on Peter's hand and bites him, causing him to acquire the proportionate strength and speed of a spider, the ability of sticking to walls like a spider can, as well as a precognitive alert of incoming danger simply called *spider sense*. With these newfound powers, Peter Parker sees a crowd cheering a wrestler known as Crusher Hogan with an advertisement saying they would give a hundred dollars to anyone who could stay in the ring with him for three minutes. Peter thinks it is a good opportunity to test his new abilities, so he puts on a provisory mask and enters the ring. After winning with ease, a television producer offers him a chance to earn a fortune with this act. Peter Parker agrees to this, goes back home and makes himself a proper suit to conceal his identity, and to further amaze his future audience, he develops a pair of "web-shooters" to put on his wrists that shoot a sticky glue in the form of strings like web, finally he settles on an alias to be called in his show: Spider-Man.

After a few days of performances, Peter becomes arrogant and while exiting one of his shows, a police officer chasing a thief that runs past him, and the officer asks someone to stop him. Peter ignores the request saying he has other things to do. On the next day, as Peter returns home he sees a police car parked in the front of his house, the police officer there says that a criminal entered the house and killed his uncle. Peter, shocked by this, rushes to his bedroom, changes to his Spider-Man suit and goes after his uncle's killer whom, according to the police, was already cornered in an abandoned warehouse. Peter wanted to avenge his uncle, so he decides to enter and do justice with his own hands to the killer. After knocking him out, Peter sees his face and immediately recognizes him as the thief he did not stop the other day. Deep in his own thoughts of guilt caused by his inaction the day before, he decides to leave the unconscious killer to the police and goes home learning the now infamous lesson through the narration in the comic that "with great power, there must also come great responsibility" as his debut on *The Amazing Fantasy #15* closes.

In the structure of the *monomyth* Campbell (2008) describes the first stage of the journey as “Departure”, a journey to new experiences to the hero which will begin the transformative cyclical journey that is ever present within myth. After going through so much change in his life, Peter could not simply pretend things would go back to as they were. Campbell (2008, p. 46) states that “even though the hero returns for a while to his familiar occupations, they may found unfruitful”. As the means to compensate for his previous lack of action in the moment that could have saved his uncle, Peter then decides from now on to do everything he can to make the life of those around him safer using the powers he has been given. This configures a structure of the “Departure” called *the call to adventure*, defined by Campbell as:

[...] that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown. This fateful region of both treasure and danger may be variously represented: as a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state; but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds and impossible delight (CAMPBELL, 2008, p. 48).

The process of initiation in myth is also compared by Eliade (1963, p. 79) to “a second birth. It is through the agency of initiation that the adolescent becomes both a socially responsible and culturally awakened being”. Of course, in the Spider-Man comics this initiation is a much more gradual process given the serialized nature of the storytelling medium of comic books.

After his decision of helping everyone he can to live in a safer city, Peter is struck with his first problem now that his uncle is gone, his aunt May cannot pay all the bills by herself, so Peter thinks how he could help her. Afterwards having the editor of the sensationalist newspaper *The Daily Bugle*, J. Jonah Jameson publishing an article against Spider-Man because he does what he wants with no regard for the law, (according to Jonah) Peter has the idea to photograph and sell his pictures of himself as he protects the city to this newspaper, helping him provide for his aunt May and their home. Peter’s only condition is that Jonah never asks how he gets these exclusive pictures, to keep his secret concealed, which Jonah agrees, without suspicion that the photographer and the masked hero he hates the most, are the same person. During the first few issues of *the Amazing Spider-Man* the cast of characters also expands by properly introducing Flash Thompson, an athlete who bullies Peter every chance he gets, while at the same time adoring and being the most faithful fan of Spider-Man.

Even with Jonah putting some of the people against Spider-Man using his newspaper and Flash Thompson constantly bullying Peter Parker, he resiliently pushes forward as a good nephew, a good student and the best superhero he could be, until issue #3 of the comic book,



when he is faced with his first real challenge by the hands of Dr. Octopus - an atomic researcher by the name of Dr. Otto Octavius - who got his moniker because of the four metal mechanical arms he uses to conduct his experiments with volatile substances without harming himself. Until one day when an experiment goes wrong and after an explosion in the lab, his conscience is merged with his metal arms. Now Dr. Octopus has a brain damaged by radiation which makes him think he is superior to everyone else and he does not need to command his metal arms with the push of buttons, but with a mere thought. His metal arms paired with his intellect, proved to be too much for Spider-Man prowess at that point in his journey.

Facing this defeat, Peter Parker believes his days as Spider-Man were ending. This brief moment configures what Campbell defines as the *refusal of the call*, he argues that “Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative. Walled in boredom, hard work or ‘culture’, the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved” (2008, p. 49), as Peter indeed does. Within the same issue, though, while watching Johnny Storm’s (*The Human Torch*, another of Marvel Comics’s heroes) words during an assembly in the city, Peter is able to be saved by one of its peers, albeit a more experienced one.

Johnny stated that even he - a member of the *Fantastic Four* - one of the most known superheroes had his fair share of defeats and moments of doubt, he finishes his speak saying to all the people present there to never give up and that ability alone does not make anyone a hero, the right mindset does. Johnny’s help, configures what Campbell calls *the supernatural aid*, defined by him as:

[...] a reassurance – a promise that the peace of Paradise, which was known first within the mother womb, is not to be lost; that it supports the present and stands in the future as well as in the past (is omega as well as alpha); that though omnipotence may seem to be endangered by the threshold passages and life awakenings, protective power is always and ever present within the sanctuary of the heart and even within, or just behind, the unfamiliar features of the world (CAMPBELL, 2008, p. 59).

Frequently, the supernatural helper is masculine in form. While in many forms, it always provides the amulets and advices that the hero requires (CAMPBELL, 2008, p. 59). This segment in initiation myths is portrayed as Eliade (1963, p. 81) states “the new birth is not a repetition of the first, physical birth. There is properly speaking a mystical rebirth, spiritual in nature – in other words, access to a new mode of existence”, this new birth being one of self-annihilation, as defined by Campbell (2008, p. 77), this is *the belly of the whale*<sup>1</sup>: “but here,

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<sup>1</sup> It is a place of Metamorphosis: “the disappearance corresponds to the passing of a worshiper into the temple – where he is to be quickened by the recollection of who and what he is, namely dust and ashes unless immortal.” (CAMPBELL, 2008, p. 77) Such temples are guarded by monstrous and colossal figures as threshold guardians to ward away all incapable of encountering the higher silence within (CAMPBELL, 2008, p. 77). A more practical

instead of passing outward, beyond the confines of the visible world, the hero goes inward, to be born again.” (CAMPBELL, 2008, p. 77). Johnny’s words reach deep in Peter’s psyche giving him the motivation to have this inner transformation in resolve and to press forward. He thanks Johnny and goes straight after Dr. Octopus, this time with something other than his powers to help him. In regards to the hero’s journey this can be classified as *the crossing of the first threshold*, which according to Campbell (2008, p. 67) is a shock between the hero and a guardian, a watcher of established bounds. And only by passing that threshold of the destructive aspect of the same power, can the hero experience a new zone of his journey.

The power which appears in this comic is also present in a Buddhist parable about Prince Five-Weapons and his battle against an ogre, in which the prince uses all his weapons but none of the five weapons even scratched the ogre. The ogre commended the prince courage and saw no fear in the prince’s eyes. Stunned by this he asked the prince why he did not tremble in fear and the prince simply said that he did not fear death because he had a thunderbolt for a weapon, a weapon that was inside him and if the ogre ate him, both would perish. This thunderbolt was *vajra*, one of the symbols of Buddhism, because Prince Five-Weapons was in fact Buddha in an earlier incarnation, according to Campbell (2008, p. 72-73).

The invisible sixth weapon the prince had was enlightenment, knowledge to be ever free of the binds of his ego, rendering him self-denying. In *The Amazing Spider-Man #3*, the protagonist uses his knowledge coupled with the words of Johnny Storm about how a hero should be resilient, to shunt his previous self-doubt and go after Dr. Octopus whom was in an atomic research center to carry on his dangerous experiments with volatile chemicals. Peter believes it is his duty as Spider-Man to face Dr. Octopus and take back the atomic research center to the United States Military, so he develops a chemical component that is able to melt the metal arms of Dr. Octopus. This allows Spider-Man to knock Dr. Octopus unconscious and to deliver him fully secured to the authorities.

In issue #8, Peter Parker and Flash Thompson’s heated discussions came to a boiling point, one that resulted in a boxing match. One he wins without much efforts but that still did not quell the differences and feelings of contempt towards one another. The relationship with J. Jonah Jameson’s secretary Betty Brant<sup>2</sup> that began as a co-workers friendship and through the story so far evolved their relationship to a romantic one by issue #11, never truly flourished, because on that day, Doctor Octopus has being released from prison. Peter changes to his

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example is seen in Pinocchio (Ben Sharpsteen; Hamilton Luske, 1940) where after entering the belly of Monstro, the whale, he turns into a real boy.

<sup>2</sup> Introduced in *The Amazing Spider-Man #4* (1963, p. 9).

Spider-Man costume and quickly traverses through the city arriving to the prison in which he was being held, then he tries to convince the ward that he is too dangerous to be set free once again, to which the warden of the prison responds simply that he did his time and would not change his mind. Back at his house, Peter dwells on the situation but ultimately concludes that every man deserves a second chance. But he decides to manufacture a tracing device to keep his newly released enemy under surveillance. The next day as he follows him, he sees him getting into a car driven by Betty Brant. He later approaches Betty as Peter and claims to her that he was searching everywhere for her and that he cannot live without her. Touched by Peter's words she comes clean about why she was helping a man as dangerous as Dr. Octopus: it was to help her brother who owed a lot of money to a criminal, that enlisted Octopus' help. On this very moment, taken over by his feelings, Peter decides that after all of this is dealt with, he would come clean about his secret identity to Betty Brant. Next, at the house that Betty and Dr. Octopus were staying awaiting for her brother to show up, it is revealed that until Dr. Octopus breaks the criminal that Bennet Brant owes money out of his prison, Betty and her brother will be held in custody of the aforementioned enemy of Spider-Man.

During the next day, as the breakout of the criminal is supposed to take place, Spider-Man tries to do everything he can to save the Brant brothers and also to stop the criminals and Dr. Octopus. Unfortunately, it is more than what he could handle and amidst the fight, shots were fired and one of those shots hits Bennet Brant, something Betty blames him for and says that will never forgive him for it. Still trying to do what's right, he goes after all the criminals to catch them before they get away. Sadly, Dr. Octopus escapes. But at least Bennet's killer was arrested by the police. Peter attends to Bennet's funeral and then understands that he could never be completely honest with her about who he was and he could never explain his sudden bruises and disappearances to her, all this piling on to the fact that he cared too much about her to put her in danger ever again.

The majority of the following issues of *The Amazing Spider-Man* set the hero on an array of perilous situations as both Peter Parker and as his alter-ego Spider-Man. This marks Peter's entering the second stage of his journey which Campbell (2008, p. 89) called "Initiation", characterized by him as "The hero, whether god or goddess, man or woman, the figure of myth or the dreamer of a dream, discovers and assimilates his opposite (his own unsuspected self) either by swallowing it or by being swallowed. One by one the resistances are broken" and to Peter, this means letting go of love interests, his pride and how he spends his time outside of his normal teenager obligations. Campbell (2008, p. 89) further summarizes the essence of this

step on the hero's journey "The ordeal is a deepening of the problem of the first threshold and the question is still in balance: can the ego put itself to death?"

Finally, the last steps in his arduous journey as a hero being analyzed here are presented in *The Amazing Spider-Man #31 to #33*, where – graduated from high school and – now student to Empire State University as the winner of a science scholarship, Peter meets new faces such as Gwen Stacy and Harry Osborn, both classmates who at first do not like Peter Parker. Aunt May is diagnosed with an unknown illness which is why Peter ignores everything around him for his first days in college. His classmates think that he is just being arrogant, thinking he is smarter than everyone else. This illness is later revealed to be caused by the transfusion she had received using Peter's blood in issue #10. The radiation in his blood affects May negatively, causing her to slowly weaken herself until she would die. After Peter discovers this, he rushes as Spider-Man to one of his former enemies, Dr. Curt Connors<sup>3</sup> as he was the best surgeon Peter knew to search for a solution. He suggests the use of a chemical called *ISO-36* to try to neutralize the radiation in the patient's blood.

In Spider-Man's version of a step of the *monomyth* Campbell (2008, p.1 76) called *The Magic Flight* Peter sells all he deems worth a good amount of money to return with a solution – or a *boon* if you will – for his aunt. The information of the rare ISO-36 being transported to the city reaches the ears of a former enemy of the hero. He was leading a group of criminals from under the surface on a hideout in the bottom of a river under the new moniker of Master Planner. His henchmen intercept the cargo to steal the rare chemical. Spider-Man follows them in a race against time to save his aunt. Amidst the fight with the henchmen and the Master Planner – now uncovered as one of his old arch enemies, Dr. Octopus – Spider-Man ends the battle damaging the central structure of the base, which falls on top of him. At this moment Peter has a moment of inner realization that only he can deliver the cure to his aunt on time, remembering of his past failures – mainly with his uncle Ben – and his responsibility to save May, he finds within himself a glimpse of the power to lift the rubbles and to emerge from the guilt he was carrying of the death of his uncle since the start of his adventure. Finally bringing the chemical ISO-36, his version of the *elixir* back to his aunt May, curing her and concluding the arc of his journey examined here.

Lastly, it can be argued that while this hero's journey did not presented all of the steps in the *monomyth*, it is concluded that this structure is a template that is present in all of myth,

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<sup>3</sup> Introduced in *The Amazing Spider-Man #6* as the villain *The Lizard* (1963, p. 2).

but not every single structure is present in every single hero's journey, as Campbell himself presents:

Many tales isolate and greatly enlarge upon one or two of the typical elements of the full cycle (test motif, flight motif, abduction of the bride), others string a number of independent cycles into a single series (as in the *Odyssey*). Differing characters or episodes can become fused, or a single element can reduplicate itself and reappear under many changes. The outlines of myths and tales are subject to damage and obscuration (Campbell, 2008, p. 212).

These were the necessary interpretations so that myth could be passed on in Spider-Man comic books during the 1960's and beyond, according to the comic books examined.

### **3 DUSTING OUT THE WEBS: THE OLD WAYS OF SOCIETY**

Outside of the pages of Spider-Man comics, heroes were needed as well. The country had many social problems that, according to the younger generation, it should not have. Especially in what was such thriving times for the United States. The movement that sparked

in the hearts of the youth, claiming for change would change forever the American history. This will be examined through various lens as the web gets more elaborate.

### 3.1 TECHNOCRACY: HOW COUNTERCULTURE CAME TO BE

Before discussing what Counterculture is, it is necessary to understand how it came to be. The web of circumstances that created the need for change. One of the most silent and concealed of those circumstances was the advent of *technocracy*, a concept Roszak (1969) elaborated as:

[...] that social form in which an industrial society reaches the peak of its organizational integration. It is the ideal men usually have in mind when they speak of modernizing, up-dating, rationalizing, planning. Drawing upon such unquestionable imperatives as the demand for efficiency, for social security, for large-scale co-ordination of men and resources, for ever higher levels of affluence and ever more impressive manifestations of collective human power, the technocracy works to knit together the anachronistic gaps and fissures of the industrial society (ROZAK, 1969, p. 5).

This kind of efficiency in industrial planning would not work if it had been tied to a left or right wing ideology, it needed to transcend such questions. By orchestrating human context in its entirety: the industrial complex (mainly), the culture – movies, leisure, entertainment – as well as politics, education and even unconscious drives in every individual. In technocracy, man must be reduced to a technical animal, racing on its wheel like a good little hamster in a cage. American society could not afford another Great Depression, it had to have predictability. The individual needed “to be fashioned by techniques, either negatively (by the techniques of understanding man) or positively (by adapting man to the technical framework), in order to wipe out the blots (SIC)” (Roszak, 1969, p. 6) that the individual’s personality could introduce to this perfectly designed organization, as humans could not have autonomy in the face of technical autonomy. This was the level of control that technocracy had to have in society in order to reach its full potential.

Technocracy had a number of failures before finally having a real shot, the first failed attempt to do so in 1920 by the brief formation of the Technical Alliance, formed and led by Howard Scott. The second rise of the subject was during a period of intense public interest and debate on the “findings” of an Energy Survey, directed again by Scott at Columbia University. Until finally after various amalgamations, conflicts and schisms, Scott’s Technocracy Inc. was the only organization remaining, according to Adair (1970, p. 13).

The first steps towards the need of the ideas of technocracy were present in the wake of the Great Depression when various establishments spokesmen in various efforts trying to normalize the panic in the working class, began to circle around that “The Economy is

Fundamentally Sound”, a statement that became so rethorical and spread out that it was impossible to retrace its origin (ADAIR, 1970, p. 10). All of this in an attempt to make the gears keep turning. But as this statement became rejected, the interest in technocracy grew.

In order for technocracy to take over, it had to make itself exclusive, only to technicians. Nothing was small or simple anymore. At least not to the non-technical man. The scale and intricacy of every human activity transcended the competence of the amateurish citizen, furthermore the core who deals with the large-scale public necessities are the experts, the technicians. Technical knowledge became synonym of social prestige. This prestige came after the first publicly known record of technocratic ideas in 1932, when Howard Scott presented data of the findings of Energy Survey, a study he was directing at Columbia University seemed to predict the 1929 Great Depression (ADAIR, 1970, p. 26). To prevent that from happening again, among the key institutions of society, a “think-tank” was formed. Housed by a multi-billion-dollar brainstorming group that sought to anticipate and integrate into the social planning pretty much anything and everything they could (Roszak, 1969, p. 7).

In such a society, the normal citizen confronted by enormous complexity and nuances, found it necessary to leave such matters to those who had the expertise. They had no time to learn or discuss, they had an economy to recover, an income to earn, things to buy, a necessity to fill the void created specifically for them. All of this by design. This phenomenon of oral tradition is described as “a fixed and still largely trustworthy reference in a world now difficult to understand”, proceeding to comment how it should not come as a surprise that the working class reproduced sayings out of context always repeating “they say that...”, because they did not think critically about it (HOGGART, 1917, p. 29), and more importantly they did not think that these sayings applied to them, the workers, further establishing the social segregation present in technical knowledge and skill representing an elite. Once again, the normal citizens and workers left it to the wealthy experts. Technocracy therefore could also be described as: “that society in which those who govern justify themselves by appeal to technical experts who, in turn, justify themselves by appeal to scientific forms of knowledge. And beyond the authority of science, there is no appeal” (ROSZAK, 1969, p. 8).

Understood in those terms, technocracy has the characteristic of rendering itself ideologically invisible. However, the implementation of technocracy was not so easy. The first reception of the ideas of it was confusing to say the least. At first, the technocrats seemed to have trouble in explaining what is it that they would do, the goals and the means. The public response in the initial years (1932-1933) was: “For some, a new form of government was implied, to others, only minor economic reorganization, as there were those of whom it was

science fiction ‘come to life’”, according to Adair (1970, p. 33). The statements given by Howard Scott in the early stages of Technocracy were contradictory and caused the interest in it to die down.

Almost a decade later, the efforts of Scott had ensured some followers who were still loyal to the techocratic movement. The challenge of the first half of the 1930’s was to make technocracy an organized movement. The main issue was in the conflict of how Technocracy was to effect its desired social change. The group at the center of the spotlights, *Technocracy Inc.*, could not decide if it would engage with a more active political stance or the passive millennial concept that change was inevitable, without needing assistance of the Technocracy (ADAIR, 1970, p. 42). This caused a schism in the movement that led it to divide in two major factions: *Technocracy Inc.* and the *Continental Committee on Technocracy* and years later another schism within *Technocracy Inc.* itself.

In the *Continental Committee* the strategy was tending toward political reformism. One of its leaders, Harold Loeb even wrote in an unpublished manuscript that they did not see a need for transforming the government system: they wanted a department of the government with democratically elected officials subordinated to the political authorities, which should be entrusted with the subject of technocracy within the administration. This is a point where Howard Scott and Loeb firmly disagreed, as Adair points out:

[...] Technocracy Inc. developed along somewhat different lines. Loeb felt that the new society of abundance could be achieved, by convincing enough people it was to their advantage. Technocracy Inc. considered such a tactic ineffective. It believed in recruiting a small group of trained technicians who would prepare to take over the switchboards when the price system collapsed (ADAIR, 1970, p. 44).

This back and forth between technocracy aiming for a more passive and active role in regards to the movement’s role in effecting change was at the center of all its failures, among and within its factions. For the next few years *Technocracy Inc.* tried to do an educational tour throughout the USA trying to gather followers, but outside of the West Coast, which had numerous independent technocratic groups, he did not achieve much success with his goals. Even going bankrupt and living in the apartment of a friend in Canada, since he had lost everything, with his lectures across the country rarely paying more than his bills, according to an article on the New York Times (March 5, 1933, p. 1). One repeated argument of Howard Scott was that the inevitable collapse of the price system could come again as soon as 1940. And since he was right in his prediction of the Great Depression, this was a statement that made people listen to him, despite his previous failures in drawing attention to the *Technocracy Inc.* In May of 1935 he made a new prediction:



[...] Howard Scott, the Director in Chief of Technocracy Inc., has issued one more of his rare statements. As usual, it is important. Instead of 1940 being the year beyond which the price system cannot last, the date is now brought as close as 1937. Howard Scott does not guess at things. He knows. His knowledge is as accurate as scientific observation can make it. The time is now short. It is time that all Technocrats got busy (*Technocracy Digest*, 1935, p. 3).

After the article in question published in this technocratic journal, Howard Scott ideas began to gain relevance once more. Before the incoming World War II, Scott amassed the momentum gained and started producing literature of technocracy once again, as well as pamphlets, giving lectures across Canada and the United States in his annual tours, interviews on radio stations and so on. *Technocracy Inc.* was again, the unparalleled front of the technocratic movement. Unfortunately, it was during Howard's group tour of 1937 that the movement also began to show its fascist tendencies, as Technocracy Inc. slowed down the education side of its tours to began focusing on a process of selection, this idea of biological elitism and the participation in technocracy was clearly showed in a subsequent edition of the *Technocracy Digest* of 1937, stating that:

[...] Genius is a rare biological occurrence. The behavior of the majority of the 165,000,000 people on this continent indicates a capacity but little about the moron level. Three percent or roughly about five million of them have sufficient well developed cerebral cortex, the activity and past training to become Technocrats. The balance are never expected to understand it, participate in it, or supply the requisite leadership to effect the greatest social transition in all history (*Technocracy Digest*, 1937, p. 1).

This concept was later more directed to organizational recruitment. It was during the 1937 tour that the idea of a technocratic army was conceived, with the concept of having grey uniforms and cars. After this, Howard Scott was seen dressed in grey suit and driving a grey car with red lined wheels (ADAIR, 1970, p. 74). By 1939, with the threat of war after Britain had declared war on Germany, the program of recruitment for a technocratic army was developed more thoroughly. This organizational recruitment program was called the *Total Conscription* program and it began in July of 1940. But Howard Scott was too adamant on the role Technocracy was to play in the war, even going as far as suggesting to be made Director of National Defense of Canada in a telegram to the prime minister of the country at the time. The response of the prime minister was "the literature of Technocracy discloses, in effect, that one of its objectives is to overthrow the government and constitution of this country by force." (ADAIR, 1970. p. 78).

Hardly over two weeks after the *Total Conscription* program was announced, Canada banned all activities of *Technocracy Inc.* of its territory from 1940 until 1943 (ADAIR, 1970, p. 78). After this, Howard Scott's group was still active (still in Canada), albeit more quietly,

until 1942 when they eventually surfaced under a temporarily new name: *The Victory Committee*, a name that would be changed back once the ban was lifted. During this time, recruiting for the technocratic army was happening. The idea behind this army caused suspicion if this was to help the country or it was Scott's ultimate goal, the installment of a Technate, technocracy's absolute control of society (ADAIR, 1970, p. 86-87). This was the bane that made *Technocracy Inc.* and all the other groups of Technocracy still active to fall into irrelevance as the use of militancy, big interference in government matters and the various speeches with a fascist tone which did not sit well with people.

Little was heard about Technocracy in the years that followed, the only other note worthy mention being around 1950, when the automation of technology became prominent, something Technocracy had foreseen. It caused some of the technocratic literature to go back in to print for a while, in small quantities. But the movement itself was practically dead, not causing any more ripples in society.

However, some ideas endured and infiltrated into the American society until the 1960's. Technocracy had power to "[...] provide 'satisfaction in a way which generates submission and weakens the rationality of protest.'" (ROSZAK, 1969, p. 14), one such example of this was how sexuality was treated during the advent of Technocracy. To allow sexuality to run free would create a society in which technocratic discipline would not be possible. And outright prohibiting it would cause an explosive negative response and association of technocracy with puritanical traditions. Their strategy was, then, to transform that permissiveness in glamour, hence *Playboy* brought about a version of sex that has a special social coloring, as Roszak describes:

[...] It has been assimilated to an income level and social status available only to our well-heeled junior executives and the jet set. After all, what does it cost to rent these yachts full of nymphomaniacal young things in which our playboys sail off for orgiastic swimming parties in the Bahamas? (Roszak, 1969, p. 14-15).

This was the *real* sex. The only one that mattered, the one decorated in magazines and movies, the one that goes with the best scotch, expensive sunglasses and expensive clothes. Anything else was a shabby substitute. In summary, permissiveness existed in technocracy, but only to someone with deep pockets full of cash. Serving as motivation for the loyal employee to keep working to get there. This is one of many examples of the ideas that technocracy quietly induced in American society and eventually would become synonym with how the great masses perceived capitalism. The more distinctive attractions that technocracy and its regime of experts provided were the exploitation of the scientific world-view in industrial nations and in manipulating the lives of the population with the comforts and security that science has brought forth.

The cost of an aggressive “capitalist technocracy” was big, as during this period capitalist enterprises move to a stage that large scale social integration and control become interests of the utmost importance in and of themselves with companies behaving like public authorities concerned with rationalizing the total economy. Profit was the motivation that kept the wheel spinning and if it worked for the economic system, it should work in other aspects of society to achieve that perfected and centralized organization (ROSZAK, 1969, p. 18). It was a change so subtle that one generation that only saw its benefits, did not care for what it would cost them. They had enough, with their resilience through the economic collapse in the thirties, and the fatigue of war.

### 3.2 THE SCHISM – THE BOOMERS AND THEIR CHILDREN:

The division that was the catalyst for Counterculture was a generational schism. Adults exhausted of war, the Great Depression and at the same time comfortable with commodities brought by the advances on the American economy and technology and their children who did not approve the current state of society as a whole. The disappointment of the younger generation was not present only in America, as in Europe the situation shows signs of the same problem:

[...] the young radicals of Europe still tend to see themselves as champions of “the people” (meaning the working class) against the oppression of the bourgeoisie (meaning, in most cases, their own parents). Accordingly, they try valiantly to adapt themselves to the familiar patterns of the past. They reach automatically along time-honored ideological lines to find allies – to the workers, the trade unions, the parties of the left... only to discover that these expected alliances strangely fail to materialize and that they stand alone and isolated, a vanguard without a following (ROSZAK, 1969, p. 2).

Having no support from the government, as their parents and adults in general of all kinds of professions, even persons in power had shifted their trust to the urgent centralization in decision making and reverence to science, in fear of repeating the same mistakes of its past, before Technocracy left its mark their children had to start looking for support, ideas and ideals elsewhere. Embodying that much responsibility was a tremendous weight for the youth of the 1960’s to bear. Hoping that they would succeed, it would be just that: hoping. This perceived crisis, ironically was one that demanded maturity and wisdom. Something that the builders of this new society had absolutely no experience with, since they were still beginning in life and all of its intricacies.

Another cause for the schism between the youth of the 1960’s and their parents was not only the market expansion and consumerism mentality, but the expansion in education: “In the United States, we have a college population of nearly six million, an increase of more than

double over 1950”, as Roszak (1969, p. 28) states. Higher education meant more self-awareness of the problems in society and the need of change. The wide nature of universities campuses where newly graduated from high school and veterans of college shared the same space made sure that the younger ones also participated in the larger “youth” movement, giving to the whole student movement a degree of competence that the younger students alone could not muster. On the other hand, universities produced the brains that the industrial apparatus wished, that what remained of Technocracy needed. And this manifests in the crucial role of the elders in universities:

[...] for they tend to be those who have the most vivid realization of the new economic role of the university. Being closer to the technocratic careers for which higher education is supposed to be grooming them in the Great Society, they have a delicate sensitivity to the social regimentation that imminently confronts them, and a stronger sense of the potential power which the society’s need for trained personnel endows them (ROSZAK, 1969, p. 29).

Some sectors and parents feel that their money could be wasted on college education since most of them want college to produce technicians and not philosophers. But messing too much with these institutions was not advised as it would mean to mess with one of the economy’s most vital sectors, since it is where advancements in technology and science spring from.

Adults have been educated to serve a high consumption, leisure wealthy society that in turn produced children that did not need to be rigidly trained to be responsible until later in life. Families had the means to spoil and to prolong their children’s childhood since the skills they had to learn to thrive in society would not be learned until college. But at that point, these children have been permeated in freedom and pleasure for eighteen to twenty years, which made some of them poorly prepared for the real world, for the proper sense of responsibility that the crunch will ask of them.

A new wave of music and artists that engaged deeply in these generation’s problems was called *the Beats*. Jack Kerouac used the term *Beat* for someone who was “poor and downtrodden, but free and beatific, or blissfully happy” (BROWNELL, 2011, p. 10). On Kerouac’s book, *On the Road*, he wrote about this period of the Beat Generation. Joyce Johnson who knew him, wrote on *Smithsonian* magazine about the book, saying that:

[...] Their main goal in life was to ‘know time’, which they could achieve by packing as much intensity as possible into each moment. They didn’t have houses with mortgages – they had wheels. They didn’t worry about hanging on to 9 to 5 jobs – they picked up lowly gigs that kept them afloat between adventures. Convinced that black jazz musicians, freight-hopping hobos and Mexican grape pickers knew more about the meaning of life than men in gray flannel suits, they didn’t care about achieving respectability. (*Smithsonian Magazine*, September, 2007).

Kerouac's fellow writer, William Burroughs and the poet Allen Ginsberg wrote the novel *Naked Lunch* (1959) and the epic poem *Howl* (1957) respectively, and both of them got arrested for writing such things. At that time, they were ridiculed. Herb Cean, a columnist of the *San Francisco Chronicle* called them *Beatniks* (BROWNELL, 2011, p. 11), a term that was inspired by the name of the Russian satellite *Sputnick*, implying that they were not American if they were not supporters of the American government or patriots. Eventually the writers were released and their work found its audience.

Those were the first among other authors who "challenged the predominant American culture in both their work and their lifestyles, and they inspired young people to seek out views that were different than those passed down by their parents" (BROWNELL, 2011, p. 15). It is note worthy to mention Kerouac and Ginsberg because they influenced young musicians such as Bob Dylan and John Lennon. Their writings spoke directly to an American generation that was coming of age, that needed this spark to see that there was still another way. And some of them were willing to go to great lengths to achieve it.

### 3.3 THE CHANGE: COUNTERCULTURE

The 1960's opened with a promise of change. The youngest ever president of the United States of America was elected: John F. Kennedy. This symbolized a new beginning to a new generation, "[...] It signified a fresh perspective in America's leadership at a point when minorities began expressing their desire for equality. Additionally, a large segment of the younger generation was eager to take a greater role in society, due in part to Kennedy's inspiring words and energetic persona" (BROWNELL, 2011, p. 12). Some, however, were still concerned with the turmoil of the Cold War resulting in more actual war. This sentiment was present in the minds of many. Others believed that Kennedy – being the politician that he was – could be practical, but from personal experience they believed that like any other politician he was bound to be untrustworthy.

Those that could not wait to see if the government would actually effect change, found their inspirations in people as the college dropout Bob Dylan, himself inspired by Beat literature, who moved to New York to give rise to his career in music and to visit his idol, Woodie Guthrie, a folk singer. Allen J. Matusow, a historian wrote that "Immersing himself in the left-liberal-civil-rights ethos permeating the Village in the early 1960's, Dylan wrote folk songs as protest... He used figurative language and elusive imagery to distill the political mood of his time and place" (MATUSOW, 1984, p. 295). Bob Dylan went on to become hugely popular among the youth who simpatized with his ideas, lifestyle and songs.

Parallel to the first steps of Counterculture, in the 1960's ideas that became popular on college campuses around the country formed a political movement called *The New Left*. The old left wing had association with communism, something that made it lose all credibility with the general public, as the Cold War with the Soviet Union began. The college students that made *The New Left* were free thinkers, students who felt guilty for the life of privilege they had when comparing to minorities and poor people. They were upset by the uneven distribution of wealth, lack of equality for black citizens and these students, along with the professors that also comprised this political movement believed that the government was to blame (BROWNELL, 2011, p. 18). Another party formed was the *Students for a Democratic Society* (SDS). Among the students that formed this party were Alan Haber and Tom Hayden of the University of Michigan. The SDS was dedicated to fighting for civil rights and free speech, among other causes that *The New Left* already manifested the relevance in fighting for. However, the SDS became known for planning and taking part in protests to raise awareness of the laws that needed to be changed and to inform what were the attitudes that perpetuated these issues of authoritarianism, poverty and segregation.

By 1962, the SDS held a national convention in Michigan, where they developed a document that encapsulated their views and had guidelines to carry them out (BROWNELL, 2011, p. 18). This document called *The Statement* was constructed mostly by Tom Hayden called for "[...] fundamental change in society to break the cycle of anti-democratic tendencies that SDS believed had pervaded America. It called for a national participatory democracy, which meant a decentralized government, in which everyone had the opportunity to express his or her views and that accomodated all opinions." (BROWNELL, 2011, p. 18). This was important for the SDS to see in American government because their own party was set in this particular manner, so they had faith that it could be implemented nation-wide. One of SDS's first projects, called Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), was an idea to educate and empower poor residents across several cities, but was overall too small of a success compared to their vision. As a result, some members questioned the efforts of ERAP, while the vast marjority recognized the value of taking part in Martin Luther King Jr. fight for civil rights in the South of the United States, as they were reenacting pages of *The Statement* (BROWNELL, 2011, p. 20). Seeing their views in action was deeply motivating for them, so they took part in the movement. In the South especially, black people were treated as lesser citizen. Martin Luther King together with other activists held mass demonstrations that emboldened young black folks coming of age in the 1960's.

One event that stood out took place on February 1, 1960. With four black students sitting in the whites-only section. It did not matter how well dressed and polited they were, they simply were ignored, refused to be served by the waitress because of their skin color. The next day, they came back with even more black students. The word of the event spreaded and this began happening in other southern cities. The sociologist Todd Gitlin (1987, p. 85) wrote in his book *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Hate* that those demonstrators “threw the burden of disruption onto the upholders of white supremacy. Instead of saying that segregation ought to stop, they acted as if segregation no longer existed.”, but this peaceful protest instigated a contrary effect on racist people. Which fortunately, in turn, inspired more sympathy and support for their cause.

In 1963, probably the high point for the cause, Martin Luther King along with A. Philip Randolph, James Farmer and other civil rights leaders spent the summer of that year organizing a march that would be know as the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (BROWNELL, 2011, p. 23). This march had various purposes such as a meaningful legislation for the rights of black people, an end to segregation, protection against violent law enforcers such as the police and so on. On August 28, of that same year, two hundred and fifty thousand people showed up, only a fifth of them were white. The event was peaceful and drew international attention. Musicians like Bob Dylan, Joan Baez (another popular folk singer of the sixties) and several other musicians performed at the Lincoln Memorial. Many speeches were made that day, but that was the day that Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech – even though it was not his first time doing it – reached the largest crowd. However positive the march may have been, the fight for civil rights went on.

Another growing aspect of the 1960’s outside of youth involving itself in politics was “the progressive ‘adolescentization’ of thought and culture, as described by Roszak (1969, p. 39). He further explains what makes Counterculture something new, stating that:

What makes the youthful disaffiliation of our time a cultural phenomenon, rather than merely a political movement, is the fact that it strikes beyond ideology to the level of consciousness, seeking to transform our deepest sense of the self, the other, the enviroment (ROSZAK, 1969, p. 49).

The youth of Counterculture then, denying the technocratic ways that society and science dictaded their path so far, decides to go for a more raw way of living, focusing in the moment, in the communion of human exchange of life experiences, even if it would be considered an egocentric way by those who disagreed. This was their method for arbitrating their *new* concepts of what was right, what was beautiful and what was true. In line with that adolescentization mentioned earlier, this caused massive shifts in how culture was made and

whom it was to. By 1965, with more than 50% of the American population being under twenty-five years old, the aggressiveness of a culture towards young people was empowered by them feeling the potential of those numbers (ROSZAK, 1969, p. 27). The invasion of British culture came with the takeover of The Beatles in 1964 that brought the Mod subculture along with them. In 1965, it was argued that high fashion came from low places, from the marginals that fearlessly carved the world for themselves (WOLFE, 1965, p. 212), the surge of Mod fashion trend made things reverse. The parents were trying to look like their kids, and since the trend dictated the market, it affected even the adults. Being young was not simply demographic anymore, it also was a consumer identity, one that adults could emulate with similar buying patterns and 'become young' (BRAUNSTEIN; DOYLE, 2002, p. 245).

In another trend that came from Europe, the *discotheques* brought forth another interesting aspect of the behavior change that young people were causing in American culture: the silly moves were made with serious attitude. This marked an important sign: the vanishment of the distinction work and play the rejuvenation of society. Ironic events were happening in these dance clubs where the young dressed as the young, the adults could look like the young if they wanted, but under any circumstances the young could look like their parents. This schism between the generations began to permeate movies as well, as young culture began to be the center of every media, with caper films having honorable mentions with movies like *Kaleidoscope* (Jack Smight, 1966) starring Warren Beatty and Susannah York and *The Jokers* (Michael Winner, 1967) with Oliver Reed. Those movies illustrated always the same premise: someone young plans a daring robbery not because he needs cash but just to prove that he can outsmart someone older and with more authority than him. The ultimate middle finger. Always implicit and as time went on, more and more prevalent and violent was the antagonism between the individuals and the society. Other noteworthy examples were *Danger: Diabolik* (Mario Brava, 1968) and *Thomas Crown Affair* (Norman Jewison, 1968). The caper genre of cinema illustrated "youth's cocky optimism, sense of superiority and thirst for challenge and adventure" (BRAUNSTEIN; DOYLE, 2002, p. 249). Several of the TV shows during this period flirted with that hero-criminal and authoritarian adversaries in espionage and 'cat and mouse' crime shows like *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *Get Smart* and *Batman*. The break-up in the dichotomy of work and play was felt in the antagonism of this era of movies and TV shows, one that was playful and serious in one moment, fun-loving and ruthless in the next one.

As Counterculture evolved, other forms of media evolved with it, as the movement became more fervent, so did the movies. The high mark of this was released in August of 1967 when *Bonnie and Clyde* was released. The movie was specially provoking because it is set in



1930's, some of the adults of the 1960's most dreaded years. It was a movie about robbers with attitude clearly influenced by the youth of the 1960's, to further antagonize the previous generation. They play of being bank robbers and this work & play ensures them with money, and in their minds, elevated their self-esteem with more social coverage due to the high profile of their doings. It was a glamourized version of the real events, seemingly made just to piss the adults of the sixties. And true to the spirit of Counterculture, they lived always in the present with no concern for what would happen afterwards, even going as far as to say that if they could go back, they would not have it any other way. They were fulfilled.

This child regressiveness came from another part of the country, from San Francisco where the new epicenter of Counterculture would be. In 1967, the hippies, a more insurgently radical in principles youth emerged. Their debut event was a festival called "The First Human Be-In" (BRAUNSTEIN; DOYLE, 2002, p. 250). Since this event was so nebulous and existential, no observer thought it would have part in greater meaning. But twenty thousand people showed up to it, using LSD (popularly known as acid), listened to music and celebrated the simple act of being (BRAUNSTEIN; DOYLE, 2002, p. 251). The hippies elevated the status of youth to a more organized collective ambition of the rejuvenation in America. It also evolved Counterculture to a more political stance, under the perspective of the political climate in 1967's America. In 1967, almost half a million were in Vietnam fighting a war. The previously discussed Civil Rights movement and the Voting Rights Act both had happened in 1965 and violent responses to the many social movements since then were increasing in frequency – in the streets, university campuses or in Vietnam – this flower loving psychodelical youth was a mockery to counter all this aggression present in society. Hippies aimed to achieve a childlike innocence, to revert themselves back to before knowing the evil that plagued their reality, as explained:

To be childlike, in this new construction, meant to be one with nature, with the earth, with other human beings; to be non-violent, loving and (re)sensitized to the violence around you; to consciously regain the simplicity and wonder of childhood as a perceptual prism for reclaiming a society wracked by civil uprisings and war abroad. (BRAUNSTEIN; DOYLE, 2002, p. 252)

This transition in mentality caused the shift in the youth insurgency from attitude to ideology and from posture to provocation. The hippies believed in the philosophy of deconditioning, something Jay Stevens (1987,p. 291) explains: "deconditioning assumed that LSD allowed you an objective look at your own life, all of the categories you had been taught to filter experience into, first as an infant and later as a functioning member of a complex, highly organized society". As much as the drugs use in the sixties facilitated an exit from the rules that

made the society they were imposed to habit, LSD experiments were conducted even before the hippies. Dr. Timothy Leary was a very important person in the role of spreading LSD<sup>4</sup>. But the hippies were the ones that made it purposeful for Counterculture.

Writer Ken Kesey and his inner circle self titled themselves *Merry Pranksters* and contrary to Leary, believed that it had various uses beyond the medicinal uses:

Unlike Leary's Harvard crowd, the Pranksters took acid not so much to explore inner space as to re-negotiate social space. Whereas the Leary circle of adepts believed that "set and setting" should be carefully controlled to create an individual LSD experience pointed toward maximum inner exploration, the Pranksters insisted on "freaking freely" (BRAUNSTEIN; DOYLE, 2002, p. 24).

The Pranksters were in favor of taking acid (LSD) and experiencing the world in that heightened conscience state and tried to transfer what they experienced during that time to the real world. But after being so largely distributed, the opportunities for various studies and tests being concluded resulted in various concerns with the immediate and the long term side effects of the drug. The more immediate side effects were psychotic breaks, something that happened to about two percent of the users (BRAUNSTEIN; DOYLE, 2002, p. 31). And long term side effects were pointed out by Dr. Sidney Cohen, as users became invalids, "that is the loss of all cultural values, the loss of feeling of right and wrong, of good and bad. These people lead a valueless life, without motivation, without ambition... they are decultured, lost to society, lost to themselves." (COHEN, 1965, p. 279), thus rendering them unproductive members of society and therefore enemies of the industrial society that Technocratic capitalists practices had made.

These factors eventually made LSD illegal in the United States. And with legislation in effect, LSD advocates began to be arrested and pure LSD was nowhere to be found. This, in turn, brought the advent of the underground labs and made taking acid even more of a rebellious act, as the simple act of using drugs meant that they were willing to go to jail in pursuit of an experience of altered conscience (BRAUNSTEIN; DOYLE, 2002, p. 34).

The shift from youth culture to Counterculture in its later stages with hippies at the forefront raised a question that was there since the beginning of the movement. How to plan a future for a movement so centered in the moment, so presentist? The child regression was to enter a state of inner discovery, but if LSD opened that same door over and over, how many trips were really necessary? In the end, there were very little individuals who actually got to transfer what their acid trips taught them to the real world, many "attempted to live of the land; scorning materialism, they sought a simple life, more attuned to the natural world. Some

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<sup>4</sup> Further reports of its endeavors on *Imagine Nation: the american counterculture of the 1960's and '70s*. New York: Routledge, 2002 (BRAUNSTEIN, Peter; DOYLE, Michael William).

grew marijuana, many took up craft and artisanal work.” (BRAUNSTEIN; DOYLE, 2002, p. 37). The hippies that remained engaged in their protest eventually wondered if someday they succeeded they would become the very thing they were up against. Ultimately, Counterculture was doomed from the start. But as it shall be seen, its impact was felt. And comic books carried their values forward for many years to come, as it will be explored.

## 4 TYING THE WEB TOGETHER

After getting to know the intricate web of circumstances that composes the context of society at the time of the creation and the creation itself, this is the moment where the spider will be dissected and it will be seen what makes it so special. It shall be seen if Spider-Man really can do whatever a spider can, if he was an advocate for change and if it represented and resonated well with the readers of the 1960's during Counterculture and what lasting legacy he carries forward. As comics always said in its final pages: Don't miss out the next chapter!

### 4.1 SPIDER-MAN: THE EVERYMAN'S HERO

Spider-Man stories revolved around the balancing act of living as a normal teenager and as his secret alter ego, the hero himself, Spider-Man, being written and drawn by the duo of Stan Lee (40 years old) and Steve Ditko (35 years old) respectively. Both of them had lived through the years of World War II, the advent of technocracy and were out of the Cold War years for only a few years. So these themes were still pretty fresh in the minds of great part of the population and would be part of the initial arcs of stories told in the comic. In *The Amazing Spider-Man #1* (LEE and DITKO, 1963), the first of the stories presented the hero as a menace to the public because of the lawless actions he could commit, according to the character of J. Jonah Jameson, the owner of the sensationalist newspaper that published the headline "Spider-Man: Freak! Public Menace!" present in the very first page of the comic and in the journal of said character by the end of the story presented in this comic issue. Stan Lee himself commented that the purpose of this character:

[...] When I first wrote him into the series, he was just a minor throwaway character. I thought he'd be good for a couple of good laughs and that was it. Then y'know what happened? The irascible ol' curmudgeon became one of the mainstays of the entire series. He's perfect to foil for both Peter and Spidey to tangle with in a never-ending battle of wits and verbal barbs. JJJ has come to represent the most conservative, straight-laced members of society, the self-righteous know-it-all who dislike and distrust anyone who looks, acts or thinks differently than they do (LEE; DITKO, 2019, p. 297).

Spider-Man, being an agent of change in what still was a technocratic – and therefore deeply organized in its process of industrialization – society was not going to be a smooth transition. Neither for the creators and the reception of its ideas in the real world, nor mainly, for the fictional people of the world created in this hero's comics.

The second story present in the pages of *The Amazing Spider-Man #1* put Spider-Man against a villain known as *The Chameleon*. In this story the villain is someone who can change appearance and look like anyone. The story is framed around the Chameleon disguising himself as Spider-Man and stealing plans for defense missiles. In the later half of the story the villain is

revealed to be a russian spy for the U.S.R.R; Spider-Man stops him and says: “End of the line for you, commie!”<sup>5</sup>. With this being the only mention of communism and of Cold War related stories in the Spider-Man comics. The social commentary on mainstream comics especially in the the superhero genre were rare as by the time they gained popularity in the end of the fifties and beginning of the sixties, a regulamentation was imposed on them, much like the regulamentation that books and noir films went through in the prior decade (ASHBY, 2006, p. 311-313). In order for mainstream comics to stay mainstream, they had to tread lightly on social commentary. Their matters had to tread on a moral ground at best, but not on a political one. Part of what makes Spider-Man comics so inventive it is that it managed to do both, in ways that were subtle enough to not cause a comotion with the watchdogs of comic books and to inspire most of its readers.

In subsequent comic issues, a plot point was made on how Peter would gain income to help his frail aunt May. The income would come from a job that Peter did not like, for a man that he did not like, a man that also did not made his life as a superhero any easier. Peter Parker started working as photographer for the Daily Bugle, the sensationalist newspaper that was owned by J. Jonah Jameson. Putting Peter as part of the working class, along with him being a teenager made sure that *The Amazing Spider-Man* comics would reach a greater audience. Outside of the initial identification, maybe not much else could be absorbed by the uneducated worker who reads Spider-Man comics only for the entertainment value of it. However, Hoggart draws an interesting parallel in the working class that perhaps illustrates the appeal that Spider-Man could have on them. He says that a narrative of “them” and “us” is always at play in the working class, that the prospect of their lives is not to enrich, and neighter have they other intelectual interests, not even those that their work might entice. Their focus remain totally on their group and their tradition. A personal and local tradition (HOGGART, 1917, p. 102). To them, political and social matters are, as shown:

[...] to politics, therefore, they have a limited realism which tells them that, as far as they can see ‘there’s no future’ in it for them. ‘Politics never did anybody any good’, they will add; and there they are drawing upon more reputable assumptions, but applying them too widely. There are, of course, individual exceptions; and there are occasional increases in the intensity of political preoccupation among the majority (HOGGART, 1917, p. 102).

Most of the working class, therefore, have other concerns. They talk about religion, politics, social aspects of life, but these conversations happen with reproduction of rethorics used by “them”. Sentences completely unexamined such as generalizations, prejudices and half-

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<sup>5</sup> Present in *The Amazing Spider-Man* #1, 1963, p. 22, panel 9.

truths. Ultimately, as an amalgamation of these narratives that they tell and reproduce, their unfortunate social and economic condition and “they are asked to respond to ‘the needs of the state’, and the ‘needs of society’, to be ‘good citizens’ and to have in mind ‘the common good’” (HOGGART, 1917, p. 104), these narratives resulted in a working class that would end up having no great notion of what happened in more complex spheres of society. Therefore their moment of relief and main focus of their experience with the world is when they come to one of their groups, when they find ‘one of us’. These interactions – however small or big – were how the working class experienced life. A life that still retained the great themes of human existence, such as marriage, relations with other, sex and children. This happened during the crunch of factories and this made working in such long hours not only bearable, but positively interesting. This is important to everyone, but is mainly important to the working class because

[...] Working class people are only rarely interested in theories and movements. They do not usually think of their lives as leading to an improvement in status or some financial goal. They are enormously interested in people: they have the novelist’s fascination with individual behaviour, with relationships – though not so as to put them into a pattern, but for their own sake (HOGGART, 1917, p. 105-106).

In turn, this made them intuitively sensitive to reaching their own conclusions on social interactions. While in fast judgement, these judgements are never picked from outside sources, are always from firm qualities that they experienced in past experiences with one of their own: friendliness, decent-heartedness, of directness and openness in dealing. This focus on being in the moment in their interactions – something they shared in common with the emerging youth of Counterculture – and the qualities that they valued were all present in *The Amazing Spider-Man* stories. Thus, even if social commentary would become scarce beyond the first two issues, the element of a teenager working hard, with a good heart trying not to get his spirit crushed by his hard life could still speak to them and carry them towards the same optimistic energy that they tried to achieve in their little interactions with one another. These universal qualities present in Peter Parker’s core characterize him as the everyman’s hero.

#### 4.2 SPIDER-MAN AS A NARRATIVE OF NEW SIMBOLS: IMPERFECTION WAS NEVER SO APPEALING

In a time where superhero comics as a genre were populated almost exclusively by adult men as heroes, who lived in “clean, green suburbs and modern, even futuristic cities with shimmering glass skyscrapers, no slums, and populations of uniformly well-dressed white people” (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 184), Stan Lee admitted he did not like superhero stories very much because:

They were always too perfect and unbelievable, and he felt that most discerning adolescents could not relate to such stiff and silly characters. Lee hoped to recapture the teenage audience with a new kind of superhero comic book – one that played to some of the moral ambivalence that young people recognized and responded to (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 204).

This is further explained by Kothe (2000, p. 70) in his examination of trivial narratives archetypes, saying that there is a political stand taken in those stories – left or right – where in a story of right wing orientation, a social difference is manifested between a high class and a low class, those in turn serve to create, provoke or enforce a fascination of the low for the high class. Doing so not necessarily needs the high class to appear or to be directly involved: it just needs that the values and interests of such class to be front and center in the story. These stories are classified within the trivial stories archetype because “they are incapable to retain or show the contradictory and complex nature of reality.” (KOETHE, 2000, p. 70, my translation)<sup>6</sup>. Before *The Amazing Spider-Man* comics even Marvel Comics the publisher itself was at fault for this kind of story in their comics.

In the 1950's, after numerous types of pressure from different fronts, comic books had to do the same thing that the movie and TV industries had done and adopt a self-regulating code. The Comic Magazine Association of America (CMAA) was created in 1954 (ASHBY, 2006, p. 313) and was responsible for the corner that comic books had put themselves into. According to Wright (2001, p. 181), three quarters of American families had a TV on their home as the main source of entertainment, making the comic book industry a contender, along with the films, music and magazines industry competing for the remainder of everyone's leisure time. By accepting the regulation of CMAA, what creators did was basically give up their creative extent that made them popular in the first place. Making the challenge of creating profitable comic books even greater, since the code of CMAA “essentially dictated that comic books ought to be produced only for young children” (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 181).

It was amidst these circumstances that Stan Lee along with Steve Ditko created a hero which the importance was only surpassed by the creation of the first superhero, Superman, in 1938. Spider-Man brilliance came from giving the spotlight to a teenager having to deal with more responsibility than he ever asked for, and for him to understand and respond to his call of duty was pivotal to the American society. It evokes a reassuring voice of “you are not alone” to teenagers everywhere even those not engaged with the Counterculture movement. While also at the same time portraying a powerful image of change to adults with the depiction of a young

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<sup>6</sup> “[...] são incapazes de apreender ou mostrar a natureza contraditória e complexa da realidade” (KOTHE, 2000, p. 70).

man taking matters into his own hands, matters that as seen before, at the time, most of the adults who were not in power, did not.

Spider-Man moved those people through the combination of the social context and the symbolic nature of his story. While not reaching a symbolic depth found in comic books nowadays that have a much creative freedom once again, in the 1960's everything about his character was ingenious. To analyze its symbolic value for the generation of the 1960's, we must consider Baczko's statement saying that "the mythology that is created from a determined event overshadows in importance the event itself" (1985, p. 296, my translation)<sup>7</sup>. While Spider-Man's journey as a hero could be seen as mythical, his creation served the archetypal of "The young, flawed and brooding antihero became the most widely imitated archetype in the superhero genre since the appearance of Superman." (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 212). These aspects made *The Amazing Spider-Man* comics a symbol itself, but not only by the interpretation of Jung in this instance, since his definition would be incomplete: "what we call a symbol is a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. It implies something vague, unknown, or hidden from us." (1964, p. 20); but by looking at them as a product of its time, product of someone's imagination to the masses, further exemplified by relations of the social interactions and the imaginary, as stated:

It is only possible to commune or communicate among men through symbols external to the individual mental states, through signs posteriorly conceived as realities. One of the fundamental characters of social fact is, precisely, its symbolic aspect. In the majority of collective representations, it is not about the single representation of a single thing, but of a representation chosen more or less arbitrarily to the purpose of meaning various others and to exert a command over the practices. Frequently, the social behaviors are not so much about the things themselves, but to the symbols in them (BACZKO, 1985, p. 306, my translation)<sup>8</sup>.

Consequently, this endowed Spider-Man, the simple evoking of his name, with so many different and important meanings. Even inside the comics, Peter Parker developed an electronic belt signal to signal for citizens and foes that he was coming, the sign was a red beam with webs projected and his eyes in the center but that sign brought comfort to the people and panic to its villains<sup>9</sup>. Stan Lee himself heard from his superiors at the time that "You can't name a hero

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<sup>7</sup> "[...] a mitologia nasce a partir de um determinado acontecimento sobreleva em importância o próprio acontecimento" (BACZKO, 1985, p. 296).

<sup>8</sup> "[...] só é possível comungar ou comunicar entre os homens através de símbolos exteriores aos estados mentais individuais, através de signos posteriormente concebidos como realidades. Um dos caracteres fundamentais do facto social é, precisamente, o seu aspecto simbólico. Na maioria das representações coletivas, não se trata da representação única de uma coisa única, mas sim de uma representação escolhida mais ou menos arbitrariamente a fim de significar outras e de exercer um comando sobre as práticas. Frequentemente, os comportamentos sociais não se dirigem tanto as coisas em si, mas aos símbolos dessas coisas" (BACZKO, 1985, p. 306).

<sup>9</sup> Introduced in *The Amazing Spider-Man #3* (1963, p. 2).



‘Spider-Man’ because people hate spiders!’<sup>10</sup> and yet, when people think of Spider-Man this association with the spider never happens evoking anything other than the hero.

So while Spider-Man comics showed a conflicted superhero with human problems, while at the same time doing social commentary, Stan Lee managed to escape the troubles that the CMAA could give him for these stories by making sure that

[...] there was never a question as to the morality of the Marvel superheroes. They never hurt innocent people, never killed anyone, and generally respected the law. The U.S Army might torment the Hulk, and the police might harass Spider-Man, but superheroes and authority figures ultimately stood on the same side. Likewise, while often insensitive and wrongheaded, respected authority never appeared corrupt or malicious. Hedging of this sort allowed Marvel’s quietly subversive overtures to slip past the censorship of the comics code to perceptive young readers (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 218-219).

While it could be argued that Peter Parker the person and Spider-Man the hero appealed to different audiences it is the duality of the character and the focus of the story in the person beneath the mask, the hero side of superhero that made the character so symbolic. The stories were inventive on how they communicated the hero deed, in a time where such examples were desperately needed. Campbell (2008, p. 152) argues that “the ineffable teaching of the beatitude beyond imagination comes to us clothed, necessarily, in figures reminiscent of the imagined beatitude of infancy; hence the deceptive childishness of the tales. Hence, too, the inadequacy of any merely psychological reading.”, this aspect is what resonated with readers, as literature does not only reflect the society in which it was produced but also has the ability to change it back as well.

By September of 1965, an issue of *Esquire* magazine reported on the Marvel phenomenon at college campuses. “Bundles of mail”, poured into Marvel’s offices every day from more than 225 colleges. About fifty thousand American college students had paid a dollar each to join Marvel’s official fan club, the *Mery Marvel Marching Society* (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 222). Stan Lee became repeatedly requested in colleges and universities like Columbia and New York University. *Esquire* magazine asked why comic books, specifically Marvel comic books were so popular on campus. Among the various responses, a Stanford University student cited Spider-Man as his favorite because the hero was “beset by woes, money problems, and the question of existence. In short, he is one of us.” (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 222). In 1965, *Esquire*<sup>11</sup> magazine held a poll in college that revealed that student radicals ranked Spider-Man alongside Bob Dylan and Che Guevara as their favorite revolutionary icons. A *New York Times* book

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<sup>10</sup> “It Was the Mag’s Last Issue Anyway” by Stan Lee (LEE; DITKO, 2019, p. 6).

<sup>11</sup> *Esquire*, September 1965, p. 97.

reviewer in 1976 called comic books “the scriptures of the cultural revolution”<sup>12</sup> (ASHBY, 2006, p. 357). While referring to the hero’s journey, as a template to the human triumph over itself, as Campbell says, further interesting connections could be made in the success of Spider-Man. While not a mythological hero, he evokes many meanings in the same way that said hero archetype does. By evoking the ancient and symbols of myth in the unconscious, and bringing them back to modern consciousness. This dialogue of symbols with the unconscious could be explained as “subjective assimilation plays an important part in the linking of symbols and their motivations.” (DURAND, 1999, p. 36), proceeding to say that our senses serve as intermediary between the real world, the world of objects and that of dreams, or the unconscious. Campbell further complements this by saying that:

[...] it appears that through the wonder tales – which pretend to describe the lives of the legendary heroes, the powers of the divinities of nature, the spirities of the dead, and the totem ancestors of the group – symbolic expression is given to the unconscious desires, fears, and tensions that underlie the conscious patterns of human behavior. Mythology, in other words, is psychology misread as biography, history, and cosmology (CAMPBELL, 2008, p. 219).

Psychoanalysis showed that imagination is nothing but a global activity of the individual to organize a world adjusted to its needs and conflicts (BACZKO, 1985). In fact, according to Baczko (1985, p. 308, my translation)<sup>13</sup> “any culture could be considered a set of symbolic systems and that all those systems are looking to express certain aspects of the physical reality and of the social reality; and, furthermore, the relations that those two kinds of realities maintain between themselves, such as those of the symbolic systems weave among themselves.”

Ultimately, Spider-Man works as a symbol because of what it represented: the many aspects of culture at the time, for bringing an imperfect human hero to the core of a story and for being a new way, or, better yet, a forgotten way of fulfilling the promise of the hero deed that at the same time incited the social imaginary of the young generation desperately looking for new symbols.

#### 4.3 SPIDER-MAN AND COUNTERCULTURE – HOW THE WEB GOT TANGLED

Counterculture was intrinsic in Spider-Man’s story appearing in *The Amazing Spider-Man #1* (LEE; DITKO, 1963), where the immediate consequences of the death of his uncle Ben

<sup>12</sup> *New York Times*, September 5, 1976, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> “[...] qualquer cultura pode ser considerada um conjunto de sistemas simbólicos e de todos estes sistemas procurarem exprimir certos aspectos da realidade física e da realidade social; e mais ainda, as relações que estes dois tipos de realidades mantêm entre si, bem como aquelas que os sistemas simbólicos tecem entre eles” (BACZKO, 1985, p. 308).

portrayed in his origin tale<sup>14</sup> were seen. With his uncle gone, his aunt does not have enough money to pay the bills and thinking he still could perform shows for an audience as it did before, he finds out that the man is paying in checks now, and that these checks cannot be cashed out since he needs to provide identification. To lower his odds at successfully getting paid, the character of J. Jonah Jameson starts his public hunt on Spider-Man. Jonah's initial statement could be seen as a stand against young culture as he said that:

We cannot allow that masked menace to take the law into his own hands! He is a bad influence in our youngsters! Children may try to imitate his fantastic feats! Think what would happen if they make a hero out of this lawless, inhuman monster! We must not permit it! The youth of this nation must learn to respect real heroes – men such as my son, John Jameson, the test pilot! Not selfish freaks such as Spider-Man – a masked menace who refuses to even let us know his true identity! (J. Jonah Jameson, *The Amazing Spider-Man* #1, 1962, p. 5).

Jonah's quote invokes a sense of patriotism that enforced much of the established American culture of the 1960's that young people were starting to rebel against. Roszak (1969, p. 201-202) states that old radicals condemn the youth for their irresponsibility and they always enforced the advise for young people to "grow up" and "be responsible" which was meant to direct their energy to different political actions, one's that would not dismantle the whole system. Such as helping to organize the slums, join the Peace Corps, to find a project, etc. And while those objectives were noble causes, in long term they were episodic commitments at best. They did not compose a way of life. Political action and organizing cannot even provide a full-time carrer, as Roszak (1969, p. 202) states. So then, what choice did the disaffiliated young had to grow toward? The smart answer according to old radicals, is a more reliant job, such as the ones themselves settled for: A teaching position, a civil service job, a trade union... something from eight to five that brings in an income for home and family. Even work with a journal or a newspaper, as these old radicals would say (ROSZAK, 1969, p. 202).

So while still frustrated for not having found a way of helping with the bills, Peter watched the launch of the rocket of "the real hero", the test pilot, Jonah's son on the next day. His statement toward his son, is part of the combination of patriotism and entertainment celebrating the American way of life that became very popular in American mainstream culture during the Cold War years (ASHBY, 2006, p. 305). In the comic book, the rocket launch goes wrong and without any other alternative, hope falls on Spider-Man's shoulders. Despite saving John Jameson from a fatal crash, John's father thinks that it was Spider-Man himself who sabotaged the launch of the rocket and claims "It was all a plot by Spider-Man to steal the spotlight from my son!", publishing another editorial against the hero, the next day. Lastly, still

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<sup>14</sup> See page 16.

in Peter's pursuit of money to help his aunt, he goes to the Fantastic Four looking to join the team, but after a short battle with them, they talk and he discovers that the Fantastic Four is a non-profit organization. To which the Human Torch (Johnny Storm) complements "You came to the wrong place, pal! This isn't General Motors!", once again, a sign of the 1960's, a time which – in order to provide – you had to submit to the regular industrial kind of job, according to the older generation. In Peter's case, he begins to work as a freelance photographer for J. Jonah Jameson in *The Amazing Spider-Man #2* (LEE; DITKO, 1963). Jonah's newspaper The Daily Bugle was paying a high amount of money for pictures of a criminal who called himself the Vulture, since he was so fast in his criminal activities and nobody could get a photo of him, until Spider-Man did.

Another noteworthy aspect of the Vulture, was that during his debut in issue #2 he does the kind of robbery that is not just about the money, but about outsmarting the authorities, such as in caper movies of the 1960's. He does it, by leaving deceiving notes to the police, a popular radio station and the Daily Bugle. This approach was marked as:

The 1960's conflation of work and play, and its affinity for spy and caper film scenarios that counfounded the two categories and melted them into one single approach to life, illustrated the rejuvenation mentality which held that adults could be children again: they could play with utter seriousness and "work" with blithe and creative abandon (BRAUNSTEIN; DOYLE, 2002, p. 250).

In *The Amazing Spider-Man #3* (LEE; DITKO, 1963), during a science class, while Peter was conducting an experiment, his professor shows him to a colleague from outside the school. And believes that Peter would be able to be a good assistant to him, so he introduces them to one another. This leads to Peter now having his first extra-school scientific assignment. The colleague of Peter's teacher, named Doctor Cobwell, asks him to come on Saturday to help him. Immediately after, in one of the many instances that Flash Thompson bullies his nerdy colleague, Peter, he says "...Well, Well! So teacher's pet is gonna help the nice little doctor with some experiments this week-end (SIC), eh? While us other dumbheads waste time having dates and livin' it up!", this kind of message is further illustrated in *The Amazing Spider-Man #4* when Flash again shows up in a convertible car, with some of his friends and Liz, a colleague of Peter, that Flash dated. Roszak says that if the average teenager of the 1960's would come from a family of high income and he would always had "a car of their own (or control of the family's), with all of the sexual privileges attending" (Roszak 1969, p.31). This generation was mostly spoiled, influenced to believe that being human was a hedonist existence, always seeking pleasure and freedom. Still in issue #4, Peter needs money and goes to Jonah to ask for an advance, to which Jonah replies "An advance??! Are you kidding??What do you do with

money, eat it?? Look – this is a business, not a charity!”), Jonah then adds “You teen-agers (SIC) are all alike – you think the world owes you a living! Now go out and get me some shots of Spider-Man, and don’t come back till you do!”), this sentiment of seeing young ones as selfish, who think that the world owes them is present in the perception of Counterculture of the 1960’s. As the spoiled children could and frequently did become ‘good for nothing’ dependents living bohemian lives in America and Europe with money sent from home (Roszak, 1969, p. 33). The over-extension of childhood that Roszak (1969) talks about, is also felt in society, as a perception of older people had of the hippies caused by their experiments of child regression<sup>15</sup> using LSD. As children could only live in the present while perhaps making occasional incursions of the immediate future. This, presentism, however was not a hippie innovation, but a characteristic of youth culture in general (BRAUNSTEIN; DOYLE, 2002, p. 255).

At the end of issue #4, after saving the day again, Peter passes by a newsstand with various people reading another one of Jonah’s editorials against the superhero. Two citizens are seeing saying “What would make a guy wear a goofy costume and run around chasin’ crooks?” to which the other replies “I dunno! He must be a neurotic of some sort! Probably has delusions of grandeur!”, and that leaves Peter questioning his purpose and if those two were right. This exchange resonates with the sentiment that young people felt when they gained attention by the media, as Disney movies “take the self-indulgence of adolescent ‘life problems’ so seriously” (ROSZAK, 1969, p. 32), Braunstein and Doyle further illustrated this sentiment:

Youth in the mid-1960’s, a resplendent entity bathed in media attention and suffused with such attributes as energy, ingenuity, and idealism, was the driving force behind America pop culture. Not surprisingly, this type of cultural authority only served to inflate youth’s sense of importance, producing an attitude that was at once self-confident and whimsical, holier-than-thou and smart-alecky, and occasionally smug and omnipotent (BRAUNSTEIN; DOYLE, 2002, p. 249).

Counterculture was not present in every issue of Spider-Man comic books, the next social comentary was made in *The Amazing Spider-Man #6* (LEE; DITKO, 1963), with the introduction of the super-villain The Lizard, whom, as revealed to the hero by the villain’s wife “my husband was a surgeon – he lost his right arm during the war! Ever since then, he has studied reptile life! He became one of the world’s leading authorities on reptiles...”, so he develops a serum to grow his arm back using his studies on reptile regeneration, but becomes one himself in the process. While it cannot be said if by ‘the war’ the character was refering to the World War I or the Vietnam War, the anti-war protests and demands were present in all

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<sup>15</sup> See chapter 3.3 on page 37.

fronts of Counterculture, because of the horror and suffering for those that died in the war or those that returned in situations similar to that of this recurring villain.

A significant change to Peter's character happened on the pages of *The Amazing Spider-Man #8* (LEE; DITKO, 1964) where in a boiling point for Peter in the constant bickering with Flash, he pushed Peter's head and made his glasses fall and break on the ground, this marked a shift as "After a half-dozen issues, he stopped wearing glasses and shed much of his adolescent awkwardness in favor of a more mature outsider persona, coming to look and act more and more like a comic book version of James Dean" (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 212). James Dean, was a star in movies referred to by many official voices as 'juvenile delinquency' such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), movies like *The Blackboard Jungle* (Richard Brooks, 1955) and *The Wild One* (László Benedek, 1953). These movies helped to establish new rebellious images that appealed to the young, such as the aforementioned James Dean and Marlon Brando (GAIR, 2007, p. 4). This new look on the protagonist of the comic book made the female characters of the book to start noticing and being attracted to him, most notably shown in *The Amazing Spider-Man #26* (LEE; DITKO, 1965, p. 5) when Betty confronts him about his affairs with Liz and the girl that Peter had not even met yet, Mary Jane. While connections between Spider-Man and Counterculture were mostly composed of comments of Flash Thompson representing the irresponsible and carefree young teenager of the 1960's and by J. Jonah Jameson representing the older generation, the representation of social problems in the initial phase of this hero comic books is a part of this title identity that would be carried forward in adventures past the initial analysis. The web was forever tangled in social commentary, even if only sporadically.

The upheavals that Counterculture caused in the way society was being structured could not and would not be ignored by comic books. Stan Lee picked up on something after the ripples of Spider-Man's creation, so, in 1966, he created the first black superhero: Black Panther (ASHBY, 2006, p. 357). By this time, while belated, Marvel comics began to show random African Americans walking by in the streets of its comics, appearing as police officers, reporters or mere citizens. It was a meaningful representation in comic books as it illustrated the United States as a multiracial society (WRIGHT, 2001 p. 219).

While connections between Marvel Comics and Counterculture were tenuous at best, it had a fair amount of 'hip' credibility. In the late 1960's Marvel Comics invested more heavily in its anti-establishment posture releasing comic books that portrayed the increasingly violent protests of the time (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 230). *The Amazing Spider-Man #68* "Crisis on

*Campus*” (LEE; ROMITA SR., 1969) showed clear reference to the protests done at colleges in American society.

In the follow-up issue #69 Spider-Man chases with the press and the authorities reaches a boiling point where in the last page of the comic issue, after being targetted wrongfully by the police, he clenches his fists and starts to say that “No matter what I do... nothing ever changes! The more I try to help the law... the more they hunt me... the more they hate me!”, concluding with “I’m through being a public fall guy! From now on... it’s Spidey against the world! If they call me a menace... and treat me like a menace... I might as well be a menace!”, and this wave of fed up superheroes carried over to other superheroes like the Hulk and eventually culminated in two ramifications: one more immediate in the creation of Silver Surfer in 1965, an alien superhero who tried viewed us as human beings, it was Marvel’s most creative and bold attempt to recapture heroism in a time of social controversy, Silver Surfer dealt with the discovery of Earth with innocence and as an outsider. Wright (2001, p. 231) wrote that Silver Surfer “soon learns that there is much about humanity that is not admirable. No matter where he goes or what he does to aid human civilization, he is repaid with fear and animosity. Yet, like a Christ figure sent to save the people of Earth, the Surfer bears his cross and endures his lonely obligation.”, the other ramification was a breaking point in comic books: on the pages of *The Amazing Spider-Man* #91 and #92 (LEE; ROMITA SR., 1970), a character by the name of Sam Bullit, a former police officer campaigning for New York District Attorney, says he “never had any time for liberals, or bleeding hearts, or big-talkin’ long-haired do-gooders”, he proceeds to warn the silent majority of New York that “society is at war... with the left-wing anarchists who are trying to destroy this great, proud nation of ours! We need strenght... to punish those who mock the law<sup>16</sup>!”. A reference, perhaps, *too clear* to Counterculture. In comic #92, Spider-Man exposes the Sam Bullit character as a outright crook with ties to organized crime (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 238).

This resulted in the second and maybe most serious ramification to Marvel’s political stances present in their comics. Since such negative caricatures of American authority had not been in comic books since 1954, before the CMAA got adopted among comic book publishers. A letter was sent to Stan Lee by the Nixon Administration Department of Health, Education and Welfare (WRIGHT, 2001, p. 239). The letter asked for Stan Lee to use one of his main line titles to promote an antidrug message. The polemic story appeared on the pages of *The Amazing Spider-Man* in 1971 in the issue number #96 through #98. These were the first issues of Marvel

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<sup>16</sup> *The Amazing Spider-Man* #91, 1970, p. 6 on panel 4 and 5.

to have ever been published without the CMAA seal of approval. They sold well enough, proving that Spider-Man had enough power as an intellectual property to tell more daring stories. After this, the comic book's code was slightly revised.

A last examination of Counterculture values in Spider-Man stories was present in *The Amazing Spider-Man* #83, where old time enemy of Peter Parker, the athlete that bullied him in high school, Flash Thompson who turned into somewhat of a friend, during his college years, is going away to fight in the Vietnam War. After saying their goodbyes, Peter thinks to himself “ Which is worse...? Staying behind while other guys are doing the fighting...? Or fighting against in a war that nobody wants against an enemy you don't even hate?” (LEE; ROMITA SR, 1970, p. 10). A story centered around Flash Thompson's return was done in issue #108, where Spider-Man saves him from crooks trying to silence him, for an event during his time in Vietnam. There he got wound, passed out and woke up in a temple of monks that took care of him. Flash returns to his platoon just to discover that later they would bomb the region where that hidden temple was. He runs to them, trying to repay their kindness and asks them to run away from there, the elder monk from the temple replies with “We have harmed no one, you are our friend. Surely those with whom you serve will do us no harm.” (LEE; ROMITA SR., 1972, p. 10), Flash insists in his desperate plea that he is wrong and begs for them to leave but the bombing hit them before they could. He reports of his guilt of the development to Spider-Man and how the army is trying to kill him to silence this event. Spider-Man stories cooled off on the social comentary for various years after this, but Spider-Man still brought new and inventive ideas to the comic book industry, especially since Marvel Comics ditched the CMAA regulation in 2001 in favor of its own in-house regulation.

In 2002, the first live-action movie of Spider-Man (directed by Sam Reimi) was released. It was incredibly successful granting it a trilogy, with sequels Spider-Man 2 and Spider-Man 3 both still directed by Sam Reimi, in 2004 and 2007, respectively. The third movie was not as successful as the first two, so the movies with Spider-Man ended there, at least for the next few years.

Meanwhile, in comics, a second line up of comic books, more in line with the creative choices of the Marvel movies released thus far was being created. It was called *The Ultimate Universe*. In this universe of comic books, a new origin and series for Spider-Man was created, the comic book tittled *Ultimate Spider-Man* written by Brian Michael Bendis since 2000. The most important contribution of modern Spider-Man comics was brought to the pages in 2011, by Brian Michael Bendis and Sara Pichelli, the character of Miles Morales was created. Peter Parker, for the first time was killed permanently in comic books, and Miles was his successor



in the Ultimate comics universe. He is a teenager also bit by a radioactive spider, that gave him superpowers. His powers, despite being different of those of Peter, were not the reason Miles stood out. The aspect that made Miles so special was the fact that he was a black teenager with latin heritage. Even if Marvel still had the original Peter Parker in their original universe, the decision of killing a version of him to introduce a representative of minorities caused major repercussions in the comic book industry that had not been seen since the social hurdles of the 1960's in the pages of Spider-Man.

Having been well received by the majority of the readers, Miles Morales cemented his place in Marvel Comics rather quickly. This resulted in an internal decision to bring Miles Morales to the original universe of comics in 2016, thus causing a significant and permanent change on Peter's character as well, as from that point forward, Peter would take on the role of mentor for Miles and having stories centered around that from time to time. While both versions of Spider-Man (Miles and Peter's) would still deal in their stories about the difficulties of handling multiple responsibilities... Peter stories finally showed Peter as an experienced young adult dealing with more serious decisions and responsibilities that come with this new role. While the stories of coming of age during the teenage years now rested upon Miles' shoulders – or pages. Another theme present in Miles Morales' Spider-Man stories was how to differentiate himself from the legacy that Peter created, how to overcome this massive shadow cast upon him by Peter's deeds in the past decades in comic books, so creating an identity and autonomy for Miles was an urgent topic present in his stories since 2016 in the original Marvel Comics universe.

In 2018 during an interview, writer and co-creator of Miles Morales, Brian Michael Bendis told Syfy Wyre that during the rumors for a reboot of Spider-Man movies, the actor Donald Glover started a campaign on social media for being the next actor to portray the character, and this became really notorious because most of the negative comments focused on his skin color, so that was the push he needed to create Miles, as Bendis himself told Syfy Wyre:

It did reveal to us, this is the right road to go down, like if we need a extra little thing, then that definitely did it, right? Including the reaction, positive and negative. Like you definitely feel like you're on the right side of the argument. I am thrilled that Miles connected. I am aware that there is no reason he should've, like Peter Parker isn't broken, no one want that 'ugh, enough of Peter Parker already!' (BENDIS, 2017).

At another moment in the same interview he notes that while he knows that everyone gets caught up on the skin color or the nationality of the heroes he created, he remember what an actress said to him during the recording of an tv show he produced:

[...] ‘What you’re doing right...’ – and I didn’t put the words in it – she goes ‘...you’re not focusing on skin color, you’re focusing on diversity of perspective and diversity of experience’ and that what’s needed and everyone’s story is unique. You can’t just create an African-American character and say ‘Now we’ve created the African American character!’ right? And hilariously she said that and then when someone saw the announcement for Riri<sup>17</sup> someone innocently asked me ‘Why you need to do this? You already created Miles.’. (BENDIS, 2017).

In December 2018, an animated movie centered around Miles Morales called *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (directed by Bob Persichetti, Peter Ramsey and Rodney Rothman) and one of the core themes of the movie as Miles gets to know the different Spider-Men from different corners of the multi-dimensional universe – hence Spider-verse – the powerful message that is echoed “anyone can wear the mask”. The status of Spider-Man as a symbol was also displayed in a trailer showed during E3 2016, for a Playstation 4 game trailer of the hero where the trailer opens with a narration that says “People see me and think they’re safer. But it’s not really me they’re seeing. Probably for the best. Knowing everything hinges in a guy from Queens sounds as scary as it feels.” (MARVEL’s, 2016).

Lastly, echoes of Spider-Man impact on American Culture and were shown not that long ago. In the United States during the protests of Black Lives Matter against police brutality and racism, protestants were costumed as both Miles Morales<sup>18</sup> and Peter Parker’s<sup>19</sup> Spider-Man costumes holding signs in support of the movement.

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<sup>17</sup> Riri Williams is a black young African-American girl created by Bendis to be the Iron Man successor temporarily in Marvel Comics in 2016, she was called *Ironheart*. She was introduced in *Invincible Iron Man #7* (BENDIS; DEODATO, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Aavailable on the following links: <https://twitter.com/WalkerBragman/status/1269406674433060865> and also here: <https://twitter.com/wyntonred/status/1272256225896353797>.

<sup>19</sup> Aavailable on the following link: <https://twitter.com/Anyavolz/status/1267992611849228288>.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Pursuing the objective of answering the question if Spider-Man could be considered a representative of Counterculture in the 1960's, it was possible to see and to contextualize what this period that seemed so long ago still holds value for our current society and the importance that *The Amazing Spider-Man* comic books brought to kids, teenagers and young adults that read its stories. They were pivotal then, and still are relevant now as once again we see governments that do not uphold the interests of their people. Of the everyman present in working class that Spider-Man so easily resonated and still resonates with.

It was also examined how the social can – and almost always is – intertwined with imagination. To construct these analogies helps us to stay one step closer of the purpose of the hero, whose deeds serve as a map for our growth as individuals. Spider-Man success on multiple mediums throughout his years further established his place as a permanent pillar of superhero in stories moving forward, in a time that desperately needed such heroes. The society reflected and influenced comic book stories for such a long time, even before Spider-Man came around, but Spider-Man comics were the ones that propelled the dialogue between the medium and society more strongly because of its circumstances. A young superhero – the first of its kind – to criticize and in very subtle ways battle against an authoritarian and outdated government, that did not represent the reality that they saw on the country, according to the youth that created and sympathized with Counterculture.

The second aspect of this job was to bring to the forefront again the Counterculture and the changes that the protestants demanded in the 1960's. Most of the problems of their society got mitigated but all of them still exist. Which shows the relevance in bringing these problems into discussion once again, as the problems of economic disparity, social values being so dissonant among the young and the adult citizen, problems of racism are all very much problems of our present. Leaders, heroes and role models are still needed, not to guide our society, but to inspire each of them to pursue their own responsibility, as Peter's motto tells us and as was document in the studies presented on this paper about the role of the hero and its journey: What responsibility could be greater than to put the gift of life to service of enlightening others into finding it themselves?

The 1960's, were a time of collective transformation and conflicts, a shift in power from outside influences to inside interpretations, as stated in the infamous manifesto in the French colleges in 1968: "We are inventing a new and original world. Imagination is seizing power"

(ROSZAK, 1969, p. 22). And this world is still in struggle, needing its heroes and symbols for the change that is needed.

The roadmap of this hero's journey might pose interesting questions for those that should choose to study it, but even more valuable reflections of the truths of myth will reveal themselves translated to modern audiences in the form of literature that is comic books. A truth that in fact could and has – as shown in this study – brought social change to controversial times.

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