The Apotheosis of Discontent: Representations of the Counterculture in 1960's Film and Television.

Jeffrey Rothstein

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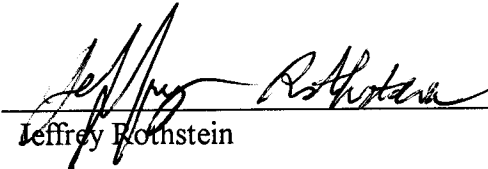For the Degree of
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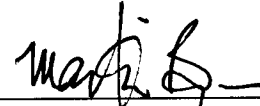Representations of the Counterculture in 1960's Film and Television.
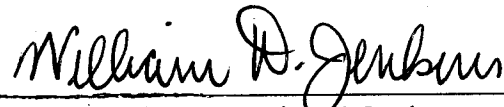
Jeffrey Rothstein

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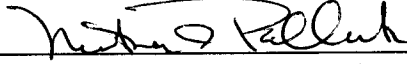
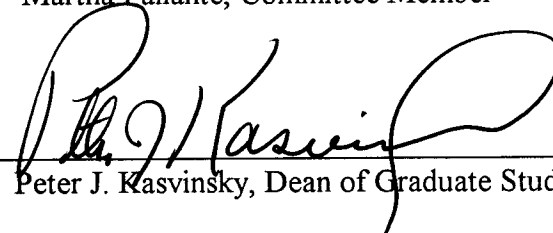Signature:

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Contents.

Abstract

Cinema, during the 1960's indirectly reflected the social and political conflagrations of the era through changes in production and style. These changes shadowed a larger transformation in sensibility that was most visible in the development of a youth subculture that questioned the hegemony of a pre-existing set of cultural preconceptions, creating a canon of its own. While the emergence of a counterculture, did not alter American politics, it exerted an indirect effect over all of the arts, including Cinema, where new ideas about effacing boundaries between audiences and performers, directors and critics and old notions regarding high and low culture came together to form a new cinema. This new style in film-making reflected the growing cynicism of a generation that felt ill-at-ease with the geo-politics of the cold-war, and that questioned the basic tenets upon which the foundations of post-industrial society were erected.

I have chosen several films that reflected this transformation of sensibilities, and which reveal the dialectical relationship between art and cultural experience. Although, most of what came to be associated with the counterculture was quickly merchandized and absorbed into mainstream cultural discourses, including film, much of it remained too radical to digest, existing just beyond the purview of what was considered culturally acceptable. These more radical discourses, were slowly transformed into a pervasive atmosphere of disaffection which is a salient characteristic of the films analyzed here. I have attempted to capture the "feeling" of the times by deconstructing these films as if they were artifacts, or texts. By re-reading them in this way, I hope to shed light on the dynamics that made the 60's an era of such dramatic change, and which make these films

important illustrations of the period's more marginal sensibilities.

Preface

An intellectual approach to history is not merely based on an accumulation of facts which fall into place of their own accord utilizing some axiomatic law of natural events that fold into a larger discourse. Rather, it is a process of retrieving information about the past and ascertaining how best to use that knowledge in order to formulate a workable model of the period from which it has been extracted. Thus the cultural, or intellectual, historian uses historical data--whether concrete or intangible--to extrapolate an elegant reconstruction of the social paradigm that informs a particular phenomenon or event, always keeping in mind that such representations are inherently unstable, and contingent upon the discovery of some new piece of information which might suggest another theory entirely. Moreover, cultural historians should recognize that the protean histories of the past, where the life-spans of entire nations could be encapsulated within titles such as *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* were acts of imagination as much as they were the result of an artful synthesis of factual data and speculation.

In this thesis I have attempted to evaluate the mindset of disillusionment that surfaced and became pervasive during the 1960's by focussing on the decade's most telling cultural artifacts: movies. I could have chosen popular music, the visual arts, or even some blending of all three, but I felt that it would be simpler to emphasize the way that culture and art influence the sensibilities of a particular period, eventually becoming intertwined aspects of a new mindset. In expanding my research beyond the narrowly-conceived parameters of political history in order to write an American Studies-styled analysis, I have chosen to emphasize the texts of films over the political details of the 1960's. Moreover, I

have tried to contextualize these films where possible to show how cinema interprets and represents experience; and how, in turn, celluloid representation becomes inseparable from the sensibilities that it influences. If I had to reduce this complex explanation to a simple thesis it would read: A study of how 1960's cinema reinforced the cynicism of the counterculture, simultaneously undermining social conventions and transforming marginal discourses into domesticated commodified images.

It is important to note that when I say "counterculture" I do not mean an easily identifiable group associated with the social upheavals of the time, such as "hippies" or the New Left, or people with long hair who smoked marijuana and listened to Frank Zappa records; rather the term is used loosely to denote anyone who felt alienated enough to think of themselves as in opposition to the mainstream culture. More specifically, it refers to the resurgence of a spirit of discontent that has opposed the Cartesian rationalism of the enlightenment with utopian alternatives, the adoption of standards that run counter to those of mainstream culture and, paradoxically, an occasional nihilism expressed through the avant-garde artistic movements of the last century.[1] A common problem in defining

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[1]Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic society and its Youthful Opposition*(New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 5. Roszak felt that the counterculture defied conventional definitions because its character was suffused with radicalism without necessarily being political. While the New Left was adapting Marxist ideas to the realities of post-fifties campus life--and its recognition that a singular approach to activism would eventually replace the stale bureaucratic Soviet model--a culture of drop-outs began to develop, which, like its Bohemian predecessors of the 30's and 50's, experimented with Eastern religions, alternate living arrangements, and a wide variety of drugs. Rozsak saw in the counterculture a generalized rebellion against the rationalized empirical approach to social engineering that he referred to as the *technocracy*. This technocracy did not represent any particular group or political ideology; rather, it was a nomenclature applied to the post-industrial process of complete systematization through the application of a technological paradigm. See also: Kenneth Keniston, *Youth and Dissent: The Rise of a New Opposition*(New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 173. While Rozsak attributed the rise of the counterculture in the late 60's to the dehumanizing effects of rapid modernization, Keniston identifies a concurrent breakdown in the notion of consensus and how that contributed to a growing alienation, especially among a highly intelligent segment of the young who regarded Western civilization as faceless and impersonal--a machine that operates

terms like "counterculture" and "hippies" is that they refer to a set of traits that exist in an idealized realm where distinctions can be clearly drawn and where everyone is packaged with a convenient label. Of course, history is this pristine only in the mythological world of mass media, where phenomena need to be named in order to be defined and dismissed as fads. The 60's however, were unique in that they not only defied such simple classifications--all "periods" do--but that they did it so vocally. Paradoxically, the constellation of various attitudes and lifestyles that comprised this multi-faceted entity quickly ossified into a formulaic assemblage of traits. The merchandising of the counterculture tended to caricature and mythologize it. The power of myth, in an environment where transformation has become a new social value, was amplified by the availability of powerful hallucinogenic drugs which enhanced one's sense of dislocation and alienation, often leading to new ways of thinking and acting.

Nonetheless, the segment of the culture actually involved in New Left politics, drug taking and a concomitant repudiation of the work-ethic, was a distinct minority, but their effect on the larger culture, filtered through the archetypes and ontologies created by cinema, was so pervasive that in retrospect it appears as if the entire period were convulsed by seismic waves of change. The process, of course, was much more subtle, and to those involved often appeared quite slow. Yet, those small groups whose eccentric modes of dress and unusual behavior attracted so much attention, were like small stones thrown into a large pond, the concentric ripples created by their emergence were far in

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much like the character of Moloch in Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, imposing a rationalized order at the expense of those things that give life meaning; thus, leading to the "alienation of man from his own creative potentialities..." 33.

excess of the sum of their parts. It is this ripple effect--the indirect way in which one small segment of culture can, at the right moment, spark a new awareness--that this thesis addresses. But what makes such ripples so interesting is how they are changed by the various and unexpected cultural sensibilities that they help create. The oppositional mindset that peaked in the late 60's was ultimately a hybrid of politics and style, the latter acting as a net to entangle the complexities of the former. This process of coopting harnessed the energies of the counter-culture while subtly corralling the fires of discontent that it produced, eventually leading to an erosion of established boundaries in art and culture that marked the advent of Postmodernism.[2]

What I am speaking of here, is not a consciously thought out process, but a dynamic that operates on the level of a dialectic: Culture, art and history reflect and refine each other. In modern post-industrial societies this process is accelerated by electronic media and the instantaneous generation of images causing phenomenon to proliferate so rapidly that a layer of mythological simulacra grows around them like coral fragments on a limestone reef. This is essentially how the counterculture grew from a constellation of assorted New Left groups and seekers of alternate lifestyles, into something that looked from a distance to be a unified community of activists with an agreed-upon agenda for social change. The truth, was in fact much more fragmented, and quite difficult to define. What resonated most clearly was not the specific political positions--although many positions have found acceptance within certain niches of what remains of radical politics

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[2]Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." in *Movies and Mass Culture*, ed. John Belton (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 185-187, 201,202.

after the Reagan "revolution" revised the meaning of being radical--but the aesthetics that

became part of the *movement*, its style.[3] In particular, I refer to an ethos of self-expression

over that of social obligation, a conviction that personal experience was more meaningful

than the dry academic analyses offered by experts, and the larger idea that traditional

notions regarding authority should be questioned. The latter was manifested in the gradual

breakdown of canons of all kinds--artistic, literary, academic, even epistemological. While

all functioned as important contributions in the transformation of culture, their absorption

into the capitalist environment of American society altered their dynamics so that equality

of values transmogrified into syncretism, and the breakdown of old notions regarding high

and low culture translated into a vulgar commercialism that objectified art by turning it

into a commodity. This transformation was also characteristic of film, which evolved to

the point where it could lampoon its own conventions, but often sacrificed verisimilitude

for a facile synthesis of nostalgia and cynicism. Moreover, as the decade progressed, it

was often difficult to determine where representation ended and reality began; thus,

leading to the fundamentally postmodern question regarding whether the two can be

readily separated. This question, if applied to conventional historical narratives, might be

perceived as glib, but is worth studying if one chooses, as I have, to analyze the social

rupture of an historical period through the aperture of film.

What I aim to accomplish in this paper is to provide an historical map that would

show the hidden landscapes that informed this change. I have located those landscapes,

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[3] Steven M. Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties: Moral Meaning in Conversion and Cultural Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 28.

not in the material conditions of 20th century life, but in cinema where representation

creates myths that supersede reality and provide glimpses into the unconscious desires of a

collective culture. Such landscapes are often informed by the sensibilities of the people

who shape them, and are not always amenable to more established methods of historical

research since they consist largely of intangibles, such as mindset, attitudes and desires.

Thus, I have chosen to dissect several movies that I view as emblematic of the period, and

which provide a distorted mirror to the intense social conflagrations that comprise the

historical construct known as the "Sixties." Since the Sixties were so complex, I settled on

the word "discontent" to describe the mood and atmosphere that evolved during the

decade--a factor not often subjected to analyses in most traditional histories that portray

the period through the more conventional prisms of socio-historical conflict and national

politics, and therefore tend to regard "atmosphere" as tangential. While these models are

effective in analyzing mainstream politics, the Vietnam War and Race Relations, they are

insufficient in clarifying the peculiar emergence of a sensibility of outrage among the

normally privileged white middle class.

Understanding the principle behind this paper may be simplified somewhat by

applying an analogy once used by Albert Einstein to explain the difficulty in proving

quantum theory. In order to explain the task of physics in the 20th Century, Einstein had

compared the scientist to a watchmaker, of sorts, who must extrapolate the workings of a

black watchbox simply by carefully observing those parts of the watch that are amenable

to direct observation. His reasoning was, that though imperfect, one could come up with a

theory to explain how the watch worked--although unable to ever prove it conclusively

since the box could not be opened--simply by coming up with an explanation elegant enough to make sense of the watch mechanism. The theory need not be the only one--since such things were impossible to determine--but merely one possible hypothesis which could conceivably be correct. Similarly, my analysis of a mindset, by indirect observation of certain specific artifacts, is not quantifiable; rather, it aims to provide one explanation, or one picture of the *Zeitgeist*, in order to make sense out of some of the more flamboyant activities of the many groups that the 60's produced. In this way, I hope to remove some of the layers of mystification that have obscured the world of that decade and make part of its multifaceted personality more accessible.

In the Introduction I discuss the often unstable relationship between art and culture, and how representation leads to discourses that distort and reconstitute the meaning of various social phenomenon. In the first chapter I explain this by using the precursors of Sixties film--Underground Cinema and B-Movies--to exemplify how cultural change was reflected in the changing aesthetic values of film, and how this development presaged the end of the restrictive production code, and by extension, a loosening of restrictions on unorthodox representations and controversial subject matter. In the paper's following chapters I analyze several films which I believe to be emblematic of the period's aesthetic innovativeness, starting with *Bonnie and Clyde*, which I contextualize as a nostalgic reinvention of the Underdog myth with allegorical overtones about the glamour of youthful rebellion. The latter is put in context with a brief history of the fringe subcultures which comprised the so-called counterculture.

The analysis continues with an in-depth reading of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A*

Space Odyssey. As in *Bonnie and Clyde, 2001's* central metaphor is about social

disruption and change, but focusses on the utopian desire to transcend humanity's innately

violent proclivities through an alteration of consciousness. The film's release in early 1968

coincided with a great increase in the use of psychedelic drugs by young people, many of

whom hoped to derive insight about the nature of the socially constructed reality of

modern society. The chapter includes a discussion of the drug culture, and suggests that

extreme alienation helped lay the groundwork for the rapid acceptance of Postmodern

social theories in the next decade, since they employed a meta-analysis whose aim was to

uncover the extent to which common assumptions about the nature of everyday existence

were rooted in constructs such as language and socialization.

    The latter become particularly important in the analysis of the paper's final two

films, *Medium Cool* and *Midnight Cowboy*, since each deals with the question of

representation itself, although in dramatically different ways. In *Medium Cool*, the issue is

whether it is possible to represent historical events objectively. Using the violence of the

1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago as a backdrop, the film explores the complexities

of the various points of view that comprised radical discourse--becoming a film about film

and how it distorts what it examines by unconsciously conveying one point of view over

others. *Midnight Cowboy* asks the same question, only in a different way, functioning on

one level as a meditation on identity in a culture that imposes its own framework of values

through the ubiquitous presence of electronic media. The film's concern is with its

protagonists' identity and just how much of it is constructed by society's discourses, which

are implicit in almost every social ritual and therefore inescapable. Unlike *Medium Cool,*

Midnight Cowboy examines the redemptive possibilities of an unlikely friendship between two individuals branded as "losers" in a society that bases its mythology on the notion of success and "winning." This last aspect of the film is particularly important given the time period and its changing values, which included a pervasive questioning of traditional American notions about success.

All four films raise this question, functioning on one level as meditations on existence itself, and undermining traditional sensibilities by exploring alternatives within the confines of their respective fictional narratives. Moreover, all of these films discuss the nature of discontent, and strategies for survival, in a society whose very complexity becomes a barrier to the human values that it officially promotes. In the paper's conclusion, I review the major themes of all four films, and tie them together by putting them in historical perspective. This includes a brief history of films in the post-Sixties era and an analysis of the way in which the counterculture archetype has been coopted and reduced to a commodity through the mass-marketing of its style.

This tendency has, paradoxically, been accompanied by a critique of culture, which simultaneously comments on the crassness of the very materialistic excesses that such films have often exploited and reduced to the level of fetish. Such ambiguities have often added to the richness of cinematic narrative, where--in *Bonnie and Clyde*, for example--a director will glamorize the very greed that he/she sets out to lampoon. A big part of the argument put forward in this thesis is based on the notion that the values which were so briefly resurrected during the Sixties--individualism, communitarianism and intimacy--were historicized and coopted by the popular arts, including cinema, and that this process was

both unconscious and ambiguous since the dynamic that created it was an innate aspect of such cultural forms.

Contextualizing such a wide spectrum of narrative styles necessitates a broad array of research sources.I have employed three different types of literature in my research: general historical works about the Sixties; analysis of film and media; and, critical theory. The last is particularly important since it helped to provide a framework, utilizing meta-analyses, that could make the other two comprehensible. It is also important to mention that in the context of American Studies the utilization of an eclectic assortment of sources is necessary since it validates styles of literature that have traditionally been excluded from the historical canon. While this resistance has often been attributable to prudence regarding the verity of such writings, it has also frequently been far too restrictive, excluding journalism, cultural criticism and theory because they do not meet narrow criterion for appropriate historical material. However, if such sources are qualified through cross referencing and contextualized within the parameters of a strong analyses, they are not only helpful but necessary. In this thesis I have made extensive use of both traditional and non-traditional historical documents for the purpose of deriving a more comprehensive understanding of those features of history that might be called intangibles: the mood and feel of a time, the foundations in which its most basic assumptions are rooted--factors which, although hard to define, provide the missing elements that make a culture understandable to itself.

Since certain aspects of history often operate on a tacit, sometimes unconscious level, I have used theory to provide possible models which might articulate those qualities

most elusive and yet, indispensable to understanding the motivations that drove so many people to question official truths in the 1960's. My analyses include Marxist writings, mostly from the Frankfurt school, and post-structuralist texts, as well as an eclectic variety of philosophical writings, including the Existentialists. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is an indispensable text, both because of its popularity during the 1960's and because of its role in the analyses of culture. Arguing that the modern era has culminated in the post-industrial systematization of every aspect of existence, reducing all things, including people, to the level of commodities whose worth can be measured according to the utilitarian dictates of the open market, *Dialectic* is a seminal work of post-Marxist criticism. Another Frankfurt book of particular interest here, is Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, which first articulated the idea that modern capitalist societies deal with subversive discourses and artifacts, by adopting their form and slowly siphoning off their substance through the inclusion of such forms as mere style devoid of any real content.

Similarly, Guy Debord, in *Society of the Spectacle* (a book I have not cited, but which is important to mention given its place in the canon of post-Marxist writings) argues that post-industrial society commodifies fringe practices, reducing them to spectacles whose visibility is in inverse proportion to their substance. One example of this practice would be the phenomenon of the Rock concert which, in the post-Woodstock era, was inflated to an empty ritual whose meaning was no longer attached to a set of political ideals or an oppositional ideology. The more recent example of the latest Woodstock incarnation bears out Debord's prophecy; an open-air shopping mall of rock-n-roll

merchandising where even identities could be bought and worn with all the commitment that one would normally give to a fashion accouterment (the conflagration that ended the show was an ironic coda indeed, since its apparent motivation was anger, by some of the concert-goers at the way in which their own sensibilities had been reified as objects, packaged and then sold back to them). Closely related, is Hanz Enzensberger's *The Consciousness Industry*, which emphasizes the paradox created when electronic media reduce everything to the level of spectacle, precisely by playing on those very sentiments which have been most compromised in the wake of post-industrial systematization: intimacy, autonomy, and originality.

I have also included several well known post-structuralist texts in my analysis. Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* traces the epistemic shifts which have provided the underpinnings for cultural ruptures that have served to demarcate between historical periods that the author refers to as *epistemes*. These *epistemes* are not ordinary periods connected by a causal chain of events amenable to normal methods of historical analysis; rather, they are a sort of crust which provides an often invisible foundation for events and conflagrations that are said to define a given period. In order to address the problematic nature of analyzing these subterranean forces that exert an unseen gravity on the epistemological framework of a given period, thereby effecting events indirectly. Foucault has called his unusual method of historical analysis Historical Archaeology, since the intention is to dig below the surface of the known world of recorded events and extrapolate from their nature the epistemic shifts that differentiate one period from another. While the idea of periodization itself tends to impose an artificial structure over

the object of analysis, Foucault's epistemes are broadly defined, their parameters

indeterminate and based on cultural gestalt shifts rather than specific events. Foucault sees

the last major shift as occurring between the end of the Renaissance era and the

Enlightenment, which forms the beginnings of the modern period.

Similarly, my thesis intends to explain a minor epistemic shift in American culture,

one occurring at the juncture of the modern and post-modern periods, when a new self-

consciousness began breaking down the remaining boundaries between high and low

culture; particularly, epistemological precepts that had never before been subject to

serious inquiry, such as the questioning of accepted definitions of behaviors, gender roles

and artistic representation, including film.[4] It is this last thing which my paper is primarily

concerned with, specifically the cinematic representations of the counterculture, since it

personified social discord and rupture during the 1960's. In order to examine the often

unseen relationships that a more traditional historical analysis might miss in an attempt to

impose linear cause-and-effect relationships over events and phenomenon whose

ramifications are often horizontal, extending in all directions, I have chosen to emphasize

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[4] Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties*(New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 216, 219. Although there is no agreed upon date to delineate between these two periods, using the emergence of self-consciousness in the arts--meaning: an awareness of how the conventions of a particular art-form play a defining role in shaping the observers/readers perception--satisfies some of the criterion for distinguishing modernism from post-modernism. In art, the introspective, solipsistic canvasses of the abstract expressionists gave way to the ironic detached commentaries of pop-art, specifically the deconstructions of popular forms offered up by Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist, as well as Andy Warhol's dead-pan irony. In literature, Morris Dickstein places the transition somewhere in the mid-sixties when the coherent narratives of writers like Saul below are supplanted by the fragmentation offered by Thomas Pynchon and John Barth, although he does not use theoretical language, or state this explicitly. Similar to the other arts, there is no exact point at which one can map the emergence of post-modernism, but it seems to have emerged in the early 60's with the self-conscious anti-glamour of Andy Warhol's films, and the realization that the conventions of film-making circumscribed the phenomenon that it examined. Invariably, in a film like *Medium Cool*, the camera is turned on itself, as the focus becomes the way that film alters the nature of discourse. See also: David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 291.

the way that the counterculture was represented in film, paying particularly close attention to the discourse and debate over LSD use. In many cases, the films I have chosen do not directly allude to LSD, or any aspect of the psychedelic experience, but all are implicitly concerned with challenging traditional notions about epistemology, ontology and the nature of representation itself.

Related texts such as Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* and Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism*, help clarify some of the theoretical problems encountered when engaging in a formal analysis of a cultural artifact. Additionally, Jean Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is an important text for understanding the philosophical precepts that comprised an essential aspect of the Counterculture's intellectual framework. Lastly, I have utilized Jere Paul Surber's excellent *Culture and Critique,* and several other general Culture Studies texts in order to better penetrate the often difficult writings of some of the aforementioned scholars and philosophers.

For a general overview of the period as a whole I have used William O'Neill's readable but slick *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960's*, as well as a wide assortment of general reference materials and magazine and newspaper articles, mostly for the purposes of verifying information. Additionally, for a more focussed perspective on the Counterculture, Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counterculture* is idealistic but still quite readable. David Farber's *Chicago 68* may be the most well researched text ever written about the events surrounding the Democratic Convention of 1968, including its excellent background information on the Yippies. I utilized it

throughout my thesis and found it consistently balanced and well informed. Kirpatrick

Sale's *SDS* is a chronological history of the New Left's most well known exponents,

including their radical offshoot, the Weathermen. Charles Perry's *The Haight-Ashbury: A

History* is one of the best social histories ever written on a subculture although it sacrifices

analysis for colorful details, and is sometimes unclear. A more sophisticated perspective is

offered in Nicholas Von Hoffman's *We Are the People Our Parents Warned Us Against*,

perhaps the most sympathetic and balanced portrayal ever offered on the Haight by a non-

hipster. An insiders perspective is provided by Abe Peck, in *Uncovering the Sixties: The

Life and Times of the Underground Press.* Similarly, Michael Schumacher's excellent

Biography of Allen Ginsberg, *Dharma Lion*, provides several informative chapters

regarding the Beat poet's central role in the Counterculture, although at times, as with

most biographical materials, the writer has a difficult time distancing himself from his

subject.

A more objective approach is taken by the two well researched historical texts on

LSD and its role in the Counterculture. Martin Lee and Bruce Schlain provide a wealth of

material on the CIA's role in intelligence research utilizing psychoactive drugs, much of it

taken from formerly confidential government files. They also provide a concise history of

the LSD subculture in San Francisco, including Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, and

the role of Owsley Stanley in supplying large quantities of the drug to an ever expanding

community just before the media really started to catch on. Jay Stevens' *Storming

Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* focuses more closely on Timothy Leary's role,

particularly in his less than flattering portrait of Leary's tendency to proselytize, although

he is prudent enough not to blame the counterculture's most visible over-thirty proponent for some of the unpleasant experiences that acolytes had when mundane horrors exceeded mystical expectations.

I have also made use of several texts that specifically focus on the drug culture. Brian Ingles's *The Forbidden Game*, is the most comprehensive of these, providing an exhaustive social history of the longstanding relationship between Western Civilization and drugs. Unfortunately, most of it was only tangential to the subject of my thesis. Similarly, Richard H. Blum's *The Dream Sellers* provides a sociological analysis of drug dealing which was of peripheral interest. To gain a more balanced perspective I perused Jill Jonnes's *Hep Cats, Narcs and Pipe Dreams: A History of America's Romance with Illegal Drug.*, and although it provides much information it should be read with caution, since much of the text is filled with the sorts of generalizations that one might find in a pamphlet put out by the Partnership For A Drug Free America. Similarly, Robert De Ropp's *Drugs And The Mind* mixes history with speculation, although, on the whole, it is far more balanced.

Lastly, and perhaps most important were the texts on popular culture, cinema and art criticism. Ethan Mordden's *Medium Cool*, may be the best book ever written on 60's film, but the journalistic style of the writing can often sound facile. A more theoretical approach is offered by David James in *Allegories of Cinema*, a text which applies critical theory to film analysis, often with confusing results, although the section on Andy Warhol is essential reading for anyone interested in that artist's singular approach to underground film-making. Of Course, anyone interested in film should read Pauline Kael's astute

criticism. I have included *For Keeps, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, and *Deeper Into The Movies*--
even when she's wrong she's perceptive and interesting, displaying a great knowledge of
the art form, with the intelligence to put it in historical perspective.

Nonetheless, for perspective, ideally, one needs the distance provided by more
general histories. Seth Cagin's *Hollywood Films of the Seventies* is something of a
misnomer since its focus is the previous decade, which it covers quite thoroughly given the
short amount of space allotted for each film. Similarly, James Monaco's *American Film
Now* provides a concise overview of the late 60's and 1970's, and puts the era in historical
context. In a different vein, Stephen Prince's *Visions of Empire: Political Imagery in
Contemporary American Film* puts cinema in a historical and political context with a great
deal of eloquence and accuracy, although most of the analysis is on contemporary cinema.

I have also used Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation* and *Styles of Radical Will*,
for the eclectic variety of cultural criticism they provide, especially her essay, "One
Culture and the New Sensibility" a perceptive overview of 60's culture, particularly her
recognition of the post-modern merging of high and low culture. This essay can also be
found in *The Sixties*, ed. Gerald Howard, which includes essays on a wide variety of
cultural topics, including Albert Goldman's well known tract on "The Emergence of
Rock," and excerpts from Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*.

Additionally, I have consulted literature which does not easily fit within any of the
more circumscribed categories mentioned above, such as *Sixties Without Apology*, a
collaborative effort which includes a segment on the history of French Maoism and its
influence on the May, 68 Paris Uprising, and Fredric Jameson's influential article,

"Periodizing the Sixties." Several other writings were instrumental in the formulation of my thesis, including Norman Mailer's excellent *Armies of the Night*, which closes the gap between literature and history, becoming a personal reminiscence about a publicly experienced time. Similarly, Tom Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* implicitly questions the notion of objective history. Those who find its excessively descriptive prose style irritating may want to keep in mind the fact that, in this instance at least, the words were well suited to its subject: Ken Kesey, leader of the Merry Pranksters, founder of the Acid Tests, and the original purveyor of a style that later came to be called "hippie." The stream of consciousness prose is appropriate for the disorienting effects of LSD. Also worthy of mention is David Marc's *Demographic Vistas*, mostly for its analysis of 60's television, sit-coms in particular, as well as Greil Marcus's *Lipstick Traces*, which provides a fascinating, although difficult to follow, history of Underground artistic movements, focussing on the *Situationiste internationale*, and its relationship to the May 68 uprisings, Bohemian movements in America, and Underground music, particularly punk rock. Lastly, is Hal Foster's *Recodings*, an analysis of artistic movements in relation to the larger culture that provided me with key insights for my own analysis.

While no new consensus has emerged to replace the monolithic histories that dominated post-enlightenment Europe up until the time of the Annales school in France-- and for which many American historians still nostalgically yearn--the field is now expanding horizontally rather than vertically, accommodating a wider range of subjective experiences rather than the neatly circumscribed approaches of the past. Nowhere is this horizontality more necessary than in trying to uncover the histories of small subcultures,

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since they tend to be groups who do not dominate public discourse, and whose origins are often shrouded in onion-skin layers of mythology. Indeed, in the McLuhanesque landscape of the Post-war Twentieth Century, these myths have become assimilated into the larger culture's instantaneous historical canon, adding confusion to the historian's job of attempting to decipher the numerous artifacts which, in an age of disposability, invariably point towards paradoxical conclusions. To extrapolate one true portrait of history from such a densely layered jungle of information would be the equivalent of establishing a counter-myth in order to simplify those already in existence; thus, bringing them into line with the historian's own preconceptions.[5] Often, artifacts will bear the imprimatur of more than one cultural discourse, suggesting a complex genealogy which informs even the most vapid cultural detritus.

Admittedly, I must resort to periodization here, not to distort my subject into the corset of an artificial social construct called a "decade"--and the implication that each one has a distinct set of characteristics based solely on that criterion--but to provide parameters that would, hopefully, allow for a more focussed analysis. Nonetheless, in order to write the history of a segment of time, a period, a rupture, a cynosure or juncture at which point dramatic changes became evident, it is necessary to provide a working genealogy--an intellectual and cultural history of the foundations of the Sixties--since the counterculture was more of a mind-set, a sensibility, than a series of events that can be

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[5]In reference to my method of analyzing cinematic texts, it is important to point out that in the main body of my analyses I often use phrases that attribute intent on the part of a director, when in fact I have not consulted the director's actual opinion. I resort to this as a rhetorical device, that is not meant to imply that I have any idea regarding how a particular director intended his work; rather, I employ a textual analyses that uses historical contextualization to extrapolate the effect that these films may have had upon audiences.

enumerated like the outbreaks of plague towards the end of the middle ages, or the number of times London was bombed during the early part of the Second World War. I use such examples intentionally, to distinguish between the kind of history that aims to capture essences--not in the impressionistic sense of the word as something that flavors one's perceptions, but as something that conveys the sensibility of a period--and the more traditional, chronological histories of political movements, wars, presidencies, social conflicts, etc. While the counterculture encompassed several formal movements-- everything from the more radical offshoots of the SDS like the Weathermen, to communes like the Hog Farm--it was not analogous to a single political ideology with a single point of view; rather, it was a sensibility, or more concisely, a way of looking at the world that provided a framework for some members of successive generations--a modified aperture through which to view social transitions--and legitimated the notion of more pluralistic ways of seeing history. Ultimately, it was about the social triumph of the personal, regardless of the fact that most of its political initiatives failed.

The mystical phenomenon lacks continuity: it flourishes, achieves its apogee,
then degenerates and ends in a caricature. E.M. Cioran [1]

Thus, today, artists...only *seem* to prise open history...to redeem specific moments; in fact, they only give us hallucinations of the historical, masks of these moments. In short they return to us our historically most cherished forms--as kitsch. Hal Foster [2]

Introduction: Art and Culture.

Each generation attempts to define itself against its predecessor by

cannibalizing the most cherished myths of its forebears. For every ideological position,

no matter how intractable it may seem, there exists an antipodes that would destabilize

it and question its hegemony. Similarly, artistic movements invest themselves with the

authority of the *Zeitgeist* precisely because their novelty eclipses competing

sensibilities. Such aesthetic reconfigurations--no matter how singular--are invariably

revealed to be comprised of a series of rules, or conventions, that dictate their mode of

representation, and therefore inevitably undermine whatever claims of authenticity they

may have once possessed. During the last several decades, this process of shifting

artistic conventions accelerated to the point where an equality of expression has

evolved; one which aims to destabilize the very conventions that underlie any, and all,

assumptions about uniqueness, even at the expense of its own claim to singularity.

Nowhere has this implosion been more explicit than in the world of film, where a post-

war reaffirmation of the political status quo has given way to a plurality of competing

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[1] E.M. Cioran, *The Temptation To Exist*, Trans. by Richard Howard (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1956), 158.

[2] Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1985), 76.

discourses, each equally meaningless, and each mired in a self-reflexivity that has come to resemble caricature.

The origins of this shift can be found in the 1960's, a period of turbulent upheaval that indirectly preserved a record of its seismic changes in the artistic innovations that it produced. The decade saw the emergence of independent film as a legitimate genre--this coinciding with an emergent political ethos that favored the singularity of individual expression over the consensus ethos that had dominated the Fifties. Moreover, large studios, in order to assimilate the momentous shifts in youth culture, race relations and attitudes towards authority--as well as a cynicism towards government catalyzed by the Vietnam war--began to allow directors a great deal of artistic freedom, eschewing the limitations that had relegated political statements to the allegorical genre of science fiction, and opening up audiences to a wider variety of types than had been previously allowed under the rigid guidelines of the production codes.[3]

Invariably, new modes of representation tend to ossify into formulaic discourses that distort and flatten their intended subjects. The intent of this thesis will be to examine how cinema mediated the growing cultural cynicism of the Sixties--as well as the counterculture, which was most vocal in expressing its discontent--through representations that defined and historicized various modes of dissent by bringing them

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[3]David Steigerwald, *The Sixties and the End of Modern America*(New York: St. Martin's Press,1995),2,170. The author states that: "The Liberation of culture from the censors freed artists but did little for art, which increasingly became the realm of investors and mass-marketers." Such statements imply that prior to this "liberation", there existed a golden age where commercialism was mitigated by integrity. In fact, it was the avant-garde, which, for a little while at least, emerged from the fringe to briefly dominate the center. Its subsequent domestication did not invalidate the integrity of the underground as much as it revealed the dynamics at work in a culture where the marketplace dictatespublic tastes, and where commercial formulas often supplant originality.

within the purview of the film-maker's lens. The focus here will be primarily on the keystone films of the decade, rather than on the underground or small studio genres, since the former accurately assess how various heterogeneous lifestyles and sensibilities are assimilated into mainstream discourse through the neutralizing process of representation. The way in which a mainstream art form mediates a certain kind of cultural experience elucidates how a society coopts and defangs potentially volatile discourses through a gradual assimilation process. This process is not conscious or conspiratorial, but rather a dynamic method of colonizing realms of experience whose energy and singularity derives precisely from that fact that they are outside the purview of accepted social practices. The slow legitimization of the Sixties rebellion was invariably a double-edged sword which diffused the disruptive potential of certain discourses by recontextualizing them as stylistic changes in sensibility, and neutralizing their political content through caricature, exclusion or misrepresentation. Ultimately, the Sixties social conflagration transmogrified into a colorful entertainment event, a process that continues even in such ostensibly benign guises as retro spy comedies like *Austin Powers* and the more hard-edged films of Quentin Tarantino which extract stylistic content at the expense of their original context.

The problem becomes particularly complex when examining cultural movements, especially those which were rapidly coopted by the instant neutralizing discourse of mass media. This is the central issue confronting anyone who attempts to analyze seriously the so-called counterculture of the1960's; because, upon analysis, one senses another history buried beneath the vestigial, volcanic residues of that decade. Indeed, one may surmise that the driving forces behind those eruptions--

articulated as protest, the apotheosis of the ecstatic and the resurgence of a long-supressed pre-enlightenment system of metaphysics often found in the permisive doctrines of eastern religions--were rooted in a complex counter-ideology that has periodically re-emerged during times of rapid historical change.[4] At the center of much of the discourse generated during that period by, and about, the counterculture, was LSD. While only a fraction of college-age people actually used the drug during the Sixties, its dramatic sensory effects--especially its ability to defamiliarize the mundane and call into question many of the a prioris that are implicit parts of modern discourse--tended to metaphorize the atmosphere of change that characterized the entire era. One did not need to use acid, however, or even to refer to it directly, in order to encounter the rapidly fluctuating scale of ideas and values that indirectly alluded to the same gestalt, and which invariably touched every form of cultural expression during the Sixties. Cinema, more than any other form of expression, captured the most important transformations of the period. Its formal qualities were conducive to the presentation of various reconfigured social relations, which contextualized images of change while investing them with the authority of truth through representation.

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[4]Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991) 243. This ideology privileged sensory experience over abstract logic, Dionysian excess over Apollonian moderation, and the values of community over those of centrally planned bureaucracy; in short, it favored everything that the rationalist discourse of Western Civilization found necessary to supress in order to functon efficiently. The philosophical roots of this idea extend as far back as Euripides, and are expressed in the Nietzschean dictum that calls for the transvaluation of all values. Ironically, this assault on Western reason has often led to the adoption of paradoxical value systems, being linked to both anarchism and fascism. Moreover, it has taken widely varying forms, from the *Romantics* of the 19th century to the present day *New Age* movement. What is important here is not ideological consistency, however, as much as the way in which a particular idea has endured, shadowing the development of reason with a discourse that has often assumed the form of nihilism. See also: Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (New York: Vintage, 1973).

LSD, however, is only the cynosure, or focal point, around which any analysis

of cinematic representation of the counterculture must coalesce. More important is

the way in which the discourse of a discontented generation--whose desire for change

seemed to crystallize towards the end of the decade with the advent of a New-Left

hippie synthesis (also called "acid" politics)--infiltrated mainstream cinematic

representations; and, how it was subsequently neutralized, assimilated and simplified in

order to render it comprehensible. In *One Dimensional Man*, the social theorist

Herbert Marcuse outlined the complex process by which outsider discourses are

neutralized through decontextualization, functioning as sanitized reductions that

maintain their original form but with an emptying of content that renders them

marketable. Of course, the particular keystone films of the Sixties which are the focus

of this analysis do not all employ the same strategies to assimilate the anger that was at

the center of the social rupture that became the counterculture. Some, such as

Midnight Cowboy, *Medium Cool*, and *2001*, are not countercultural in any direct

sense, but rather reflect--sometimes obliquely--the shift in values that was central to

the New Left discourse through their use of symbols, their unorthodox

characterizations, and their reflexive attitudes towards the conditions of their

production. This is especially true of *Medium Cool*, and to a somewhat lesser extent,

Bonnie and Clyde and *Midnight Cowboy*. All three self-consciously parody and

reconfigure the genre conventions that had usually been employed in American cinema

without reflexivity.

This is most obvious in *Bonnie and Clyde*, which presents the mythologized

daily drama of the depression-era gangster team in quotes, artfully playing on the

discrepancies between their idealized images and the emptiness of their experience to

create a tension that is not even reconciled by their inevitable apotheosis as folk

heroes--although the latter made them excellent personifications of the

counterculture's most cherished myths: self denial, a sense of community, and a life

lived outside the law off the bounty of a greedy economic system.

To reveal the hidden epistemological framework and overlapping paradigms

that informed the ethos of the Sixties, it is necessary to employ theoretical sources in

addition to the historical. Postmodern texts, including *Dialectic of Enlightenment, The

Order of Things* and *Society of the Spectacle*, become as important to understanding

the subtle shifts of mindset that provided a context for the emergence of ideologies,

excesses and conflagrations as the journalistic forays of Tom Wolfe and Hunter

Thompson. The latter explored the esoteric niches of the decade's most solipsistic, and

paradoxically most influential, cultural experiences: LSD, the Hell's Angels, Haight-

Ashbury, Ken Kesey, The Living theater, Underground Cinema, etc. There exists an

endless list of names, dates and places which can be enumerated without approaching

anything resembling an explanation of why these people, movements and

interpretations of religion, drugs and performance were, in the space of a decade, to

alter the American aesthetic landscape so thoroughly. Indeed, what is missing is both a

sense of context, and a deeper history that might probe their origins buried within the

sediments of post-enlightenment thought and philosophy; and more locally, festering

like a thermal vent beneath the thin volcanic crust of postwar American life.

Conversely, in *2001, A Space Odyssey,* Stanley Kubrick transforms the murky

metaphysics of the acid subculture into a Nietzschean melodrama about spiritual

evolution. The film was noteworthy both for its critique of human civilization and for its dramatic coda, which employed techniques culled from contemporaneous underground cinema and light shows, and used them to make a point about the necessity of spiritual change--possibly through some means of altered consciousness-- in order for evolution to continue.

Medium Cool and *Midnight Cowboy* take the most post-modern, and therefore difficult approach to their subjects. While Haskell Wexler's film ostensibly deals with the 1968 Chicago Democratic convention, he is more concerned with the way media, and more concisely television, represent events--particularly Vietnam and the protest movement that grew in response to it. The rise of the underground press in the late Sixties, and the coterminous emergence of a dialectic devoted to deconstructing the official discourse over the war, contributed to, and hastened the development of, more radical modes of cinematic representation. This was not merely irony, but a recognition of the fact that the thematic conventions of film--its tendency to employ linear narratives to explain complex events--were problematic, distorting their subjects by confining them within the artificial parameters of a cause-and-effect epistemology. European filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard and Federico Fellini, recognized this problem a decade earlier. Similarly, Wexler followed suit by making a movie whose ostensible subject became its own production; particularly, the impossibility of representation.

While superficially different, John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* is also about representation, but confines itself to contrasting the unpleasant realities of real life in a utilitarian capitalist society with the archetypes that evolved during the course of a half

century of cinematic representation. The film's protagonist, Joe Buck (John Voight) is

a dishwasher from Texas who puts on a cowboy suit and hops a bus to New York

hoping to make a living hustling married woman. The realities that he encounters in

New York are far different from his expectations, giving Schlesinger an opportunity to

deflate the conventions of the Western-loner film, a representation that had

transmogrified, by then, and spread into every other area of media. While only

peripherally concerned with the counterculture itself, Schlesinger raises a question that

was an implicit aspect of social protest in the 1960's: who controls how an individual is

represented, or more importantly how the narrative an individual imposes upon his

own life is distorted by the media archetypes that shape such construction? Jean

Baudrillard writes about the precession of simulacra, where "the network of artificial

signs will become mixed up with real elements" thus, leading to confusion between the

signs themselves and the deposits of association and meaning that eventually

problematize them. [5] Joe Buck knows he is not a real cowboy, since he--more than any

New Yorker--understands that Texas is a place filled with small towns and empty

grazing land populated by telephone poles and drive-in theaters. His fantasy however,

is identical to that of his quasi-mythical forebears: self-sufficiency, sexuality, rugged

individuality and resiliency. His very blindness to the fact that these ideals cannot exist

in a society which has institutionalized the ethos of consumerism--where

standardization, uniformity and urbanization are the rule--is used by Schlesinger to

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[5] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 20.

comment on just how deeply we are immersed in a mythology whose vague

boundaries are difficult to transcend.

Film in the Sixties, constituted a discourse on alienation, which ultimately

replaced the apotheosis of conformity through assimilation with the exaltation of an

ethos of alienation. The latter however, only becomes apparent through a

deconstructing of the essential conventions of Sixties filmic texts.[6] The conditions of

film production during the period--the changing relations between directors and

studios, innovations and existing technology, and a new willingness to stretch

boundaries that became visible in the midst of social upheaval--recontextualized the

existing parameters of film. Suddenly, the medium became aware of itself,exploiting its

own conventions through the use of irony. Films such as *A Fistful of Dollars, Easy*

Rider, and *Bonnie and Clyde* revamped the tired forms of the Western and Gangster

genres, creating something that implicitly critiqued the value systems which

undergirded them by self-consciously lampooning their excesses. Henceforth, as an

agent in effecting the narratives that it portrayed, film was no longer seen as

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[6] As to the origins of the gestalt shift which took the form of a seismic jolt along the social foundations of the western paradigm, it is perhaps a fair analogy to compare it to an earthquake along a fault line upon which tension had been building for a long time. Indeed, if one were to study the various points of historical pressure which accumulated along this fault line, one would be confronted with the surprising discovery that the most significant sources of pressure were also those which operated on the most sublime level. McCarthyism, the planned obsolescence of the post-war economic boom, rigid social stratification and racism were only the most obvious precursors to their antipodes in the Sixties, such as the reemergence of radical politics, conservationism, experiments in alternative lifestyles and the civil rights and Black Power movements. More pervasive and subtle was the resurgence, manifested in myriad ways by various incarnations of the counterculture, of metaphysics--itself part of the hidden dialectic between logical positivism and the ever present need for spirituality; the latter, achieved through new and eidetic forms of mantra, meditation, drug use and endless study of the most arcane and esoteric texts. All of this was not meant as an end in itself--although countless innovative approaches to such questions would harden into rigid formulaic dogma--but as a way of transcending the enlightenment's tendency to objectify and anatomize all phenomena empirically, which in the eyes of many of that generation, implied the reduction of humanity as well, into little more than a procession of organization men, or conveyor belt components.

transparent, but rather as a form of mediation between such texts and their various meanings. Moreover, if underground films at the vanguard of experimentation remained relatively ghettoized throughout the decade, the sheer weight of so much innovation altered the ethos of Hollywood permanently, from that of social reaffirmation to a more anarchic experimental approach whose self-reflexiveness acted to undermine institutionalized modes of production by uncovering their discourses in cinematic texts. Thus, by the end of the decade, outlaw films which explored the dialectics and dispersement of power such as *The Good the Bad and the Ugly*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, also functioned as meditations on the psychology of the marginalized as well as critiques of institutionalized authority in ways that even their most radical counterparts of a decade earlier did not.[7] In short, film lost its pretensions of innocence during the 1960's, mirroring the contemporaneous social and political transformations in the culture as a whole.

Moreover, the new cinema was as much a reaction against an existing canon of "good taste," and its orthodoxy of stylistic conventions, as it was a process of exploring new innovations. In fact, the two were inseparable functions of the same process--each part of a larger response against the ossification of a once vital artistic vocabulary. Although the PCA (Production Code Administration) codes had been violated routinely by mainstream studios after Otto Preminger successfully released *The Moon Is Blue* in 1953, the institutionalized cinematic conventions that such codes

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[7]James, *Allegories*, 173.

helped fossilize only began to erode in the late 1960's.[8] Films such as *The Graduate*

and *I Love You Alice B. Toklas* violated the remnants of whatever remained of the

PCA through an acknowledgment of the youth culture's cynicism and explicit

references to its interest in mind-altering chemicals. Nonetheless, neither film was as

radical as they may have appeared at the time of their respective releases. *The*

Graduate cleverly captured the disillusionment of a generation which, unlike its

predecessors, did not want to be herded into the corporate corral to sell *plastics*, or

any other commodity, that had no immediate connection with their actual lives. As a

symbol of alienation, the film's sketches may have been on target, but they seemed

rather superficial given the very real signs of discontent that were commonplace on the

evening news by 1967. The March on the Pentagon, revelations about the CIA's role in

the National Student Association, and frequent reports about San Francisco "hippies"

were lurid by comparison. Conversely, Peter Sellers' film was merely another attempt

to digest and market a complex subculture as if it were a mere marketing fad. The

"hippies" had now replaced the bongo-banging "beatniks" who had already become

mainstays on episodes of *My Three Sons* and *I Dream Of Jeannie*; but their image had

remained static as little more than a regression to a neolithic primitivism with no

ostensible political core. Both *Graduate* and *Toklas* were emblematic of a trend

toward coopting rather than ignoring youth culture--a characteristic which, in

comparison with European film-makers such as Jean Luc Godard and Michelangelo

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[8]"The Production Code" from *Movies and Mass Culture*, ed. John Benton (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996). 135-138.

Antonioni, made their characters appear cartoon-like and contrived. Even the so-called

"Spaghetti Westerns" of Sergio Leone--which brilliantly allegorized the violent

sensibilities associated with America's involvement with Vietnam--appeared authentic

by comparison, precisely because they chose to represent the violence of

contemporary culture without sentimentality or caricature. Ultimately, the

mythologization of the counterculture, and the sensibility of discontent that it created,

would not be initiated by Hollywood but would be created by outsiders whose

multiplicity of visions lent an air of authenticity to the gestalt shift that altered cinema

during the decade.

Chapter 1: Subversive Currents.

The progenitors of the youth-cult films of the Sixties came primarily from two

sources outside the mainstream studios: The "B" exploitation flicks with which AIP

(American International Pictures) saturated the film market during the postwar years,

and the underground cinema and its nascent homemade raw sensibilities. The first set a

standard for low-budget production values and a coarse aesthetic which was

remarkable in how it fulfilled the hollow promises of the second. In particular, films

such as *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein, How to Make a Monster, Hot Rod Gang,* and

Invisible Creature, among other Fifties shock-cinema titles, exploited the culture of

teenagers, metaphorizing their ethos of alienation as all manner of alien blobs, androids

and mutants. What the plots lacked in sophistication they made up for in simulated

terror and an angst familiar to a post-war generation whose reflexive appraisal of its

inherent otherness was reflected in the large box office ticket sales of films involving

variations on the idea of transmogrification: most frequently, that of a normal acne-

prone teenager who is suddenly afflicted with strange markings, perhaps hairy arms,

nails turning into claws and a host of other exaggerated physical symptoms. More

important, perhaps, was AIP's recognition of the teenage market and its incredible

purchasing power.[1] This new-found economic capability, coupled with AIP's

wonderfully eclectic schlock taste for novelty--everything from the Roger Corman-

directed Gothic horror classics like *House of Usher* to the low-budget self parody of *It*

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[1] Mark Thomas McGee, *Fast and Furious: The Story of American International Pictures* (London:
McFarland, 1984), 72.

Conquered The World (widely regarded to be among the worst films ever made, an honor it would surely have secured were it not for the competition of *Plan 9 from Outer Space* and other oddities from Ed Wood, the John Ford of low budget genre auteurism), and the pop-inflected mythology of *Hercules, Prisoner of Evil*, not to mention a whole plethora of forgettable paleolithic caveman epics--guaranteed a monopoly over a segment of the film market not often visited by the major Hollywood studios.

Ironically, the "undergrounds" that had emerged at the end of the Fifties as an alternative and a response to the rigid control over product exercised by the studio system, did not live up to their initial promise. While early offerings like Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* and Ron Rice's *The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man* were highly improvisatory and exposed the process of film making through self-reflexive techniques and a completely non-linear narrative structure, the later underground films often confused boredom with social critique. Of particular relevance here are the films of Andy Warhol, since they tended to focus on the lives of people who were normally considered too deviant, vapid or bizarre for mainstream film, and in this sense presaged the arrival of the counter-cultural mythos into mainstream cinema--the latter being partially responsible for the off-beat characterizations of films such as *Midnight Cowboy* and *Bonnie and Clyde*. Moreover, Warhol provided previously unexplored avenues of self-consciousness, in which his broad array of characters could transgress the boundary between explication and flagrant self-promotion. None of Warhol's portraits retains any element of naturalism; rather, they are transformed by the gaze of the camera into spectators who must constantly mediate between the contrived nature

of filmic representation--no matter how unobtrusive--and the purity of the narratives

which they recount, for, "as the recording apparatus mechanically transforms life into

art, it constitutes the space of its attention as a theater of self-presentation."[2] In one

example, *Couch*, Gerard Malanga and Kate Heliczer engage in various sexual activities

on a cluttered couch, seemingly oblivious to the presence of the camera. Nonetheless,

the snatches of self-referential--and therefore untranslatable--conversation, and the

apparent lack of concern regarding the possibility of unseen spectators has the remote

feel of the action in a Nineteenth Century salon painting depicting a group of nude

bathers. The camera ostensibly becomes a privileged voyeur precisely because its focus

is never challenged. Nonetheless, after several minutes it seems apparent that the very

avoidance of its presence is a form of acknowledgment, which functions as an

indicator of narcissism: the more the actors perform, the more incessantly they engage

in the activities that are the film's focus, the more central they become. This process is

particularly evident in a film like *Eat*, where the camera clearly becomes the locus of

concern after the sitter has finished consuming food. This functions as the ostensible

plot of the movie, revealing the film's true focus-- the gestural vocabularies of the

sitters themselves, who fidget, squirm and talk, all in an attempt to diffuse the gaze of

the apparatus. David James explains that, "in the knowledge of being observed...the

subject must construct himself in the mental mirrors of his self image..."[3] This newly

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[2] James, *Allegories*, 67.

[3] Ibid., 69.   If Timothy Leary's Millbrook Institute was in emulation of Herman Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game*, then Warhol's Factory was its alter-ego, a small society where the leader was venerated precisely because he didn't speak, and where the level of dissimulation was in direct proportion to one's power within the group.

discovered self-consciousness was the antecedent of films like *Medium Cool* in which

self-reflexivity was expanded to incorporate the entire concept of textual

representation.

Conversely, while the Warhol films operated simultaneously as epics of

narcissistic self-indulgence and parodies of the excesses of such attitudes, they also

functioned as portraits of social outcasts, often the very types of people who had been

ostracized from accessible modes of cinematic representation in the post-war culture.

Ironically, Warhol's film's exposed a cross section of "deviant" types to audiences who

had never had access to such an abundance of human diversity. Prostitutes,

transvestites, junkies, misanthropes, artists and un-categorizable oddballs all co-starred

in various *cinéma-vérité* epics at the factory--a strange name considering the anti-

utilitarianism inherent in Warhol's cinematic portrayals. Colleagues such as George

Kuchar and Kenneth Anger, while stylistically distinct, were influenced by Warhol's

casting methods. Moreover, mainstream film-makers responding to the changing ethos

of filmgoers, particularly the counterculture-inspired veneration of "loser" and

"outcast" types, began making films about the sorts of people who would never have

been represented even a decade earlier. John Schlesinger, in particular, was influenced

by the Factory's obsession with oddballs and weirdos. Not only did he cast Dustin

Hoffman's Ratzo Rizzo character as the sort of street person who might accidentally

end up in front of Warhol's voyeuristic camera, but he included a long "psychedelic"

party sequence in the middle of *Midnight Cowboy*, as both an homage and a parody of

the activities that went on there, including the non-stop social gatherings, drug taking

and various sexual escapades of the regulars. Warhol's Factory was part salon, part workshop, and part commune filled with a population made up equally of transients, artists and local eccentrics.

The element of exploitation that was a natural outgrowth of Warhol's voyeuristic method would soon become apparent, however, after Valerie Solanas, a radical feminist loner who had penned a polemic called the SCUM (Society for Cutting up Men) Manifesto shot the artist several times, claiming afterwards that he had manipulate and exploited her. This event caused a minor conflagration in the art world, raising questions about ethics that nobody was prepared to answer (indeed, the startling revelations that some of his subjects made on film may have required a certain amount of subtle manipulation, in the form of using the camera to play to the individual's natural narcissistic impulses). This signified an awareness of the growing rift between the social scene at the Factory and the politicos of the East Village. In many ways this low-key conflict of ideology superficially resembled that between the "hippies" of the Haight-Ashbury and the radicals of Berkeley before the 1967 March on the Pentagon signaled a synthesis of the two formerly antagonistic forms of social rebellion. Similarly, Warhol's Factory had, for a short time, gone on the road, using the music of a rock band called the Velvet Underground to accompany various films produced by Warhol's people. Although it proved to be primitive by the standards of West Coast light shows, it reinforced the idea that the underground culture developing in the mid-sixties was utilizing totally new ideas in its approach towards cinematic texts and their use. The subsequent valorization of Solanis in the underground press

after the shooting effectively formed a rift between the Warhol group and the politicos

just as the New Left began to merge with the counterculture into a seamless whole

By the Middle of the Sixties, while the underground sensibility was being

coopted by the major studios--invariably leading to the partial ghettoization of

independent films--AIP was ironically, poised to tap into the almost taboo market of

the outlaw/protest film; something only attempted by the aboveground cinema when

the topic was heavily saturated with a didactic status-quo affirming message. Fifties

films like *Rebel without a Cause* and *The Unguarded Moment* were essentially

assimilationist in their thinking, isolating the deviant as the pathological other even as

they exploited his/her excesses through sensationalistic close-ups and lurid

promotional stills.[4] Even early Rock-N-Roll movies like *The Girl Can't Help It*--a film

far more popular for its soundtrack featuring Little Richard and The Big Bopper, than

for its showcasing of Jayne Mansfield's pirouette-and-shake dance movements--and

the insipid beach party-genre that developed in the relative quiet of the late 50's, were

prone to sentimentalize difficult subjects whenever they became too threatening for the

light-comedy structure that they supported.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the peculiar fascination with the

culture of African Americans--an obsession simultaneously admiring, anthropological,

dismissive and unabashedly racist. Such attitudes were not the exclusive province of

well bred white business owners but were often strongly manifest in the actions of

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[4] Peter Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 200-203.

Bohemian types who saw in the lives of people of color a model for a more liberated approach to taboo subjects like drugs and sexual pleasure.[5] While this sort of bigotry was often dissimulated as fascination, making the Beat Generation's obsession with "negro" culture ambiguous, its later detection by chroniclers of the "hippies" during the Sixties made them easy targets for accusations of hypocrisy by pointing out the similarities between pre-Civil Rights Southern attitudes and frequently whispered hip-storefront mantras such as "spades are programmed for hate." The origins of such obvious contradictions pre-date the fringe sub-cultures of the 50's and 60's however, and, in fact, reside deep in American culture.[6]

Early cinematic representations of youth culture often capitalized on this complex affinity by adding Rock and Roll soundtracks to their films, and giving their characters convoluted hipster dialogue. Even the predecessors to the Delinquent Films of the Fifties would add an element of danger to their portrayals of gangster types by throwing in the insistent beats of Gene Krupa and emphasizing the colloquial vernacular of the underclass. While the dialect of the latter may have been exaggerated to the point of caricature, its significance was unmistakable. The pre-noir stylizations of gangsters in films such as *Angels with Dirty Faces, On through the Night,* and *Roaring Twenties* anticipated the ambiguity of later counterculture films, often

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[5] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," from *Advertisements for Myself* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), 340.

[6] Nicholas Von Hoffman, *We Are The People Our Parents Warned Us Against* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1968), 112.

exploiting the same reservoir of signs to heighten dramatic conflicts through the invocation of popular stereotypes. This ambiguity crystallized in the simultaneous apotheosis and demonization of gangsters in pre-war cinema. Concomitant with this tendency was the imposition of a moral duality over the characterizations in the gangster genre. Often, two separate characters would come to personify the oppositional duality of an idealized set of ethical traits. The function of the good character (meaning, the one who is morally salvageable) would be to marginalize the extremism of the unambiguously evil opponent. In *Roaring Twenties*, this is exemplified by James Cagney's misguided, but ultimately moral, bootlegger whose ambitions are consistent with the highest values of Capitalism, except for an indiscretion engendered by the quick-money climate of Prohibition. His subsequent involvement with real criminals, such as the quick-tempered, homicidal Humphrey Bogart, also creates a chance for him to redeem himself by taking a bullet in the back as the price for turning his unethical business partners in to the police. Such idealized bravery trades in verisimilitude for the catharsis provided by a character whose self-sacrifice cancels out moral ambiguity. Hence, the audience can revel in the anti-social behavior of the protagonist, while freed from the guilt which such dramas often invoke through the plot device of the character's final act of contrition. In a sense, James Cagney is killed so that the audience can satiate its need for anti-social behavior while being reminded, in a didactic way, of the consequences of such behavior. The latter, of course, best exemplified by the cruel downfall of his unredeemable other: Humphrey Bogart.

Similarly, the early Youth films of the Fifties employed these same oppositions, both to provide a foil for the main character, and to reinforce conventional notions about proper conduct while appearing to celebrate anti-social urges. This is evident in the 1954 Biker film, *The Wild One*, where Twentieth Century style conventions and technologies barely disguise the sensual bacchanal which is the film's primary target. Marlon Brando is widely remembered as the movie's prototypical delinquent who, when asked what he is rebelling against, replies, "What have you got?"[7] It is Lee Marvin, however, who as the film's true psychopathic villain, embodies the anarchic energy that befits a true manifestation of Dionysian excess. His counterpart and nemesis, Brando, is ultimately forgiven for his insolent impropriety, but only after being humiliated at the expense of the very manhood which is the source of the sexual energy that drives both Marvin and his mythological prototype. Despite the fact that audiences were attracted the *Wild One*'s dramatic action--replete with angry bikers doing wheelies through town, pouring beer over hapless citizens and indulging their sordid passions for both sexual innuendo and fisticuffs--the film is clearly intended as a parable about the excesses of the physical drives when they are not properly reigned in by necessarily restrictive social conventions. It is the pagan desires themselves--the reaffirmation of the cthonic flesh through wanton copulation, the reunification with the primal elements through the insensibility of chemical (in this case alcohol) inebriation and the abandonment of the senses through animal violence, all apparently real, albeit atavistic, human needs--which are the true target of this repressive Calvinistic drama.

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[7] Biskind, 198.

Civilization may indeed have its discontents, the director subtly informs his audience,

but they are best kept submerged, lest the unspeakable occur. That unspeakable, has

always been the inevitable, and very real, loss of control; not on the part of some

unshaven hoodlum mob, but by the very purveyors of cleanliness themselves: the

middle class.

That theme of conflict between children and their parents soon became

dominant, and began to have more cryptic cinematic overtones. Buzz Kulik's *The*

Explosive Generation pitted ignorant parents against a reform minded teacher and a

militant group of kids.[8] John Frankenheimer's *The Young Savages* went even further,

valorizing a group of inner-city teenagers who are more delinquent, and less

romanticized, than those in *Blackboard Jungle*--a film from the mid-Fifties.

Frankenheimer's miscreants are the heirs to the undercurrents of dissent which had

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[8] Ethan Mordden, *Medium Cool: The Movies of the 1960's* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1990)11. Two films in particular which bridged the gap between Fifties restrictiveness and Sixties singularity were *Splendor in the Grass*, and Roger Corman's low budget *Little Shop of Horrors*. Both were important for the way they treated conflict, not as part of a natural struggle between two mythical polarities called good and evil, but as an outgrowth of self-righteousness, sanctimoniousness, misunderstanding and just plain voraciousness. In *Little Shop*, a plant becomes a proxy for all manner of appetites that cannot be satiated or concealed. There is no real moral here, only a carnivorous plant, a sadistic dentist and a colorful cross section of Manhattan's Lower East Side: ethnic, unshaven, opportunistic and hapless. They are worlds away from Elia Kazan's version of Kansas, where he places his theatrical drama about inter-generational conflict. *Splendor* is essentially a reworking of a theme as old as *Romeo and Juliet*: two adolescents fall in love, and all would be perfect except for the mindless authoritarianism of their parents. In this case, the parents are superficially decent people, thoughtful, polite and respectful of social boundaries; yet they cannot allow their children the impropriety of an adult relationship--never mind the fact that their children happen to be Warren Beatty and Natalie Wood, both of whom are obviously too old for high school. Both the apolitical theme and its overly-theatrical staging--which made parts of *Splendor* look too contrived and artificial to be convincing--function paradoxically to increase the surreal drama of Beatty's clash with his father (Pat Hingle). The very artificiality of the sets potentiates the conflict that threatens to spill over their back-lot boundaries onto the streets of Hollywood. The audience knows (or should have, even then) that this is not Kansas, and that the histrionics place artificial emphasis on certain aspects of the story which would otherwise have passed without drama. The staginess however, emphasizes just how ordinary Pat Hingle is, and just how banal evil--especially when it is cloaked as good intentions--can become. A prophetic reminder of the grey area subtleties of the upcoming decade; and, for Kazan, a sublime reminder that the insidious invaders need not be the Communists whom he fingered for HUAC (House Un-American activities Committee) during the period of the Hollywood Blacklists.

been ignored throughout most of the post-war era; and for all of their anachronistic language and attitudes, their anger was sincere and hinted at the mutations to come in the next decade, when being disaffected would become a style rather than a response. Nonetheless, this was not the first time that film had dealt with the counterculture in its various incarnations. AIP's own *Bucket of Blood* was ostensibly an analysis--albeit a rather superficial one--of the coffee house subculture of the Beats; and, regardless of its attempts at Howl-like poesy, and its horror movie aspirations, it still achieved a greater degree of verisimilitude than MGM's gaudy and pretentious reduction of Jack Kerouac's *Subterraneans*.

Concomitant with these excursions into the exploitation cinema of the "Beats" was a series of independently-produced films which aimed to portray segments of culture not represented by mainstream cinema. Chief among these early underground films were Robert frank's *Pull My Daisy*--a non-linear portrait of Allan Ginsberg and the beats--and John Cassavetes' *Shadows*, which showed real lives in real time at the expense of the unwanted stylistic appurtenances of mainstream cinema.[9] While the *cinéma-verité* spontaneity was largely acquired from an older European tradition, both films were American in feel and scope, particularly, in their emphasis on the subterranean intellectual life of New York and their valorization through cinematic representation of a wide variety of early "countercultural" types, including existentialists, artists, poets and Jazz musicians.[10] Similarly, both films, and the

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[9].James, 86.

[10]Ibid., 87. See also: "Beyond the Sacred and the Profane: Cultural Landscape Photography in America, 1930-1990" from *Mapping American Culture*, eds. Wayne Franklin and Michael Steiner (Iowa City:

visionary artists behind their production, presaged the emergence of a counterculture whose ethos would--like their counterparts in the underground cinema--valorize all of the things which the mainstream found disquieting, inassimilable or deplorable: instant sexual gratification, obsessiveness, excessive drug use, Eastern religions, the value of madness, primitiveness and the celebration of sensuality.

The primary stylistic influences for early underground cinema were from the European avant-garde, including Jean Luc Godard--whose excursions into reflexive films about film itself have been the subject of innumerable dissertations--Federico Fellini and Francois Truffaut. Underground American film-makers also developed a keen interest in film-noir, pornography and coterminous developments occurring in documentary photography (particularly photographs taken by a group known as the "New Topographics," who sought to capture an unrehearsed realism that embodied the essence of suburban and industrial spaces, focussing on the alienation that they produced). Unlike the underground film-makers, however, avant-garde photographers of the same period took longer to develop an awareness that their recording apparatus--the camera--mediated the effects of the environments that they sought to capture. The construction sites, refineries and suburban dwellings in the photographs of Robert Frank adhered to a set of conventions that dissimulated their intentions, thus, making their grim depictions appear transparent to the realities of modern urban environments despite the fact that they were products of the photographer's gaze. Conversely, what Andy Warhol, Jack Smith and Goerge Kuchar, among others,

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University of Iowa Press, 1992), 191-230.

sought was a more complex discourse on the nature of film itself, and how it became a factor in defining discursive spaces. Thus, the subject of their films was often the way that film functioned as a language with a particular set of conventions that mediated the nature of what it portrayed. By the late 60's, this self-reflexivity was a common element of mainstream cinema that was invariably transformed into a cinematic convention itself, leading to a number of contrived films about film during the following decade, and incorporating production itself into cinema's ever expanding semiotic vocabulary. Thus, films like *American Graffiti*, *Silent Movie*, *Star Wars*, and in the 80's *Back to the Future*, all used the cinematic tropes of nostalgia to represent the past, not as an actual place but as a heavily mediated realm of memory, employing irony as a part of film's new vocabulary, thereby coopting one of the last avenues through which film could criticize itself.

By 1967, the *cinéma-vérité* aesthetics that informed underground films had begun to seep into the sensibilities of mass-marketed movies aiming for youthful audiences. The seductive notion of alternatives to a drab prefabricated existence start to surface in lightweight iconoclastic comedies like *Georgy Girl* and *Lord Love a Duck*, which valorized the principles of non-conformity while abdicating any claim they might have had to artistic legitimacy, employing a rigid set of comedic conventions that gave them the appearance of glib jokes. Pauline Kael noticed this paradox in her review of *Morgan*--a film which parodies *My Man Godfrey*, itself an attack on the pretensions of the avant-garde--when she commented that: "Morgan is so appealing to college students because it shares their self-view: They accept this mess of cute infantilism and obsessions...without expecting the writer and director to

straighten it out or resolve it."[11] She went on to offer an analysis of how a film with

such obviously flawed production values might appeal to younger audiences.

> They may be shocked when they see that he really is crazy and in pain, but they can...quickly accept that too because he's mad in a pop way they respond to-- madness as the ultimate irresponsibility for the rebel, the only sanity for those who see what the 'responsible' people supposedly did to this world...If flipness is all (as it is in so many of the new movies) the flip-out is just an accepted part of life. Students liberally educated not to regard analysis and breakdowns and treatment as anything shameful...talk about breakdowns as 'opting out'--as if it were a preference and a *moral choice* [italics mine].[12]

Here is the nascent embryonic beginnings of a new canon built upon a set of

values that stand in opposition to those the Vietnam generation had been brought up

with. The fact that this awareness was most profound in those who had been raised

with the best access to wealth and education is not lost on Kael, since it has also given

them something to be cynical about. In 1966, a nervous breakdown was a "badge of

honor," proof that one had seen through the moral hypocrisy of American society.

Moreover, this attitude was being translated into the vocabulary of film even as the

very dynamics of culture-as-commodity in a capitalist system sought to contain and

denature them through the use of slapstick comedy as a method of domesticating

dangerous or subversive attitudes. Roland Barthes has written about the ways in which

a culture will act to contain elements of nihilism which might threaten social stability

through what he referred to as *"privation of History,"* meaning an objectification that

removes any contextual element which might make sense of the subversive.[13] Thus,

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[11] Pauline Kael, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968), 21.

[12]Ibid. 21.

[13] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 151.

mainstream movie heroes like *Morgan*, who are angry or disillusioned or crazy, are rendered comical, frivolous and ultimately without clear motivations to explain their actions as anything but irrational.

Clearly, the 60's were in marked contrast to the relative inactivity of the previous decade. The escalation of the conflict in Vietnam became the catalyst for a protest movement whose fires had begun to burn quietly in the wake of the development of the Hydrogen Bomb, and which was galvanized into action by President Johnson's sudden activation of the draft status of many college students who had never seriously considered such issues before. This change coincided with dramatic shifts in the cultural mind-set as well. The stripped down rock-and-roll of Elvis Presley had been supplanted by the more complex music of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Pop art--consisting of renderings of common objects and products-- supplanted the introspective non-representationalism of Abstract Expressionism, and in film, the scathing satire of *Dr. Strangelove* preseaged the emergence of an angrier artistic sensibility that sought to expose social and political hypocrisy.

The plethora of Drug Culture films produced by American International Pictures during the Sixties--including *The Trip, Psych-out, Wild in the Streets* and *Riot on Sunset Strip*--owed much of their cynical humor to the aesthetic breakthroughs made earlier in the decade, and a strong note of concurrent cultural activism. These films, while often aimed at an unsophisticated adolescent audience, were not simple vehicles meant to disseminate official propaganda; rather, they were ambiguous, valorizing and castigating the ethos of the counterculture simultaneously. Moreover, it

is unlikely that audiences merely watched like ciphers, absorbing such films as literal analogs of real-life situations. Instead, such information would have been filtered through a number of preconceptions, including the widely varying social milieus of different audience members. Still, their responses would have been distinct from those of contemporary audiences, although both might recognize elements of camp in AIP's teen-exploitation based output. Moreover, such films might have resonated differently with people who saw real-life counterparts to those caricatures depicted on screen as soon as they left the theater. Thus, there was a sense that exploitation films were campy parodies of reality rather than literal reflections of it; yet they also suggested possibilities and social configurations not immediately apparent to those unfamiliar with the ethos of the counterculture.

Two of the most important "B" movies from the Sixties, *The Wild Angels* and *Night of the Living Dead*, combined characterizations of groups outside the social mainstream with simple narrative structures that laid bare an essential metaphor regarding the nature of social alienation in contemporary American culture. In Roger Corman's *Wild Angels*, motorcycle outlaws become personifications of marginalization, as their violent excesses are glamorized as a more honest response to post-industrial social hypocrisy. By casting Peter Fonda and Nancy Sinatra in the lead roles, Corman gave outlaw bikers an air of decadent glamour that was absent from earlier--and more manichean--depictions, such as *The Wild Ones*. Although the Bikers are seen as morally ambiguous, capable of both violence and heroism, their mythical status as heirs to the mantle of hipness is underscored by the fact that their real life counterparts were contemporaneously charging fees to journalists for interviews, using

the services of a public relations firm to rehabilitate their rather sordid image, and

making headlines by violently breaking up anti-war demonstrations. [14] Moreover, they

became self-conscious of their own image to the extent, that for a short time at least

they were able to manipulate the way in which they were covered, providing a model,

of sorts, to subsequent--and more sophisticated--political groups on how to use the

media. In Corman's low-budget version of outlaw life, their easy assimilation into an

archetype already created by a century of mythologized western outlaws, is

emblematic of the way their real life counterparts played on the repressed fantasies of

"ordinary" citizens, who had too much to lose to actually imitate the Hells Angels.

Conversely, George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* focuses on a small group of

people, whose only common bond is that they have not yet been transformed into

zombies. By reifying the idea of normalcy as equal to the state of zombiehood,

Romero tapped into a metaphorical archetype that raised questions about race,

conformity and ontology. If the minority--the poor, the insane, the young and the

forgotten--perceived the outside culture, as a hostile world of zombies, too far gone to

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[14] Hunter S. Thompson, *Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), 80-120. Although Thompson's book lacks the rigorous use of citation that is characteristic of the best history, he provides some of the most incisive analysis ever written regarding the social phenomenon of outlaw motorcycle gangs, combining it with an awareness of the strange dialectic between the grim working class reality of California's outlaw biker subculture and its mythical representation; the latter which was understood well enough by the bikers that many of them began to carry around their own personalized identification cards. Invariably, many of them found their way to Hollywood where they got jobs as extras in films aimed at the burgeoning youth market. Although Thompson uses exaggeration and hyperbole as stylistic devices, any deconstructive reading of his seminal work provides invaluable information about the sensibilities that inform membership in outsider subcultures. See also: Tony Jefferson, "Cultural responses of the Teds" from *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain*, eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (London: Hutchinson, 1975), 81-87. While the "Teds" were an exclusively British phenomenon, their working class origins, rigid hierarchical structure and emphasis on excess and what Michael Foucault called limit experiences through the use of drugs and alcohol, as well their reputation for violence, makes this sociological study of interest.

be amenable to reason, then the simultaneous valorization of alternatives--whether they be achieved through the apotheosis of technology, such as through the rise of motorcycle fraternities, or by resisting assimilation, one possible interpretation of Romero's underlying theme--is not only conceivable but unavoidable. As the decade progressed, the elevation of the outsider to the level of privileged observer would develop into a filmic trope, signifying a gestalt shift towards discontent; first, as a natural response to the oppressive, impersonal nature of post-industrial society, and ultimately as a style devoid of any significance beyond a facile disavowal of any possibility of altering that society at all.[15]

A cursory glance at American media in 1967 might have revealed a curious transitional state besetting Western Culture. Suddenly, there emerged a visible duality between the way reality was experienced and how that experience was mediated through popular media. This tension was reflected in the radical reconfiguration of the heroic paradigm. Seemingly overnight, the icons of previous generations--John Wayne, Harry Truman, Frank Sinatra, Douglas MacArthur, even the Kennedys--appeared prefabricated or mired in self-parody. Fringe personalities, and those whose province was in the most esoteric regions of formalized thought, like philosophy and quantum physics, were suddenly in the ascendant, since their very difficulty now accorded them

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[15] Seth Cagin and Philip Dray, *Hollywood Films of the Seventies: Sex, Drugs, Violence, Rock 'n' Roll and Politics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984.), 83-90. I refer here specifically to Jack Nicholson in *Five Easy Pieces*, who plays an outsider who is neither a hippie or a biker, but a drop-out who seeks escape in the purity of the working class. Upon realizing that the reality of working class life is far different from his romantic image, Nicholson is forced to confront his own loneliness, and, by extension, the existential emptiness of the larger culture.

a certain amount of authenticity. Hence, Norman Mailer, Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, Susan Sontag and R.D. Laing were elevated to the status of culture heroes, and found themselves rubbing shoulders with an eclectic variety of radicals, gurus and primitives whose refusal, or inability, to adjust made them anti-heroes. While *Esquire* magazine created a journalistic genre by deflating social conventions, mostly through the writings of Tom Wolfe--tapping into a sizeable market of hip cynicism that had been dormant, or very quiet, during the Eisenhower decade--the cold-war espionage thriller, that had been previously characterized by humorless paranoia, was now recontextualized with the satirical *James Bond* film series. Moreover, the rapid escalation of the Vietnam War had opened up a chasm of anger that was instantly filled with those discourses that most vociferously critiqued the paradox of Post-industrial society's ethos of deferred gratification. Everywhere one looked, the cultural canon was being altered at a rapid pace and losing the center of gravity that had once held it in place. Characters who operated at the peripheries of popular culture suddenly took on a significance that directly reflected just how effectively they symbolized the alienation of the young. *The Silver Surfer*, Mao Zedong and various painted likenesses of Crazy Horse intermingled on the same discursive level as Che Guevera, Robert Kennedy and Bob Dylan. Whether a personality was from the real world, a mythical reduction of a more complex reality, or merely a cartoon fantasy was less significant than the question of how well they embodied a growing set of precepts about how the world should be changed in order to make the future a habitable place. In the Sixties, the *Zeitgeist* was change. Invariably, verisimilitude became, for a time, less important than movement itself.

Chapter 2:The apotheosis of Youth rebellion.

The Bohemian subculture which had been developing during this time, in

places like San Francisco and New York, also valued the primitive, which was equated

with the purity of honest, unconditioned responses to various situations--a

characteristic that undermined the way that cultural discourses were normally

circumscribed. Neal Cassidy, who was both the hero in Kerouac's *On the Road*, and

the real life zen model for the Merry Pranksters, was something of a legend to fellow

dropouts, who imagined him to be the prototype for the man of the future--one who

eternally lives in the "now," the moment. While the larger society may have viewed

Cassidy as a pill-popper and an unrepentant car thief, to Allan Ginsberg he existed in

perfect harmony with the urban environment where he had chosen to live, holding

several conversations simultaneously, popping Benzedrine tablets and driving with the

reckless abandon of reflexes honed by years of near misses at extra-legal speeds.

Cassidy's proclivity for taking chances was what made him the personification of what

the Diggers referred to as the new "mutants," or freaks, who were at the vanguard of

human development, as the only sane response to the "rectilinear boxed straight line

1600's static Cartesian coordinate systems..."[1]

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[1] "Mutants Commune," a Digger Broadside from, *Notes from the New Underground*, ed. Jesse Kornbluth (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 34. The Diggers were a group of political activists who utilized agit-prop and theatrical techniques to convey their message, a radicalization of the New Left's notion that a successful alternative society must be able to divest itself of the as aphyxiating bureaucraciesand hierarchies that post-industrial societies create in order to legitimate their repressive ideologies. The Diggers believed that if they could point out the paradoxical nature of modern life through humour and confrontation, then people would comprehend that "freedom" was more than a mere political abstraction, but a way of living that implied liberation from narrow ideological and psychological boundaries. For anin-depth analysis of the Diggers, see:

Thus, the resurgence of the metaphysical heresy of spirit and feeling--reified as an objective state of mystical transcendence behind rationalism's synthetic curtain of quantifiable doubt--shaped and informed social, political and aesthetic discourses throughout the Sixties. This largely unexplored metaphysical terrain, officially neglected since the Enlightenment, was conceptualized by Wilhelm Reich as a form of radiation, literally inhabiting the very air around and inside of the physical body. By imposing a nomenclature more appropriate for the nuclear age, Reich--whose *orgone energy* was both a descendent of Aristotle's ether and a reification of an elusive metaphysical ideal in an age of materialistic consumption--unwittingly devised an appropriate metaphor to instruct acolytes in the art of harnessing something that resembled a westernized version of what Tibetan Bhuddists called *Kundalini*. He even designed special boxes which purported to be able to attract and store this elusive quantity for future use. Indeed, Reich had transformed the invisible void, that "glimpse into the eternal process" experienced epiphinously by J.A. Symonds while under the influence of chloroform, into a commodity--one which found a market serendipitously amongst members of a generation whose thirst for a way of transcending the Euclidean Western ideal accommodated itself to these structures as easily as it had once embraced the Millbrook translation of the *Tibetan Book Of The Dead*.[2] If the more

Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The CIA,LSD and the Sixties Rebellion*(New York: Grove Press, 1985)

[2] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982. Original publication date, 1902.), 390. See also: Lee and Shlain, 101-102. See also: Susan Sontag's introduction to *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976), xvii-lix. Indeed, while Reich was among those intellectuals most scorned by tenured university academics, his writings--overflowing with a juxtaposition of uncanny neo-freudian insights, bizarre speculations and an alchemical reduction of metaphor into concrete literalism--were as central to the syncretistic underground newspaper discourse of late Sixties counterculture, along with Antonin Artaud, Henri Bergson, Gurdjieff, Hermann Hesse, Marshall McLuhan and reconstituted Nietzsche (not to be confused with

conservative intellectuals of the Fifties found a safe haven in the reductive categories

of Freudian analysis--applying it to everything from their often guarded critiques of

nuclear deployment (except for Mills, whose explicit criticism of the Western Power

structure in his *Causes of World War Three* was dismissed as too radical) to their

essays on the social causes of juvenile delinquency--their counterparts in the next

decade rejected Cartesian logic in favor of a synthesis of works whose main appeal lay

not with rationalist discourse but in their very liberation from the constraints which

such discourse imposed on intuition. [3]

Thus, the politics of Consciousness, which Marcuse had prophesied as the

salvation of the *One Dimensional Man*, emerged in a form as colorful as *Eros*, but

motivated by the desire to obtain the instant disjunctive enlightenment of LSD.[4] It was

the latter, in fact, which made the radically new intellectual configurations of the

nascent counterculture appear so elementary, so obvious, to its purveyors, whose

primary goal, if not a politics of real humanism--as opposed to the Brooks Brothers

liberalism of their predecessors--was the emergence of a new sensibility based on

religious intuition rather than cold sequential logic. Those looking for the former in

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the *Will to Power* Nietzsche who haunted the first half of the Twentieth Century), as Freud, Thomas Dewey, C.Wright Mills and the Frankfurt school were to the ideas of an earlier more disciplined group of writers, including Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, Paul Goodman and Norman Mailer.

[3] William Irwin Thompson, *At the Edge of History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 28. See Also: Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 58.

[4] Abe Peck, *Uncovering The Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Citadel Press, 1985), 15, 16. See also Edward P. Morgan, *The 60's Experience: Hard lessons about Modern America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 172.

this vibrant collage of McLuhan, metaphor and magic mushroom-inspired idealism often found it wanting because it didn't acknowledge the pragmatic realities that liberal criticism necessitated. Of course to the heads and campus radicals, such concerns were boring and irrelevant: the revolution was inherent in the very act of defying normal conventions.[5]

Nonetheless, this was not the dramatic rupture that it appeared to be from a distance; rather it was an articulation of a paradox implicit in the Cartesian mythology about order: namely, that humankind was a self-contained marvel, distinct and separate from the universe which spawned it, connected only by its singular capacity for inquiring about the nature of its own mechanics. Ontologically, passionate mythopoeic soliloquies aimed at reconciling humanity's interminable dichotomy--the separation between Homo sapien the rational agent of cause and effect logic and Homo Sapiens, the grunting micturating purveyor of its own pursuit of ecstasy--were little more than a side effect of a unique and remarkable intelligence. Hence, the utilitarian world that entered the landscape of reality in the Twentieth Century regarded such questions with suspicion, as self indulgent and childlike diversion. Religion, as everyone knew, in its officially sanctified forms, was a morality system--a set of codes regarding proper

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[5]The evangelicization of the psychedelic experience invariably becomes a key factor in the ambiguous pop-cultural representations of LSD use. Is it a form of religious ecstasy--like the Native American Church (Arthur Kleps, an early Leary associate and founder of the Neo American Boo Hoo church would go so far as to argue before a congressional committee in 1966 that it was)--a variation of chemical abuse or a subversive act that could cause such extreme ego dissolution that all ties to social norms would be irrevocably severed? While the latter was true, users found it more liberating than alienating, but the idea became the cornerstone for both the permanent madness mythology espoused by television shows in the 60's (*Dragnet, Star Trek, Mod Squad, Room 222*) and the related notion--also ascribed to marijuana--that acid would relax one's ambitions, leading to something called *Amotivational Syndrome*, a reification intended to neatly encapsulate the complexities involved in the "dropping out" process, that would become more prevalent as the decade progressed.

actions and behaviors; an index of propriety which cloaked axiomatic psychological precepts within the fanciful garments of anecdote. Underneath all of the confabulations, was an organism whose desires would, by necessity, always be subordinate to the acquisition of knowledge and a pragmatism based on logical systems of thought. Things which interfered with this pursuit were at best harmless and at worst pathological manifestations of a nihilism which could instigate tremors of dissolution. The Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy, illustrated by Euripides in the *Bacchae*, and conceptualized as humanity in conflict with its respective male and female sides, gradually evolved into a dogma that reconceptualized the pagan awareness of humanity's irrational nature as a series of didactic morality plays which reduced discourse over the profound nature of existence to a simplistic manichean duality.[6] Even the idea of good and evil, as abstract concepts denoting a dynamic ontological process, gradually fossilized into self-evident reflections of an unalterable scientific reality. Evil became a form of sickness, a pathology rather than a set of characteristics. To be *good* was to be healthy, and to have adjusted oneself to the problematic nature of living within the boundaries of an impersonal technocracy-- albeit, one which had, over time, developed a complex set of transparent notions regarding fairness and morality. The gift of Descartes' peers--Newton, Galileo and the *philosophes*--was the development of a *scientific* basis for morality, a profoundly

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[6] Euripides, *The Bacchae and Other Plays*, trans. by Philip Vellacot (New York: Penguin edition, published in 1951), 214, 215. See Also: Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1970), 78-124. Foucault's chapter entitled "Speaking" elucidates the complex dialectic between discourse, or commentary, and language itself; the former already mediating the experiences it describes into abstracted archetypes.

humanistic perspective that rendered the person as an object, whose nature could be accurately measured with the noble purpose of its improvement.[7]

The inherent paradox of art and personal expression--which implicitly regarded the individual as a participant in a dynamic life-process rather than a static entity--was an affront to this pretext of objectivity. During the nineteen Sixties, doubts regarding the nature of what Theodore Roszack dubbed the *technocracy*, crystallized in both various forms of protest and seemingly outlandish lifestyles. In a culture where deviant behavior was consigned within the rubric of illness and its various tropes, taking drugs to achieve states of ecstasy--an idea with ancient roots whose potential for dramatic shifts in consciousness was once an important aspect of various neolithic epistemological systems--was merely one more form of pathology, compartmentalized within a discrete system of taxonomy.

The Marxist critic and historian Fredric Jameson appropriately characterized the Sixties as an ever widening series of transgressions. The counterculture was, in many ways, the name given to this apparent rupture in the deceptively seamless fabric of the previous decade; and, at least where film is concerned, has been objectified and reinvented as commodified spectacle--a rebellion, but one with limited goals and an easily fathomable character.[8] Of course, the reality was a great deal more complex, and filmic representations of the period tended to stress the most publicized aspects of this partially manufactured identity--*Wild Angels, Easy Rider, Wild in the Streets, The*

[7] Roy Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 27.

[8] James, *Allegories*, 18, 19. See Also: Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 4.

Trip--while invariably exploring terrain opened up by its existence; thus, leading to a surprisingly ambiguous corpus of representations spanning the entire spectrum from outright parody, to allegory and realism, often mixing these into an entirely new form.[9]

The emergence of the low-budget aesthetics of AIP, and an eclectic style which borrowed equally from underground and B-Movies, subverted any attempt at assimilation by placing the universe which their characters inhabited outside the boundaries of middle-class etiquette. Beginning with *Wild Angels* and *Hells Angels on Wheels*, and followed by *The Trip*--which became controversial for its remarkably objective treatment of an LSD experience, not to mention Roger Cormen's liberal appropriations from some of his older, more Gothic AIP films, to provide a visual analog to Fonda's flights of hallucinatory fancy--the films of AIP reconceptualized the American social landscape as parasitical, manipulative and self-centered. In *Wild Angels*, it is the cops who are reactionary and drive the Bikers to violent extremes. The world of seconal and red-wine driven bacchanals is seen as an enticing solution to restrictive forms of social hypocrisy. Similarly, Peter Fonda's desire to experience a purer form of consciousness is not motivated by some shallow desire for "kicks"--like the teenagers who, a decade earlier, played chicken in *Rebel without a Cause*--but by an urge to attain religious insight.

In all of these films it is the primitive which is privileged as a method of accessing eidetic forms of knowledge that have been denied to the middle class, and to those who have chosen more conventional methods of surviving in the technocracy.

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[9]Cagin and Dray, 57.

Underground Cinema, such as Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*, and Kenneth Anger's

Lucifer Rising, had often played with the oppositions between civilized, ritualistic

behavior and the orgy; the latter often becoming the dominant mode of acting out

desires when the former failed to satiate the primal urges that were always seething

beneath the surface of civilized life.[10] The films of Stan Brackhage, which manipulated

rudimentary imagery to show how the camera often corrupted its own subject matter

by fetishizing it, functioned allegorically as meditations on the way the filmic gaze

created mythologies around even the most ordinary situations.

Into this highly charged atmosphere, where cultural alchemy could

instantaneously elevate even the most shallow purveyor of cultural rebellion into an

instantly marketable icon, emerged Arthur Penn's, *Bonnie and Clyde*. With its

evocations of ambiguous violence, disenfranchisement, and valorization of anti-

establishment behavior, it may have been the first mainstream film to incorporate the

nascent values of the counterculture. It was also one of the first films to use self-

reflexivity as a rhetorical device, using irony as a distancing mechanism, exaggerating

the various tropes of Depression-era gangster films to comment on the differences

between myth and reality, even as it indulged in its own recontextualized mythmaking.

More profoundly, the film's treatment of the relationship between its outlaw couple

and their romantic folk-hero aspirations functions as a critique of American culture and

the pervasive climate of materialistic acquisitiveness that motivated westward

expansionism a century earlier. In essence, Bonnie and Clyde are heirs to this tradition,

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[10] Roger Bartra, *Wild Men in the Looking Glass: The Mythic Origins of European Otherness*, trans. Carl T. Berresford (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 86.

engaging in all of the behaviors and attitudes--aggression, narcissism and murder--

which motivated generations of settlers before them; only; this time however, in Penn's

ambiguous directorial treatment of their actions and resulting celebrity, they are on the

wrong side of the law. Such subtle forms of social critique did not go unnoticed by the

guardians of cultural morality among American film critics. Bosley Crowther wrote

three separate reviews admonishing the film as a symptom of American moral

decline.[11]

In many ways, *Bonnie and Clyde* shared common thematic elements with the

anti-westerns of Sergio Leone in which: "No period was left has it had been found.

American expansionism and manifest destiny were reinterpreted as modes of

opportunism and imperialism...New themes were attributed to American history,

namely greed, lust for power and property, racism and the profit motive."[12] Both the

Leonne westerns and *Bonnie and Clyde* revitalized older forms through a pop

reflexivity which elevated their themes to the level of camp while retaining enough

depth to involve their audiences on more than a superficial level. The film's ad trailer

which stated, "They're young, they're in love, and they kill people," might well have

reflected the hidden desires of thousands of young, disenfranchised students, radicals

and drop-outs--many of whom expressed, in abbreviated form, the same anger which

had caused riots in the nations Black and Brown ghettos, although for much different

reasons. While the ostensible message was one of nihilism, its willful discrediting of

genre conventions resonated a deeper note among those who saw in the films fated

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[11] Cagin and Dray, 13, 14.

[12] Ibid., 16.

heroes reflections of a generation who had no escape from a mechanized, rationalized society other than a complete disregard for its mores and cultural values. Thus, *Bonnie and Clyde* metaphorized the complex political upheavals of the 1960's, personifying the counterculture's most repressed desires and symbolizing the hopelessness of both causes.

Nonetheless, the film itself is less concerned with romanticizing violence than with valorizing the outlaw consciousness. Clyde Barrow (Warren Beatty) is an unemployed part-time armed robber when he first meets Bonnie Parker (Faye Dunaway) outside her home as he admires her mother's car with just a hint of larceny. A subsequent trip into town for a Coke, and a quick peek at Clyde's gun, are all that it takes for Bonnie to become his constant companion. The film is filled with such sexualized metaphors, where potency is translated into violent and erotic terms. Clyde is as adept at robbing gas stations, groceries and banks as he is at avoiding sexual encounters with Bonnie. His impotence becomes an ironic reminder that his outlaw personae is suffused with a pathos profound enough to compensate for his inability to be successful on society's terms.

What *Bonnie and Clyde* did not do was pretend that the outlaws were merely misunderstood innocents, victimized by an unfeeling society and an impersonal legal system, as in earlier fictionalizations of their story like *They Live by Night* and *You Only Live Once*. Here, both outlaws are seen to revel in the excesses of their lifestyle: each an emblem of a bored overlooked generation, whose desires and needs have been neglected by necessity. In the fictional construct of Penn's film, this necessity is called the Depression, and it looms over the murky southwestern landscape like a fog which

conceals desire and subordinates idealism to the immediate demands of survival. Bonnie may be little more than a waitress from southwestern Texas, but she desires to be like those glamorous icons she views in movie theaters, who have access to material possessions, adulation and instant gratification of all kinds. Similarly, the 1960's of Penn's mythical account were a period where a generation spawned amidst the passive ethos of the Fifties were seen to take control of their lives and voice demands that would have been unheard of a decade earlier. Still, the rebellion of *Bonnie and Clyde* is too aestheticized to be read as a call for political action. Moreover, one might argue, as David James does in *Allegories of Cinema*, that this very recontextualization, the act of setting this story in the past, helps depoliticize and distance it from its target audience who perceive its violence as abstracted from the social structures that are its primary cause, reducing questions of blame to styles of representation.[13]

While much of the film's youthful audience did not resemble the sort of revolutionaries who would evolve by the end of the decade, as purveyors of a singular style of mostly symbolic armed rebellion where Eros was joined with Dionysus, they did respond to the film's underlying message of social transgression. Bosley Crowther understood this well enough to review the film on several separate occasions for his column in the *New York Times*, precisely because he feared that it symbolized a slow decay of public morality--after all, this film did not portray outlaws as innocent victims of a corrupt legal system; rather, their pathos was put in quotes and ironized as a stylistic appurtenance of the period to contrast it with the sophistication of the Sixties.

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[13]James, *Allegories*, 173.

The depression as a camp artifact reinvented as a combination of nostalgia and allegorical celebration of social; dissolution. These outlaws celebrated the very transgressions that earlier films would have portrayed as misunderstandings. If Crowther's hostility towards the youth culture reflected the fact that an emerging ethical transition was a fait accompli, it was not the transition he feared, but a more subtle shift in attitudes. Beatty's male co-star, Michael J. Pollard, who played C. W. Moss, the gang's sidekick and driver, was a part of the counterculture which the film alluded to obliquely, replacing direct references with evocations of certain attitudes and behaviors that were presented as models of action for the disenfranchised. When Clyde does finally shoot someone--a bank employee who jumps on the running board of his getaway car--it comes as a shock, since up until that point he had played his role for laughs. The intrusion of sudden and unanswered violence jarred audiences as much as it redefined the behavioral parameters in which film heroes, or anti-heroes, could act. While Clyde expresses some remorse for his violence, it is apparent that the director feels no need to explain such actions, Clyde is merely acting as an outlaw; and within such boundaries his actions begin to appear justified regardless of their intrusive violence.[14]

One wonders if Arthur Penn was not thinking of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam when he portrayed his characters as violent players reacting to a corrupt society, thus rendering their actions virtuous. The reduction of the political struggle in Vietnam to a simple dichotomy of good versus bad was practiced on both

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[14] Cagin and Dray, 14.

sides of the political spectrum. On the Left a popular, and not totally misleading, view had developed regarding the so-called Viet-cong. They were regarded as revolutionaries, whose occasional violence--usually against landlords and government officials--was deemed acceptable by students who, in disgust with Johnson Administration political policy, rushed to embrace them.[15] An early scene in the film, which shows the couple shooting out a bank repossession sign in front of an abandoned house where they have spent the night, establishes their credentials as folk heroes of the poor and dispossessed. A subsequent scene shows the home's former owner returning for "one last look at the place," and being invited to take a few shots of his own. With relish, he begins to shoot out the windows, before inviting a neighbor (a black man, no accident in this film) to join him in his shooting frenzy. This atmosphere where all actions are implicitly viewed as justified revenge against an oppressor pervades the film, and seemed to tie it to contemporaneous sentiment about Vietnam, as much as it connected it with the nascent counterculture.

Nonetheless, Penn did not need to look as far as Southeast Asia for models on which to base his characters. The alienated amongst the white middle class were a largely inchoate but active segment of the population, disrupting campuses in protest against the war, seeking alternatives to the insular lifestyles of their parents and trying to identify with those who had been historically oppressed: people of color, the poor and the human flotsam of the third world. The counterculture adopted these groups as part of a larger indictment against western materialism, but desired a genealogy of

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[15] For an expanded analysis of the rapid increase in political activity on college campuses in the 1960's, see: Kenniston, 143-168.

their own, even if it had to be culled from the stuff of myth. Outlaws had long been favorites of the alienated and disenfranchised, but Penn sought to make *Bonnie and Clyde* accessible to a generation whose innocence had been tarnished by the military prowess of the Eisenhower years and whose taste for sensation had been stoked by the post-war resurgence of puritan values. The Jazz culture of African Americans, and the Beats--who had been primarily influenced by the former--had already been adopted as cultural precursors in the complex mythology of Sixties youth culture. By historicizing *Bonnie and Clyde* Penn was able to accomplish this while maintaining an artistic distance from the violence of their existence. Pauline Kael summed up the emerging camp aesthetic of nostalgia-films when she commented that: "In 1967, the movie-makers know that the audience wants to believe--maybe even prefers to believe--that Bonnie and Clyde were guilty of crimes, all right, but that they were innocent in general; that is, naive and ignorant *compared with us.*"[16]

Penn's distancing, however, also functions as a subtle way of introducing contemporary themes into a forum where, undisguised, they might have explosive impact. This is best illustrated by Penn's allegorization about family structure through the film's contextualization of Barrow gang domestic life. When Clyde's brother Buck comes to visit with his new wife, the Barrow's decide to move up to Missouri where they can "take a vacation." Their subsequent discovery by local authorities presents a dilemma to Buck (Gene Hackman) about whether to abstain from resisting and retreat to the mundane domesticity offered by his new wife (Estelle Parsons) or side with his

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[16]Kael, 54-56.

brother, and become an outlaw as well. Buck chooses the latter, widening the gulf between his wife--a preacher's daughter whose conservative upbringing has provided no models for the unorthodox outlaw family she finds herself part of--and the rest of the gang. This split is particularly acute when the differences between Blanche and Bonnie are examined. Each is an idealization, emblematic of a different approach to their femininity. Bonnie is open about sexuality, materialistic and liberal; Blanche is conservative, traditional and religious. Even Blanche's apparent defection to the clan-- when she asks for her share of robbery money, arguing that, she too, is wanted by the police--does not prevent her from identifying C. W. Moss to the police after she is captured and Buck is killed. This is the ultimate test of loyalty in the Barrow clan, and she fails it, never completely accepting the unorthodox structure of the gang as a proxy family. Yet Penn is intent on convincing the audience, that although the Barrow loyalties are mostly based on friendship, they are stronger bonds than those seen in more traditional familial structures.

Near the film's end, Penn draws a distinction between Bonnie's apparently dysfunctional relationship with Clyde, and her unsatisfactory relationship with her own mother. Clyde, trying to make Mrs. Parker feel better, tells her that they will find a home near hers because Bonnie doesn't want to live "more than three miles from her mother." Mrs. Parkers reply is an unambiguous no, telling Bonnie that "if you live three miles from me, you won't live long," and informing Clyde that he "best keep on running." Nonetheless, the scene contrasts traditional family structures with those based on bonds of loyalty and--in keeping with the period--favors the latter. The scene uses a washed-out color tone as if to accentuate the nostalgic sense of family unity that

it conveys. The images that emerge, showing the Barrow and Parker families mixing together amidst the barren dust-fields of the Southwest, are intentionally iconographic, reminiscent of a dustbowl America culled from Dorothea Lange photographs; children playing in the sand dunes in the bleached out sunshine evocative of an Andrew Wyeth painting; Clyde replacing C. W. Moss at standing guard at the edge of the field reminiscent of mythical pioneers looking out for unfriendly Indians; the scene ending with a gathering and a simple spoken prayer. It is as if Penn is both distancing his audience through such cinematic historicizing mechanisms--perhaps to emphasize the anachronistic nature of the family structures he invokes--and romanticizing his subject by presenting such tender moments in a wistful and nostalgic way that presages the film's tragic ending without the sentimentality that often accompanies such a buildup.

Inevitably, Clyde is successful in performing the sexual act with his outlaw girlfriend but only as a form of closure that works dramatically to introduce the film's ending. Ultimately, after several shootouts, Bonnie and Clyde recuperate at the home of C.W. Moss's father, who works out a deal with the police to save his own son from prison. The film's final scene shows Bonnie and Clyde slumped over in their car, brought down by a hail of bullets before they even had a chance to react. The intensity of the barrage might be the film's one detail that is faithful to reported reality, and is a telling reminder of just how difficult it is to destroy a myth. Ironically, the very intensity of the force used to kill Bonnie and Clyde was a testament to their protean status. Yet, the secret of their appeal may rest with their innocence, their naivete; and what might be characterized by an anthropologist as a profound primitivism: They are creatures of instinct, in a world of predetermined and empirically organized lives. In

this, lies their appeal, since it suggests a liberation from the Calvinistic constraints placed on citizens of western culture.

Certainly, the realities of inter-generational conflict in 1968 necessitated the emergence of youth icons who could simultaneously valorize the inevitable defeat of the student radicals while providing a fictional form of compensation where the ideals of the new left might achieve a kind of apotheosis. The underground film and its low-budget aesthetics came to canonize the ideology of defeat, which at the end of the decade became an emblem for moral superiority. The experiments of Stan Brackhage and Andy Warhol--where imperfections became emblems of distinction--soon gave way to the violent asymmetry of films like *El Topo*, which substituted a non-linear fantasy realm for unpleasant political realities and permanently sealed the connection between cult movies and drug use.[17] Similarly, radical left wing politics began to confuse the language of polemic with reality, and soon invented a discourse as insular as it was inventive, saying far more about the aspirations of youth culture than about the means to achieve them.

If Abbie Hoffman had become a symbol of the New Left synthesis of acid and politics, then *Bonnie and Clyde* were a metaphor for the power implicit in such a combination. Glamorous, defiant, youthful and subversive, the romanticized crime team did not reflect the unkempt disposition of the counterculture as much as they idealized its aspirations. Certainly, the generation to whom they appealed was the most

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[17]James Monaco, *American Film Now: The People, the Power, the Money, the Movies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 66.

self-conscious in Western history, able to interrogate its own image through the immediacy of television and its unique ability to absorb and disseminate styles and sensibilities as quickly as they could be generated. The result was a completely new iconography which reflected the self-absorption, idealism, obsession with technology and moral ambiguities of the centuries most rapid period of change.

The formation of the Youth International Party (better known by its acronym, *Yippie*), in December of 1967 symbolized a deeper shift in the politics of the counterculture: the reconciliation of the rift between the apolitical hippies and the New Left SDS. [18] While the latter had been dropping acid, smoking marijuana and experimenting with unorthodox sexual arrangements since 1965, they regarded these things as mere appurtenances to a lifestyle at most and more often as superfluous luxuries that could distract a committed activist from the more important business of conducting the *revolution*. If Timothy Leary's admonition that student politicos were "Young men with menopausal minds" went unheeded by the authorities, who had trouble making even the most elementary distinctions between the various factions of the disaffected, it was the source of a rift between those who followed the Millbrook institute's *Turn-on-Tune-in* mantra and a more politicized segment of college students who read the Berkeley *Barb* and had decided to join the ranks of anti-war protesters for the big march in October of 1967. That event would be the catalyst for both the reconciliation between and the transformation of the various factions of the youth

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[18]Hunter S. Thompson, "The Non Student Left" from, *The Great Shark Hunt* (New York: Warner Books, 1979), 264-274. See also: David Farber, *Chicago 68* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 56. See also Morgan, 156.

culture. The theatricalization of political protest--an approach used with great

innovative success by the Diggers in San Francisco during the previous year--was

appropriated by both the SDS and the younger generation of protesters who came to

Washington that October.[19]

The resulting protest was a theatrical victory that accomplished little other than

to give the anti-war movement one of its most enduring and ironic images: a group of

young protesters putting flowers into National Guardsmen's gun-barrels.[20] Perhaps an

even more revealing image occurred later on that afternoon when no cameras were

around to record, as a large group of protesters gathered around the Pentagon and

attempted to levitate it to exorcise its demons. The planners of this metaphorical ritual

played it straight, even to the extent where they were able to procure permission from

the General Services administrator, who acquiesced, asking only that they not levitate

it more than ten feet off the ground. The attempted levitation was perfect Sixties

theater, not only because it focussed attention on tangible issues through the use of

symbolism, but also because it embodied all of the contradictions of its most ardent

practitioners. While such a ritual provided group catharsis and allowed a symbolic

venting, its fantasy element became a symbol for more pragmatic activists--those who

still resisted assimilation into the synthesis between the politicos and the heads that

was creating a wholly unique counterculture--of the shortcomings of such a fantasy-

based approach, since it replaced change with a mutually experienced hallucination: a

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[19]"Banners of Dissent," *Time* (October 27, 1967), 23-29. See also: Don McNeill, *Moving Through Here* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 172

[20]Ibid., 29.

purging ritual in place of a radical alteration in policy. Such conflicts, consistent with

the decade of which they were a part, were assimilated into its complex dialectic rather

than becoming proof of the unworkability of the youth movement. Quite the contrary,

they came to symbolize its singularity, its ability to form a hybrid, multifaceted, and

ultimately problematic, political ethos from the embers of internal conflict. Eventually,

this would be one factor in its undoing, but in late 1967, it became one part of the

energy that drove the wild and mysterious wave of change that Hunter Thompson

would write about at decade's end.[21] Abbie Hoffman, who got his first exposure in his

new Yippie incarnation through *Time* magazine's coverage of the protest, was

portrayed as a "hippie" on a mission--one which was so bizarre that LSD was

implicitly suggested without ever being mentioned.

> 'Everybody knows that a five sided figure is evil' said one New York
> Hippie named Abbie. 'The way to exorcize it is with a circle'. Abbie and
> a hippie poster painter Martin Carey measured the Pentagon to see how
> many hippies would be needed to circle it (answer 1200). The oddly
> costumed pair was arrested for 'littering' and haled before a general
> services administrator. they asked for a permit to levitate the Pentagon
> 300 feet off the ground, explaining that by chanting ancient Aramaic
> exorcism rites while standing in a circle around the building they could
> get it to rise into the air, turn orange and vibrate until all evil emissions
> had fled. [22]

Although *Time* gave a deadpan account, with a detachment worthy of *Esquire*,

it was clear that their reaction was attributable to confusion rather than a well

developed sense of irony. Several weeks earlier the same magazine had reported on

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[21]Ibid., 29.

[22]Ibid.

unsubstantiated claims of LSD-caused birth defects in an article that, upon closer

reading, appeared to be based primarily on hearsay and poorly done studies on

laboratory rats.[23] All the talk of chromosome breaks and "stunted offspring" born to

mothers reputed to be acid heads had little more than a context of public hysteria to

give it legitimacy. The fortuitous release of AIP's *Wild in the Streets* in late May of

1968 fed into public hysteria about the LSD epidemic, particularly in Chicago where

Mayor Daley's paranoia regarding hippies and radicals obstructing the upcoming

Democratic National Convention led to his deployment of the National Guard to

fortify reservoirs against the possibility of their being contaminated with acid.[24]

Of course, Mayor Daley, and most of the establishment, did not understand the

merging of theater with real life which had grown out of the political sensibilities of the

San Francisco Mime Troupe. Both the Diggers, who had originated as part of the

mime troupe, and the Living Theater combined their New Left sensibilities with a

belief in the idea that boundaries between performer and audience--which reinforced a

dichotomy that was itself a metaphor for the split between government and the public-

-had to be dissolved before an individual could liberate oneself from the sort of

programmatic responses which preceded fascist thinking.[25] This betrayed an

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[23]"LSD and the Unborn." *Time* (August 11, 1967), 60.

[24]McGee, 179.

[25]Kirpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973), 49-54. The Purt Huron Statement drafted by the *Students for a Democratic Society* in 1962 summed up the distinctions between the old doctrinaire Marxist left of the thirties and the *New* left of the Sixties by demanding that a less ideological type of socialism- one which did not emulate the repressive Soviet system--be implemented. Moreover, they called for "students" rather than workers to unite in a common cause against various forms of social and political repression, and that they deal with issues on a "personal" level rather than on a purely systematic basis. The notion behind this new philosophy that espoused the personal as political was based on the conviction that if an organization used hierarchical, bureaucratic methods to achieve change, they would invariably become as rigid and mechanized

ideological ancestry going back to the old left of the Thirties who felt that they had

fought the good fight against fascism. The Yippies, who were heavily influenced by the

way that the Diggers combined agitprop with performance in the Haight-Ashbury,

further confused the boundary between the two, by transforming the real-life drama of

politics into theater of the absurd (something which many would argue it already was),

and doing it in such an ironic way, that spectators were forced to take notice and

become involved. Indeed, at the heart of New Left thinking was an idea that had only

been an aspiration to Antonin Artaud a quarter of a century earlier, that there should

be no spectators since political power proceeded from political involvement.[26]

Moreover, the aesthetics of street theater owed much to the old Merry Prankster trick

of providing some unforeseen stimuli for the purpose of "blowing somebody's mind."

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as their predecessors by exchanging one ossified system for another. The SDS called for an organization that would become a model for the system which it hoped to produce, by employing democratic, grassroots approaches to problem solving that operated within a purely American paradigm.

[26]Ibid., 515. To the SDS leadership "class consciousness" evolved out of participation in a political process. See also: Antonin Artaud, from *The Theater and Its Double*, quoted in Free [Abbie Hoffman], *Revolution for the Hell of it* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 101. One can detect a synthesis between the ideologies of the various incarnations and factions of the New Left and Artaud's ideas about returning the purity of "primitive" man to an alienated modern world which had lost touch with its sensorium and its desire. The deep seated romantic longings that underlie much of the political writings from the Sixties, from those of SDS to Abbie Hoffman to Allen Ginsberg--and even Norman Mailer--tended to reveal these longings even when they were concealed beneath torrents of prosaic jargon, or humorous invective. Invariably, the New Left was less a coherent political movement with a definable set of precepts than a rebellion against the tenets of Rationalism that had dominated much of western thought since the time of Francis Bacon. By rallying against the most gratuitous manifestations of the Enlightenment in post-industrial western culture--industry, monopoly capitalism, the military industrial complex--the New Left called into question the underlying principles that formed the framework for these things. Of course, it took the Vietnam war to galvanize these far reaching sentiments into a concentrated and direct form. Philosophers from Nietzsche to Heidegger and Sartre had critiqued much of what was dehumanizing in western culture already; but Nietzsche was, up until that time, regarded as a nihilist, Heidegger was a Nazi party member (a fact that may not have any bearing on his philosophy in any case) and Sartre was perceived by Americans as opaque. This left a lot of angry people in the mid Sixties with a large corpus of oppositional literature to draw on--including Reich, Artaud, Herman Hesse, Gurdjeff and Oswald Spengler--much of which was neglected by the universities during the Fifties, or simply relegated to a historicized, and therefore safe, category.

Such activities could, under the right circumstances, surprise someone into seeing the

world quite differently, and perhaps precipitate a gestalt shift. The notion that years of

conditioning could be broken down so quickly, using little more than clever theatrical

techniiques to emphasize the disparity between ideals and real-life, owes a substantial

bit of credit to the use of LSD, since it tended to facilitate such changes, and acted to

make counterculture agitprop and its mind-blowing propensities, that much more

intense. Subsequent activity employed more and more street theater tactics and

moved the New Left closer to their bohemian counterparts until a style began to

emerge which was neither stereotypical hippie nor utilitarian New Left but a strange

hybrid of the two: The counterculture had merged into what appeared to be a new

entity. [27]

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[27]Thompson, 464. Hunter Thompson had begun to notice a merging of hippie elements and student radical types from Berkeley sometime in early 1967, but outside large urban centers like San Francisco and New York--where a similar thing was occurring on the lower east Side, long a haven for Bohemians, junkies, artists and outcasts (as well as a very large and impoverished Puerto Rican population, with whom the dropouts often came to blows over issues of turf)--it would not be until the post-Chicago period when the radicals would start dressing more like hippies and dropping acid in droves. See also: McNeil, *Moving Through Here*, for an incisive analysis of the Lower East Side Hippie subculture.

Chapter 3: *2001*, LSD, and Transcendence.

In order to make sense of the confusing dialectic between the emerging counterculture and its representation in cinema, it is important to digress and review the development of each up until the time of the Democratic Convention of 1968. In Arthur Penn's film, the effectiveness of the myth paradoxically relies on the audiences appreciation of just how much glamour Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway bring to the world of their drab real-life counter-parts. Thus, Penn's mythologizing is reflexive and relies on his audience's capacity to self-consciously appreciate the distance between art and life. In *Bonnie and Clyde*, the posthumous victory of the outlaws, and by extension, the film's media-savvy hip audience, can be measured by just how stylized and exaggerated their exploits have become in their recontextualized version. The apotheosis of defeat is the issue here, one that is treated far differently by Dennis Hopper in *Easy Rider*, for example, where verisimilitude emerges from the ambiguous portrayal of the characters. The lifestyle shifts of the middle and late Sixties, created an entirely new realm of discourse which shook the established social boundaries of the Post-World war II era, and was often dismissed for its lack of depth. Reactions to the counterculture often ranged from the aloof puzzlement of academics to displays of concern on the part of middle-class professionals. Both responses legitimated the designation of youthful deviance as pathological, thereby bringing it within the purview of the adult-world's parameters, and appearing to domesticate it. Television tended to portray "hippies" as distinct from other teenagers; when not caricaturing them, it depicted them as deeply disturbed, or as naive waifs misled by a manipulative pied piper.

By 1969, with the Haight-Ashbury social experiment a broken dream and the

tranquility of Woodstock supplanted by the violence of Altamont, Charles Manson--

leader of a strange sect which stole dune buggy parts in anticipation of a racial

Armageddon, and mastermind behind several well publicized homocides, including the

murder of actress Sharon Tate--personified this mythic entity. This tended to

overshadow that fact that both Ken Kesey--one of the original purveyors of the hip-

ethos--and Timothy Leary, had preached the values of communitarian non-violence;

and that whatever excessess they could be said to have commited, neither was

regarded as malevolent, even by their enemies. This sort of confusion exacerbated pre-

existing tensions between the counterculture and an increasingly hostile "adult" world,

leading to the paradoxical valorization of anyone who was demonized by the

mainstream press. Manson's subsequent apotheosis, in an underground newspaper

called *Friday's Child* showed just how extensive this polarization was, and just how

far an increasingly radicalized subculture would go in their political rhetoric. It

required a great leap forward to move from SDS (Students for a Democratic Society)

support of the National Liberation Front in Vietnam to the canonization of someone

whose superficial "hippie" style rhetoric concealed a strong propensity to manipulate

and control others. Of course, Manson was not the first example of this tendency, on

the part of the underground press towards hagiography--they had previously exalted

Eldridge Cleaver, Bernadine Dorn and Mark Harris, all of whom would eventually

manifest distinctly militaristic tendencies after years of estrangement from the

mainstream culture--but he was surely the most frightening. Nonetheless, even when

the mainstream media was right about a particular proponent of the youth culture, it

tended to generalize from that one example about all others. This caused an increasing

alienation amongst the ostensible subjects of such analysis, who perceived that they

were being misrepresented when they were not being vilified. Paradoxically, this

discourse on "hippies" went two ways, and many began to constitute their identities,

and to see themselves within the parameters of caricature as defined by popular

cultural representations of counterculture types.

The principal focus, and central metaphor, behind many of the decade's most

profoundly felt personal and artistic gestures was LSD. The drug was often a catalyst

for radical transformations in a period were the idea of change itself acted as a sort of

Zeitgeist, focussing what would otherwise have been diffuse and inchoate. Thus acid

functioned as a cynosure and metonymy, symbolically representing the underpinnings

of the entire decade which were rooted in the idea of rapid transmutations. the

idealism which lent many of these changes their alchemy, was both amplified and

reconceptualized by LSD. Its representation in cinema and the various artistic

discourses of the decade was often indistinguishable from the things that it seemed to

bring out in the counterculture--its idealism, paradox and intensity of purpose. In

another time period, LSD might simply have been viewed as a novel chemical oddity;

in the Sixties it was a central focus of the polarization between conflicting attitudes

regarding politics and a metaphor for change, dissolution and the convulsive beauty of

art.[1]

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[1]In the Sixties, it was the very foundations of Western culture--rationalism, the enlightenment, the entire Cartesian paradigm--which was thrown into discord and conceptualized within various cultural discourses. The premise of the latter, especially film, is the primary focus here; particularly, its tendency to encapsulate, recontextualize and recapitulate the pivotal debates that formed the underpinnings of the often invisible but modern life in Mcluhan's post-war global village came under scrutiny. This is the history of the recurring heresy of the metaphysical, the manifestation of all of those values--mystery, spirituality, sensuality-- which the enlightenment pushed under the surface of common experience like the neolithic substratum buried

The use of LSD during the Sixties, and its effect on the so-called

counterculture, offers a key area of inquiry into the process by which media distort

cultural phenomena through the semiotic language of representation (not through a

conscious process, but a complex dynamic involving the unstable relationship between

signifier and signified) and how that drug came to be associated with an entire set of

aspirations and assumptions about existence, change and the world in general. While

acid was not represented directly in many of the era's most well known cinematic

artifacts, the ethos it reinforced--and its invisible presence--were a constant factor in

the discourses that came out of the period. Moreover, its effects on culture--both

positive and negative--were substantial, and it invariably became an emblem of the

radical gestalt shift in social discourse that its use seemed to engender. One didn't need

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beneath sedimentary layers of newer material. Similarly, the epistemic shifts that cracked the frail paradigmof Medieval thought, leading to the beginnings of the modern period, marginalized, as folklore, madness and superstition many of the previous periods mythic foundations, excluding them from the objectifying discourse of a new scientific empiricism. The result was the occasional recurrence of these ideas in the west, often in the forms of ecstatic movements, cults, and more recently, the alternatives offered by Bohemian lifestyles. It is this last thing out of which the mythical "hippiedom" of the 1960's arose, not ex-nihilo from an historical vacuum, but out of a long tradition of aestheticized non-political dissent. Their predecessors were the French literati of the club haschichens, the salon culture of late Nineteenth century Paris, the dadaists of the Cabaret Voltaire prior to and during the First World War, the Situationist International, innumerable naturalists from Thoreau to many of the turn-of-the-century communal movements, the Beats of the Fifties and the African American Jazz and drug subcultures which provided an alternative model for how to comport oneself in the utilitarian repressiveness of America in the Fifties. Most of all, the catalyst, for the expansiveness of these new cultural mutants, was LSD To analyze the effects of such a transition in culture, it is necessary to resort to per iodization as a way of providing a framework to understand how the dialectic between culture and art was reflected in film. Putting the sixties into an heuristic category functions as a way of exposing the cultural underpinnings that informed change during the decade. However, this recognition of an historical process comes at the expense of an accurate sense of how postwar culture developed to the point at which historical rupture became an inevitable by-product of rapid change. The very quickness of the transition from the mildly repressive social climate that characterized the Eisenhower era, and the dramatic fluctuating transformations that often flared into conflagrations--such as the ascension of "black power" from the ranks of SNCC--into the polarization that expressed itself through protest and acts of rage during the years of the Nixon administration, made self reflexivity possible. The outmoded social conventions of an earlier period were shifting so dramatically that a gradual, apparently static, process was suddenly rendered transparent thereby opening a discursive space to meta-theoretical analysis; and in the process, creating irony as a by-product of the social distancing that inevitably occurs with such changes.

to take LSD, however, to implicitly understand how the mind-set it invoked could work to confound normal linear discourses and make new ways of seeing and thinking possible. In an era that privileged creativity, acid became a symbol of its extremes--both in its tendency to reduce everything to syncretistic pastiche and in the development of a solipsistic internalized world-view that became part of the counterculture's search for meaning. How this was expressed through the dialectic between culture and art in the 1960's, especially film and television, and how the latter often tended to mediate radical changes in societal attitudes and norms is also of particular interest and will be explored here.

While acid did not provide the spark that gave impetus for many to "drop out" of mainstream American culture--contrary to a lot of popular misconceptions--its gestalt shifting potential, its ability to make a lifetime of conditioned responses appear contrived and absurd, simply amplified a pre-existing undercurrent of radical change. The creative synthesis of the new lifestyle and political protest, which appeared later in the decade--as well as the odd sartorial manifestations and affect of many who comprised the relatively small LSD subculture--were inseparable from its effects however. This was also the colorful, eccentric and bizarre aspect of the counterculture which the media found least complicated and easiest to represent. Hence, by mid 1967, acid was no longer confined to the medical section of *Time* magazine, but had, in a curiously transformed incarnation, quickly spread to every aspect of popular culture in the guise of that year's major cultural buzzword, *psychedelic*. By being domesticated in this way, the *Counterculture*, as a thing, an entity, a style, was both reified and popularized at the expense of the solipsistic and subversive visions of those who had

created it. Ironically, the embryonic stage of what subsequently emerged as the first

community of *Hippies*, was self-conscious enough to understand McLuhan's central

dictum regarding the instantaneous transmissibility of any image, idea or concept

without being large enough for their own presence to generate the necessary gravity to

alter the nature of their social experiment.[2] Inevitably, however, this is precisely what

happened.

The coterminous development of the hippie ethos, their alienation from social

structures and their evangelical idealism embodied by the consciousness-altering

characteristics of an acid trip, took place in an environment of uncharacteristic

tolerance. San Francisco had always been known as a city of great diversity, one which

since the days of the 49'ers had always given wide latitude to eccentric forms of

behavior.[3] But the wildflower which began to emerge in 1966, after the initial acid

tests, and the weekly dances at the matrix sponsored by Chet Helms brought people

together, was seen as an affront to everything decent even by local standards. To the

Bohemians of the Haight, acid was a sacrament, not in the same sense as the wine

which was drunk from a chalice on holidays in church, but in a more spontaneous eye-

opening sort of way. As the Hip community developed, bounded on one end by Kezar

Stadium and on another by the fanciful art-deco statuary of Golden Gate Park, it

became more and more polarized from the straight world of people who worked

ordinary jobs and did not use drugs, but who obsessively lingered over sensationalistic

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[2]Marshall McLuhan, *Underwtanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 28.

[3] David Duncan, producer, *The West*, PBS, originally aired April 19, 1999.

accounts of people jumping from windows and engaging in prurient acts while high on LSD.[4] Conversely, the colorful counterculture of the Haight saw LSD as something which could break down conditioning, and, like a strange new butterfly in the process of molting, facilitate the emergence of a new, free individual. As the year came to a close, local denizens proudly proclaimed themselves to be mutants, harbingers of a newer, freer social order, unconstrained by the Victorian proprieties of their parents generation. [5]Homo Faber, maker of tools, the artisan, had reemerged as Homo Gestalt who, like Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, had taken the largest evolutionary step of all: a shift in consciousness.

In Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the metaphysics of spiritual transcendence are those of an acid trip, metaphorized as contact with a superior alien culture. Separated into three sections, Kubrick's opus examines the complex dialectic between evolution and progress and the relationship between humans and technology. The film suggests that human epistemology, which since the enlightenment has equated the development of technology with higher notions of evolution, has ironically hindered the very type of spiritual development that the West saw as inseparable from material progress. Thus, as humans become more like machines dissembling their primordial violence behind a latticework of conditioned responses, they become less able to cope with the ramifications of their own discoveries, a fact suggested by the

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[4] Nicholas Von Hoffman, *We Are the People Our Parents Warned Us Against* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1968), 118. See also: Todd, Richard, "Turned-on and Super-sincere in California." *Harpers*, 234 (January, 1967) 42-47.

[5] Allen Ginsberg, "Renaissance or Die," Kornbluth, 55.

decision of a prominent American scientist to conceal the discovery of a futuristic

obelisk--central to the film's plot--from the public early in the movie's second section.

The era of human hegemony is traced back from the primordial simians who

discover an obelisk--precipitating a gestalt shift which occurs when the apes learn to

use weapons--to their modern human counterparts whose violent nature is

metaphorized by the continuing, but more subtle, conflict between the superpowers.

Thus, the boar's jawbone, sent into flight by an early Cenozoic hominid, is transformed

in mid-air into its modern day counterpart, the space station--a more subtle strategic

weapon. Kubrick seems to suggest through this transition that even with a lapse of

four million years, real evolution has only progressed a mere millisecond, men are still

violent and aggressive, jostling with competing nations for primacy.

The film's long middle section begins with appearance of the space detritus that

comprises culture in the Twenty-First century--a varied assortment of docking

stations, rocket shuttles and satellites, including the transmogrified jawbone, all

floating provacatively in orbit around the earth to the music of Johann Strauss. In a

self-referential bit of intertextuality Kubrick recapitulates one of his favorite themes,

the anthropomorphization of machines, by showing two small ships in an act

resembling a coital embrace. This is reminiscent of a similar scene in *Dr. Strangelove*,

in which a B-52 bomber being refueled in mid-air appears to copulate with the smaller

plane as it detaches its long fuel hose in an almost pornographic gesture. similarly, this

device is used in *2001*, to suggest that human technologies possess human frailties, as

well as signifying the shortcomings of the Enlightenment as an ideology of progress.

"Nature," as Theodore W Adorno and Max Horkheimer wrote in, *Dialectic of*

Enlightenment, "...is that which is to be comprehended mathematically; even what

cannot be made to agree, indissolubility and irrationality, is converted by means of

mathematical theorems."[6] In Kubrick's world of the future existence has been rendered

predictable, objectified as a quantifiable variable; its technological emblems as cold,

compartmentalized and lifeless as the humans who operate them. Primates see the dark

voids of their own inner drives as obelisks of unknown origin which they are incapable

of deciphering; dead planets reveal monoliths which emit magnetic energies whose

mystery is exceeded only by that of their own existence; machines built by humans

conceal souls made up of the composite parts of the people who constructed them--

each mystery becomes, in turn, a metaphor for that which preceded it, and those that it

creates.

Similar to the film's opening sequence, the dilemma that drives *2001*'s middle

section revolves around the mystery of the obelisk--perhaps the same one, or maybe a

twin object--discovered buried under layers of lunar soil. The subsequent decision by

an American scientist, Dr. Haywood Floyd, to suppress the information by

disseminating a rumor that there is an outbreak of an epidemic on the moonbase

spreads panic throughout the ranks of the misinformed representatives of the other

nations who work at the nearby space station. Yet, this instinctive and primal attempt

to control the unknown by limiting access to information about it is regarded by the

director as a meaningless folly, one which through time appears to be as fruitless a

gesture as the primate ancestor from the film's opening throwing up his arms in a

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[6] Max Horkheimer and Theodore W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cummings (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969. Originally published 1944), 24, 25.

symbolic act of beseechment when it becomes apparent that the nature of the obelisk

will not be easily divulged. In many ways Floyd is used by Kubrick as the modern

counterpart of that Cenozoic hominid who discovers that a bone can be a weapon.

Floyd's weapon is diplomacy, and the synecdoche which is emblematic of this

disguised form of warfare, is the pen which floats from his pocket in the zero gravity

environment of the moon shuttle while he sleeps. A subsequent encounter, in a later

scene, with a group of Russian scientists, is reminiscent of the earlier hostilities

exchanged at the film's beginning, between the two groups of primates. Indeed, the

director suggests, humans are still very much like their ancestors, only their violence

has been sublimated into diplomatic subterfuge, their desire for dominance--the need

to reinvent the world in microcosm using technology and architecture as spatializations

of a Euclidean epistemology--channeled into an obsession with controlling nature.

When Floyd and his modern counterparts gather around the obelisk which they

have uncovered on the moon, the scene recalls the spectacle of the hominids, from the

film's beginning, surrounding its earthbound predecessor. What the primates came

away with from that encounter was the knowledge of weapons, what contemporary

humans gain from their's is apparently little more than a desire to quantify such a

phenomenon so that they can control it.

The Jupiter mission, which is the focus of the film's last two segments, is about

this desire to measure and define the cosmos, the intention being to gain power

through scientific knowledge. This explicit function of the mission is mirrored by a

more subtle motivation that resides in the unknown signifier of the obelisk itself: the

potential to alter human consciousness. While the obelisk is not featured until *2001*'s

conclusion, it looms invisibly, articulated through the relationship between two

astronauts and the ship's onboard, almost human, computer. The ontological questions

that are raised here, regarding what characteristics define a human being, are mirrored

by the film's ostensible subtext about how a deep seated will to power channels

creativity into various disguised forms of aggression. even a chess match between one

of the astronauts and the computer reveals a level of covert rivalry that is dissimulated

precisely through the same etiquette which conceals the hostility between the

Americans and the Russians in the film's previous section. Later, the astronauts

covertly threaten to disconnect the HAL-9000 computer's higher memory functions

after they discover that he has made an error in predicting the failure of the ship's

deep-space radio system, and then covered it up by attributing it to "human error."

Hal takes revenge on his human companions, for their perceived treachery, by

murdering Commander Poole and refusing Commander Bowman access to the ship

when he returns from the craft's exterior. The battle between tool-bearing simians--

where crude weapons made from the bones of a wild boar are used to defeat an

opposing tribe--is thus transmogrified into a conflict between human primates and their

own technologically advanced tools. In the conflict's decisive conclusion the

computer's verbose exterior is revealed to be a shell which conceals intentions as crude

as those which motivated the hominid ancestors of the men who built it. The

metaphorization of human desire and transformation, the impregnable obelisk, is only

effective in revealing untapped modes of consciousness after civilization's artificially

imposed sensibilities are slowly worn away by isolation. The lone astronaut's trip

through a cosmic void neither the exclusive province of outer space or a mere creation

of consciousness becomes a spatialization of an inner journey; a psychedelic voyage to a realm which, has not been colonized, and is therefore without easily definable parameters. If Kubrick's astronaut could name the essence of the things which subsequently occur--despite the fact that many of the film's final scenes depict a recontextualized life among common domestic objects--they would lose all meaning and cease to be important.

Kubrick's cynicism invariably leads to the conclusion that humans will not change through technology and its ever-expanding signifiers of power--which is both dehumanizing and as flawed as those who build it--but through a more radical restructuring of consciousness. The latter is only apparent in the movie's last scenes which depict Keir Dullea (Commander Bowman) embarking on a psychedelic journey reminiscent of a San Francisco light show, with dramatic shifts in color, focus and lighting, ostensibly intended to suggest an internal itinerary which leads to new insight.

This anticlimactic coda may have been at the center of the film's post-critical revival among late night theater audiences. Dullea's final apotheosis leaves him regressed to an infantile stage physically, but reborn with a consciousness that is unfettered by earthbound technologies. The journey is divided into a series of almost abstracted patterned color sequences, each possessing a subtly different landscape that is perhaps equivalent to a rapidly changing shift in consciousness. Moreover, there is little doubt that Kubrick, with his unfurling landscape negatives, was referring to, if not quoting, one of the staples of the late 60's counterculture entertainments: the light show. An outgrowth of the independent cinematic experimentation of the middle part of the decade, Light show effects and innovations developed concomitantly with

underground film. This is particularly true with the work of Jordan Belson, who in

Samadhi, and his later *Re-Entry* employed effects and methods that would later be

coopted by Kubrick for *2001*. More importantly, Belson's work, in its emphasis on

Buddhism and modes of altered consciousness anticipated and contributed to the work

of later Haight Ashbury liquid projectionists such as Ben Van Meter and David

Hillyard.

> Bhuddism's subordination of dogma to meditational practices that
> integrated mental and physical disciplines was crucial in the beat
> critique of post-enlightenment ideologies of progress materialism and
> ego affirmation, and because it was unincriminated by association with
> modern institutions, it could supply the basis for a social ethic.
> Eventually widespread commercialization depleted countercultural use
> of Asian religions as a model for *translating the perceptual
> transformations caused by hallucinogens* into utopian social
> programs...[Italics mine] [7]

The use of liquid pigments in slide projection light shows was, until they became

commercially popular, peculiar to the San Francisco area, having been invented in

1952 by a State College Professor named Seymor Locks. Later in that decade, an art

student named Elias Romero would take Locks's ideas and apply them to multi-media

presentations which formed elaborate avant-garde theater pieces when utilized with

sound and dialogue. During the mid Sixties, in the formative years of Haight-Ashbury,

Ben Van Meter, influenced by Romero, applied his interest in slide projections and

theater into a strange film which showed a clip of the *Hindenburg* exploding over the

body of a live nude woman. Called *Poon Tang Trilogy*, the piece became something of

an emblem of the merging of cinema and live theater. Later, Van Meter would become

one of the Bay Area's most well known exponents of liquid-pigment slide projection,

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[7] James, *Allegories*, 127, 128.

using various techniques to approximate the dislocations and abstract gestalts of the psychedelic experience with his accompaniment to weekly concerts at the Fillmore.[8]

Although *2001* suggests the possibility of going beyond the circumscribed boundaries of the modern political state through a mystico-psychedelic transcendence--the slit-scan cinematographic technique from the star-gate corridor scene is heavily influenced by both Jordan Belson and John Whitney, both exponents of psychedelic film techniques---the film's conclusion is quite cynical. Kubrick's self-contained fetus is as large as the planet only because of an optical illusion which makes depth difficult to resolve in space. Perhaps he is suggesting that we too, labor under the illusion that we can anatomize and dominate our world--a projection of human arrogance. Yet, the universe he projects, symmetrical, organized and suffused with a light that surpasses conventional understanding (the light of religion rather than the light of physics), is a sublime reminder that perfection of a sort is attainable. Astronaut Keir Dullea's trip through the star-gate corridor can be seen as a metaphor for a psychedelic voyage. The subsequent encounter with the grey monolith is also a metaphorization of the human quest for the unknowable. This inscrutable object becomes both a reification of human ambitions--the very thing which empowers the hominid at the beginning of the film in choosing to transform a bone into a weapon, as if to suggest that the gestalt of any creative act is rooted in violence--and an opaque boundary which separates us from the unknowable. The journey through the star-gate then can be viewed as a psychedelic conduit through which humanity can gain access to a transcendent cosmic

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[8] Charles Perry, *The Haight Ashbury: A History* (New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1984), 70.

wisdom and then be reborn, separate and inviolable. Such an interpretation was consistent with a counter-cultural gestalt which framed a teleological Cartesianism--a mindset based on ethical rather than industrial progress--behind a facade of metaphysical abstractions. Nonetheless, *2001* can legitimately be read on many different levels. Invariably, Kubrick's vision is not intended as a literal version of the future, rather it is allegorical, one possible future with one particular antidote to the dehumanization which is an ancillary effect of human technological progress; consciousness expansion.

To fully understand the ramification's of Kubrick's film, and how it historicized a certain period of cultural history, it is necessary to digress and reexamine the history of the psychedelic movement and its ethos of transformation through gestalt shift. The counterculture which subsequently emerged was a loosely organized social movement focussed around a radical rethinking of the Western paradigm comprised of a multifarious mixture of various fringe-groups and lifestyles forced to the center by the tumultuous political tides of the late Sixties. Although no monolithic consensus existed to explain its purpose, politics or ethos, the spirit in which it emerged--or, more correctly, grew out of--in the bohemian enclaves of the preceding decades, was one of exploration, possibility, sincerity and a strong desire to right social wrongs conflated with hedonistic impulses that can be traced back to the turn-of-the-century middle class obsession with leisure--including many behaviors that fell outside the boundaries of accepted etiquette, and were therefore excluded from the historical discourse until being rediscovered by amateur cultural archeologists looking for a genealogy to call their own. These included ether binges, free love experimentation and America's long-

standing flirtations with marginalized cultures of both the Orient and the Occident. As

far back as the turn of the Century, a singular strain of hedonism dwelt and prospered

within the exotic redoubts of the country's intellectual vanguard.[9] Much of this

fascination with ingesting novel substances stemmed from both the canonization of

drug use through literary endeavors--specifically, Thomas deQuincy's widely-read

Confessions of An Opium Eater--and the explorations of the *Le Club des*

Haschischens, whose well-known members, including, Jacques Moreau, Honore De

Balzac and Charles Baudelaire, added their observations to a large corpus of historic

drug literature.[10]

When transplanted to American shores, however, these experimental impulses

took on an almost religious cast, intermingled, as they were with a strong undercurrent

of puritanical evangelism. Consequentially, the metaphysical explorations of William

James would inevitably collide with the sensory excursions of English writer Havelock

Ellis, who introduced the Native American religious sacrament of peyote to many of

his friends with varying results.[11] Once liberated from its traditional religious

framework however, the drug often had unpredictable effects, ranging from

evocatively colorful ecstasy to terrifying images of repugnant forms.[12] James was so

dissuaded by descriptions of how horrible the cactus buttons were to eat--as well as

the mercurial whimsical nature of the visions it produced--that he was reputed to have

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[9] Robert S. De Ropp, *Drugs and the Mind*, rev. ed. (New York: Dell, 1976). 28. See also: Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD And The American Dream* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 58-72. See also: James, *Varieties*, 390.

[10] De Ropp, 29.

[11] Ibid., 28.

[12] Ibid., 34.

responded to Ellis's entreaties by asserting that he would have to "take [the visions] on

faith."[13] Nonetheless, an almost spiritual fascination with the consciousness altering

effects of drugs predominated, at least among intellectuals; who, more and more

frequently began to examine the lifestyles of the poor--traditionally the biggest

consumers of intoxicants. a vast subculture existed among the underclass around the

use of various drugs, and the mystique with which such subcultures were regarded was

invariably intertwined with the use of chemical intoxicants.[14]

References to various hallucinogens in the annals of folk culture were certainly

nothing new. The representation of ecstasy and altered states of awareness was a

problematic area of inquiry that had, nonetheless, been common in written and artistic

texts for centuries, often in disguised or sanitized form. In antiquity, the Indo-

European Ur-religion utilized mushrooms in its ecstatic rituals. Moreover, medieval

folklore was filled with stories and myths regarding witches' covens and other pagan

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[13]Stevens, 7.

[14]Richard H. Blum, *The Dream Sellers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1972), 12. While the official line had always been to demonize psychoactive substances that had potential to create states of awareness extrinsic to the accepted parameters of perception, such sentiments were not translated into cinematic propaganda until the 1930's when Henry Anslinger, desperate for funding for his fledgling Federal Bureau of Narcotics, underwrote *Reefer Madness*. While the film purported to show the dangers of marijuana smoking, its conventions were already becoming outmoded when it was made, and ironically, within a little more than a decade it became the quintessential piece of camp public-health-menace film making, favored by none so much as those who partook of the sacraments which it so roundly and hysterically condemned. The medical press, however, took an unflinchingly conservative view which appeared more legitimate because it came packaged in the neutral nomenclature of science. In particular the *Journal of the American Medical Association* would print numerous articles during the Sixties on every aspect of LSD use from alleged reports of chromosome damage (later proven to be untrue) to the propensity for "bad Trips." Using the prestige of Science, particularly medicine, to bolster arguments often based on half truths and fear was nothing new. At the turn of the Century the *British Medical Journal* had printed an article by Ellis entitled, "Mezcal: A New Artificial Paradise" which praised the mind-expanding powers of peyote. Already notorious for his banned seven-volume *Psychology of Sex*, Ellis incurred an angry editorial response from *BMJ*, which castigated his "Paradise," with characteristic Colonial racism, as a "New Inferno", adding that the Kiowa Indians--who had been the author's inspiration-- were not far above the level of savages. See also: Stevens, 7. *BMJ* (February 5, 1898), 390.

rites; it has even been argued that stories of potions and flying broomsticks may have evolved out of an esoteric knowledge of certain psychoactive plants, particularly, mushrooms of the Fly-Aminite species. In the nineteenth century, Lewis Carroll had integrated such lore into *Alice in Wonderland* by depicting a hookah-smoking caterpillar sitting on a fly-aminite mushroom--at least the Tenniel illustration shows it this way--and ordering Alice to consume pieces of "either side" to adjust her size.

While such depictions were shrouded in the context of children's fantasy, they had never entirely disappeared from Western Cultural discourse, rather they had been sublimated into the less conspicuous vehicles of mythology and folklore--the two eventually assimilated into the institutionalized and bowdlerized Victorian genre of the Children's fable. The compartmentalization of myth into these peripheral discourses, marginalized and discredited its value, subordinating its essential meaning to the pragmatic and empirical dialectic of reason and its offspring the machine. Discourse about transfiguration and ecstasy was commonplace in Twentieth-Century comic books, novels, and technology's newest entertainment device, the cinema. It was the latter which would, arguably, go furthest towards the realization of mythical discourses, even as it cloaked them within the vocabulary of formal linear narrative and acceptable images of technology that contextualized rupture as teleological. In this context both *Metropolis* and *Dracula* were interpreted literally, one as a utopian fantasy at the end of the evolutionary spectrum, the other as a reactionary nightmare with atavistic overtones--a return to a forgotten ancestor's bestial primitive ways. In fact, both were also meditations on human consciousness reified as transfigured worlds where the impossible was altered into a mundane reality, with varying consequences.

Myth had never in fact disappeared from contemporary life, it was simply reconceptualized, now regarded as fiction or fantasy--its most provocative elements dismissed as garish shock tactics.

Thus a discourse on drug use had existed uninterrupted within various forms of literature and culture. The version which emerged by the mid Sixties--with an upheaval of suppressed ideas, utilizing a more effective way of communicating its values--was in many ways unchanged, altered only in its frame of reference. Subsequently, it would convey the unspoken ethos of a nascent period through sartorial excesses and its insistence on cloaking a very American emphasis on individuality in the garb of New Left collectivism, or the romanticized trappings of an alluring cultural deviancy. The rupture of mid Sixties exploitation films would have been apparent with or without acid, but LSD gave them a focus, a taboo to coalesce around--one which exerted a profound gravity upon both a social order which implicitly understood its import as that of a force of cultural dissolution, and a growing number of disenfranchised and alienated products of that culture who saw the possibility of stripping away centuries of social conditioning as a liberating experience, tantamount to a kind of cultural revelation. This idea would also be manifested in films that did not use the counterculture as their subject matter, but which, nonetheless, retained within their narrative structures the essential dialectic between social change and reaction. Thus, consciousness-expansion became a central metaphor to many different forms of narrative.

The discourse on ecstasy, which had been confined to the realm of Fantasy, religion and science fiction for much of the century--primarily in works like Huxley's

Brave New World (published over a decade before he actually tried mescaline),

Zamyatin's *We*, and the early writings of Arthur C. Clarke where altered states of

consciousness were utilized as government-controlled teaching tools--began to a

emerge in a newer incarnation through the work of a disparate group of writers

disparagingly referred to by the sobriquet "beat." Among these was Jack Kerouac's

whose *Town and the City, On the Road* and *Dharma Bums* exalted existential

wanderings of hoboes while stressing the importance of speed, drug use and open

sexual encounters as an alternative to a post-war utilitarianism that many viewed as

oppressive. Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* would inevitably become the most recognizable

prosody to come out of the widely misunderstood bohemian experience. Secreted

within its Rabelaisian descriptions was a map of an extensive cultural underground that

had been growing throughout the Fifties. Central to this lifestyle were the use of and

experimentation with drugs.[15] While the "beats" experimented with a wide variety of

psychoactive substances--everything from alcohol, amphetamines and heroin to cough

syrup--it was hallucinogens like Yage and mescaline which most appealed to the need

to uncover a more ancient and receptive form of consciousness, in particular Yage

which Ginsberg tried on a trip to Mexico in 1957.[16]

Still, it wouldn't be until after 1960 when the remnants of Ginsberg's coterie

would make contact with the ever-expanding circuit of psychologists and researchers

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[15]Michael Schumacher, *Dharma Lion: A Critical Biography of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 145-165. See Also: Dennis McNally, *Desolate Angel:Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation and America* (New York: Random House, 1979), 260-270.

[16]Schumacher, 157.

doing controlled studies with psychedelic drugs, particularly LSD and psilocybin. By that time psychiatrists throughout the country were using LSD both as a research tool (often funded through various CIA front organizations) and as an adjunct to psychotherapy. The latter included Humphrey Osmond, a research psychiatrist working in Canada, and Timothy Leary, a Harvard sociology professor best known for a personality test he had devised called *The Leary*.[17] While most of the clients who sought out the suddenly fashionable psycholitic therapy were not well known, the use of these agents quickly mushroomed into a source of controversy throughout the medical profession.

Osmond had become well known in the medical profession doing studies on the similarities between the active molecules of mescaline and adrenaline, suggesting that there might be a link that could explain certain forms of madness. Subsequently, he would coin the term *psychedelic*, meaning *mind manifesting*, as an alternative to the more traditional *psychotomimetic*, which reflected the traditional view that hallucinogens simulated real madness. Osmond's heresy in questioning this bit of received wisdom, led him to seek out Aldous Huxley, the eminent British writer and philosopher, who confirmed Osmond's suspicions after trying the drug and writing *Doors of Perception*, that what these drugs actually did was open up the mind to a full spectrum of stimuli, and break down the conditioned reflexes built up over a lifetime which tended to block out information that the psyche considered extraneous.[18] This view shared common assumptions with the philosophical notion promulgated by Henri

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[17]Schlain and Lee, 73.

[18]Ibid, 72-5.

Bergson, that the mind acted as a filter, or reducing valve, removing superfluous

stimuli to aid in the survival of the species.[19] Huxley believed that humans had

advanced sufficiently to recover that lost unity with their environment that

psychedelics promised to restore if used judiciously.[20]

2001 indulges in similar utopian pretensions, suggesting through its use of

cinematic tropes such as lighting effects and disorienting camera angles, a transcendent

state that can only be reached through the mysterious rite of communion with the

obelisk itself. The obelisk also functions as a proxy guru, providing, one would

assume, the necessary indoctrination that would make Kubrick's reification of a

psychdelic voyage comprehensible. Similarly, the counterculture displayed a marked

tendency to adopt modern counterparts to mystery rites, often through rituals

involving the perusal of archaic texts rewritten to fit within the parameters of the

psychedelic experience. The *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, or *Bardo Thadol*, was one of

these texts.

One of Timothy Leary's first tasks, as head of the Millbrook Institute, which

emerged in 1965 to study the effects of psychedelics, was to collaborate on a definitive

version of this text. Often, the models offered by eastern religions, which counseled

contemplation rather than action, easily fit within the parameters of the psychedelic

experience. Leary, the self-proclaimed guru of the underground LSD circuit,

understood the importance ofd using a text as a guide. Invariably, however, the text

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[19]Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911), 127.

[20]Stevens, 41. Along with prominent people like Henry and Clare Luce, Gordon Wasson, and an ex-OSS agent named Al Hubbard, Huxley sought out and "turned on" some of the most well known politicians and artists in the late 1950's.

would set up expectations that the drug, unpredictable as it sometimes was, could not always live up to. Conversely, Kubrick's monolith makes no such promises, it merely exists as a doorway to an elevated state of consciousness. Certainly, by the time of *2001's* release, in 1968, the rigid Eastern oriented doctrines of Leary had been supplanted by Ken Kesey's more existential philosophy that cautioned those who undertook the experience not to go into it with any preconceptions whatsoever. Kubrick's obelisk offers no familiar answers and is as impenetrable as it is cold and unfamiliar. Invariably, the experience of "tripping" was not amenable to any linguistic or visual frame of reference. This created a need on the part of users to attach the experience to something familiar, even mundane, that might provide a framework for how to interpret it. To understand how Kubrick came to use a black monolith as a metaphor to explain transcendent consciousness--one which obfuscates the essence of what it attempts toclarify and make understandable--it is important to examine an analogous situation: that of Timothy Leary and his attempt to put the psychedelic experience within the framework of Eastern mysticism; a task that failed precisely because it sought models in the familiar and reduced the art of altering one's consciousness to a formula, as surely as Stanley Kubrick reduced it to a standardized visual signifier.

Timothy Leary was first introduced to psilocybin mushrooms, also called *teonactl*, in early 1960 during a summer vacation in Mexico. Subsequently, Leary and his colleague Richard Alpert would develop the Harvard Psilocybin project whose ostensible aim was to test the effectiveness of psychedelic drugs in various forms of psychological therapy with an emphasis of how the experience effected the individual.

Shortly thereafter, a fortuitous encounter with Allen Ginsberg helped spark a

movement, by signaling the widespread nature of the experimentation--which unlike

Huxley's envisioned Utopia, aimed to be all inclusive, inadvertently bringing it to the

attention of the public.

Even before Leary had adopted the public personae that would establish him

at the center of a swirling controversy, he clearly believed that one role of Psycholytic

therapy would be to enhance the spiritual aspects of the human organism which had

been neglected and marginalized by the behaviorists--whose rigid empiricism reduced

all human functions and moods to the level of mechanistic responses to stimuli. Leary

expressed to Hollingshead, the essential anti-Cartesian premise that even in 1961

motivated his work, and surely presaged the emergence of a culture in rebellion from

the deterministic logical positivism of science and the citadels of culture during the

post-war years.

> We must move beyond [the] scientific tyranny of behavioristic and mechanistic
> procedures, where man is understood in terms of controls of biological-drive
> mechanisms. This is carrying Descartes too far. A psychdelic user cannot
> reduce the mind-brain problem to a materialistic monism. He is more likely to
> see how the current over-emphasis on mechanism has produced a
> corresponding dislocation of vision, one that is resulting in a de-humanization
> of man. He is more likely to turn into a revolutionary than a college
> professor.[21]

The writings of Aldous Huxley, particularly his ideal community in *Island* also

became a model for Leary's group. The subsequent formation of the Millbrook

institute--named after the town where they were located in upstate New York--and the

emerging canon of the new acid subculture, including Eastern religions, Hinduism, The

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[21]Michael Hollingshead, *The Man Who Turned on the World* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1973), 18.

Tibetan Book of the Dead, Herman Hesse, and Huxley, turned the Leary group into

trend setters. With the publication of their own in-house newspaper of sorts, *The*

Psychedelic Review, the people at Millbrook began to examine the value of a lifestyle

based around psychedelic drugs and how they might interact with the larger society

which disavowed their use. The institute became a locus of activity for members of the

avant-garde intelligentsia throughout the country, including Alan Watts, R.D. Laing,

members of Andy Warhol's Factory, and even Charles Mingus. While Millbrook used

Hesse's book as a model of what the *enlightened* society of the future might look like,

they used their own, re-translated version of the *Bardo Thadol*, or *Tibetan Book Of*

The Dead, as a blue-print for one's mental itinerary in a successful LSD session.[22]

Set and setting played an important role in these sessions--which helped

explain how inmates at the Massachusetts state prison, who volunteered for one of

Leary's studies, embraced the same religious insights found in the corpus of mystical

writings which Leary had adopted as a sort of "applied Mysticism."[23] Suddenly, the

mystic canon embraced by thinkers as diverse as Aleister Crowley, Oswald Spengler

and Gurdjeff had been resurrected. While some, such as William Burroughs,

disavowed its use, seeing it as an ersatz short cut to true spirituality, LSD opened the

door to an entire species of discourse which had been usurped several centuries earlier

by the Cartesian geometry of the enlightenment. The rediscovered popularity of

psychedelics, and the concomitant rise in popularity of eastern religious discourses

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[22]Ibid., 69.

[23]Stevens., 156. Everyone from Blake to William James and the *Bardo Thadol*. See also: Lee and Schlain, 87, 88, 102. See also: *New Yorker*, June 15, 1963.

(and, later in the decade, Native American sacred practices), represented a rupture in that discourse and the resurgence of a rebellion against its hegemony.

Invariably, the line between controlled studies and proselytizing became quite blurred as news of an inter-faculty debate over the validity of Leary's research made the Harvard *Crimson* and from there was quickly dispatched through the wire services to every major newspaper on the East Coast. Subsequently, the FDA made Leary give up his psilocybin research. By this time, however, Leary and Alpert were too involved in the gestalt-shifting potentialities of psychedelics to merely go back to administering personality tests and lecturing. Alpert became the first University employee fired for an infraction in the Twentieth Century when he was fired after giving an undergraduate LSD. The Harvard administration, needing only the most frivolous excuse, fired Leary soon afterward for missing a faculty meeting. After a brief stint in Mexico with a small band of devoted followers, calling themselves the IFIF (International Federation for Internal Freedom), their visas expired and they went back to the States looking for a patron to fund their nascent psychedelic organization. They found a backer in William Mellon Hitchcock--grandson of the founder of Shell Oil--who gave Leary and company the use of his mansion in Upstate New York, where they changed their name to the Castilla foundation, using the commune from Herman Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* as a model.

Simultaneous with the newly discovered infatuation with LSD, a youth culture of indeterminate size was growing on the West Coast. In Late 1966, emboldened by the success of a number of local dances, called "acid tests," a group of local artists and musicians began to organize an event they named "The Trips Festival." The Trips

Festival turned out to be the best advertisement the growing hip culture of San

Francisco could produce for itself, becoming what Tom Wolfe called, "the first

national convention of an underground movement that had existed on a hush-hush cell-

by-cell basis."[24] This wide recognition would both serve as the earliest true publicity

for the experiment in communal living going on in the Haight and would form the basis

for a mythology that would be rapidly transcribed into the language of film, and

subsequently the didactic vocabulary of network television, which used the "acid

party" as both a symptom of dissolution, in the form of a modern bacchanal, and a

paradigm for explaining the confusing values of a segment of the population soon to

be caricatured with the sobriquet, "hallucination generation."[25]

One of the dilemmas which was illustrated rather pointedly by the use of acid

was the fact that in a rapidly proliferating world of technologies, and the myriad

configurations and possibilities which they ushered in, language--which evolves

organically from the perceptions experienced collectively by a culture and is then

honed to an admittedly dull perfection by necessity--was outstripped by concepts and

ideations that were more complex than the words and terminologies used to

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[24]Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1968), 234. The early acid tests conducted by Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters were far from unifying in their effect on the larger bohemian community. Since LSD was not yet illegal, there was little that the police could do except to watch for impaired drivers or those unlucky enough to be caught in possession of marijuana; but people as diverse as Richard Alpert--who had given up his career at Harvard to join Leary in a nascent public movement on the West Coast--and Owsley Stanley felt for various reasons that making such a sacrament available to the public within the confines of a public space could have disastrous consequences, the most severe being the eventual banning of psychedelic substances. Nonetheless, the acid tests continued. First in various halls around the Bay area, then in Palo Alto; Portland, Oregon; and even Mexico; finally in Los Angeles with the Watts acid tests where there were moments of both Dionysian ecstasy and monstrous, often private panic, the latter often a result of the large crowds. The scene came to a fruition of sorts with the Trips Festival in Longshoremen's Hall, which after the spontaneity of earlier events was something of a letdown for most of the serious heads in Kesey's inner circle, but still managed to capture the essential spirit of the event, condensed into a single phrase written by Kesey onto an overhead projector and flashed in front of the crowd: "Anybody who knows he is God please go onstage." Wolfe, 234.

[25]Advertisement for *Hallucination Generation*, taken from *Wavy Gravy* compilation. Beware Records, 1985.

encapsulate them. LSD exacerbated this problem by enhancing the user's awareness

that linguistic systems could be as restrictive as they were enlightening, distorting and

reconfiguring ideas and images by couching them within the imperfect and abstract

structures that could only describe a phenomenon by analogy, never--as was often

believed--by becoming transparent to it. Moreover, words--when at all pronounceable-

-became ponderous objects that appeared to block perceptions, like immovable stones

thrust by glaciers into a valley so as to block the illuminations of a particularly

photogenic sunset. While no apparatus existed to explain the "mystical" and ineffable

states that hallucinogens created--investing the ordinary with cosmic significance, and

the rigidly circumscribed with the ardor of the infinite--the non-linear creative

processes of the visual arts were often more effective than literature or even poetry,

evoking through images what language could only intimate through sound. In this

sense, the films of Stan Brackhage--although not directly evocative of an LSD trip--

may have been even more effective than Allen Ginsberg's poetry, or Aldous Huxley's

wondrous descriptions at suggesting that mysterious confluence of perception, stimuli

and images that came together to alter consciousness so abruptly.

The film makers at American International Pictures--lacking both the artistry

and the ethos of conceptual art intrinsic to the work of a Godard, a Brackhage, or

even a Warhol--were still in possession of a more effective tool for communicating an

admittedly untranslatable experience by drawing on the techniques which had enabled

them to make effective pieces of cinema with small budgets and hastily put together

effects. Indeed, it was this very impromptu sensibility which gave a film like *The Trip*

its mysterious appeal. By simply drawing on his own Gothic-horror-film past, director

Roger Corman was able to suggest through fantasy metaphor sequences the

disssociative nature of a trip without resorting to ameboid shapes or stroboscopic

cliches. Nonetheless, the technique was still an idealization, further problematizing its

intended subject by presenting it as the equivalent to a theme park, leaving out the

essence of the psychic discombobulation that was inseparable from the experience. yet,

the latter could only be expressed through metaphor, and even then rarely

successfully.[26] The solution to this problem was to present LSD trips in magnified,

enhanced terms, reifying the difficult non-verbal nature of the experience as a series of

swaying images, witch-like apparitions and dream-like fantasies, while simplifying the

emotional content to the equivalent of a quasi-mystical ecstasy--often invoked, as in

Psych-Out and *The Trip*, quite literally as a session of lovemaking, or as a bad horror

movie.

While counterculture films often broke the formalistic fences constructed by

budgetary constraints and social attitudes to contain them, they all share certain key

narrative elements in common. Because the form was constructed on such shaky

epistemological ground to begin with--changing conceptions of gender, art and the

relation of the individual to the larger society--it was inevitable that the formula would

become outmoded, given its inherent limitations, before its formal elements could be

routinized. Still, some intriguing aspects of these films survive, although in much

different form, in almost all of the films produced in this era. The very cynicism which

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[26] Henri Michaux's text on the mescaline experience, *The Major Ordeals of the Mind, and the Countless Minor Ones,* must stand as the true exception to this rule, conveying both the horror and the ecstasy of the aging French writer's trips--certainly more of the former than the latter--through an exquisite and delicate ability to render details of apperception without reifying them as actual images. Few texts--written or visual--approached the effectiveness of Michaux's.

has become a cliche in contemporary cinematic depictions of youth culture, was conceived in the repressive atmosphere of the Fifties where doubt, mockery and irony contained a subversive quality that has long since been absorbed and reconstituted as part of culture's self-reflexive discourse on its own intertextuality.

Perhaps Kubrick's biggest obstacle is in his attempt to render the psychedelic experience recognizable through the use of what were by 1968 stock psychedelic light show images. The paradox here is in the desire to uncover the essence of a phenomenon not amenable to the structures of language except at the expense of its meaning. Thus, Kubrick, like every expressive artist before him uses the mediating tool of the sign--in this case visual signifiers--to express something which defies their use by concealing its true nature within the signs that eclipse it. The inner experience of the trip loses its essential quality precisely because a language of accessible symbols (no matter how abstract) is used to mediate it. Keir Dullea, at the very moment when he is supposed to transcend the mundane strictures imposed by ordinary human language--the structure which throughout the film mediates and modifies the experience of being human by providing the framework through which human history, discourse conflict and technology constitute themselves--is in fact merely transported to a different linguistic realm. Kubrik has replaced one set of signifiers with another, and has taken a metaphor for an experience outside the boundaries of discourse, and therefore by definition not amenable to the signs that would make it familiar, and mystified it by replacing the essential void, or ellipses, that defines the space around which such an experience would be constituted with a light show. One might argue that this is simply a metaphor--one kind of sign which substitutes for an indescribable

truth that cannot be said in any other way; but such symbolism can often become clouded with the residue of grand sweeping cinematic gestures that replace the sublime elements of experience with the language of epic transformation. Kubrik has created a psychedelic Bible epic, with ponderous thundering music, eerie shafts of light and a space schooner slicing across the indefinable reaches of the cosmos like the arm of Charlton Heston cutting a swath through the Red Sea.[27]

What makes *2001* so ground-breaking is the attempt to posit a level of consciousness that would go beyond the Cartesian revolution of objectifiable human robots and machines who can play chess and enter a more holistic realm where that which is most resistant to rational explication becomes a clear mandate for a new more spiritualized mode of being. What makes *2001* almost fail in the attempt is that Kubrick is too much of a perfectionist to realize when the process of clarification itself begins to make his innate sense of metaphysics recede beneath layers of nebulous haze. He might have kept in mind Paul de Man's comments on attempting to describe an inner world using a system of familiar--and therefore mundane--signs: "The whole notion of an 'inner experience' enters our consciousness only after it has found a language that the individual *understands*--i.e. a translation of a situation into a familiar situation."[28]

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[27]For a more scathing review of Kubrick's opus see Pauline Kael's sandblasting in the February, 1969 *Harpers*, reprinted in *For Keeps: Thirty Years at The Movies* (New York: Plume, Penguin, 1994), 222-223. Although Kael seriously underestimated the timeliness of the film's message, her take on its underlying ethos was absolutely on target even with its hostile dismissive tone intact. "*2001* is a celebration of cop-out. It says man is just a tiny nothing on the stairway to Paradise, something better is coming, and it's all out of your hands anyway. There's an intelligence out there in space controlling your destiny from ape to angel, so just follow the slab. Drop up."

[28]De Man quoted in Foster, *Recodings*, 62.

Kubrick's approach was not problematic simply because it laid bare the difficulty of expressing the inner realm using recognizable signs, but also because it institutionalized the process, creating an established language of instantly recognizable "psychedelic" signifiers that became a shorthand for describing the experience, thereby distorting it into a quasi-mystical form of spiritual insight. The transformative gestalt shattering nature of psychedelics was poorly served by such a set of garish symbols, which emphasized its religious aspects, using an established visual language to denote the idea of the "spiritual" or inner, while neglecting to deconstruct them into something else or to acknowledge the metaphoric nature of "light" and "awe." The result is a reconstituted language of visual signifiers that put the concepts of *religion* and *insight* into quotations through the act of reconfiguring those signs. It is a process analogous to what Roy Lichtenstein did in the realm of painting when he recontextualized the basic "abstract Expressionist" brush stroke, except without the deconstructive irony which was intended to take these signs out of context and reveal them to be gestural signifiers--with all of language's conventions--rather than transparent windows into the painter's soul. Similarly, Kubrick uses a routinized language of distorted light images to represent the psychedelic experience, and this is precisely what becomes a hindrance that impedes the film from completely expressing its purpose. Instead, Kubrik elevates his own status to that of expressionist mystic, whose pyrotechnic displays and cinematic precision are like metaphysical riddles to be solved by those clever enough to know that they conceal only a vast emptiness.

Read on one level, *2001* is a film whose primary concern is signs: how they constitute discourse, circumscribe technological innovation, provide a language for the

mysterious, and contextualize history as an evolutionary process from the past to the present. The failure of traditional modes of discourse is not only metaphorized by the bone which is transformed into a satellite--the act of aggressively throwing the former providing a paradigm through which the latter can be explained ("the will to power" as an essential motivation in human innovation)--but also through the failure of technologies highest expression to function properly. I refer here to the HAL 9000 computer who is at the center of a dialectic which explores the relationship between machines and humans. It is an error made by Hal--when he predicts without evidence that a satellite relay system will go bad--perhaps with uncertain motives, that reveals his essential imperfection. Yet a subsequent scene involving the two crewmen having a conversation, ostensibly in private, in one of the docked space pods, is even more telling. Hal's later decision to prevent commander Bowman from re-entering the ship is the result of having overheard the two men planning to disconnect him, in essence to lobotomize him. Hal's instinct for self-preservation brings out the same sort of aggression seen earlier in the film's opening section. However, Hal points out to Commander Bowman (Keir Dullea) that it was their conversation, surreptitious, but overheard by the computer who "saw [their] lips move" which is the catalyst for his homicidal rage. Indeed, this may be Kubrick's way of showing the ultimate failure of language as a representational mode of discourse, a subtext that might mirror and reinforce the films more obvious narrative regarding the inability of the species to see beyond its own built-in aggressive impulses. The very pantomime engaged in by the crewmen as they talk of disconnecting HAL within the confines of another piece of machinery becomes emblematic of the interdependency between humans and

mechanical contraptions and acts as a metaphor for the mechanized nature of language itself, whose refined Cartesian character provides a structure as ineffective, deceptive and bulky as the suits worn by the two astronauts.[29]

In *Expanded Cinema*, Gene Youngblood goes as far as to interpret the film's starchild-embryo coda as "[symbolizing] a generation gap so sudden and so profound that few of us believed it possible. As we unlearn our past we unlearn ourselves."[30] seeing it as symptomatic of a new nostalgia--the beginnings of a cybernetic age no longer circumscribed by the parameters of a Newtonian physics of matter or consciousness--Youngblood indulges in a narcissism which at the time was inseparable from the reflexive character of textual analysis. Kubrick's last man may have far more in common with the grasping simians at the film's beginning than with any protean transformation into a higher state of awareness; thus, he is portrayed as insular, cut off from experience, except for its simulacra, self-absorbed, and finally capable of seeing only his own reflection in the inscrutable object that the cosmos has thrust upon him. The obelisk is not merely a reification of human potential but a symbol of the ultimate unknowability of what the future might bring. Kubrick's high-tech, interstellar acid trip--the journey which ties the main part of the film to its ending--does not assign any value to the experience beyond the fact that it is transformative. Whether that transformation leads to genuine insight, or a greater degree of turned-inwardness is part of the mystery of *2001*'s conclusion

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[29]Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970), 60.

[30]Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1970), 146.

Surely, the counterculture valued LSD because it disrupted so many of the ordinary conditioned reflexes that operated sublimely even when individuals were most convinced that they were acting independently as free agents. Its very potential to engender gestalt shifts--to radically alter the awareness of the user regarding the nature of the world around him--created an exterior zone where such self-reflexive discourses were possible. This is not to suggest that acid was responsible for the creation of post-modern theory, only to point out that the visceral dislocations caused by the hallucinogenic experience tended to amplify the tendency to deconstruct the mundane rituals of everyday existence--especially those which appeared most linear. Suddenly, history itself--and the social conventions which had solidified around it--had a history, a genealogy. Even the most mundane act of civility could be deconstructed to reveal a hidden past that informed it.

The advent of meta-discourse that allowed for the anatomization of social conventions also freed the people who used them from the restrictive notion that such norms were self-evident, or hard-wired, aspects of human behavior. The *Zeitgeist* of change in the Sixties seemed to hasten the process that informed social transitions, creating a rupture that promoted reflexivity, since the very contrast between what had been acceptable and what was evolving distanced the young from a value system that seemed antiquated and self-contradictory. This process reflects the emergence of a deeper epistemic shift whose full contours have not been resolved, but which--by violently uprooting older social conventions--creates an ontological space that had not previously existed allowing for a method of criticism that would not have been permissible in an environment where the hegemony of one value system went

uncontested.[31] Subsequent explorations of "inner-space" would not require the

darkness of outer-space as a cloaking, or concealment, since metaphor and allegory

were now beginning to seem like obstacles rather than devices to make inaccessible

realms transparent. The large spate of art-events known as "happenings" in the late

60's was testament to this awareness, since they stressed a more direct mode of

experience--one made accessible through actually touching and interacting with artistic

materials--rather than the old ways of viewing that implied an untransgressible

boundary between audience and creator. The sudden self-consciousness of artists and

film-makers mirrored that of the counter-culture, which now envisioned itself, in

quotes, making history by self-consciously avoiding the mistakes of the old-left.

Ironically, while this approach worked brilliantly for film-makers intent on revitalizing

old forms, it would be a disaster for the new left, especially for Jerry Rubin and Abbie

Hoffman: revolution worked much differently on paper, or in one's mind after it was

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[31] For a more in-depth analysis of how the social dislocations of the Sixties acted to create a rupture that achieved a distancing effect which allowed for the emergence of self-conscious modes of criticism, see Frederic Jameson, "Periodizing The Sixties" from *The 60's without Apology*, eds. Sohnya Sayhers, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz, Fredric Jameson (Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press, 1984). 178-209. While Jameson takes a Marxist view of how the decade developed--attributing its energized polemics, movements, discourses and expanded markets to the expansion of monopoly capitalism--he sees the origins of postmodernism in the "schizophrenic" rifts that characterize modern culture's relation to its own history, the deflation of the modernist duality of high and low culture and the leveling of discourses so that all are assimilated at the expense of their autonomy and their ability to transgress boundaries. Jameson uses Marcuse and DeBord as models to show the emergence of a culture where all modes of expression are coopted and reduced to spectacle. While this postmodern "style" is recontextualized as a form of pastiche--where all elements are equal and meaningless, since they lack context--it opens up new territories to markets that would never have colonized such off-limits cultural terrain in the post-war era. Hence, everything from the "revolution" itself (witnesss the preponderance of Black and red Che Guevera posters that pop up in college dorms all over the country as synechdocal references to radicalism) to the lifestyles of the young is coopted, marketed and reduced to caricature or a simulacra that contains none of the bite of the original. See also: Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in The Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), particularly Chapter Three, "The Conquest of Unhappy Consciousness: Repressive Desublimation," 56-83.

saturated with Marxist insight, than it did in practice, especially when practiced in the streets of Chicago.

Chapter 4: *The Medium Is the Message.*

The real-life counterparts to Kubrick's high-tech *Übermensch*, were, by late

1967, moving out of the Haight and onto communes like Lou Gottleib's Morningstar

Ranch, and a plethora of small communities which together formed a small rural

constellation of transplanted middle class urbanites over much of the Southwest. The

move to the country, simultaneous with the influx of a younger and more

disenfranchised type of dropout to *Hippie* communities in San Francisco, Berkeley,

Los Angeles and New York, signaled a shift in the sensibilities of those who

considered themselves part of what Marcuse had called *The Great Refusal*. Similarly,

on various college campuses across the country local enclaves, filled with an as yet

undefinable coalition of misfits whose bay area counterparts had been labeled *The*

Non-Student Left back in 1965 by Hunter S. Thompson, began to grow into a hybrid

that nobody would have predicted. Neither pure Hippie (meaning they bore little or no

resemblance to the post-beatnik stereotypes being portrayed endlessly on television

and low-budget cinema), nor clean-cut radical, the new style seemed a mixture of the

two, blending proletarian denim with beads, moccasins and buckskin.[1]

Moreover, these more radicalized mutant flower-children were angrier than

anyone who could fairly be called a hippie, freely mixing revolutionary rhetoric, with

bits of Marxist doctrine, Anarchist aphorisms and copious amounts of drugs--mostly

marijuana and acid, although methedrine was rapidly becoming the drug of choice for

many. Much of the credit for this subtle alteration in outlook between 1967 and 68,

has been attributed to Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Paul Krassner and their brainchild

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[1] Lee and Schlain, 168-169.

organization *Yippie* (Youth International Party) which combined the theatrical antics

of the experimental theater with the political seriousness of the Situationist

International.[2] Together, they began plans for a countercultural siege of the upcoming

Democratic National Convention in Chicago later that summer. To Hoffman, Rubin

and Krassner, it would be the defining moment of the youth revolution.

Ironically, the discourse generated by the counterculture quickly surpassed its

ability to follow through on most of its demands. Despite the incresaing radicalization

of the SDS and the estrangement of growing numbers of teenagers and college

students from midfdle class society, few were really committed enough to move to

communes and invent their own and fewer still were up to the task of taking up arms

against the establishment. The effect of this inflation of rhetoric was to exacerbate the

already solipsistic world-view that many in the acid subculture appeared to subscribe

to. Fantasy began to overtake reality in the collective consciosuness of the

counterculture--although those most politically active in SDS were still sober enough

in their assesments, as of late 1967, to acknowledge the amount of work necessary for

even the preliminary steps of a social revolution to be effective--and by the end of the

year, as politicos became indistinguishable from hippies, a fervor began to build in

regard to a revolution whose existence seemed largely fabricated.

In Dr. Charles Slack's sarcastic portrait of the acid guru, *Timothy Leary, the*

Madness of the Sixties, and Me, the author recounts a strange incident that illustrates

this new solipsistic world-view, when he encounters a young man dancing with a

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[2] Farber., 26. See also: Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 426.

Raggedy Ann doll in the home of a local Hindu swami. After ignoring an invitation to

talk to the doll, Slack is struck in the head with it instead. Subsequently, after Leary

and the swami unwittingly introduce Slack to DMT, he feels a strange sense of

urgency and again tries to communicate with the young man. The encounter is

amongst the strangest and most telling in the annals of psychedelic lore:

> "What have you done with your doll?" "I have put her to bed, she needs her
> rest....She is the President of the United States you know." "I thought Mr.
> Johnson was the President," said I. "Just like a psychiatrist to think that," he
> said. "Johnson is just a figurehead. That doll is the real President. I elected her
> and I know. Wait till she decides to eliminate the human world with a single
> press of the boom button....Have you ever actually seen this human person,
> Johnson? I mean for *real*? No, of course not. But you believe he is President
> because of the television and radio. Well, that's all it is, really, just a TV show.
> The government is nothing but a TV show....Well, I happen to have my own
> show. I take it along with me wherever I go. Dancing, singing, news and
> sports. I don't like the other TV. I only like my own TV....Have you ever
> actually been to Vietnam? have you ever really seen the war there in the rice
> paddies? Have you ever, to your genuine knowledge, ever, ever killed anyone,
> say, men or woman or children or soldiers in that war?...Have you ever lost an
> arm or a foot or an eye or an ear in that war?"
> He paused then, and I could see his mind was occupied with the images he had
> conjured up for himself....He continued. "you see my friend...that war doesn't
> really exist--except in...three or four places. First of all, your mind. Next of all,
> your television set. And then, say, the newspapers...Just channels really, not
> places at all."[3]

Of course, the recognition of the political process as a spectacle played out in

the prefabricated realm of electronic media may have had a certain McLuhanesque

logic--since it acknowledged both the instantaneous nature of television and the

inherent artificiality of its recontextualizations--but beyond metaphor, it could only

lead to a caricature through pantomime.[4] The gradual erosion of credulity during the

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[3]Charles W. Slack, *Timothy Leary, the Madness of the Sixties and Me* (New York: Peter H. Wyden, 1973), 129.

[4]McLuhan, 56.

Sixties may have gone hand in hand with a perceived loss of ingenuousness. Media

was merely the most obvious manifestation of this tendency to provide the facts, but

within a framework that either rendered them meaningless or caused many to question

the premise which supposedly kept them epistemologically anchored. The latter

became easier to question once one had been subjected to the dislocations of

hallucinogens, often creating a tendency to confuse the aphoristic criticisms that

attempted to address the material shallowness of western civilization with the

shortcomings of society itself.

Subsequently a loosely defined hippie ontology emerged which traded

perspective on the nature of material culture for poorly applied Hindu and Buddhist

maxims--the fact that these were intended metaphorically was often forgotten. While

not responsible for the quintessential hippie journey to the solipsistic interior, Leary's

penchant for one-liners ("You have to go out of your mind to get into your mind"),

and glib explanations tended to reinforce this tendency among the young and

disinterested. In such an environment, alternative media, like psychedelic newspapers,

light shows and film became predominant in the youth culture, especially the latter

which responded to the vacuum of belief by providing instantly recognizable images

that pandered to the youth market's awareness of itself as a distinct and autonomous

culture with its own singular consciousness.[5]

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[5] While such sentiments expressed a desire to transcend power politics they also contained the seed of a weird ideological permutation summed up by Michael McClure when he spoke of "those spiritual bigots whose eyes are turned upwards towards heaven and can therefore see nothing." The latter often confused introspective analysis with the solving of genuine political problems, leading to the emergence of a strange form of reasoning where metaphor was confused with fact. Thus, the idea that the war was, in essence, a media spectacle, reducing the viewer to a mere spectator with little power to effect political change, was transmogrified into the dictum that the war was not real, and that therefore only by transcending this reality--this illusion--could one hope to come into contact with the higher truth of existence. hallucinogenic states fed and nurtured these phenomenological

LSD, then, was a substance with cultural ramifications on a scale that gave it the potential to facilitate shifts in social perceptions. These gestalts were more likely in an environment where the underpinnings of change had become visible due to conditions of discontent. Such milieus existed on many University campuses, as well as small pockets of bohemianism that survived the so-called beatnik era and had re-emerged in a much different incarnation where acid parties were becoming as commonplace as amphetamines and coffee had been a decade earlier. Still, LSD did not make the transition between the psychiatrist's office--where it had become popular in both psycholitic and psychedelic therapy--and the punch bowl instantaneously; rather, it filtered down through a process of diffusion; first to the artistic and literary community and then, for many reason, to a growing population of Bohemians whose dissatisfaction had already engendered an evangelical mind-set. Henceforth, use of the drug would take on an almost religious mystique among the initiated, whose tendency to divide the population into two distinct categories, consisting of those who had undergone the transformative psychedelic experience and those who had not, further isolated them from a post-war consumer culture which they found spiritually void.

The paradox of new and vibrant forms is that all innovations--whether they be changes in the techniques of cinema, or transformations in the way that people live-- are subject to assimilation, often by the very same social structures whose monolithic presence created a need for an oppositional discourse in the first place.[6] Thus, the hippie subculture, once so named was invariably circumscribed and defined by the nomenclature used to capture the very qualities that gave it an elusive inassimilable

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[6] Horkheimer, Adorno, 12.

character. It was subsequently reduced to a series of slogans, logos, exclamations and various sartorial, musical and cinematic tropes, so self-limiting that by 1967, *I Love You Alice B Toklas*--a Peter Sellers film intended as satire--was easily confused with a fringe reality that had grown like an invading algae around the original counter-culture which had inspired so many imitators.[7] Indeed, as the Diggers attempted to communicate with their symbolic "Death of Hippie, Birth of a Free man" parade, the Haight-Ashbury experiment, once reduced to an easily identifiable type, was in fact, "devoted son of Mass media," rather than the spontaneous eruption of freaks (as they preferred to call themselves) who quietly believed themselves to be progenitors of a new vision of mankind, a new race of *mutants* with a vision for humanity.[8] The emergence of a new vocabulary of signs to describe and encompass such dramatic cultural change, generated a sufficient number of signifiers to produce what Jean Baudrillard would call a *precession of simulacra*; meaning that hippies soon became unnecessary in order for their image to proliferate, reproduce itself into infinity and render them simultaneously innocuous through domestication and threatening as a new mask for an old archetype of primitivistic menace.[9] Thus, by 1969, long-haired ghouls were everywhere: in Saturday morning cartoon shows chasing a gang of teenage

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[7]Baudrillard, 21.

[8] Lee and Schlain, 160. Thompson., 21.

[9]Baudrillard, 75. See also: Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), 134. This tendency to produce discourses around things, thereby objectifying and reifying various phenomenon, is the result of the rapidity with which historical change has been transmuted, over the past century or so, into historical fact--often, before the linguistic cement of which events have been reconstituted has even had a chance to harden. In the McLuhanite era where information can be aqcuired instantaneously, phenomena are given names and their own peculiar nomenclature with which to more quickly evaluate, categorize and define them. This objectification process also has a tendency to neutralize whatever it comes into contact with, using discourse as a reverse alchemy of sorts, the Midas touch that turns living, vibrant entities into stone.

detectives, blowing themselves up in mysterious incendiary bomb-making accidents as reported by all of the New York dailies, touting revolutionary changes in carbonated soft drinks, and transformed into the prototype for the anarcho-terrorist of the future whose existence was never so secure as in the imaginations of FBI and undercover police operatives who worked on COINTELPRO.[10] Indeed, the irony of the Democratic National Convention of 1968, was that over one third, and by some estimates almost half, of all of the protesters present were members of various police organizations working undercover, in some cases acting as provocateurs to give the uniformed Chicago Police an excuse for clubbing their fellow radicals.[11]

The release of AIP's satirical fantasy about the impending youth revolution, *Wild in the Streets*, was allegedly a factor--along with Abbie Hoffman's's facetious remarks about dosing the Chicago water supply--in Mayor Daley's decision to use the police department to, among other things, act as sentinels and guard the City's reservoirs. The film's release date--right around the time of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, did not help matters much, inspiring the mayor to some of the wildest flights of official paranoia ever taken by a public official.[12] Nonetheless, the process by which intimations and vague threats were translated into action by the Chicago Police Department said a great deal about just how much hysteria could be generated by mentioning the initials, LSD.

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[10] Farber, 170.

[11] Morgan, 159.

[12] McGee, 177.

> a police Lieutenant was assigned to contact the commissioner of water and sewers, inform him of the situation, and get sufficient information to protect the city's water. Even after commissioner Jardine ascertained that it would take five tons of LSD--enough LSD to make nine billion tabs--to effectively contaminate the water, the police continued to guard pumping stations and the filtration plants. To the police there just wasn't anything funny about threatening the people of Chicago with a dangerous narcotic. [13]

By August, the city of broad shoulders was preparing for an invasion. National Guardsman mingled with local police and various federal agents--including those from the FBI--all in an attempt to forestall what police experts had already admitted was an exaggerated threat of insurrection. Nonetheless, the Yippies came to Chicago, although their numbers were far less than originally predicted, and included--- according to some estimates--a significant percentage of undercover FBI agents, working with COINTELPRO, whose main job during the convention week was to incite the police to violence through various acts of provocation.[14] Given the presence of such a complex amalgam of radical groups during the convention week, however-- everything from the relatively moderate MOBE to the Yippies and the Black Panthers- -the kids in the street needed little prodding from undercover provocateurs and spent several nights fighting police mace and billy clubs--all part of what was later dubbed a police riot--with rocks and bottles, becoming progressively more radicalized in the ensuing days of the convention.[15] By the middle of the week most of the major press organizations were complaining about the police handling of reporters and cameramen,

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[13]Farber, 153. See also: "Yippie," *Chicago Journalism Review* (May 1969) 1-11.

[14]Farber, 170. See also: *Chicago Tribune* (August 15, 1968), 20.

[15] Farber, 90.

which on several occasions involved beatings of newspersons and film being taken from cameras.

The culmination of a week of protests occurred on the evening of August 28, as a large group of demonstrators found themselves on Michigan Avenue in front of the Convention Center at the Hilton Hotel surrounded by police on one side and National Guardsmen on the other.[16] There are various interpretations regarding the subsequent events, but what almost all agree on is that at some point a police order to clear the streets, incited by a large contingent of radicals chanting slogans and throwing bottles, degenerated into a police riot in which hundreds--many just bystanders who happened to be walking down the street--were beaten with clubs as the crowd began chanting, "The whole world is watching."[17] The evening ended with a large contingent of protesters still chanting in Grant Park, as others--enraged at reckless police tactics--ran amok, starting fires, setting off stink bombs and overturning garbage cans.[18] Even George McGovern was infuriated by what he saw from the window of his hotel room. Moreover, the whole convention was thrown into disarray by the reports of what was happening out on the streets, inspiring mention of Mayor Daley's "gestapo tactics" during George McGovern's nominating speech.[19] While the spectacle would be explained by Mayor Daley as a precaution taken because

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[16] Ibid., 198.

[17] Ibid., 200.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

of an assassination threat against some of the delegates, most believed that more complex factors were needed to explain what had occurred.[20]

Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool*, a film which analyzes the media's role in shaping the events it reports, was released just as the Chicago 8 trial--where several major anti-war protesters and radicals were accused of conspiring to riot (interestingly, no charges were ever brought against the Chicago Police)--was getting underway, providing an audience and a context. On one level, *Medium Cool* operates as a meditation on the function of media in simulating, recreating and constructing perceptions of events.[21] During an intense moment in the film, which replays the events of August 28, tear gas is deployed as someone shouts, "look out Haskell, it's real," simultaneously alerting the director and deepening the ambiguities of a film concerned with the indeterminate epistemology of events. By acknowledging the director in the midst of a politically charged scene the film inadvertently draws attention to itself as a film, an artifact, and a fiction; but ironically, one which has lost its distance from its ostensible subject matter--an unintentional metaphor, perhaps, for the impossibility of complete neutrality in 1969.

If *2001* concerned itself with the utopian fantasy of transcending the reptilian order of *realpolitik* and achieving a higher state of consciousness, *Medium Cool* can be looked at as a meditation on the emergence of self-consciousness as a strategy for counteracting solipsism. Thus, *Medium Cool* functions concomitantly as a film about

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[20]Ibid., 203; CBS convention out-takes, Daley-Cronkite Interview, August 29, 1968. CBS News.

[21]James, *Allegories*, 291.

film, a text on the nature of cinematic texts.[22] It effortlessly and implicitly asks questions such as Who controls information, Where do events diverge from their simulacra, and Do those who record these events shape how their subjects are perceived? The car accidents, at the film's conclusion, involving Robert Forster--who plays the movie's central character, a news-cameraman--parallels one at the beginning, which is coolly photographed by the newsmen before they call for an ambulance. In this way, the evolution from neutral observer, to an active participant swept up in events that demand a response, is metaphorized. The ostensible plot-line, involving a friendship between Forster and a woman who has migrated with her son from West Virginia to find work, is less important than the backdrop of events in Chicago during the convention week as the film climaxes while the two drive around the city frantically looking for a child who has innocently wandered back to his house--a true bystander during a period where none were allowed to be.

Now, with the polarities reversed, not only is the *Cool* observer--who early in the film is described as the human equivalent of a typewriter, a cipher, an objective, detached recording device--entangled in the violent realities of Chicago, he/they have merged with their subject to become part of the manufactured reality which creates, periodizes, and reconciles disparate and fragmented ruptures by imposing narrative in the form of headlines and statistics to give closure to the chaos of unfolding events. Thus, by encapsulating Chicago's brief conflagration as emblematic--a watershed, a defining moment--those who are paid to observe the news unwittingly create it.

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[22]Ibid., 291.

a dialectical relationship always exists between a film and its subject. Invariably, any film becomes its ostensible subject reflexively through the mere act of imposing a framework through which to record a simulation of the events it seeks to describe. Why this reflexivity is so often evident in the filmic texts of the 1960's and not in previous decades may have a lot to do with the radically altered conventions of the genre by 1969. In the previous decade, such realism would have been presented in quotes--sandwiched within the framework of an overly-contrived staginess (the thing that makes many Elia Kazan movies seem so contrived today) or embellished to fit a far more rigid set of cinematic formulas. the successful challenging of these formulas, first by the "B" movies of the post-war era, and then by the undergrounds, made the emergence of a completely self-conscious film like *Medium Cool* inevitable.

As Robert Forster walks amidst the Dantesque underworld of the convention floor, conflagrations flaring up all around him, it is no longer possible to tell whether he is an actor portraying a journalist recording an event, a voyeur capitalizing on the public's need to define and compartmentalize such phenomena by observing them through the distancing medium of film; or, an actor thrust into a maelstrom over which he exerts no real control, and consequentially absorbed into the chaos of the event, and therefore, no longer an actor but an active participant. Nor, in any real sense, do such distinctions matter, because *Medium Cool* is not about Chicago 1968, or about hippies and straights, militant blacks, the March on Washington, Robert Kennedy's assassination, the Vietnam War, the migrant poor of Appalachia, or even how belief systems are filtered through the complex matrices of media to give these things meaning. Rather, *Medium Cool* encompasses all of these, by transcending its own

topicality and revealing the process through which film signifies and contextualizes that which is often far too complex to be conveniently condensed into a consumable form. Simply put, Wexler's film dispenses with the fiction that the chaos of the Sixties can be effectively organized within the circumscribed confines of any artistic medium, or that power can be gained over the occurrence of such events if one somehow manages to define them within a particular discursive framework. This makes *Medium Cool* the first postmodern film, since it neither attempts to fully explain its subject, or itself, but rather shifts the focus to the question of whether truth can ever be represented fully or only in fractured glimpses that distort more than they clarify. The Sixties happened, but they were a myth created by both radical and conservative elements who felt justified by the magnitude of events to reconceptualize the byzantine complexities of the period as Thanatos versus Eros, or a manichean struggle in which light would finally displace the forces of reactionary darkness, a reduction as absurd as it is elegant.

Central to *Medium Cool*'s *cinéma vérité* aesthetic is the notion that events are constructed from the experiences of the characters who become part of them, rather than of their own accord outside the purview of human understanding. However, there is a sense of powerlessness to Wexler's characters who imagine themselves as spectators to history. This is underscored by Forster's own preconception that he is merely an aperture or cipher who exerts no influence upon the essential character of the history that his camera records. This notion is problematized during the film's middle section when he discovers that his stock news footage--most of it uncut and

unused--has been regularly scrutinized by the FBI for information about militant blacks

and anti-war protesters.

When Forster's sound man is accused of being a cop, during a scene where the

two are covering a story on Chicago's South Side, the idea seems frivolous if not

downright absurd. The viewer is initially led to believe that such ideas are merely a

product of the angry imagination's of black Chicagoans intent on putting complex

issues of systemic racism in comprehensible terms. His remonstrations to the contrary,

that he is a "soundman" go unheeded, as one of his accusers says, "we know that one

of the best ways for spying on black people is to impersonate TV-men." While the two

emerge unscathed from this confrontation, Wexler uses it to establish the film's

political tone and to make a metaphor. Up until that point, Forster had treated such

accusations as fringe paranoia. The revelation that he has inadvertently played a key

role in a government agencies attempt to subdue dissent within a democracy is the

catalyst that transforms him into a self-conscious actor within the dramatic stage of

late Sixties political activism. Wexler did not have to fabricate much to make such

ideas plausible, since Chicago in the late Sixties was filled with both police and FBI

operatives working undercover to obtain information regarding both black separatists

and white militants.[23] However, the idea is also used because of its symbolic

ramifications. Forster is not merely a bystander, but a cipher through which a terrified

white middle class interprets the urban violence that he ostensibly records. Even his

choice of what to shoot invariably betrays a certain set of values and preconceptions, a

purposefulness that is dissimulated as objectivity. Forster's news camera carries with it

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[23]Ibid., 289. Farber, 170.

the assumptions of his employers, and once he becomes conscious of one of their more

obvious manipulations, he is no longer entrusted to wield an instrument as powerful as

a film camera.

The same question is raised earlier in the film, when a girlfriend of Forster's

comments on his apparent indifference to the events that his camera captures by

alluding to a scene in the film *Mondo Cane* where a group of turtles--disoriented by

radiation--lay their eggs in the wrong place, thus insuring the extinction of their

offspring. She wonders rhetorically, if the cameraman's job in such a situation would

not be to correct the turtles' mistake rather than watch dispassionately as a minor

ecological tragedy unfolds. This invariably becomes a metaphor for the idea that the

observer has a moral responsibility to become involved. Such reasoning is underscored

by the fact that *Medium Cool* is itself a *loaded* film, which uses puns about "shooting

Film" to point out that the camera is not an innocent object, but a creator of the frame

of reference that it pretends merely to observe. (as if to bring home the point, Wexler

closes the scene with an image of a blow-up of the famous Vietnam photograph

depicting Security Chief Loan shooting a Viet-Cong suspect in the head at point blank

range.) When Peter Boyle asks, "Is that thing loaded?" during a sequence about

suburban women taking shooting lessons to protect themselves against a feared black

insurrection, the question is intended to implicate the cameraman--as much as the

housewives--in the culture of violence by suggesting that no representation can be

entirely neutral. Even had the plot not turned on such a simple issue, as the question of

whether a police agency can examine news footage without permission, the deeper

significance of the camera as an instrument whose use can have explosive ramifications would have been forcefully conveyed through Wexler's clever use of puns.

Moreover, *Medium Cool* manages to articulate the rage, confusion and paradox that created various forms of opposition to an imaginary center against which all the rebellious factions shared a common goal--that of change. By confronting that center--indeed by using as its subject the very discourses which were believed to derive from it--the film reveals it to be composed of little more than fragments that once formed part of a hegemonic whole before the cultural inequities of the post-war era inevitably caused it to collapse. from that collapse emerge the fragmentary pieces of narrative that form the film's core, and allow it to deconstruct common assumptions as aspects of a larger attempt to form a new gestalt from an unfamiliar pattern. Black rage, anti-war protests, drug-induced sensory alterations and police riots all formed part of this new, and ultimately unstable pattern. *Medium Cool* becomes emblematic of the decade's most important artistic statements by attempting to capture the confusion and chaos of the Sixties rather than attempting to impose a limited definition upon those events.[24]

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[24]David Sanjek, "Apocalypse Then." in, *Sights on the Sixties*, Barbara L. Tischler, ed.(New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 144

Chapter 5: *Midnight Cowboy* and the Apotheosis of Discontent.

In *Easy Rider*, the Pioneer western is inverted into an eastern. Two middle-class dropouts, on motorcycles instead of Conestogas, travel back east after making a large sum of money selling cocaine. The planes which take off and arrive continuously at LAX as the exchange is made with a wealthy client (played by Phil Spector), become a symbol of Western culture's deterioration and compartmentalization into the same narrow confines that once inspired people to leave Europe. The film is filled with such metaphors as well as comparisons between pre-industrial ways doing things and their modern equivalents. Lazslo Kovacs emphasizes the power of machines, their speed and their efficiency--as well as their symbolic downside in terms of dehumanization--by making the motorcycles the key emphasis of the film. At one point the two riders stop in a barn to fix a flat tire just as a horse is being fitted with a repaired shoe, giving the camera the opportunity to contrast emblems of two different eras--the motorcycle and the horse--as signs of a dislocation in the social structure.

Only the outsider status of the two riders (played by Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper) allows them the luxury of initially believing they have transcended the materialism of the modern world that they find themselves in. Still, a subsequent visit to a commune, as well as myriad scenes of the expansive western landscape add a certain ambiguity. Fonda and Hopper may be "hippies," but their aspirations are not much different from those of an accountant in New York who would also like to retire and move to Florida. Only their means of locomotion, and the threat that they represent to others is different. LSD is still equated with a religious sacrament, as the two riders--with two local prostitutes accompanying them--prepare for an acid trip in

New Orleans. In fact, since their experience occurs during Mardi Gras, an exuberant festival involving costumed revelers and celebrants walking through the city in a large parade, it is sort of a trip within a trip taken in the heart of the country. Its outcome though, unlike Kubrick's almost hopeful view of what might happen if consciousness could take an affirmative leap into the cosmic realm, is rather negative. The two find themselves quite earthbound, haunted by macabre religious insights and disillusioned. Mardi Gras is not seen as a reaffirmation of pure American values, but as a confirmation of the country's commercialism and gaudiness. In the film's final sequence they are shot by a pair of rather stereotyped rednecks driving a pickup truck. Here, the horror of the concert at Altamont--an event which many regarded as the end of the Sixties--is presaged by several months. The films dramatic coda leaves little doubt that the counterculture is--at least in the eyes of Dennis Hopper--both ambiguous and doomed to failure, its internal contradictions summed up in the characters last exchange of dialogue. "We blew it man, we blew it." "What do you mean we blew it?" "We blew it." Thus, the counterculture--its transition from self-aggrandizement to self-parody--is mirrored by the plot of Hopper's low-budget film. Its simultaneous valorization and exploitation of the "hippies" becomes self-reflexive and finally ambiguous.

Like *Easy Rider*, *Midnight Cowboy* is an Eastern, an inversion of the classic Western formula where a hero makes an untamed wilderness safe for pioneers. Instead, we have a new scenario where a misfit, whose notions about heroism and happiness have been supplied by the mythical archetypes from cinema, moves east to realize those visions. Ironically, John Schlesinger makes New York, and its varied

population of outsiders, lunatics, artists and ethnics, into the receptacle for a Texas boy's fantasies about success. In what may very well be a reference to Robert Frank's *Pull My Daisy*, the young boy who approaches Joe Buck outside a 42nd Street movie theater frequented by hustlers is an Allan Ginsberg look-alike. inside, while the two watch a science fiction film, Joe Buck is entreated to a sexual experience very different from those he might have had in Texas as a teenager. Both the ramifications of real-world hustling, and the fact that his customer doesn't possess the promised twenty-five-dollar fee consolidate Joe Buck's disillusionment with New York, and problematize his feelings regarding his professed heterosexuality.[1] Ultimately, Joe Buck survives, but only after appropriating Ratzo's dream of moving to Florida to start a new life, a fantasy he inherits after his companion dies. In the end, the open road-- that American symbol of the existential-- is superimposed over the two companions. While the two principal characters are far from counterculture types, their status as outsiders puts them in a similar position, garnering the audience's sympathies through the pathos of their heroic failures. By the time of *Midnight Cowboy*, the transposition of various archetypes had culminated in a temporary fad for films about outsiders, whether regular people like Dustin Hoffman in *Straw Dogs*, or a wife on the run for inchoate reasons like Shirley Knight in *The Rain People*.

Central to *Midnight Cowboy's* plot and narrative structure are a series of binary oppositions that operate within one another like the semiotic equivalent of a Chinese box. Superficially, Schlesinger adopts the emerging genre of the buddy film, using the friendship between Ratzo and Joe as a metaphorization for a complex series of

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[1]Archie K. Loss, *Pop Dreams: Music Movies and the Media in the 1960's* (Philadelphia: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1999), 192.

relationships that the film explores in great detail. While Joe Buck is portrayed as naive and credulous, his youthful enthusiasm seems to embody the willingness of a generation whose primary focus appears to be movement. Like the era's *Zeitgeist*, Joe is transient, rootless and without any loyalty to the myths of his own history. His discontent is translated into a desire to escape and reinvent himself. At the film's beginning, he embarks on a bus journey to New York, in order to fulfill what would appear to be a preposterous fantasy: becoming a successful male prostitute by capitalizing on the myth of the Western cowboy. Ironically, his cynical counterpart Ratzo Rizzo, is a prisoner of tradition. Immobilized by a bad leg, and surviving on cheap con games and what he can steal from local fruit markets, Ratzo is at once a symbol of failure--a living repudiation of the Horatio Alger myth--and a personification of the cynicism that gripped the Counterculture at the end of the decade.

When Ratzo recounts to Joe the mundane details of his father's desperate life as a shoeshine boy, for what amounted to "a lousy handful of change for eighteen hours work," he is not merely waxing sentimental over a life wasted, but explaining his own refusal to buy into the myth that hard work alone can bring sucess. When the two later visit his father's grave, they are pictured from a distance walking together over an abondoned elevated track, two loners traversing the Dantesque landscape of New York's supressed unconscious, amidst the falsity of glamorous billboards promising bank loans to anyone lucky enough to make the trek across town. At the cemetery, while Ratzo communes silently with the dead, Joe--whose relatives are seen only in flashback sequences that are self-consciously celluloid, as if to suggest that their

origins lie in the fictive world of cinematic archetypes--stands next to his friend to protect him from the rain, the brim of his Stetson appearing to extend wide enough to act as an umbrella. This is not merely a symbol for the bond between two friends, but the umbilicus that ties two halves of the same soul together.

Ratzo--cynical, tradition-bound, tubercular and lacking a vision to anchor his intelligence--is filled with anger at the pretenses of a society that willfully excludes him. This hostility is made apparent when he is approached by an over-solicitous hostess at a downtown party inhabited by artsy Factory types. Her offer, to lend him her apartment key in order to use her shower and "clean up" is turned down both out of pride and from a sense that to accept would be to abdicate to a definition of himself as a cripple. The split screen technique Schlesinger uses to accentuate the contrasting characteristics of his protagonists, reveals Joe, at the same moment, losing himself amidst a swirling multi-media barrage of experimental films, Day-Glo-painted nude bodies, disorienting psychedelic music and Brenda Vacarro's cleavage. It is as if to suggest that Joe Buck is the personification of the hipster ideal, with all of its untenable contradictions. He is insubstantial, adaptable, self-possessed and without a history. At one point he stands with Vicarro in front of a multifaceted mirror which exponentializes his reflection. While she explores the terrain of his arms, perhaps to convince herself that they do, in fact, posses substance, he stares transfixed at his own image--a product of a mythical discourse that has reproduced itself until the original referent has disappeared amongst the play of signifiers. No better metaphor could have been used to show how at that moment, in 1969, cinematic representation had become impossible in any traditional sense of the word, replaced instead with an irony

conveyed through the ludicrousness or repetition, or the spectacle of deconstructing the loaded iconography of film history, by using it as a way of humiliating the unsuspecting into the realization that they have been duped. Only here, it is not only the cowboy-poseur who is unsuspecting, but the downtown bohemian types as well, who may have really believed that they were doing a Texas greenhorn and his crippled friend a favor by inviting them to a party. In exchange all that either is asked for in return, is their presence; ironically, intended--as was the presence of so many "street people" and "real-life" types at those decadent Warhol bashes at decade's end--to inject reality into the failing fantasy of downtown culture.

It is Joe's inchoate desire which drives the film's disjointed narrative structure however, uniting dream fragments, embellished memories, advertising jingles and the protagonist's protean self-definition into a narrative held together by what might be described as a locus of Lacanian desire: more specifically, a desire for that which he cannot formulate causing him to construct its essence from the reservoir of images that define his character. This would be a desire which "points to that void or real in human existence around which interpretation in the registers of the imaginary and/or symbolic grows up."[2] Thus, Joe responds to both the ubiquitous discourse of success--even when it runs counter to his experience--and the psychological "other" of homosexuality, which manifests its presence throughout as an endless juxtaposition of hustler cowboys, by reaffirming his masculinity even as its various configurations become more rigidly circumscribed. Invariably, he becomes aware that his narrow self

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[2]Henry W. Sullivan, "Homo Sapiens or Homo Desiderians: The Role of Desire in Human Evolution," from *Lacan and the Subject of Language*, eds. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan. Mark Bracher (London: Routledge, 1991), 40. Surber, 201.

conception does not fit with the reality that he finds himself sucked into. Jobless, alone, and despondent over not being able to make it on his own terms, he has a chance second meeting with Ratzo--who conned him the first time they met--and, despite the mutual epithet slinging, accepts the con-man's offer to move in with him in the abandoned building where he resides. Joe's unusual friendship with Ratzo can be read on multiple levels, some of which indicate a growing acknowledgment of a repressed desire that manifests itself as homosexuality. These covert homoerotic impulses are channeled safely (meaning, without damaging Joe's ego structure) through his platonic partnership with Ratzo, each finding in the other what might be missing in himself.

John Schlesinger, given his associations with the downtown art scene of the East Village, could not have been impervious to the changes that were transforming the identity of the gay community in New York, and by extension the rest of the country, in 1969. The Stonewall riots in the West Village, which signaled the beginnings of a new militancy amongst gay rights advocates, and the subsequent-- although perhaps unrelated--decision by the American Psychiatric Association, to remove homosexuality as a pathological diagnostic category, gave gays a new sense of legitimacy. Moreover, gay rights groups, following the example of women's liberation, had adopted the ethos of the personal being interchangeable from the political, thereby legitimizing one's way of being as a political stance. This was, in turn, a derivation of one of the underlying tenets of New Left politics, which asserted that one's politics were more appropriately conveyed through lifestyle and attitude rather than by imbibing an ossified set of pre-digested doctrines. The "Days of Rage" in Chicago late

that year, put into practice what had perhaps best remained a theory: the notion that

political action was not only a catalyst for change but a form of catharsis.[3] Similarly,

conflagrations of gay activism gave a submerged and repressed identity--one that was

invalidated for decades by being labeled an illness--a sense of unity that swelled its

ranks at the turn of the decade.

Schlesinger capitalized on this newfound visibility by using "gay" characters of

all varieties: street people, hustlers, artists and even rich businessmen. Moreover, he

intentionally used homosexuality as a metaphorization of America's underbelly, its

locus of unresolved carnal desire, to underscore how easily the obsessive mandate of

the work-ethic could be undermined. Indeed, it often appears to undermine itself, as

when Barnard Hughes--playing a rich midwestern businessman in town for a "paper

manufacturers convention"--goads Jon Voight (Joe Buck) into beating him with a

phone receiver. Schlesinger, however, is ambiguous about homosexuals in his film;

they are often portrayed as filled with a lust for all kinds of mindless consumption,

which adds to the director's metaphor about capitalism as an empty spectacle which

creates fantasies that it cannot fulfill. Yet, the repressed desire that is at the center of

the human void called Joe Buck, is one of the film's most humanizing mechanisms, and

indeed fuels the relationship between the two principal characters.

Of course, it is Joe's loneliness amidst the excesses of incessant capitalist

success based discourse that is at the center of Schlesinger's critique of American

culture. Joe Buck has frequent flashbacks showing his grandmother Sally. These

recollections appear idealized, and it becomes apparent that the ubiquitous voice of

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[3]Kirpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973), 602.

advertising which streams from his portable radio in a constant flow of reassuring messages about success has become a sort of surrogate grandparent for him, soothing his anxiety over finding himself displaced in a strange city with the palliative effect of capitalism. The mantra of acquisition, success and immersion in commodities becomes a buffer against the loneliness which is the flip-side of Joe Buck's experience in New York. The smooth intonations of advertising notwithstanding, Joe Buck's financial situation worsens. Schlesinger uses Buck's descent into temporary poverty as a way of exposing the falsity of the capitalist discourse; only Dorothea Lange, with her famous Depression-era photographic juxtapositions of impoverished Dust Bowl families dwarfed by images of billboards showing commodities, comes as close as Schlesinger to showing the contrasts between ideals and reality in western culture. Invariably, Joe Buck is left with his loneliness, his memories and the empty payoffs that his myth-immersed dreams have given him.

Schlesinger's frequent references to Buck's sometimes confused sexuality seem to underscore the metaphor regarding societal ideas about success in the modern world. To complete a sexual act is a consummation, a fulfillment, of capitalist desires; but Joe is rarely succesful in his sexual endeavors, and when he is--such as in a movie theater when he hustles for money by making out with a young homosexual--it often raises troubling questions about his own identity and the meaning of his desires. Ironically, when Joe is most successful hustling--such as in his encounter with Brenda Vacarro--he is least successful performing the sexual act, almost as if he has become aware that the procedure itself has become empty, distasteful and without feeling. Vacarro's clever way of helping Joe connect with his feelings is merely a temporary

respite, for in the end, the self-generated rhetoric and ubiquitous calls of the advertisers do not prevent Joe from subordinating his own dream to Ratzo's. Ironically, Ratzo's death becomes a form of resurrection for Joe Buck, who adapts only by recognizing his own inability to do something exceptional. In short, he has become like everyone else in Schlesinger's America: a conforming drone who reaffirms the system by implicitly accepting its scale of values and internalizing that paradigm in order to explain his own failures, rather than questioning the validity of the discourse which made them inevitable.

It is Ratzo's vision which is most pure and ascetic. At one point early in the film he tells Joe that "the two basic items necessary to sustain life are sunshine and coconut milk." Unlike Joe, Ratzo's experience as a hustler in New York has convinced him that only a simpler life would be acceptable. Interestingly, the disparity between Joe and Enrico (Ratzo) parallels that between a generation of immigrants during the early part of the century--who came to the United States believing the myths--and a subsequent generation, their sons and daughters of the 1930's, who began subscribing to utopian theories such as Marxism, because they provided an alternative way of explaining how hard work brought them no closer to success. Similarly, Ratzo yearns for a way to escape the cycle of poverty that has invariably turned him into a nickel and dime con man. Joe embodies the innocence that the physically--and perhaps psychologically--crippled Ratzo has lost, thereby making him a figure of sublimated erotic desire.

Reality however, dawns on Joe Buck only in small incremental ironies, often at humiliating cost to his already fractured self-image. Towards the end of the film, while

desperately seeking money in order to buy Ratzo a bus ticket to Florida--in hopes of saving him from the consumptive illness that has left him bed-ridden--Joe Buck suddenly sees in all of the fake Times Square cowboys who prostitute their images in dark movie theaters, an escape from his circumstances. His subsequent encounter with a middle aged homosexual businessman is both terrifying and identity-affirming. On one level Joe Buck sells out his own fantasy for Ratzo's, but on another, he suddenly realizes the cheap humor in his own last name. After accepting a small token of appreciation from his John, Buck remonstrates for more money. The beating that he gives to his victim is portrayed mostly in flashbacks and seems as much a product of Buck's own imagination. Perhaps, upon sensing the emptiness of his own mythological identity, Joe is forced to confront the violence which is at the center of the cowboy myth--indeed, the American myth--and achieves a certain kind of redemption only by boarding a bus to Florida with his ailing friend.

Ratzo's death--shortly after crossing into the Sunshine State--parallels the symbolic death of Joe Buck, whose rebirth as a Floridian is confirmed after replacing his cowboy duds for khaki pants and a sport shirt. Schlesinger's purpose here is not to sentimentalize his characters as Hopper does in *Easy Rider,* rather he uses them as synechdochal emblems, each personifying an element of the American fringe. The film's ambiguous ending suggests that Schlesinger is not applauding the survival of those who possess no true historical memory so much as he is commenting on the ability of the larger culture to colonize and absorb even the most singular discourses. Joe Buck, who is shallow, naive and a product of every movie that he has seen or heard of, is ultimately adaptable, a product of that culture rather than a true outsider to

it. Ratzo is an outsider, a person on the fringe whose existence is an embarrassment. As the bus continues down the highway with Ratzo's mythical Florida reflected through the transparent window, Joe holds his friend by the shoulder in a closing shot that renders both insubstantial to the point of invisibility: one from the effects of death, the other from having become the sum total of the mythology of the culture that has produced him. In the director's view, neither state is desirable. The Sixties are over, and the only revolution to have occurred is apparently a soulless technological one.

Conclusion: The Institutionalization of the Subversive.

Surely, the 1960's needed its myths, its Bonnies and Clydes, its Jackies and

Johns, its Abbies and Jerrys and its Ratzo Rizzos and John Bucks. Dualities are

inevitably imposed over complex realities, and the hippies of Haight-Ashbury--even as

they became aware of their communities' plunge into self caricature--could not help

but revel in the ambiguities of their rapidly proliferating image and invite untold

thousands to share an inchoate and unarticulated fantasy, any more than Mayor Daley

could control his urge to fabricate assassination plots from rumors to justify the

excesses of the Chicago police in the Summer of 1968. This is not to compare the two,

since the latter was unarguably more egregious; but the bad press over LSD during the

same period became a part of the public discourse, and was used as vociferously by

countercultural partisans, such as the SDS offshoot, Weatherman, as by the most

conservative medical practitioners to draw a line between the powerful and the

marginalized. Such distinctions usually bordered on the fictitious, sentimentalizing the

cultural complexities of the decade through a desire to take sides rather than a need to

extract some truths from the dense clumps of rumor that defined the pre-apocalyptic

landscape of the end of the decade.

The late Sixties confluence of genre cinema, underground film and the

alienated sensibilities of the Counterculture contributed to a novel synthesis of

disparate formal structures both conducive to, and at odds with the transformative

characteristics of art--namely, its ability to draw on metaphor in order to question

established notions. Conversely, the emergence of new narrative styles--such as

Kubrick's use of abstract images at the end of *2001* to illustrate the transformation

from a linear technology based view of human evolution to a metaphysic of transcendence--exacted a price on the subversive qualities of cinematic representation through the very act of assimilating film's tendency to radically deconstruct traditional relationships through an expanding vocabulary of visual reconfigurations. Thus *Midnight Cowboy* juxtaposes the institutionalized iconography of the Frontiersman--a major trope in the mythology of manifest destiny and Nineteenth Century westward expansion--with a newer enviuronment where the only cowboys remaining sit laconically with homosexual men in midtown movie theaters watching fantasy representations of a lifestyle recontextualized as camp. The contrast becomes a formal device for critiquing the twin notions of masculinity and conquest while clearly denoting their transmogrification into fictions of reflexive gesture; itself a mask unconsciously worn to conceal society's own failure to live up to its most puerile myths.[1] These myths operate in reverse as well, assimilating and domesticating the very images and tropes used to counter them. This process by which culture revitalizes its own discourse by absorbing antagonistic and viable critiques, thereby recontextualizing them as ironic reaffirmations, caricature or defanged artifacts, was called *repressive desublimation* by Marcuse, who believed that capitalist societies in the West were no longer amenable to the normal varieties of criticism, since the very assumptions upon which such critiques were based, were themselves called into question.[2]

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[1]James, *Allegories,* 271, 278; Umberto Eco, "The World Of Charlie Brown" from *Apocalypse Postponed* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 40, 41.

[2]Marcuse, 68.

All of these films, then, are concerned with issues of change and discontent as it existed in the culture in the late Sixties. This desire--to transgress boundaries and to apotheosize discontent--is expressed far differently in each film. In *Bonnie and Clyde* this anger at the status quo is expressed through the valorization of outlaw types and a new flexibility in playing with genre conventions. The film demands that its audience bring the marginalized experience of the outsider to the center of their awareness despite its inherent violence. In *2001*, the change is a shift in consciousness that represents the next step in evolution, a journey which takes place at the periphery of our ontological boundaries, both literally and figuratively. Kubrick suggests, through his use of psychedelic light show imagery, that a gestalt shift may occur through the radical restructuring of priorities that was often the result of an intense acid trip.

Such radical gestalt shifts often facilitated the development of self-reflexivity. This dual awareness, of both the reality of existence as it is perceived by others, and that reality deconstructed as a series of theatrical gestures and conditioned responses, is at the center of the final two keystone Sixties films that have been examined here. In *Midnight Cowboy*, the lives of outsiders are again the focus, but here the concern is primarily with modes of representation and the way that desire is coopted even before it is recognized as desire. Only when Joe Buck realizes that his dreams have not been his own, but a complex product of myriad, and often contradictory, cultural discourses, is he liberated from the burden of having to live up to an artificially idealized model. Similarly, Haskell Wexler uses the cinematic process itself--the very idea of representation--as the focus of *Medium Cool*. This is perhaps the most sophisticated of all American films of the Sixties, transcending both the idealized

images of marginality and the notion of psychedelically transformed gestalts by posing the question of whether any sort of representation is possible at all. Instead Wexler uses film to interrogate the distorting nature of film--something also done by Andy Warhol, but using a far different approach--and raises difficult questions about the indeterminate nature of cinematic texts and their tendency to lock events into artificially circumscribed relationships of linear causality. Only through questioning this process does the artist--rather than his fictional subject--gain a true measure of freedom through the insight that history is composed of interconnected events whose precise relationship to one another is often more a function of the historicizing aperture than of the phenomenon that it describes. While such insights leave history without any meaningful form of closure, they also reveal hidden gestalt shifts that operate under the surface of its myriad ruptures, connecting them in Byzantine configurations not easily imaginable without the use of meta-discourse.[3]

While the hippie archetype had been a short-lived phenomenon, many of the characteristics of the counterculture seemed to permeate the images of later films that had no discernable connection to radical politics or drugs. Unlike El Topo, and *Easy Rider*, films like *Midnight Cowboy*, *The Rain People* and even the Westerns of Sergio

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[3] The two final films discussed illustrate the transition between the mid and late sixties through their use of self reflexivity to point out the ultimate falseness of representation and the incompleteness of mythical archetypes, since both invoke these concepts as cinematic tropes in order to expose their vacuity, their shallowness. Thus, the mythologization of youth culture begins to appear to be less a transformative act than a substitution of one paradigm for another. Ironically, this comes at the precise point when the events in Vietnam and Chicago trigger a violent response from politically radical student groups, who quickly descend into the solipsistic affectations of middle class revolutionaries. Moreover, the failure of the New Left as a political philosophy--at least in terms of its application as a set of ideological precepts (a political rather than social failure) reflects the insights of Wexler's film which contends that even political action is cut off from the realities it seeks to address through the fragmentary apertures of modern consciousness, which reduce events to mere disconnected spectacles rather than see them as reflections of processes that can be ameliorated. However, such amelioration is problematized by the difficulty in distinguishing the mediating effect of representation from its ostensible subject--the latter often lost amidst the layers of signification which add sedimentary piles of ambiguity to history.

Leone--culminating in his opus, *Once Upon A Time In The West*--did not allude to the counterculture and yet they resonated with the same anger cynicism and desire for transcendence that was explicit in a film like *2001*. Of course, even Kubrick's film was not intended as a discourse on altered states of consciousness the way the San Francisco light shows of Ben Van Meter and Jordan Belson were. Nonetheless, Kubrick imitated these artists and in the process transformed solipsistic visions of personal spiritual transformation into a Wagnerian opera of the metaphysical that centered around the necessity of a shift in consciousness in order for human evolution to continue. The metaphor combined with the imagery to create the first bona-fide Midnight movie, one which, by the early Seventies, answered a question that nobody had actually articulated: Where had all the flower children gone? They were in various movie theaters watching a high-tech conceptualization of an acid trip. Once commercial media had effectively appropriated the psychedelic discourse, the culture that had created it, lost the energy necessary to sustain itself. If tripping--the most visceral and immediate experience one could have--could be so adeptly translated into the language of cinema, the experiential aspect of street culture that sustained the hippies ever so briefly quickly vanished. Film had unwittingly achieved what Richard Nixon had only partially succeeded in doing through social programs aimed at assimilating elements believed to be potentially threatening: it had coopted the counterculture, by reconceptualizing its ideals as the apotheosis of altered consciousness. This vulgarization of ontology went largely unnoticed, but this bothered few since the expensive special effects were too dazzling to permit immediate reflection in most cases anyway.

Such a process however, did not imply the continuing hegemony of institutionalized economic elites over film production. The cinematic rebellions of late Sixties American film--such as *Bonnie and Clyde, 2001, Easy Rider* and *Medium Cool*--may have been little more than pleasant simulacra, but they did, at the very least, serve as a kind of metaphor for shifts taking place in the industry outside of the theater. Even though top-grossing independent films like *Easy Rider* were rare, they signaled a shift in sensibility away from the monolithic studio system, and its more restrictive relations of production, to a more radical form of critique ostensibly aimed at the very social forces which produced the studio monoliths in the first place. This is not to suggest that critique did not exist in American Cinema prior to the ruptures of the nineteen Sixties--it is prominent in film noir and many of the "B" movies, albeit in a somewhat disguised or uneven form--merely that with the social conflagrations of the latter decade came a more focussed and conscious critique of how a technocratic social order might operate subliminally (which should not be translated to read consciously, or with conspiratorial intent) to encode a certain set of social precepts within the texts of the popular arts. This may explain both the Sixties cinema's hostility towards the medium of television, and its reflexive analysis of how that medium functioned in the lives of its viewers who--as in *Medium Cool, Petulia,* and most overtly, *Midnight Cowboy*--were often seen as passive receptacles for a value system that they accept as their own. The awareness of this false consciousness is made only at the expense of their own homeostasis, as if to suggest that with full awareness comes a loss of stability, since the fantasies that characters like Jon Voight's Texan have made their own prove too thin and shallow to be maintained, and yet operate as

the one thing which keeps him from slipping into a void of cynicism. In *Medium Cool*, this void is exactly what allows Robert Forster's TV cameraman character to give up his pretense of objectivity and to involve himself in the life of an émigré from West Virginia and her son. The fact that all of this takes place against a backdrop of the 68 Democratic Convention--an abyss around which the characters negotiate their tenuous connection with a complex web of traditional social bonds--only heightens the sense of unreality and danger of a society whose breakdown seems imminent.

That breakdown would not occur in dramatic fashion, rather it would be conceptualized throughout the cinematic discourses of the Seventies as a background of animosity and cynicism against which all other events would occur. Politicians lie, TV holds out false promises, and the social system is so corrupt that even lunatics can become heroes. The underlying discourses of *All the President's Men*, *Network* and *Taxi Driver* were a long way from the Old Hollywood aperture which informed both the size and scope of the outside world. Even in mid-Sixties experiments like *Lord Love a Duck* and *The President's Analyst* the break with faith in the social structure was not complete. Compared with the varieties of disenfranchisement that came at the end of the decade--*Diary of a Mad Housewife*, *Catch-22*, the Robert Wiseman documentary, *High School*, and even Paul Mazusky's deceptively light *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice*--the madcap potshots taken at the system in these films appear like burlesque spoofs. The exception to this, of course, would be Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove*, which opened the door to overt and irreverent social satire. Robert Altman's *Mash* would never have been possible without Kubrick's groundbreaking satire of the most taboo of all social subjects, the cold war. Seventies films, as diverse

as Kubrick's own *Clockwork Orange, Sugarland Express, Chinatown, The Godfather* and Robert Redford's underrated *The Candidate*, all maintained and developed their critical stance towards the *establishment*, which was portrayed variously as a distant and ineffectual bureaucracy, a paternalistic monster, a corrupt syndicate, a cabal, or a vehicle for the political aspirations of cynical former-idealists. In all its various manifestations in Seventies Cinema, the larger society is a framework against which to test one's powers of disbelief. In twenty years, the social structure had been converted from a paternalistic edifice of inscrutable complexity to a kind of Berlin Wall, whose intentions were made obvious by the ever-expanding mural of cinematic graffiti which now covered its surface as a testament to those whose idiosyncratic perspectives had yet to be incorporated into its discourse. The counterculture may have died with *Easy Rider*, and in later more contrived representations, such as the simulations of the Columbia protests in *Strawberry Statement*, and *Zabriskie Point's* scathing caricature of American Commodity culture, but its ethos lived on through the archetypes of film during the next decade, recontextualized as glib slogans, straw-men characterizations and ultimately, the revisionist cliches of the Reagan era.

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