Sex, Drugs and Protest: The Film Industry and the Counterculture

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> "But of course! — the *feeling* — out here at night, free, with the motor running and the adrenaline flowing, cruising in the neon glories of the new American night — it was very Heaven to be the first wave of the most extraordinary kids in the history of the world"
>
> Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968)

Abstract

The American counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s was a pivotal moment, not only in the American history but in that of the Western world. During the so-called "Woodstock years" the rejection of the cultural, political and social norms of the Age of Ike *prevailed alongside with the experimentation of drugs and the sexual liberation.*

*Hollywood provided "*audiences with a new set of representations for constructing the world*" (Ryan and Kellner 17). The purpose of the present paper is to show how, through two films and a new cinematic genre, Hollywood and the film industry not only illustrated the kaleidoscopic world of the counterculture but also played a major role as a vehicle of the countercultural movement. Stuart Rosenberg's film* Cool Hand Luke *(1967) pictures the rejection of authority as well as the alienation felt by many youths at the time. As for Roger Corman's film* The Trip *(1967) it portrays the prevalence of drugs and notably LSD which spawned the social and cultural upheaval of the epoch. Finally, I would like to shed light on a rather despised cinematic genre: pornography. Indeed, I want to show how hardcore pornography, with films such as* Behind the Green Door *(1972) and* The Resurrection of Eve *(1973), both produced by the Mitchell brothers, along with Joe Sarno's softcore film* Abigail Leslie is Back in Town (*1974) not only reflected the sexual liberation but also laid emphasis on the question of women's sexuality.*

During the 1960s the Hollywood system of film making underwent dramatic economic and institutional changes. As the old studio system was progressively disappearing, a growing number of films were put together by independent producers, as Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner note, "this development helped facilitate the production of more socially critical and innovative films" (6).

In addition, the abrogation of the Motion Picture Production Code (a.k.a. the Hays Code), which had been governing, since 1938, what was permissible to show or not on screen, combined with the inception of a new rating system in 1966, made it possible to deal with previously forbidden subject matter. Yet, the crucial reason for those changes was mainly due to the liberal and radical social upheavals which were taking place at the core of American society: the Civil Rights movement, the antiwar protest, feminism, gay liberation and the hippie counterculture. All these social upheavals contributed to the event of a "New Hollywood" or, what Seth Cagin and Philip Dray term the "Political Hollywood" (xi)[1]. Films began depicting the dramatic changes which were taking place within American society as they began transcoding "a growing sense of

[1] See also Ryan and Kellner, especially chapter 1, for an insightful analysis on this trend. My present paper is greatly indebted to their compelling study.

alienation from the dominant myths and ideals of U.S. society" (Ryan and Kellner 17), consequently subverting the traditional representational strategies of the film industry. New figures of social understanding and behaviour appeared on screen. The most important representation of this new trend was probably that of "the self or subject in rebellion against conservative authority and social conformity" (Ryan and Kellner 18) alongside with the portrayals of drug-induced subjectivity and sexuality, which came to be viewed as a new territory to be explored rather than as something nefarious or obscene to be repressed (Ryan and Kellner 18).

Most film historians[2] point to 1967 as a "revolutionary" year in the Hollywood film industry. Indeed, several major films produced that year redefined the prevailing representation of American society: *Cool Hand Luke* (Stuart Rosenberg), *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer), *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn) and *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols).

Alienation and Rebellion in *Cool Hand Luke* (1967)

Stuart Rosenberg's film, *Cool Hand Luke*, based on the eponymous novel by Donn Pearce, perfectly illustrates this new cinematic trend as the tagline, carried by the theatrical release poster, attests to: "The man.... and the motion picture that simply do not conform".

Lucas Jackson, having committed an act of social defiance, is sentenced to two years in a Georgia Road prison camp. His indomitable character will bestow upon him the status of a "near-mystical rebel" (Geoff Pevere) among the other inmates. His rebellious attitude is symbolized by what Dragline, the prisoners's leader, refers to as "that Luke smile of his" and his repeated escape attempts, which will result in harsh punishment and humiliation. Luke's third and final run for freedom will end tragically. Douglas Brode has cogently argued that the chain gang stood clearly, at the time, as "a metaphor of the American system" (Brode 195), while Luke's rebellious character emerged as a symbol of the individual standing against the social rigidities of the Establishment.[3]

In the opening sequence a parkmetre's red flag, bearing the letters of the word VIOLATION, pops across the screen, foreshadowing one of the key themes of the film: anti-authoritarianism versus authoritarianism. Indeed, these parkmetres, which Luke is decapitating with a pipe cutter, may well be viewed as metaphors of the System's social regimentation. An aspect which is enhanced by the way Paul Newman is filmed in this scene, conveying the impression that he is trapped between the two ranks of parkmetres (Figure 1).

[2] Several studies point to this same conclusion. See Cagin and Dray, especially 22-26 and chapter 2, Ryan and Kellner chapter 1.

[3] For a more detailed study of the rebel figure in film, see Joe Morella and Edward Z. Epstein's study *Rebels. The Rebel Hero in Films*, especially chapters 4, 5 and 6.

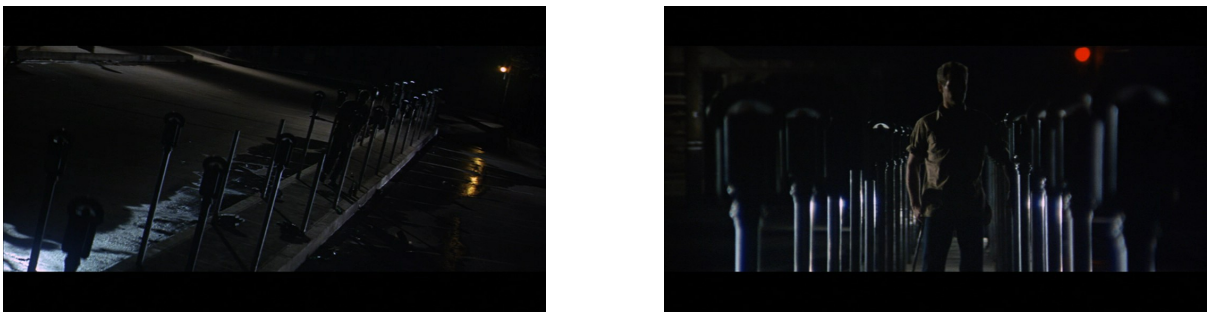

Figure 1: *Cool Hand Luke* (1967), Stuart Rosenberg.

The film's anti-Establishment's stance is underpinned at a very early stage by the speeches delivered by the Captain,[4] who runs the camp, and Carr, the prison floor walker. On the Newmeats's[5] arrival, the Captain emphatically reminds them that they will: "[have to] fit in ... [and] learn the rules". As for Carr's ritualistic recitation of the camp's litany of rules and punishments, it has an almost hypnotic effect on the new convicts, who listen passively while being indoctrinated by the staccato of the recurring sentence: "Any man forgets [one of the rules] spends a night in the box."[6]

Both speeches clearly emphasize the fact that the institution hinges on routine. A routine Luke will progressively disrupt as the plot unfolds, notably in the so-called tar sequence, when he influences the Bull Gang[7] to complete a road-paving job well before the end of the day, thus circumventing the rules of the road prison. As a consequence, Luke becomes a problem for the prison authorities as he questions their procedures and yet cannot be punished for doing so.

Another aspect of the System's repressive nature is embodied in the character of the Walking Boss Godfrey. Boss Godfrey symbolises the relentless and inhuman aspects of authority. He doesn't utter a single word throughout the entire film[8] and wears mirrored sun glasses remaining eyeless thus stressing the faceless and threatening nature of authority.

During the film the camera regularly shows the reflection on his sunglasses, and the close shots on them fill the screen. The mirror effect of these shots imparts the impression, as Stuart Rosenberg claims, that the viewers are made to see what he sees as everything is reflected back at them creating, therefore, a clear sense of distantness with the character. By laying emphasis on Boss Godfrey's impassiveness and muteness during the whole film, Rosenberg portrays the figure of authority as being unable to communicate except through violence and brutality. While the prisoners are working on the Hard Road, Boss Godfrey is handed a rifle by Rabbit so he can shoot a bird. While watching the scene Tattoo asks "Don't he ever talk?" As the gun shot is heard and the bird killed, Luke tells his inmate "I think he's just said somethin'". This scene may be viewed as a warning to the Bull Gang, as to what freedom would cost them if they attempted to flee the chain gang.

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[4] In the shooting version of the film's script the Captain is described as a "bureaucrat" F, a way of underlining the inhumane aspect of authority. The first eight pages of the script's shooting version, which concern the description of the characters, are numbered A to H.

[5] In prison lingo the term Newmeat refers to a person entering prison for the first time. In his novel, Pearce uses the term "Newcocks" (59) clearly laying emphasis on the word's sexual innuendo.

[6] The sentence is repeated ten times.

[7] In the shooting version of the script, the Bull Gang (the prisoners working on the "Hard Road", Pearce 46) is compared to "a machine" (7) shedding light on the dehumanising effect of the carceral system.

[8] In Donn Pearce's novel the Walking Boss speaks only episodically. After Luke's second failed attempt to escape, he addresses the other prisoners with harsh and minatory words: "All right. There he is. There's your Cool Hand Luke. If you all don't want to end up just like him, you'd *all* better git your minds right. Ah mean *right!*" (Pearce 254).

Luke's struggle against the institution sheds light on another major aspect depicted in the film, the inability to communicate, not only with the authorities but also across generations. Luke not only challenges the prison camp rules but he also disrupts the rules established by his inmates within the "caged world" (Pearce 3) and enforced by the convicts' self-appointed leader: Dragline. On the evening of their arrival in the barracks Dragline reminds the Newmeats of the rules:

> Fasten your flap! All you Newmeats gonna have to shape up fast and hard on this gang. We got rules here an'in order to learn them, you gotta keep your ears open and your mouths shut.

Luke, who is filmed standing at a distance from the seated group of inmates, appears isolated, highlighting his outsider status. Having drawn Dragline's attention "What we got here?", Luke in his reply — "you've got a Lucas Jackson" — clearly disrupts the rules established among the inmates as Society Red points out: "You don't have a name here until Dragline gives you one." Luke's fierce sense of individualism — "*a* Lucas Jackson" — conveys his refusal of having his individuality and selfhood abolished by the carceral system,[9] a system which erases the inmates' "Free World" name by branding them with a number and a moniker which fits either their personality or some other characteristic[10].

Luke's defiant reaction annoys Dragline who snaps: "Maybe we oughta call *it* No-Ears. You don't listen much, do you, boy?", deliberately discarding him as an individual. Luke's disillusioned answer – "Haven't heard that much worth listening to. Lot of guys layin' down a lot of rules and regulations" – induces, however, a feeling of discomfort and unease among the inmates.

His indomitable character is illustrated later on, during his pair spar with Dragline, when he repeatedly refuses to go down, earning the respect of Dragline and the other inmates. Meanwhile, Luke is increasingly seen by the guards as a symbol of defiance and a threat to the institution.

Luke's indomitability will resonate later in the film after his first escape attempt, during a Fourth of July celebration. He is caught and shackled in full sight of all the inmates who are working on a roadside ditch. His insolent attitude infuriates the Captain who retaliates by publicly striking him down. As Luke tumbles down the littered embankment, the Captain addresses the prisoners: "What we got here is failure to communicate. Some men you just can't reach, [...]" foreshadowing Luke's final words: "What we got here is *a* failure to communicate..." Although this scene epitomizes the character's refusal in wanting to conform and abide by the rules, the scene may also be viewed as a breakdown in communication between the older – the Captain – and younger – Luke – generations.[11]

However, despite its obvious social and political aspects, *Cool Hand Luke* is also fraught with spiritual and religious meaning. Religious symbolism and references are deeply embedded within the narrative; as Neil P. Hurley has convincingly shown, the narrative's formal pattern can

[9] See the British television series *The Prisoner*, which was aired from September 1967 to February 1968, starring Patrick McGoohan. See especially episode 11 entitled *Change of Mind* in which the hero, Number 6, is ostracised for refusing to be part of the social group and accused by the inhabitants of the Village of being a "Rebel. Disharmonious Rebel."

[10] Blind Dick, who was convicted of raping five girls in three days, or Stupid Blondie described in the shooting script as a "big, dumb, [and] likable oaf" etc.

[11] See Miloš Forman's film *Taking Off* (1971) which portrays, in a rather humorous way, the generational impossibility to communicate.

be related to the Life of Christ. A number of narrative motifs signal this; I shall analyze the most prominent ones.

While playing cards with the other convicts, Luke, who has been allotted number 37, successfully bluffs his opponents. Having won the pot, Dragline anoints him with his prison name: Cool Hand Luke.

> Dragline (laughing): Nothin'. A handful of nothin' (To the losing card-playing convict). You stupid mullet-head. He [Luke] beat you with nothin.
> Luke: Yeah, well, sometimes nothin' can be a real Cool Hand.

Dragline's repetition of the word "nothin'", as well as Luke's reiteration of it, combined with his prison number may well be seen as a biblical reference to the Gospel of Luke, "For with God nothing shall be impossible" (*The Holy Bible Authorised King James Version*, Luke 1: 37), which could, therefore, be read here as "For with *Luke* nothing shall be impossible."

This is illustrated in the famous egg eating contest scene, when he performs the incredible deed of eating fifty hard-boiled eggs in one hour. Such a deed may well be viewed as a kind of miracle, an aspect clearly emphasised in the novel "And it happened. We saw it happen" (Pearce 111). After the contest, Luke is filmed lying on his back with his arms outstretched in the pile of egg shells as if he were on a cross (Figure 2).

Figure 2: *Cool Hand Luke* (1967), Stuart Rosenberg.

The cross symbol will recur during the closing scene with the use of a repaired montage photo of Luke and two women. The photo had been torn up into four bits by Koko after Luke's breakdown under the punishment regime imposed upon him and which resulted in the other inmates turning away from him. The repaired photo, which has been scotched back together in a cruciform way, is superimposed,[12] during the final helicopter shot, on a crossroad (Figure 3), in an implicit reference to Christ's crucifixion and resurrection as his memory is called up through the mended photo.[13]

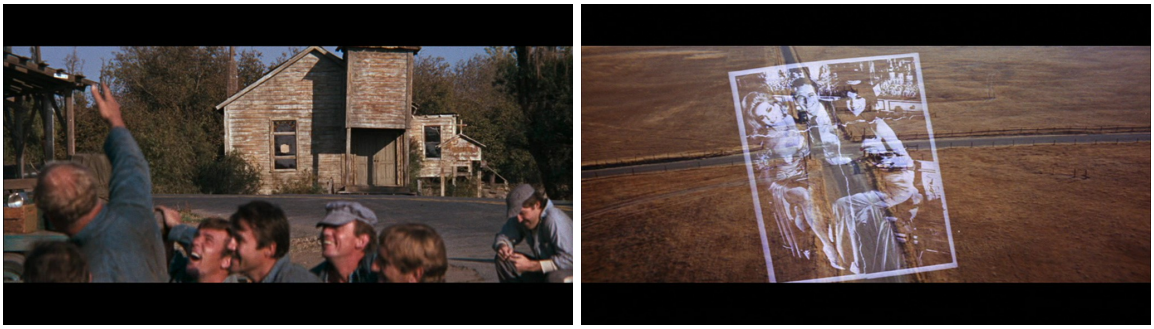

Figure 3: *Cool Hand Luke* (1967), Stuart Rosenberg.

[12] The crucifixion motif appears also in Pearce's novel, when the narrator describes Luke's beaten body as follows: "we stood there staring up at Cool Hand's body that was crucified against the sky, his bleeding head bowed toward us" (253).

[13] In Pearce's novel the photo "came to be known as the Picture" (248), giving it an almost religious dimension.

While his deeds survive in the memories of the living, as we see Dragline and the Bull Gang reminisce the story of Luke's tragic death at the church. Hence, Luke has finally acquired the status of an almost mythic hero, a "natural-born world-shaker" who, in spite of having lost his life, has finally beaten the institution.

In the final scene as Luke stands alone in an abandoned church located amidst a Negro village, "an unincorporated community which didn't even have a name" (Pearce 282),[14] he engages in an intimate and informal conversation with the "Old Man":

> Luke: It's about time we had a talk, I know I'm a pretty evil feller, killed people in the war and got drunk and chewed up municipal property and like. I know I got no call to ask for much. But even you got to admit you ain't dealt me no cards in a long time. It's beginning to look like you got things fixed so I can't never win out. Inside, outside, all them rules and regulations and bosses. Where am I supposed to fit in? Old Man, I got to tell you: I started out pretty strong and fast but it's beginning to get to me... When does it end? ... What you got in mind for me? What do I do now? Awright. On my knees askin'. Yeah. That's what I thought. I guess I'm pretty tough to deal with, uh? A hard case yeah! I guess gotta find my own way.
>
> *We hear the sound of vehicles outside, telling Luke that the police have arrived.* [...] Is that your answer, Old Man? I guess you're a hard case too.

Luke's recurrent questions convey a feeling of disillusionment and loss, reverberating a sense of metaphysical bewilderment which may well recall the words Christ uttered from the Cross "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (*The Holy Bible Authorised King James Version*, Matthew 27:46). Yet his questions, which echo into the oppressive silence of the church, combined with the place's darkness and emptiness convey a true sense of metaphysical void and, despite the possible religious reading of the scene, may well indicate a sense of desperation felt by a number of youths at the time in their search for identity in the mundane world. As Stuart Rosenberg notes, "Luke was an existential hero,"[15] laying emphasis on the sense of the alienated individual desperately seeking, like the Camusean anti-hero, his place in a world he views as absurd.

On the arrival of the police, Luke reaches the conclusion that his death or martyrdom is inevitable. He is shot by "the spiritually blind" (McEver 4) Boss Godfrey, the "Man with No Eyes," whose spiritual blindness is symbolised by his dark glasses, a cinematic quirk which stands as a motif of "spiritual obtuseness" (Hurley 429).

Yet, if Luke may be seen as a "Christomorphic" (Hurley 428) figure as the film transcodes the image of Jesus as a non-violent revolutionary, whose mind the authorities have failed to set "right," it may also be read as a parable of the counterculture as it also captures the feeling of metaphysical alienation and despair felt by a number of youths at the time.

"LSD IS A LONG STRANGE JOURNEY" (TOM WOLFE, 180): ROGER CORMAN'S TRIP

[14] See Daniel O'Brien's biography: *Paul Newman*, in which O' Brien astutely points out that, as a symbol of defiance, Luke appealed "to any number of oppressed minorities" (131). During his second escape Luke is helped by two black children the only "Free World" characters who speak to him and immediately side with him.

[15] See *"A Natural-Born World-Shaker" - The Making of Cool Hand Luke*, Leva Filmworks inc. 2008, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. This documentary contains interviews of Donn Pearce, Stuart Rosenberg and the actors of the film. It is included in the special features of the DVD.

Alongside the figure of the alienated youth rebelling against the Establishment, Hollywood also attempted excursions into the psychedelic[16] world of mind-altering drugs, notably LSD,[17] with such films as *The Trip* in 1967 or *Psych Out* in 1968. In the turbulent decade of the sixties, drugs indicated cultural rebellion and were viewed as instruments of societal change as well as the key to freeing one's mind.[18]

In the wake of the 1940s, LSD had been rather well received by the scientific community (Lee and Shlain 89) and a number of LSD studies flourished without governmental restrictions (92) which, considering the CIA's obsession of using the drug as an espionage weapon during the 1950s, is not really surprising.[19] In the early 1960s the drug received a rather positive coverage in the mass media and was notably praised as being a possible cure for certain psychological problems. Yet, by the mid-sixties the media had started to focus on the negative effects of the hallucinogenic drug, launching scathing attacks on the drug's detrimental effects.[20] In October 1966, a new law banned the substance and by 1967, in the neobohemian and hippie enclave of Haight-Ashbury, the police had begun targeting young people for drug use and vagrancy under the control of the curiously named director of the San Francisco Health Department: Mr Ellis D. Sox (176).

In Roger Corman's film, *The Trip: A Lovely Sort of Death* (1967), Paul Groves (Peter Fonda), a young television commercial director, is about to divorce from his wife Sally. Suddenly feeling the pressure of his professional and personal life closing in on him, he turns on LSD hoping to understand himself better while his close friend, John (Bruce Dern), acts as a guide[21] on his LSD session in the "Psychedelic Temple," a psychedelic parlour of pleasure owned by Max (Dennis Hopper).

The Trip is based on the screenplay by Jack Nicholson and the "King of Bs" own experience of taking acid as well as his discussions with "more than 50 subjects who [had] taken the drug."[22]

While chronicling an LSD trip, the film also encompasses the various social and cultural facets of the substance, as Corman revealed after, he had "wanted to direct another type of movie concerning the youth culture" (Naha 188).[23] However, the film does not deal with the pros and cons of the drug as Corman leaves the audience to decide for themselves.[24]

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[16] "Dr Humphry Osmond had invented the term "psychodelic", which was later amended to "psychedelic" to get rid of the nuthouse connotation of "psycho"...LSD!" (Wolfe 43-44).

[17] It is to be noted that Hollywood made films on drugs from as soon as 1916 with John Emerson's film *The Mystery of the Leaping Fish*, in which the detective, "Coke" Ennyday, injects himself drugs so as to overcome the various obstacles he is confronted with during his investigation. In 1936, Dwain Esper's film *Marihuana* depicts, in a rather realistic although melodramatic way, the potency and destructiveness of drugs.

[18] It is, however, to be noted that William Burroughs "feared that psychedelics could be used to control rather than liberate the vision-starved masses" (Lee and Shlain 82).

[19] See Lee and Shlain, especially chapters 1, 2, and 3. My present paper was greatly influenced by Lee and Schlain's detailed and insightful study on the social history of LSD.

[20] "Typical scare headlines from the mid-1960s read: "GIRL, EATS LSD AND GOES WILD"..."A MONSTER IN OUR MIDST – A DRUG CALLED LSD"..." (Lee and Shlain 150).

[21] On the critical importance of having a guide during an LSD session, see Leary, *The Psychedelic Experience*, 89-91.

[22] "The Trip: Corman's Psychedelic World," *Films and Filming* Vol. 13, no. 12 (September 1967) 42.

[23] The drug subculture also influenced the world of comics. Indeed, Marvel Comics' superhero Dr Strange, whose adventures began in July 1963, reflects not only the counterculture's fascination for Eastern mysticism, but the surrealistic landscapes, the disorienting twisting dimensions and bizarre worlds such as "the world of nothingness" or "the nightmare world," recall the features of an LSD trip.

[24] Corman noted: "I left the film with an open ending so that the audience itself could decide whether the trip had been a good or a bad one" (Naha 189).

The film's prologue, which was inserted to justify the film, addresses the audience directly, almost entrapping the viewers in the cinematic narrative. Corman had clearly intended that the audience be "included in the unfolding of the subject [so] that they [would] be as near to totally integrated into the film's emotional impact."[25] It is worth drawing a parallel here with Tom Wolfe's account (*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*) of Ken Kesey and the Merry Prankster's errands into the acid world, as he recurrently compares the LSD trip with a "movie"[26]:

> You are about to be involved in a most unusual motion picture experience. It deals fictionally with the hallucinogenic drug, LSD. Today, the extensive use in black-market production of this and other such "mind-bending" chemicals is of great concern to medical and civil authorities. The illegal manufacture and distribution of these drugs is dangerous and can have fatal consequences. Many have been hospitalized as a result. This picture represents a shocking commentary on a prevalent trend of our time and one that must be of great concern to all.

The first part of *The Trip* [27] emphasises the spiritual and transcendental experience of the LSD session.[28] As the "chemical key" (Leary 3) thrusts open the doors of Paul's inner consciousness and perception, he is on the cusp of discovering the unchartered landscape of his inner-self. While recovering from negative hallucinations in the bathroom, Paul gazes at himself in the mirror and suddenly sees black undulating psychedelic-shaped lines on his face. He then exclaims in awe "I can see right into my brain" (Figure 4) and, as he turns toward John he tells him: "Oh! You were right man. Everything is in the head." This scene is a perfect illustration of the mind expansion process induced by the drug on the voyager's consciousness.

Figure 4: *The Trip* (1967), Roger Corman.

The early stage of Paul's trip conveys a sense of fleeting reality. Brilliant colours, soft meadows and the sea all of which partake in giving the impression that everything around him is alive–"It's like everything is alive,"–illustrating what most people, who experienced the drug, felt: an "acute sensitivity to environmental cues" (Lee and Shlain 63) which may be viewed here as nature's positive reassertion over Paul's mind.

As the plot unfolds, we see Paul drifting in and out of his trip, thus gradually blurring the boundaries between his hallucinations and the real world. Progressively his trip vacillates

[25] "The Trip: Corman's Psychedelic World," *Films and Filming* 42.
[26] See Wolfe 91, 93, 242, 334, 337, 349 etc.
[27] The expression was first coined by army scientists to describe an LSD session (Lee and Shlain 40).
[28] Timothy Leary defines a psychedelic experience as "a journey to new realms of consciousness" (Leary 3).

between the positive effects of the experience and the chaotic realm of the bummer with the intense anxiety and paranoia it entails, an aspect of the psychedelic experience described by Allen Ginsberg in his poem, *Lysergic Acid.*[29]

This oscillation between the good trip and the bummer are graphically transcoded with the use of vivid colours illustrating Peter Fonda's changing mood. The good trip is shot outdoors and Paul, who is dressed in white, is filmed with a long-shot running across dunes, a way of shedding light on his closeness to nature and his growing feeling of freedom.

In the bad trip Fonda is dressed in black and filmed medium-shot to close-up indoors, in a dark environment creating a feeling of claustrophobia. This impression of claustrophobic confinement grows as Paul is filmed going down the stairs of what resembles a Gothic mansion, leading to a sepulchral cave where he is about to experience his own death.

Both trips constantly overlap in a succession of flashes accentuating the blurred impression while, in the mean time, Paul retreats from the growing complexities of the world. Roger Corman lays emphasis here on the fact that under the effect of LSD, reality becomes an illusion (Lee and Shlain 185) as it blurs the boundaries between reality and the imaginary realm illustrating his description of Paul as a "traveler in two worlds" (Gary Morris 71).

Through the often corny (Cagin and Dray 46) psychedelic cinematic effects–the use of vivid colours coming together in kaleidoscopic patterns, fish-eye lenses, painted women, op-art patterns, flashing and swirling lights and multiple exposures–the film contributes to highlighting the visual effects of LSD (Figure 5) as described by its inventor, the Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann:

> As I lay in a dazed condition with eyes closed there surged up from me a succession of fantastic, rapidly changing imagery of a striking reality and depth, alternating with a vivid, kaleidoscopic play of colors (Lee and Shlain xviii).

Figure 5: *The Trip* (1967), Roger Corman.

The film also focuses on the fact that LSD indicated cultural rebellion. During the mock trial in the merry-go-round scene, Paul is expected to defend himself having been accused by Max, who is dressed up as a sort of psychedelic judge, of his lack of integrity and selfishness. As David Farber points out, LSD was envisaged as "an agent in the production of cultural [and social] reorientation" (David Farber 19). In this scene, Paul is accused by Hopper of having "No real love" and being completely self involved, a charge to which he will eventually plead guilty. This segment is an obvious attack on American society, a society built on consumerism and the false values vehicled by advertising, an artificial world in which individual success is encouraged at any cost.

Another feature Corman dwells on, is the sexual and hedonistic nature of LSD. This aspect is depicted in the love scenes in which the sexual ecstasy of the blond girl is conveyed by the superimposed image of a blossoming rose or, in an earlier scene, when the naked bodies of

[29] During the early stages of the film there are two close-up shots which linger on Ginsberg's book *Howl*, emphasizing the influence of the Beats on the drug subculture.

Paul and Sally are intertwining amid psychedelic imagery and Sally's face metamorphoses into that of the blond girl's and vice versa.

The importance of love and sex in the LSD experience was depicted by Timothy Leary in an interview to *Playboy* in 1966[30]:

> The three inevitable goals of the LSD session are to discover and make love with God, to discover and make love with a woman.... That is what the LSD experience is all about. Merging, yielding, flowing, union, communion. It's all love-making.... The sexual impact is, of course, the open but private secret about LSD (Lee and Shlain 113-14).

The sexual "depravity" induced by the substance was of course to be used against it and the hippie culture, in the campaign which had been launched by the mass media and the conservative forces. A mediocre exploitation film, to say the least, entitled *Alice in Acidland* produced by John Donne in 1969, launched a scathing attack on LSD. The film's voice-over prologue, purportedly intended as a warning, tells the audience that they are about to see the terrible consequences of the substance on the morals of a young girl named Alice:

> Her name is Alice Trenton and she's been on a long, long trip. Unlike the favoured *Alice in Wonderland*, this Alice never saw the Cheshire Cat, the Mad Hatter or the Queen of Hearts. This Alice traveled through the dark and endless caverns of Acidland. The place for her was no fairy tale.

The film shows the dangers of LSD and marijuana by insisting on the substance's potent power to release the secret depravities hidden within the young girl's mind. The scenes in which Alice discovers "the joys of lesbian sex" (Jim Morton 149) and the pleasures of orgies illustrate the moral dangers of both marijuana and LSD. It may be of interest to note that most of the film is filmed in black and white highlighting Alice's dull existence, which suddenly comes alive when she swallows the little capsule of LSD. Her trip, which depicts a corny psychedelic lesbian sex scene, is filmed in colour, underpinning the ecstatic and elated feature of the psychedelic dreamscape (Figure 6).

[30] See also Leary 69.

Figure 6

Titillating the audience with scenes of sexual pleasure seems, however, a rather odd way to fight the noxious effects of LSD. Nevertheless, the final scene shows Alice sitting in a straitjacket[31] while the voice-over tells the viewers that the unfortunate girl never managed to cross back from the other side of the mirror.[32] A closing scene which comes as a relief to an anxious conservative audience convinced of the potent and devastating effects of the substance on social mores.

The sexual revolution as viewed through the lens of pornography and softcore feature films

The last aspect of the counterculture I would like to dwell on concerns the way in which the film industry, through hardcore and softcore feature films, dealt with the sexual liberation. Laura Kipnis specifies that the content of pornography relates to "its social moment and context."[33] My point here is, therefore, to avoid value judgements and focus mainly on the cultural and social implications of this new cinematic genre in the wake of the 1960s.

During the 1960s and 1970s in mainstream and underground cinema, sex became progressively a means of creating a "countercultural identity" (Bailey 306). It, therefore, came to embody a new form of freedom and, as such, represented a threat to the Establishment and the repressive tenets of sexual morality, which were deeply embedded in American society.

In October 1967 the Congress had authorized the establishment of a Commission on Pornography and Obscenity, giving the subject a publicity it had never yet attained. The Commission was appointed by Lyndon B. Johnson in January 1968 and Richard M. Nixon received the report on 30 September 1970. Yet, after two years work the Commission were unable to give any accurate and reliable definition of pornography or obscenity, perpetuating, as a consequence, the confused, yet famous, legal definition of obscenity established, in 1964, by Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart: "I know it when I see it,"[34] which only perpetuated the judicial confusion concerning the matter.

The unleashing of sexuality in pornography, soft X and sexploitation films challenged America's morally repressive society, inspiring great social, moral and political anxiety to the

[31] A scene which recalls the closing scene in Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho* (1960).

[32] On the psychiatrical consequences of LSD see Tom Wolfe when he describes how one of the Pranksters, Stark Naked, drifts into madness: "[She] had completed her trip. She had gone with the flow. She had gone stark raving mad" (Wolfe 86).

[33] Laura Kipnis, "How to Look at Pornography" 119. My paper has been greatly inspired by Linda Williams's ground-breaking and insightful study on pornography.

[34] The obscenity case Jacobelli vs. Ohio, 378 U.S. 184, 197 (1964). See also Kendrick, especially chapter 8 entitled "The Post-Pornographic Era", 213 –39.

Establishment. Nixon's brief address, delivered in Baltimore on behalf of Republican candidates in which he claimed that "Pornography [was] to freedom of expression what anarchy [was] to liberty" (Kendrick 219), clearly epitomized this growing angst.

Meanwhile, the illicit 16 mm stag films had progressively disappeared from the Storefront Theatres as the films merged from shorts into feature-length films. Operations like the Sutter Cinema and the O'Farrell Theatre in San Francisco began searching for a "more varied clientele who viewed attendance at pornographic films as part of their participation in the sexual revolution" (Schaefer 386).

The Mitchell brothers were probably the first porn producers with Gerard Damiano who tried to nudge pornography into mainstream. As Jim Mitchell noted, "This film [*Behind the Green Door*] [was] our shot at breaking through to a mainstream audience" (McNeil and Osborne 85-86). Thus, by 1972 pornographic feature films had reached a rather wide mixed-sex audience with such films as *Deep Throat* and *Behind the Green Door*.

Behind the Green Door (1972) is based on an anonymous short story that circulated underground.[35] Two truck drivers enter a greasy spoon café on the road. The owner questions them on some mysterious matter. After some considerations, one of the drivers accepts to tell him the story of the Green Door. Here begins a long flashback during which a young woman, Gloria (Marilyn Chambers), is abducted and brought to a club where all members, male and female, wear masks. The audience, including both drivers, is about to witness Gloria's sexual awakening as a voice-off presents her as "a woman whose initial fear and anxiety have mellowed into curious expectation." As for the audience they are merely told to enjoy themselves "to the fullest extent."

Meanwhile, Gloria, who has been taken to a room, is told by an older woman that she is about to experience "the most exquisite moment of [her] life." As she is lying down, the woman makes her progressively aware of her body–"think of your body." Gloria, who is now relaxing turns her head toward the camera. She then gazes, for a short while, at the camera, as if she were looking at the viewer, inviting him/her to witness her sexual awakening.

Gloria is then brought on stage where she is "slowly worked on by several women in a "lesbian" number" (Williams 157). The cunnilingus scene is shot very elliptically, by contrast with the traditional scopic labial close-ups or "beaver shots"[36] of the genre. The performative focus of scene is rather on Gloria's face, highlighting her growing pleasure, bringing the segment closer to softcore filming techniques rather than to pornographic ones.

Green Door is also interesting on several other accounts. It is probably the first hardcore film featuring interracial sex. The scene between Marylin Chambers and Johnny Keyes dressed up in primitive African attire (body paint, necklace...) focuses on the way in which the Mitchell brothers subverted the traditional racist stereotypes. The scene is shot so as to emphasize facial and bodily reactions. Marylin Chambers stressed the importance of this animalistic almost primitive scene in an interview: "The black-and-white sex thing–I knew this was a very big taboo as it still is in our country" (McNeil and Osborne 92).

Another aspect I wish to examine is that of the orgy scene in which Gloria begins fellating and performing handjobs on three men, sitting on a trapeze. The reaction shots isolate the

[35] Artie Mitchell recalls: "When I first read the story of *Behind the Green Door*, it was a sort of story that was handed around underground, about twenty typed pages. People read it in fraternity houses and troop-ships, those kinds of places" (McNeil and Osborne 84).

[36] In *Deep Throat* (1972) and in *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1975) the cunnilingus scenes are shot in close-ups which are visually ascertainable. Not to mention later films of the so-called Golden Age of Porn such as *Candy Stripers*, for instance, produced by Bob Chinn in 1978.

growing sexual pleasure of the audience, who in turn engages into an orgy. The audience's sexual performance then moves to the foreground. The interest of this scene, as Linda Williams avers, is its democratic dimension as it mixes "a wide variety of body sizes, shapes, and sexual practices" (Figure 7)–a trademark of the Mitchell brother's orgy scenes.[37] A possible echo of what Linda Lovelace is told by her friend about the complex and polymorphic nature of sex and sexual pleasure in *Deep Throat*: "Diff'rent strokes for diff'rent folks."

Figure 7: *Behind the Green Door* (1972), Artie J. Mitchell and James L. Mitchell.

Figure 7: *The Resurrection of Eve* (1973), Artie Mitchell and Jon Fontana.

The orgy scene ends in a rather original manner with the "money shots" filmed using "cinematic pyrotechnics of optically printed, multicolored, slow-motion close-ups" (Williams 156) clearly imparting a psychedelic dimension to the scene (Figure 8).

[37] See the last two orgy segments in *The Resurrection of Eve* (1973).

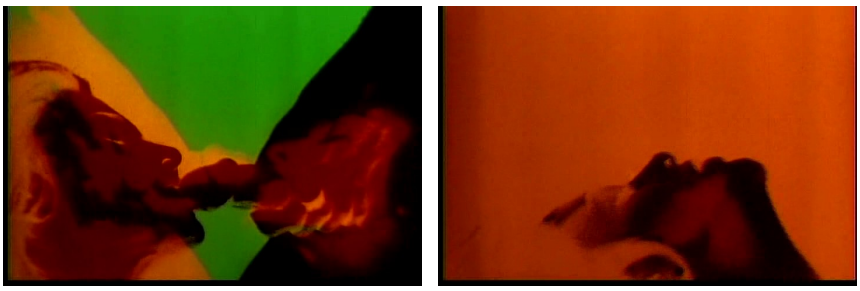

Figure 8: *Behind the Green Door* (1972), Artie J. Mitchell and James L. Mitchell.

At the end of the performance, the truck driver–narrator rushes onto the stage and carries Gloria off through the Green Door. This scene is a perfect illustration of the male sexual fantasies (rape, abduction, orgies, lesbian segments...) which inform the film. As Artie Mitchell noted, "the whole thing [was] a fantasy" (McNeil and Osborne 85).

In *The Resurrection of Eve* (1973) produced the following year, the Mitchell brothers focused on a more realistic narrative pattern as opposed to the obviously male "pornotopia" they had pictured in *Green Door*. The story follows Eve and her relationship with her boy friend, DJ Frank Paradise. They break up over his jealousy which leads to Eve's car accident. After being resurrected through plastic surgery, she marries a repentant Frank, who becomes interested in group sex. Eve, who is at first repulsed by the idea, eventually evolves and finally gets into it (Williams 167).

As the five orgy segments unfold we see Eve moving from refusal to complete involvement. Eve grows into an independent active sexual woman. While she progressively engages into the orgies, Frank gradually withdraws from the action becoming an onlooker thus giving up his role as sexual performer in the orgies. During the third and fourth orgies we see Frank glimpsing at Eve having sexual pleasure with others, a sight he has obvious problems to cope with. The final orgy scene marks the end of their relation as the film ends on Eve telling him "It's over, Frank" (Figure 9).

Figure 9: *The Resurrection of Eve* (1973), Artie Mitchell and Jon Fontana.

Sexual freedom bears "unavoidable contradictions" (Williams 169) and if, as Williams explains, Johnny, Eve's black male friend, probably disrupted the fragile equilibrium of power and pleasure within the couple, the other main question here seems to concern the way in which men actually dealt with the idea of sexual freedom and still do.

Consequently, the film lays emphasis on male anxiety, which originates in a female sexuality that eludes male power. At the very beginning of the film, Frank shows growing signs of anxiety linked to his sexual performances; when having made love to his girlfriend, Cathy, he asks her if she is satisfied and how would she react "[...] if [he got] a cramp in [his] erection?", a concern which will re-echo later as he is making love to Eve. During this scene, while being fellated by Eve, Frank "fantasizes" (Williams 167) the penis of Johnny in her mouth instead of his own. Frank then proceeds to penetrate her with brutality, as he is unable to reach a climax, he snaps at Eve: "Maybe you need some of that black stuff." The Mitchell brothers, while using the metaphor of the black male sexual performer, focus on the critical question of women's pleasure and men's ability to give them pleasure.

This aspect of male's anxiety found resonance two years later in the French humorous porn classic, *Le sexe qui parle* or *Pussy Talk* (1975) produced by Claude Mulot as Frédéric Lansac. Joëlle, a good-looking advertising executive discovers with awe that her vagina not only speaks but mouths off insanities. However, the young woman is mortified when she finds herself succumbing to inexplicable displays of sexual exhibitionism with strangers. Her husband, Eric, is sympathetic with her plight, until Joëlle's vagina reveals to him that it is his sexual inadequacy that is driving his wife to seek pleasure elsewhere. The scene is filmed in subjective camera highlighting the vagina's point of view thus giving it an autonomy of its own in the film's narrative (Figure 10).

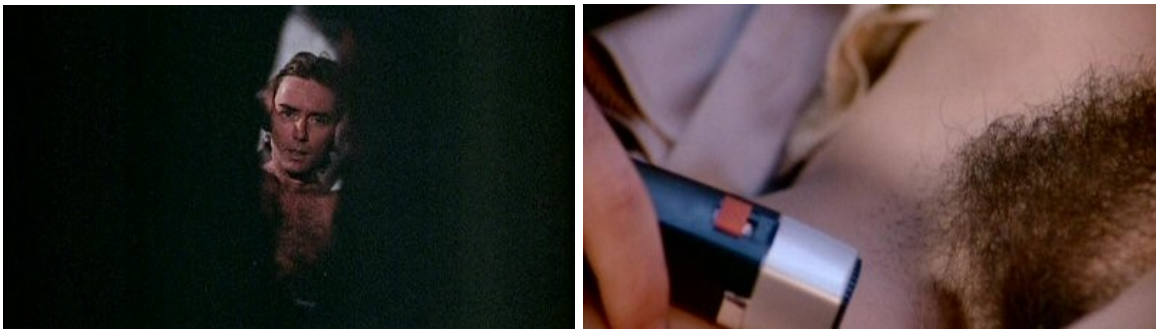

Figure 10 : *Le Sexe qui parle* (*Pussy Talk*) (1975), Frédéric Lansac

The originality of Mulot's film lies in its subversion of the ancient *vagina loquens* motif, which informs a certain number of literary texts from the thirteenth century French fabliau *Du Chevalier qui fist les cons parler* to the eighteenth century tale entitled *Nocrion, conte allobroge* (1747).[38] In this body of texts the male hero possesses the "magical" power to make pudenda talk, whereas in *Pussy Talk* Joëlle's vagina has a voice of its own which, as French critic Daniel Sauvaget points out, causes havoc as it voices what society represses.[39] The film may, therefore, be viewed to a certain extent as critique of social conformism as regards sex and sexuality.

Joe Sarno's softcore film[40] *Abigail Leslie is Back in Town* (1974) attempts to explore the psychology of female sexuality through the permissive character of Abigail Leslie. Gail was driven from her small fishing hometown after an extramarital affair with Priscilla's (Mary Mendum) husband, Gordon. Her return to Baypoint, a couple of years later, provokes fear, resentment and fascination among the female community.

The film is set in a residential town on the East coast[41] stressing Sarno's concern for the lives of white middle-class suburbanites and their uneasy and ambivalent relation to sex. Sarno's film contributes to exposing the hidden and depraved lives of white suburban America. Sarno pointed out, in an interview, that he "wanted to say things that were not, at the time, acceptable" (Vale 90).

Abigail settles back in Littlebridges, located in the lower quarters of the town, symbolising her new status as social misfit. Alice Ann remarks "You lived up in [...] the

[38] See Thomas-Simon Gueullette, *Nocrion, conte allobroge* 17-19, which is an eighteenth century variation of the thirteenth century fabliau *Le Chevalier qui fist les cons parler* see Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Raynaud 68-89.

[39] "Le Sexe qui Parle," Daniel Sauvaget, *Revue du Cinéma* 302 (Janvier 1976) : 119. The porno theatre in Pigalle, where Misty and Seymour first meet in *The Opening of Misty Beethoven*, bills *Le Sexe qui Parle*. Yet, the film they watch is not, as Linda Williams assesses, *Le Sexe qui Parle*, but some unidentified porn film. See Linda Williams 136.

[40] David Andrews defines soft core as follows: ""softcore" refers to any feature-length narrative whose diegesis is punctuated by periodic moments (typically between eight and twelve, though more is not exceptional) of simulated, nonexplicit sexual spectacle" (Andrews 2).

[41] Sarno's own hometown, Amityville.

respectable section [of the town].” Gail’s answer clearly sheds light on her new social and moral status “I am hardly respectable.”

Gail’s sexual consciousness and “free spirit” will disrupt the seemingly dull and stilted lives of Baypoint’s housewives. As the plot unfolds, Abigail reveals the hypocrisy which imbues the community of Baypoint as she tells her high school friend Tracy: “On the outside you’re a respectable wife. On the inside you’re a cunt.” Her presence will unveil the bored sex lives of Baypoint’s housewives as Priscilla is described by Alice Ann as a “bored housewife.” Gail, however, will be herself overwhelmed by a growing feeling of weariness. During a female threesome she is filmed moving away from her partners toward the edge of the bed, thus moving from the centre of the narrative to its periphery. As she lights a cigarette she watches them with an air of detachment (Figure 11), foreshadowing her forthcoming departure. At the end of the film, she meets Priscilla and tells her she has fallen in love with her. Although Priscilla is flattered she doesn’t reciprocate. As a consequence, Gail confides in her–“I have to leave. I’m bored with it all now”–and decides to leave Baypoint.

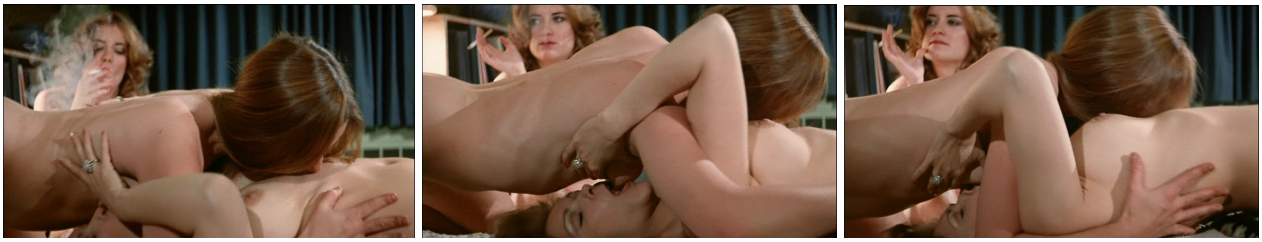

Figure 11: *Abigail Leslie is Back in Town* (1974), Joe W. Sarno

The other main character of the film, Priscilla, is portrayed as a woman who is fearful of embarking on affairs of her own, notably with Alice Ann’s brother Chester. Both Alice-Ann and Chester are trapped in an incestuous entanglement. This taboo relationship has taught Chester how to give sexual pleasure to women. However, Priscilla will progressively come to terms with her sexuality when she finally decides to confront Gail and pleads with her to help her be free “I want you to help me. Help me be free like you” despite Gail’s warning “You might not be happy being free” Both women engage in sexual intercourse. During the lovemaking scene the close-up shots on Priscilla’s face show it glowing with pleasure. At the film’s close, Priscilla leaves Baypoint and her husband to go off and live with Chester.

Nothing, therefore, will be quite the same in the quiet little town of Baypoint as Linda Williams notes “bodily desires and appetites are [...] socially disruptive” (Williams 31). By erasing the sexual barricades Gail has, to a certain extent, obliterated the town’s social conformism and barriers. Sarno’s film is fraught with psychosexual resonance as it hints at unveiling the complexity and workings of female desires. The sexual revolution meant maybe more sex for men but for women “it was beginning to mean better sex, a notion that ultimately entailed a redefinition of the heterosexual act itself” (Williams 171).

Yet, the matter remains more complex than it may actually seem. In the early 1970s a group of Feminists voiced, in the famous Feminist manifesto *Our Bodies. Our Selves* (1971), their belief that the sexual liberation did not necessarily imply women’s freedom:

> The sexual revolution–liberated orgiastic women, groupies, communal lovemaking, homosexuality–has made us feel that we must be able to have sex with impunity, without anxiety, under any conditions and with anyone, or we’re uptight freaks.

> These alienating, inhuman expectations are no less destructive or degrading than Victorian Puritanism we all so proudly rejected. (The Boston Women's Health Book 23).

Cool Hand Luke, *The Trip*, *Behind the Green Door*, *The Resurrection of Eve* and *Abigail Leslie is Back in Town* all stand, each in their own way, as the summation of an era, as they not only captured but reflected the social and cultural changes at stake at the dawn of the sixties and in the early seventies. A period during which the film industry played a political and social role in disrupting the consensus, which had characterized American life during the *Age of Ike*, as it expressed a social critique of the major social and cultural tenets of mainstream America.

However, as Ryan and Kellner note, "the sixties' assault on traditional values also provoked a reassertion of exaggerated versions of conservative ideals" (Ryan and Kellner 38). Consequently, by 1972, the Nixon administration had mobilized the conservative forces against young radicals, drugs and the sexual liberation movement, triggering the mechanisms of social and political repression. And, although the social and cultural changes of the so-called Woodstock Years deeply altered American society and paved the way for Barack Obama's recent election, the "*feeling*" Tom Wolfe depicted in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* had vanished into oblivion, leaving a whole generation wondering about what went wrong.

While re-evaluating the historical context of the period, Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle point out that the dawn of the sixties and the early seventies "marked the descent of the utopian phase of the counterculture" (Braunstein and Doyle 12) with Richard Nixon's election to office and the economic downturn. These events, as Braunstein and Doyle explain, brought into light a certain number of the counterculture's unresolved contradictions and limitations when faced with the harsh social and political realities. As the movement fragmented into "a number of countercultural liberation movements during the 1970s" (12), the inchoate utopian dream of a generation had progressively evaporated into the recesses of the American night.

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