

**FICTIONAL FORMS
AND SOCIAL VISIONS
IN THE WORKS OF KEN KESEY**

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Bennett Huffman

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INTRODUCTION

. . . to prove that genius is not a gift, but the way out a person invents in desperate cases; to rediscover the choice which a writer makes of himself, his life, and the meaning of the universe down to the formal characteristics of his style and of his composition, reaching into the structure of his imagery and the peculiarity of his tastes; in short to retrace in detail the history of a liberation.

Jean-Paul Sartre *Saint Genet*¹

In the quotation above Sartre is laying out the method that supports his literary study of Jean Genet. Taking my cue from Sartre, it is the purpose of this work to demonstrate a theory of artistic creation whereby an artist, here Ken Kesey, receives social and artistic impulses that he/she then turns into aesthetic objects, sometimes temporal in nature, which express a response to the initial environmental stimuli. Kesey's philosophy is expressed in aesthetic techniques and styles that illustrate both the changing issues of post-World-War-Two social consciousness and the stylistic modes of literary and extra-literary art. For the most part this thesis will concentrate on the social impulses for Kesey's aesthetic techniques, expressed in both his literary and plastic art, as it is towards these areas that Kesey's work naturally directs us.²

In this introductory chapter I look briefly at the method of study I employ in this

¹Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* (1952. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1964) 628.

²I have avoided the terms 'New Historicism' and 'Cultural Materialism', though my method of study, using the historical and cultural context in which Kesey was producing his works to aid in the illumination of them and a variety of critical perspectives, may indeed be such an approach.

work; then I turn to the specifics of either single works themselves or phases of Kesey's artistic explorations. In the process I gesture toward some notions of how cultural environment affects artistic expression and vice versa. My objective here is to analyse the work of an American author with a sufficiently narrow focus of vision to avoid vagueness. I do not attempt to fully render the historical context in which Kesey was writing, for it would distract us from the more important issues of Kesey's aesthetics.

In phenomenological terms the process of artistic response to the world could be called the fundamental choice that explains all human behaviour. Herbert Spiegelberg explains how Sartre's literary studies of Baudelaire and Genet illustrate a similar theory: 'In analyzing their lives he shows in detail how they chose their roles in response to given situations in which they find themselves placed in a way which gives meaning to all their concrete behaviour.'³ This theory is a kind of conversion mechanism under which world, author, and text form a continuous cycle of processing. In Kesey's case this cycle is made more complex as a result of his work and life being so popular, public, and influential both artistically and culturally. One of the main reasons that Kesey is such a good subject for such a study is that the distinct phases in his long and varied career illustrate a wide range of possible results of this processional theory of artistic creation. I will therefore be focusing on how biographical, literary, and social influences shape Kesey's aesthetic principles and how he simultaneously responds in the messages he attempts to put back into the world through his multiform works. Moreover, a substantial part of Kesey's achievement lies in his attention to the mutual influence of personal and cultural material.

Ken Kesey was born in Colorado in 1935. The son of a cowboy-like dairy farmer,

³Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction* (2nd ed. Vol. 1 & 2. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965) 494.

his family moved to California during the Second World War and settled in Oregon in 1946. The figure of Kesey's father and the movement his family made West during his youth profoundly affected his world view as an independent, self-reliant individualist within a Western context. The openness and emptiness of the West of his youth fostered in Kesey a frontier sense of place which came to be expressed ambivalently in his fiction. Place is generally, and often symbolically important in Kesey's work, and his novels display an investment of value in unspoiled landscapes.

Kesey sold his first novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962), an excerpt of which had won him \$2,000 in prize money, when he was just twenty-six years old. It became an instant best-seller and provided Kesey with a financial foundation upon which he built a secure future for himself and his family. Kirk Douglas purchased the stage and screen rights to *Cuckoo's Nest*, which eventually meant earnings of nearly one million dollars. *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964), while not as financially successful as *Cuckoo's Nest*, brought in a substantial sum as well, especially as Paul Newman made it into a film. With these significant earnings Kesey was able to purchase three houses and invest more than \$100,000 in his own Intrepid Trips Information Service, which conducted culturally influential theatrical, film, and performance art experiments from 1964 to the turn of the twenty-first century.

Kesey's work represents a fine example of post-war American fiction, as well as aesthetic modes in a variety of genres ranging beyond the novel to new journalism to performance art and theatre. In order to place Kesey and his works in context it will be necessary to begin with at least a few important definitions, especially those concerning the scope of this study. One of the most important of these terms is Kesey's sense of the word psychedelic. It is used as broadly as possible in this study to encapsulate a

wide range of literary and extra-literary techniques which in one way or another deal with representations of the senses as influenced by the ingesting of psycho-active chemicals like LSD and peyote. The hallucinations associated with the taking of such drugs is related to literary synesthesia, the poetic device in which one sensory impression is given in terms of another, as when vision is felt, or a smell is heard as in the work of French Symbolist Charles Baudelaire in 'Correspondances' (1857):

les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.

Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d'enfants,
Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies,
— Et d'autres, corrompus, riches et triomphants,

Ayant l'expansion des choses infinies,
Comme l'ambre, le musc, le benjoin et l'encens,
Qui chantent les transports de l'esprit et des sens. (Lines 8-14)⁴

The Surrealists in visual art took up this type of crossing of sensations from the literature of the Symbolists. Kesey, in his obsession with 'truth' and 'reality', is fascinated by any aesthetic technique which can explore the connection between our perception and our understanding of the world. In this endeavour he initially takes uses the literary technique of synesthesia through sensation, verbal trickery, and the use of poetic forms in prose contexts. From this beginning he expands to use a broad range of fictional forms where language is used to express hallucinations, magic, and telepathy, culminating in art works which combine aesthetics from varying disciplines, specifically books combining linguistic/literary techniques with visual/graphic ones. By the end of his career Kesey shifts to performances which make use of theatrical techniques including television, lighting, and recorded sound to overwhelm the audience's senses.

Kesey's artistic production and activities show him to be an individual with extremely diverse interests and talents. Since 1962 he has produced five novels,

⁴Charles Baudelaire, 'Correspondances.' as printed in *Baudelaire: Selected Poems* (Ed. Joanna Richardson. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1976) 42.

numerous essays, poems, stageplays, screenplays, videos, compact discs, pencil sketches, and paintings, as well as being a countercultural hero, responsible in some reckonings for the birth of both the hippie movement and the psychedelic sound of 1960s Acid rock. All these identities and aspects offer themselves as points of entry and interconnection for Kesey's works, which are in one way or another in pursuit of the real or authentic. Of all these forms Kesey considers himself least of all a poet, and believes that the skills and instincts required for the writing of fiction and poetry are very different from each other. This thesis does not treat in depth the few poems that Kesey has produced, but one untitled poem does illustrate his interest in concrete form as a means of attaining an in depth exploration of reality through typographical experimentation:

Hsst. Over here. In the wings.
 That puppet out on the apron, psht, pay him no
 mind. *I* am the real me. I, here in the wings,
 the secret observer and critic and director of not only
 the puppet's gestures but of *yours* as well! And
 now that I have your undivided attention there are a few
 misconceptions I would like to set . . . Huh . . . ?

H

bu

Hst. O
 wings
 the⁵

By employing concrete poetic typographics to spatially show displacement of the poem's persona, the combination of language and form calls into question various assumptions that can or cannot be drawn about the poem: who is the persona in the

⁵Ken Kesey is the identified author of this untitled poem as printed in Michael Strelow, ed. *Kesey* (Eugene: Northwest Review Books, 1977) 190.

poem? Is it the author, the author's conscience, or some external psyche? The use of the vocalised words 'Hsst' and 'psht' places the poem in the realm of sound. The reader must 'hear' the poem from the first word. By physically shifting the words to the margin, by using a combination of auditory and physical-graphic aesthetic techniques, and by the blending of two sensations in the same work, Kesey brings about a kind of hallucinatory moment for the reader in which we ourselves physically search for the poem's speaker. This concise example of the blending of sensation illustrates Kesey's aims in his longer, more complex works. Through a wide variety of aesthetic means, Kesey's works often attempt to bring the reader into a physical connection with him/herself. By making the reader more aware of the physical aspects of reality through fictional forms Kesey hopes to express his social visions.

Susan Sontag, in 'Against Interpretation' (1964), writes about what kind of criticism would serve the work of art rather than replace it thus: 'What is needed, first, is more attention to form in art.'⁶ Throughout this thesis I have examined experimental aesthetic techniques used by Kesey that are applied in proliferation in post-war art by many practitioners.⁷ Scholars tend to agree that the best examples of this literary experimentalism begin to emerge in the late 1950s with influential texts like William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959). The aesthetic traits discussed in this study are not confined to America, but it is primarily American writing and experience that will be discussed in relation to Kesey's work. In this context Kesey's life and work act as a

⁶Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation' (1964. Rpt. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967) 12.

⁷Many scholars have convincingly discussed the flowering of clearly identifiable aesthetic traits of avant-garde or formally experimental art since about 1945, among them, Thomas Docherty, Paula Geyh, David Seed, Brian McHale, and Linda Hutcheon. Paula Geyh's introduction to *Postmodern American Fiction: a Norton Anthology* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1998) comes closest to clearly illustrating the fictional aesthetic boundaries within the post-war era.

crucible for tracing American post-war aesthetics. His writing career truly began in 1959 when he entered the Stanford University creative writing program on a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship.⁸ His work from then to the present illustrates the post-war experimentalist exhaustion of forms.

The clearly delineated group of stylistic techniques used by post-World-War-Two era authors include the fragmentation and decentralisation of plot structures, self-reflexivity, maximalism, characterised by an overwhelming of the senses through sheer volume of detail, parodic irony, clash of high and low cultures, experiments with language and typology, the incorporation of different textual genres and contradictory 'voices' within a single work, and the employment of poetic structures within a fictional context. Their thematic concerns include ontology, fabulation, absurd quests, fictitious histories, conspiracy, ^{and} paranoia, ^{and} entropy, ^{and} nightmare, and apocalypse.⁹ Kesy has called himself a 'parabolist' in relation to his fiction, and the close relationship between parables and fables is clear.¹⁰ The general argument of this thesis is that at the heart of all of Kesy's works is not, as sometimes believed, merely an escapist triviality but an engagement with perceived tendencies of human displacement, entropy, and social upheaval.

This should be in quote marks + readjusted accordingly

So this study begins with the assumption that there is a synchronic relation

⁸Among the many biographical parallels between Kesy and Thomas Pynchon which speaks to a shared social context is the fact that both men were offered Woodrow Wilson Fellowships in 1959; Kesy accepted his and moved to California, Pynchon turned his down and spent a 'year with friends in New York' instead: Stephen L. Tanner, *Ken Kesy* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1983) 11; David Seed, *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (London: Macmillian Press, 1988) 8.

⁹John Kuehl in *Alternate Worlds: A Study of Postmodern Antirealist American Fiction* (New York: New York University Press, 1989) offers the following list of the characteristics of post-war antirealist literature: 'since reflexivity, the ludic impulse, maximalism (if not minimalism), imaginary landscapes, and the grotesque and the devil have often characterized counter traditional works. Less precedented are the patterns proliferating in the twentieth century: fragmentation/decentralization, absurd quests, fictitious history, conspiracy and paranoia, entropy, and nightmare and apocalypse' (x). The 'less precedented' patterns are among those which find themselves treated most often in Kesy's work.

¹⁰Gordon Lish, 'What the Hell You Looking in here For, Daisy Mae?: An interview with Ken Kesy.' *Genesis West* 2.5 (1963) 20.

between a socially engaged author who writes in response to society and those social aspects which may be affected by their writing.¹¹ My argument is that Kesey is a pioneer of literary, dramatic, and performance art works which fragment into eclectic collages of their repetitive forms while yet retaining enough of the elements essential to their genres to allow for identification. A case in point would be Kesey's use of narrative. Plot and narrative are two of the defining characteristics of the novel, however, a primary feature of American post-war literature is the incorporation of stylistic techniques from beyond traditional literary language. Authors in the post-war era employ scientific language, advertising material, non-cognitive cut-up devices, and many more such forms to expand the vocabulary of the novel. These additions to the range of language used in the novel need not be considered a threat to the hegemony of the novelistic form, but rather a flourishing of the vitality of the form itself. This is where Kesey is an excellent example of an American novelist able to experiment without losing meaning or power; he plays with narrative, cuts up plots, adopts film stylistic characteristics, and deploys science fiction imagery, yet retains all of the essential elements of contemporary fiction.

Kesey merrily incorporates references from a wide variety of sources without any anxiety of their influence.¹² He occasionally adopts fictional forms from two or three authors' work in order to develop an original text of his own. Throughout this thesis I use the term influence to mean authors and texts to which Kesey was exposed, some

¹¹ The themes and aesthetic forms found in Kesey's work are explicated in detail. The social ramifications of the application of these aesthetic forms are discussed only briefly, for it is Kesey's impetus to create the aesthetics themselves that are of the greatest interest to us here, though his life is complex and worthy of many studies with many different foci.

¹² Acknowledgement is here made of Harold Bloom's important study *The Anxiety of Influence* (1972. 2nd ed. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1973). Kesey, by his own admission, is not primarily a poet. Indeed, his consciousness of not being a poet is quite Bloomian. Kesey actively, perhaps bravely, embraces the stylistic techniques of other writers and accomplishes great works of literature which are 'original,' and not wholly imitative. Through the incorporation of intertextual material Kesey attempts to simultaneously acknowledge influence and disempower it.

aspects of whose aesthetic mode is better used in his own work—for example the photo album envelope in Wallace Stegner’s *Big Rock Candy Mountain* (1938), which Kesey uses in a different way in *Sometimes a Great Notion*. Intertextuality is the presence of direct references to other texts within a work that brings a paradigmatic association with it to the meaning of the text to which it has been imported—for instance, the way Lee utters references to comic books or *Hamlet* (1600), which sheds light on the meaning of actions or relationships in *Sometimes a Great Notion*. Although intertextuality as a term has not found its way into this study, specific instances of it are analysed, especially in relation to Kesey’s incorporation of textual genres and literary ‘voices’ borrowed from external sources.

I have offered my definition of the aesthetic context here at the beginning because it will unavoidably color every claim that I make in this study about Kesey’s representation. It is not necessary to view Kesey’s aesthetic tendencies as a ‘breakthrough’ of any kind, but rather as an intensity of techniques and themes seen in literature and art to varying degrees for centuries; it should be sufficient to note that they exist in an unusually high frequency and are thus important to understanding post-World-War-Two artistic aesthetics.

The post-war tendency is to look at relation between minds, or, externally, bodies. This century created a human shock in the face of the unimaginable (holocaust, atomic annihilation, pollution, acceleration of the information age, the death of the ‘subject’) resulting in a loss of fixed points of reference. Late capitalist society has a particular significance as a cultural dominant since the end of the Second World War, which was a shock to the prevailing hope that World War One was the war to end all wars. The failure of that achievement and the end of World War Two, which was accomplished by the use

of new technologies that could, and did, kill many tens of thousands of people in a single instant, lead to a long period of angst. This anxiety, propelled by the nuclear uncertainties of the Cold War, and surely for Americans the failure of the Korean and Vietnam wars specifically, expressed itself in literature in multifarious ways. Showing how these broad cultural generalisations affected an individual author proves to be exceedingly difficult. So, for the most part, this thesis relies on specific utterances of historical sentiment made by prominent representative figures and social leaders to illustrate those impressions to which Kesey responded. In this context Kesey's work shows a deep fascination with 'truth' and 'reality' from his earliest novel to his late 1990s stageplay. In order to analyse these two abstract concepts Kesey explores aesthetic techniques which reveal many possible ways in which perception can affect definitions of the world. Post-war ontological uncertainty traces this fifty-year long shift in anxiety, and as such, the works of Ken Kesey, both in subject matter and aesthetic expression, chart the changing curve of these anxieties from the early 1960s to the twenty-first century. According to Linda Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989) the 1960s 'left in their wake a specific and historically determined distrust of ideologies of power and a more general suspicion of the power of ideology.'¹³ Since faith in institutions can no longer be restored, the ideal of placing all important powers in the individual—that philosophy which Kesey's work advocates again and again—seems logical enough.

Kesey has often been associated with the Beats. There are many reasons for this association which can lead to many erroneous connections between the Beats and Kesey. Through his participation in the Stanford writing program, for example, Kesey ended up

¹³Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989) 10.

with the same editor, agent, and publisher as Jack Kerouac.¹⁴ Though Kesey felt greatly inspired by the lifestyle and language expressed in *On the Road* (1958) when it first came out, he quickly moved away from a close imitation of Kerouac's writing style. Kesey became more intimately associated with Neal Cassady, Kerouac's real-life model for Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*, while at Stanford, and eventually Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs. The fictional aspects that Kesey does share with the Beats are the desire to break both social and literary forms. Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs all privileged the spoken voice over the written in their published works, a trait Kesey also displays in the storytelling voice that comes across in most of his literary works.

Kesey's work employs literary and extra-literary aesthetics in order to analyse society. Thomas Hill Schaub writes in *American Fiction in the Cold War* (1991):

The authority of the postwar voices resides less in what they have to say than in the breezy candor and comical self-demolition of their point of view. These looser, meandering speakers enact a form which is inherently suspicious of form—of any projected meaning—at the same time that the subject of their ruminations is always the necessity of some such projection if one is to play a role in the world. In this, the fiction of Barth and Burroughs was characteristic of the postwar conflict in liberal discourse between a suspicion of ideology and a desire for action.¹⁵

Kesey, being less suspicious of form than Burroughs certainly, created novels more coherent in meaning and thus more culturally complicated.¹⁶ Burroughs desired a revolution in pure language, but refused to engage in practicalities of the real-world.

¹⁴Kerouac was given a reviewer's copy of *Cuckoo's Nest* and wrote a blurb for the novel's cover saying simply, 'A great new American author.' In correspondence Kerouac suggested, incorrectly, that Kesey was of Native American origin and should not hide behind a caucasian pseudonym.

¹⁵Thomas Hill Schaub, *American Fiction in the Cold War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991) 79.

¹⁶Despite Kesey's attempts to make light of serious subjects he returns to them again and again in his fiction and performance art pieces.

Kesey, on the other hand, has less faith in such an untainted revolution, and thus confronts the world in a more direct and social manner. The personal approach to organised evil, be it in the form of the Combine or the Labour Union or Hollywood, is an appropriate mode of social discussion in Kesey's fiction precisely because human subjects are required to enact social change.¹⁷ Kesey has been criticised for not taking an 'appropriately' strong stand in his writing. Tony Hilfer, in *American Fiction Since 1940* (1992), states that, 'The typical American literary ideology is individualism and the typical attitude towards politics as group action is ambivalent, even evasive.'¹⁸ This describes Kesey very accurately, though his work often concerns itself with group process.

Kesey's work illustrates a cultural politics at work rather like that of R.D. Laing in *The Politics of Experience* (1967), as in the powerplay inherent in dialogue, the privileging of anti-establishment positions, and even the distribution of genres and literary conventions. All these elements have a political dimension to them, but do not fit into the bifurcated politics of conservative American government versus the emerging New Left of the 1960s. Thus Kesey, developing his philosophy at the same time as Laing developed his psychologically based politics, expresses an impatience with party politics in order to express a more flexible socially conscious alternative through works which explore the relationship between the individual and society. This thesis examines Kesey's work in a social context, rather than political, to highlight the author's attempts to find real world solutions to problems outside of already galvanised political structures.

Tony Hilfer goes on from his discussion of American political ambivalence to

¹⁷Tony Barley authoritatively writes on this subject: '. . . it is only through human subjects that politics are enacted at all' in *Taking Sides: The Fiction of John le Carré* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986) 8.

¹⁸Tony Hilfer, *American Fiction Since 1940* (London: Longman, 1992) 2.

describe a particular strain of American fiction of the early 1960s, led by Thomas Pynchon, as ‘paranoid’ (Hilfer 99-100). Other writers within this mode, including Philip K. Dick, Don DeLillo, and many others, were all reacting to or engendering Cold War social stresses. Despite the fact that Hilfer overlooks Kesey in this context, perhaps because of the long gap between the publication of his second and third solo novels (some twenty-eight years), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion* are clear representations of this paranoid genre. The American ‘paranoid’ novelists of the 1950s and 60s focus primarily on domestic conspiracy, or if not domestic, then certainly not national in a traditional sense. Milo Minderbinder’s Syndicate in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* (1961) and the world of espionage in Pynchon’s *V.* (1963) are most disturbing to a sense of order in that they completely ignore or abandon national boundaries and interests for some less tangible, more sinister goal. Of equal importance as an influence on the writers of the period was the international anxiety of the Cold War—that of the annihilation of the world by nuclear weapons.¹⁹ Norman Mailer said recently of the 1950s social context: ‘How can one not be paranoid when there’s fear of a nuclear holocaust.’²⁰ As the Cold War continued through the 1960s, the build-up of stockpiles of radioactive waste from both nuclear weapons factories and nuclear powerplants developed a fear of domestic lethal contamination to rival the fear of foreign assault.

The social philosophy put forth by Kesey’s texts oscillates between positions of individualism with communitarian and ecological concerns. He begins from a basic belief in the goodness of the individual. In response to questions about his reading of French existentialism Kesey wrote: ‘The psychedelic [sic] movement springboarded from the

¹⁹Hilfer provides a convenient chronology of post-World War Two America including pertinent historical events and the publication dates of important works of fiction: 230-246.

²⁰Richard Copans and Stan Neumann, dirs. *Storyville: Norman Mailer — Oh My America Part One: Farewell to the Fifties* (Film. BBC 2, broadcast 2 Oct. 2000).

bleak, dead end of the Existencialism [sic].²¹ Here Kesey is specifically reacting to existentialism as a humanism as in Sartre's acknowledgement of the perception of its 'over-emphasis upon the evil side of human life.'²² Wanting to promote a more positive philosophy Kesey explores in his texts a position of personal responsibility expressed by Sartre in the same lecture when he says: ✓

When a man commits himself to anything, fully realising that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind—in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility (30).

It is through this responsibility of individual characters that Kesey's fiction explores the positive social realities of our world.

Kesey shows a reluctance to endorse social agendas. His ideology rests in a belief in the essential decency of the ordinary man. Kesey's novels illustrate only an individual ethos of direct action in the face of direct social oppression, not grand revolutionary stands against the bodies that suppress individual freedoms in the world. David Seed has pointed out a similar stance in Joseph Heller's first novel *Catch-22*: 'Heller has always denied that his novel has a "message" and has explained his particular kind of humour as a means of avoiding didactic earnestness: "I use flippant humour as a way of expressing certain attitudes without being pontifical or moralistic."' ²³ Like Heller, Kesey sees social realities as changing so quickly in the post-war era that advocacy of a specific party is ineffective for a social text that hopes to inform a generation surrounded by shifting

²¹Ken Kesey, 'Re: PhD answers.' E-mail to the author. 26 Nov. 1999.

²²Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* (1945. Trans. Philip Mairet. London: Methuen, 1973) 24.

²³David Seed, *The Fiction of Joseph Heller* (London: Macmillian Press, 1989) 40.

values and open to changing allegiances.

Thus Kesey shifts the focus of his social interests throughout his career. He himself is a complex mixture of conservative rural attitudes with liberal licentiousness. He avoids specific party politics by making fun of political figures and democratic political processes while still revering the basic ideal of the American way. His commitment to ecological issues fluctuates from examining them from loggers' points of view, to those of eco-terrorists, to a fantasy parable about global warming. His apparent indifference to feminist concerns by writing novels which focus on male characters is counter-balanced by subtle female characters responding to a male dominated world in his early fiction and focus on battles for equality later on.

Three major studies of Kesey's work have thus far been published: Leeds (1981), Porter (1982), and Tanner (1983).²⁴ Though each of these studies has important things to say about Kesey's art, none of them looks at his career from an overarching aesthetic vantage point. Kesey produced more works between 1983 and the turn of the twenty-first century than he had at the time these studies were conducted. None of them comprehensively takes into consideration Kesey's own exploration of what is considered the 'text' of artistic endeavor. Interestingly as well, despite the vociferous attacks in journal articles on Kesey's novels, especially *Cuckoo's Nest*, in reference to their sexist treatment of female characters, none of the book length studies focus on this aspect of Kesey's works. Though on the surface Kesey seems indifferent to gender issues, he has created a number of feminist heroines in his work, most importantly Vivian in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, the Tranny-man's wife in the short story 'The Thrice-thrown Tranny-

²⁴Barry H. Leeds, *Ken Kesey* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1981); M. Gilbert Porter, *The Art of Grit: Ken Kesey's Fiction* (London: University of Missouri Press, 1982); Stephen L. Tanner, *Ken Kesey* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1983).

man or Orgy at Palo Alto High School' (1974), and Alice Carmody in *Sailor Song* (1992). One of the main strands of Kesey's last novel *Last Go Round* (1994) focuses on gender roles in the West, as discussed in this thesis, but as with most of his novels gender plays a secondary role to the, usually male, primary plot.

In looking at Kesey's aesthetic production across his entire career, discrete phases emerge out of a combination of his personal development and evolution of the cultural milieu. At the core of each phase is a desire to solve real world problems by expressing a social philosophy. In the first phase, Kesey develops literary aesthetic modes in contemporary novels. He then expands his exploration of perception in his psychedelic performance art phase. In the middle of his career, roughly from 1967 to 1987, Kesey becomes interested in more direct ways of instructing his readership through essays, screenplays, and New Journalism. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War he returns to novelistic and theatrical forms to explore social issues in specific areas of cultural conflict.

At the beginning of his career, in just a few short years, 1960 to 1963, Kesey wrote two novels—both innovators of fictional aesthetics. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* primarily embodies the cultural concern with the military industrial complex's overarching control—represented by Kesey's Combine. The first chapter of this study draws on literary influences, Kesey correspondence, and historical contextualisation to show that the aesthetics developed by Kesey in his first novel are in direct response to the height of anxiety centred on the Cold War.²⁵ Within the literary context of 1960s Black Humor, *Cuckoo's Nest* is described in relation to the hallucinatory aesthetics, one

²⁵It is the method of this thesis to make use of literary influences, authorial correspondence, and historical contextualisation to draw conclusions about the author's work, and thus all chapters make reference to these elements to varying degrees.

of its more distinctive characteristics. Among the aesthetic devices examined in the novel are the deployment of images from science fiction, poetic techniques in a novelistic context, and the development of the 'Combine' as a metaphor of paranoia for Cold War American society.

Kesey's second novel, *Sometimes a Great Notion*, develops a polyvalent narrative voice while focusing on the individual's response to the nuclear fear of annihilation at the height of the Cold War. *Notion* is Kesey's attempt to go beyond existentialism, and thus beyond literary modernism. The main emphasis of this study's second chapter falls on biographical and literary influences on the novel still within a Cold War context. The literary innovations in narrative design examined include maximalism, the development of literary emblems as means of negotiating plot, cut-up organisation, and the expression of paranoid nuclear anxiety.

From this solid beginning as a novelist Kesey's life changes focus a number of times, though always returning to mainstream fiction in one way or another. Kesey's third artistic endeavor, the subject of the third chapter of this work, is the nebulous period from 1963 until his release from prison in 1967. During this period Kesey moved away from his fiction, which privileged the spoken voice in a storytelling mode, to the pursuit of a sustained, minute-by-minute, lived performance art piece played out on the road and in concert halls at a time when performance art was still confined to the art gallery. Though the 1964 bus trip and subsequent performance art Happenings of 1965-1966 called Acid Tests can be singled out as limited points for aesthetic analysis, the art project Kesey was involved in was the development of a lifestyle. During this time Kesey viewed his life as a sequence of performances linked by his own artistic persona rather than as a production of self-contained artifacts. By encouraging those around him

to experiment in a drug laced living-life performance art, he was one of the few leaders of psychedelic aesthetics. It is this sensibility that would become a popular movement called the counterculture. In this sense Kesey moved from being a responder to the cultural stimuli, representing the spirit of the time, to being the projector of a culture itself. Tom Wolfe fulfilled the role of responder for this part of Kesey's life by writing *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1969), an important study of Kesey's life from 1964 to 1967. The third chapter of this thesis examines the influence of drugs and drug culture on Kesey's aesthetics in his first two novels, and then in his extra-literary forms including a cross-country bus trip, film, music, and 'Acid Tests.' The aesthetics this chapter concerns itself with are primarily hallucinatory imagery and sensory inundation.

Kesey's subsequent leap past the novelistic form and its constraints into cultural innovation furnishes one explanation for his failure to produce artistic products of the strength and popular appeal of his first two works. At the end of this phase of innovation, Kesey was derailed as a cultural responder and became especially suspicious of the concept of success. Despite this suspiciousness, and in attempting to get back on track, he embraced a number of literary forms. Taking into consideration Kesey's return to textual art in the form of opinion pieces, the fourth chapter identifies the use of distinct, direct style, irony, parody, the intellectual joining of high culture with mass culture, and direct commentary on the text and the world at large. The pieces in *Kesey's Garage Sale* (1973) still use some of the aesthetic devices found in Kesey's fiction, and occasionally they adopt fictional modes. Nonetheless, their style is a more direct engagement than his earlier fiction with a wide variety of issues including late capitalism, racism, feminism, and ecology. Taken as a whole, *Garage Sale* addresses nihilism using a wide variety of literary forms in order to instruct a nation through the literary arts.

Among the literary genres Kesey has explored, the screenplay is one which he came to early in his career, though without success in regards to any Hollywood productions. Chapter five argues that Kesey's venturing into this form is an extension of the cinematic aesthetics seen in his early novels. By looking at the two screenplays published by Kesey since 1973, 'Over the Border' in *Kesey's Garage Sale* and *The Furthur Inquiry* (1990), we see the author expanding his aesthetic vocabulary.

The New Journalism, the subject of the sixth chapter, is the mode of literature that Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson had developed in the 1960s.²⁶ Paying special attention to other authors working in the form (Wolfe, Thompson, Capote, Mailer), this chapter contextualises Kesey's return to mainstream literary art in the realm of New Journalism. This phase, expressed in the journalistic fiction reprinted in *Demon Box* (1986), is important for Kesey's development, though the work itself is not as culturally influential as his earlier work had been. Chapter six argues that Kesey's New Journalism is distinct among the School. Analysis of specific pieces of Kesey's journalism illustrates the reasons for his development of aesthetic principles using fictional modes to speak directly to social issues.

This thesis goes on from the establishment of Kesey as artist in these early phases to examine Kesey's work in yet other forms. It is not until the works of the 1990s that Kesey would return to sustained pieces of fiction and drama that would focus on the cultural concerns of the times. Taking the ideas expressed in John Barth's 'The Literature of Exhaustion' this chapter argues that shifts in Cold War anxieties in the late 1980s encouraged novelists to explore genre fiction while continuing to develop literary aesthetic techniques. The publication of *Caverns* (1990) marks the beginning of Kesey's

²⁶It is no coincidence that Wolfe and Thompson developed the new journalism form while writing about Kesey during this period.

exploration of individualist themes in the genre novel. He begins with a collaborative novel that develops issues surrounding New Age mysticism, and chapter seven examines in detail the aesthetics expressed by this novel in the historical thriller genre.

From there we explore Kesey's writing in the science fiction genre in his last solo novel, *Sailor Song*, and its attention to environmental fears. *Sailor Song* shows a distinct shift from Cold War anxiety to ecological concerns. By using the structure of the science fiction novel combined with aesthetic experimentation Kesey puts forth environmental ideals as a means of confronting the apocalypse. Notable elements used in *Sailor Song* include cut-up sequencing, science fiction technological inventions, a global ecological disaster, and fabulation.

Last Go Round, Kesey's last published novel written in collaboration with Ken Babbs, explores racism and gender discrimination in the dime Western genre. *Last Go Round*'s ambition resides in its attempt to portray the range of racial and gender tensions at work in a small Western town. Aesthetic techniques employed in this novel are the allegorical use of the cowboy-hero to represent chivalric knights and the rodeo arena as medieval tournament, development of the steam train as a metaphor for society, gambling as a means of symbolic exchange of metaphysical qualities and relationship, and the employment of racial linguistic tactics, as in the use of epithets to suppress others.

The final chapter explores Kesey's stageplay and video *Twister* (1998), which concerns itself with natural disasters and diseases like AIDS. This last piece is both his most stylistically innovative since *Sometimes a Great Notion* and most culturally topical, that is to say pertinent to the time in which it was written. *Twister* is also Kesey's most ambitious attempt to join his writerly persona with his performance art self. The chapter explores the aesthetics and compositional uniqueness of the play that was also released as

a video compiled from recordings of fifteen productions over a three year period of time.

This chapter explains the intricacies of Kesey's contextualising the play as a 'virtual reality' as an advanced method of treating material in dramatic format.

CHAPTER ONE:

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

Another type of book. I don't quite know which kind—but you would have to guess, behind the printed words, behind the pages, at something which would not exist, which would be above existence. A story, for example, something that could never happen, an adventure. It would have to be beautiful and hard as steel and make people ashamed of their existence.

From Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*¹

Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a reaction to his social context, is his first published attempt at addressing the problems presented by an American society stifled by conspiratorial paranoia and atomic anxiety. This novel's central image is the greater Combine of which the insane ward of Nurse Ratched is only a part. *Cuckoo's Nest*, while on the surface retaining standard realist narrative modes, that of a first person point-of-view narrator for example, exemplifies all the aesthetic characteristics of a 'paranoid' text. These characteristics include the use of poetic forms in a work of fiction, including rhyming prose and alliteration, a polyvalent first person point-of-view, horrific content and the elaboration of a massive conspiracy by a society that, in the words of Gilbert Porter, '... has become an intimidating force for consumerism and conformity called a "Combine"' (7). This chapter will cover the personal and literary influences on

¹Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (1938. Trans. Lloyd Alexander. New York: New Directions, 1964) 237.

Kesey's first novel, and the aesthetic forms present in the novel, especially that of the 'paranoid' conspiracy within *Cuckoo's Nest*.

INFLUENCES

No author creates a literary text in a vacuum. Thus it may be helpful here to trace some of the literary influences on *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* as part of the general context of paranoid American culture. It will also be helpful to understand the influences of other texts on *Cuckoo's Nest* in describing Kesey's use of specific fictional forms and the social visions they express because of the similarities of aesthetic properties seen between the texts. One characteristic found in post-war fiction is the use of a multitude of references and styles taken from other texts. Kesey's deployment of references or styles from other texts in *Cuckoo's Nest* is not as dense as later authors and the mention of texts here falls into two categories: those from which Kesey uses specific devices and those that simply help to establish the shared contemporary cultural milieu. The presence of shared cultural and literary tropes in texts of the late 1950s and early 60s helps establish some of the social sentiments of the period that find a textual trace in *Cuckoo's Nest*. These secondary texts are mentioned here to help prove what Kesey viewed as the central concerns of the culture, and thus what Kesey chose to write about in *Cuckoo's Nest* rather than show simply what he was reading at the time.

The art of novel writing is a collaborative act between an author and the world. Direct impressions, literary research, personal history or background, and an author's psychological make-up all collaborate or contribute to varying extents with the conscious author to produce a novel. All of these aspects of the process can be considered in the

category of influences rather than strict collaboration, for without these influences novels as we know them would never come into being. According to Stephen Tanner in his detailed study entitled *Ken Kesey*, the author's family left Colorado in 1941 and settled in Springfield, Oregon in 1946. Raised as a Baptist, Kesey spent many years reading the Bible and listening to stories told to him by his grandmother Smith (Tanner, *Kesey* 2-5). It is here that Kesey developed his deep appreciation for homespun yarns and Christian ethics. The colloquial voices of both McMurphy and Bromden, and also the Christian symbolism in the novel can be linked to Kesey's upbringing.

Kesey's juvenilia can be considered an influence on *Cuckoo's Nest* because it shows certain themes and development without which his first published novel would not have come into existence. During undergraduate school Kesey wrote nearly thirty short stories.² These early stories do not yield very much in the way of either aesthetic innovation or philosophical theorising, though Stephen Tanner does mention that Native American characters do take part in some of them, most notably 'The Avocados' and 'Sunset at Celilo' (Tanner, *Kesey* 22). Kesey's first attempt at the novel, written while attending the Stanford writing program, entitled *Zoo* (1960), has never been published.³

The plot of the novel rambles along with the son of Oregon chicken farmers on adventures in California. Though not able to stand on its own as a piece of literature, through the

²I have provided a list of all of Kesey's early short fiction (see Appendix G), the manuscripts of which are held at the University of Oregon. His unpublished novels are *End of Autumn* (1958-59), *Zoo* (1959-60), and *One Lane* (1960-61) all from the Ken Kesey Collection, Knight Library, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

³In the margin of a chapter of *Zoo* entitled 'Don't Wrestle with a Tarbaby' Kesey wrote, 'Out of old North Beach novel called *Zoo* that I claimed was never published because, at the time, five or so years ago: "The name 'beatnik' has too much meaning now in the public eye--Too much to overcome. I think . . ." I have been heard to say ". . . I'll wait a number of years for the beat bit to die down before I bring it out." Bullshit. I didn't publish it 5 years ago because nobody bought it. I didn't publish it after success brought requests for it because I kept telling myself I would someday re-write it, bring it up to my *present standards* (like who wants their old adolescent bumbles marring the grace of *present mature standards* and fucking up a hard-won reputation?) . . . More bullshit. I am a terrible liar [sic.] but at least this present inky ~~writer~~ is straightshootin' enough to bygod warn you about it' (Strelow 176).

process of writing *Zoo* Kesey was able to develop as a writer. He evolves from a simple existential imitator of Kerouac and John Clellon Holmes in the early pages to an independent artisan capable of strong and original prose pointing toward both the psychedelic sensibility and his concern with Racism through inclusion of significant African-America and Native-American characters by the end.

Upon completion of the draft of *Zoo* Kesey immediately began writing *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Malcolm Cowley said of Kesey's workshopping of *Cuckoo's Nest* at Stanford that, 'Chapters of his novel were read aloud in class and they aroused a mixed but generally admiring response' (Strelow 2). When asked if he contributed anything to the novel Cowley said:

'Not even a sentence' is the answer; the book is Kesey's from first word to the last. Probably I pointed out passages that didn't 'work', that failed to produce a desired effect on the reader. Certainly I asked questions, and some of these may have helped clarify Kesey's notions of how to go about solving his narrative problems, but the solutions were always his own. (Strelow 2)

Kesey, devoid of the anxiety of influence, displays a unique willingness to be influenced by those around him. The influences discussed thus far show Kesey's willingness to allow himself to be influenced by external stimuli while working on a project.

There are many aspects of *Cuckoo's Nest* that reflect the strong tradition of American fiction. One of the earliest American texts to influence Kesey's novel is Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), the very first paragraph of which plays upon the truthfulness of the events portrayed in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). Huck, as narrator, describes how what Twain, as author of *Tom Sawyer*, wrote about the events was '... the truth, mainly' (32). The idea of the 'truth', with which

Kesey is also obsessed, bothers Huck. He commiserates over the truthfulness of the earlier text as a way of setting the stage for his own account of his own adventure. The assumption at first seems to be that his own book will be more closely related to 'reality', but even as Huck implies this he says, 'I never seen anybody but lied' (32). Here we see that Huck's version of his own tale may be far from the truth, especially as so many of his interactions with other characters involve such a high degree of the giving of false information. There is an inherent authorial challenge made when Huck, a fictional character, takes over as narrator from Twain, a real-life author. With this in mind, Kesey has his first-person narrator in *Cuckoo's Nest* taking control of the portrayal of his world, warning the reader in one of the most frequently quoted utterances of the novel, 'But it's the truth even if it didn't happen'; that the facts of the story can be questioned, but not their meaning (8).⁴

Tom Wolfe identifies Kesey's method of collecting material for his novels thus:

I think Kesey is a good example of this [Faulknerian journalistic collecting of details from life] too. Kesey's first novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, was written after he volunteered to work in a mental ward, specifically to get material. Then he went into logging country, specifically to get material for *Sometimes a Great Notion*.⁵

This journalistic method is not the only influence seen from Faulkner. Kesey was probably especially attuned to Faulkner because Malcolm Cowley, Faulkner's editor, was Kesey's teacher at Stanford, and then Kesey's own editor as well. It is reasonable to guess that Cowley would have used Faulkner's work in examples of writing technique to

⁴As the beginning of the two texts in question here bear a relationship to one another, the endings too should be remembered; Huck saying about lighting 'out for the Territory' that 'I been there before', and Bromden saying of returning to his Native American home 'I been away a long time' (311).

⁵Dorothy Scura, *Conversations with Tom Wolfe* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990) 62.

his students while at Stanford, and that Kesey would have been interested in his teacher's most prestigious client. Stephen Tanner has noted that *Cuckoo's Nest* illustrates a resemblance to Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), in as much as all these novels regard the question of 'whose story is this?' McMurphy is clearly the focus of Bromden's storytelling, but it can be debated as to which character the book is really about (Tanner, *Kesey* 24). At first glance the first person point-of-view of Chief Bromden has some of the more or less typical characteristics akin to that of *The Great Gatsby*, in which the narrator tells another's story. In a note in the eighty page outline manuscript for the unpublished and unfinished novel called *One Lane*, written between 1960 and 1961, Kesey mentions a Faulkner novel in terms of the use of humour in developing a new style of prose: 'I think the chapter must be done with fairly open comedy, a little more open than the *As I Lay Dying* type, though it is somewhat the same type of humor, the humor of heaping it on and on—and on.'⁶ Kesey here is acknowledging his taking a stylistic form from a modern author, comedic maximalism, and increasing the degree of that form in order to create a new style. This new style was called Black Humor at the time of publication. Conrad Knickerbocker hailed the Black Humorists' works as 'The one genuinely new postwar development in American literature.'⁷ As part of this new development Kesey became one of a group of writers experimenting in this novelistic form.

In the Viking Critical Edition of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, editor John C. Pratt includes excerpts from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* (1946), and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), all of which plainly

⁶Ken Kesey, *One Lane* (Unpublished and unfinished novel circa 1960-61 from the Ken Kesey Collection, Knight Library, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon) 45.

⁷Conrad Knickerbocker, 'Humor with a Mortal Sting,' *New York Times Book Review* 27 Sept. 1964: 3.

illustrate resemblances to Kesey's first published novel (Kesey, *Cuckoo's* 574-596, 600-617). The excerpt from *Invisible Man* describes a clinical scene of Electro Shock Therapy closely akin to Bromden's experience, including childhood memory and a singing grandmother. *All the King's Men* recreates a darkly humorous scene of a prefrontal lobotomy that includes imagery of inserting 'mechanisms' into the brain reminiscent of Bromden's hallucinations. Both Electro Shock Therapy and prefrontal lobotomy are technological innovations which saw much improvement of technique and consequently much more wide spread use in the 1950s and 60s. Kesey's first hand experience with patients in the VA hospital in Menlo Park contributed to the novel's expression of technological anxiety.

One theme running through Kesey's work is the struggle between the individual and society. Speaking of Kerouac's early influences, Martin Stoddard says: 'The bonehard facts were a virtue: realism. Something intensely mystical, however was the goal. In approaching this goal, a denser, more layered, inward and psychological style was needed. Kerouac imitated the conversation of his great male comrade and hero of *On the Road*, Neal Cassady.'⁸ Reading *On the Road* was one of the main inspirations of Kesey's desire to move to San Francisco, and thus the San Francisco Renaissance (especially in the form of fiction practiced by Kerouac and Burroughs, as opposed to the more strictly poetic forms developed by the Beat poets) makes up part of the foundation of Kesey's early novels.⁹ Critics have often pointed out McMurphy's similarity to Kesey himself, but rarely do they point to Dean Moriarty as the hero's partial model. Most likely Bromden's unique point-of-view, so different from Kerouac's, does not

⁸Stoddard Martin, *California Writers: Jack London, John Steinbeck, the Tough Guys* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1983) 186-187.

⁹Michael Davidson, *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and Community at Mid-Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

allow the reader to be dazzled by McMurphy's talking for its own sake. So, while Moriarty potentially affected Kesey's early writings his influence would not be profoundly seen until a later phase of Kesey's aesthetic pursuit, when Kesey would become friends with the real-life Neal Cassady himself.¹⁰

However inspirational Kerouac's work may have been, very little formal influence can be traced from Kerouac to Kesey. The latter himself mentions that his childhood reading included Edgar Rice Burroughs, comic books, and some science fiction (Tanner, *Kesey* 7). The comic, cartoon, and science fiction imagery in *Cuckoo's Nest* seems particularly influenced by this reading, in addition to William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*. A number of times Chief Bromden mentions the fact that the people around him are like characters from cartoon comedy. Some of Kesey's college stories, some of them science fiction stories written to fulfill writing assignments, illustrate Kesey's early interest in the genre and explain some of the paranoid science fiction imagery expressed in *Cuckoo's Nest*. Bromden's delivery of the narrative specifically plays with the concept of reality. The reader is left with no doubt that the events of the story occur, regardless of what Bromden believes. Was it not for Bromden's unique point-of-view that allows the reader to see both 'reality' and his hallucinated version of it, if the reader was only given access to his hallucinations, then the novel would be genre science fiction. That is to say, in this case, the distinguishing point between science fiction and that of Kesey's unique product rests entirely on the presentation of conceptions of the real.

In a letter to Ken Babbs written during the early phase of *Cuckoo's Nest's* composition, Kesey specifically notes William Burroughs' prose in *Naked Lunch* as

¹⁰Kesey has said that he met Cassady before writing *Cuckoo's Nest*, so the real-life Moriarty can be added as an influence to that of Kerouac's fictionalised character. George Plimpton, ed. *Beat Writers at Work: The Paris Review* (New York: The Modern Library, 1999) 212.

exceptionally good writing (Keseey, *Cuckoo's* 338). In another letter to Ken Babbs Keseey's praise of *Naked Lunch* is very high indeed: 'I just finished "Naked Lunch" Paris edition—rare thing—and perhaps one of the most important things written in 50 years.'¹¹ Burroughs' influence in *Cuckoo's Nest* is mostly seen in the hallucinatory descriptions by Bromden and some of their horrific content, though no specific images can be cited. Also important is Burroughs' use of cut-up narrative techniques, found more profoundly influential in Keseey's second novel, as we will see, though Bromden's stream of conscious thoughts expressed during and after his Electro Shock Therapy, already mentioned in relation to *Invisible Man*, is composed in a cut-up manner by literally cutting and pasting different sections of the stream of conscious narrative together for dramatic effect.

Though Keseey expressed great respect for *Naked Lunch*, he could not pattern most of *Cuckoo's Nest* after it because *Naked Lunch* omits so much of both character and especially plot, that its novelistic structure, or lack thereof, could not provide Keseey with any structural assistance. Strictly speaking it should not be considered a novel since it is in essence a series of cut-up bits and gags with the names of characters appearing throughout the piece—though the critical world has thus far certainly treated it as such (perhaps for lack of any other form of definition). If one disregards its packaging one might call *Naked Lunch* an epic impressionistic prose poem rather than a novel because it omits some of the necessary elements of fiction, for example plot resolution and coherent or sustained characters.

you can't say this. Again perhaps you could rework to suggest just how Burroughs reworks the novel form by disrupting linear narrative. See Tony Tanner

The absence of such defining elements as plot or character motivation prevents *Naked Lunch* from being considered strictly a novel (however much it may be an

¹¹Ken Keseey, *Outgoing Correspondence: 1959-1964* 'Letter 16' (Mostly unpublished letters from the Ken Keseey Collection, Knight Library, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon).

experiment with novelistic form) whereas Kesey retains plot enough to retain genre, while maintaining anti-novelistic elements. The comparison with Burroughs is further compelling because Burroughs is often cited as being the man most representative of the late twentieth century because his work ranges from literature to performance art, painting, and film. Kesey has been involved in the same areas of artistic endeavor as Burroughs in addition to writing plays for the stage and two screenplays.

This is not to say that *Naked Lunch* and *Cuckoo's Nest* bear no relationship to each other. Thomas Schaub recognises Burroughs' attempt in *Naked Lunch* to express a more intimate representation of consciousness than previous writers (78). Kesey's similar desire in *Cuckoo's Nest*, along psychological lines, is tempered with more thought to structure than Burroughs. The opening sentences of both texts reveal their intimate relationship. Compare Burroughs' 'I can feel the heat closing in, feel them out there making their moves, setting up their devil doll stool pigeons, crooning over my spoon and dropper I throw away at Washington Square station . . .' (1) with Kesey's 'They're out there. Black boys in white suits up before me to commit sex acts in the hall and get it mopped up before I can catch them' (3). The duplication of the phrase 'out there' and the general sense of both passages gives off a similarly paranoid feeling, indicating their close relationship. There is, however, a significant difference despite the fact that both sentences are told from a first person point-of-view. Burroughs' 'feel them out there' uses the accusative form of the verb making 'them' the object of the sentence; *Naked Lunch*'s point-of-view persona is pursued by the object, detached. Kesey's use of 'they're out there . . . before I can catch them' is using the nominative form of the verb making the 'they' of the sentence its subject; Bromden as point-of-view persona possesses a power even he is unaware of—in pursuit of the subject of the sentence—even

in his paranoia. Though there is no other evidence than that already provided that Kesey consciously patterned *Cuckoo's Nest* after *Naked Lunch* there are interesting aesthetic similarities.

There is one other text that is even more profoundly influential on *Cuckoo's Nest* than *Naked Lunch*. As hinted at by the epigraph to this chapter, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, a text that held particular interest for the Beat writers, is where Kesey gained the model for Chief Bromden's philosophical and aesthetic point-of-view and the philosophical foundation for the novel. The identification of *Nausea's* importance on Kesey has been problematised for a number of reasons. Most importantly is the fact that Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* is also so heavily influenced by Sartre's text that it is difficult to tell clearly whether specific imagery comes through Kesey from Burroughs or Sartre. Burroughs' hallucinatory images of human crabs and centipedes clearly comes from the surreal images in *Nausea*. It is interesting that critics have not explored *Cuckoo's Nest's* relationship to *Nausea* previously, and this may be because Kesey never mentions it himself as an influence as he does with *Naked Lunch* and other texts or authors, though he does refer to French existentialism in regards to *Sometimes a Great Notion*. Critics may also have ignored Sartre in the past because he is not an American author, but he certainly influenced Kesey's early writing and subsequent philosophy.

In *Cuckoo's Nest*, Kesey presents Chief Bromden as an Existential Man. Like Antoine Roquentin in *Nausea*, Bromden tells of an Existentialist world from a first-person point-of-view. Though Bromden's point-of-view is more complex than Roquentin's, it is more than just the vantage point that the two characters have in common; both see the world in hallucinatory terms. Though Bromden is more concerned with robotics and machinery where Roquentin sees insects or meat, both narrators do

share one particular image. Fog is one of the primary features of Bromden's view of the mental ward in which the action of the novel takes place. It is an artificial fog created by the Combine as a means of control, and perhaps by himself, through his own perception, as a means of defense against existence. Fog is a similar feature of Roquentin's Bouville: 'I floated, dazed by luminous fog dragging me in all directions at once' (30). Like the Combine's fog, Roquentin's has the power to drag people according to *its* will. And like the two sources of fog in *Cuckoo's Nest*, Bouville possesses two different kinds of fog: 'Fog has filled the room: not the real fog, that had gone a long time ago—but the other, the one the streets were still full of, which came out of the walls and pavements' (105). As with Kesey's interest in the relationship of perception with reality, of the two fogs in Bouville one is that of the 'real' while the other is produced artificially by the architecture of civilization itself.

While the point-of-view and imagery of *Cuckoo's Nest* owes a great deal to *Nausea*, Sartre's novel also provides the foundation for Kesey's social philosophy. Again critics may not have been aware of this connection in the past because Kesey's philosophy is diametrically opposed to that expressed by Sartre in *Nausea*. Where Sartre's novel traces the self-centred journey of an existentialist individual, Bromden's evolution is from that of a person trapped in existential solipsism, but who learns both a communal and an individualistic awareness through the example provided by McMurphy as the post-existentialist Man. The model for Kesey's post-existential philosophy comes from the allegorical figure of the Self-Taught Man in *Nausea*. It is the universal love and acceptance of all of humanity expressed by the Self-Taught Man at his luncheon with Roquentin that acts as the model for McMurphy, which allows him to make his ultimate sacrifices for his fellow Man (Sartre, *Nausea* 158). Like the Self-Taught Man

McMurphy is an autodidact of sorts, but his knowledge is street wisdom rather than any effete intellectualism Sartre's characters embody. Of all the literary influences discussed here none, save for *Naked Lunch* and *Nausea*, emerges as primarily influential on Kesey's first novel; all contribute to Kesey's interest in point-of-view, narrative technique, and the representation of the relationship between the individual and society.

COLD WAR PARANOIA

Among the themes expressed in *Cuckoo's Nest* Stephen Tanner identifies, 'the modern world as technologised and consequently divorced from nature; contemporary society as repressive; authority as mechanical and destructive; contemporary man as victim of rational but loveless forces beyond his control; and contemporary man as weak, frightened, and sexless' (Tanner, *Kesey* 18). All of these themes are social in nature; in other words, Kesey's concern is with a social apocalypse. Bromden as point-of-view character represents one individual responding to contemporary social concerns; his response is personal and representative. The foundation of *Cuckoo's Nest* is a common theme in American fiction: the individual's struggle with the order of society. What is unique about Kesey's treatment of this and related themes is the way in which a hero figure instructs the point-of-view character on ways to rebel, without dictating the terms of the individual's rebellion. In order to illustrate this complex social philosophy, Kesey had to develop innovative aesthetic devices and a unique conspiratorial entity against which the characters could rebel. As we will see, this unique conspiratorial entity, the Combine, is not a stock image as we might find in the works of William Burroughs or Phillip K. Dick, but rather a culturally specific apparatus emerging from a specific cultural

referent.

Individual characters aid one another in their struggle with a repressive society. Gilbert Porter points out that McMurphy does for Bromden what Hank in *Sometimes a Great Notion* does for Lee: liberates him from 'the loss of trust of the self' (37). This loss of trust in the self comes from social pressures and the Cold War ontological uncertainty created out of atomic and anti-communist fear. A character's liberation from that loss, caused by social pressures, enables that character to take an active role in society, rather than simply leading to a purely self-centred peace of mind. Existentialism is the literary and philosophical phase centred on the social upheavals leading up to the Second World War. This transition point is an especially solipsistic movement that shows philosophically and novelistically with Camus and Sartre in Europe and in the fiction of Paul Bowles, J. D. Salinger, and Jack Kerouac in America. The existential mode is self-absorbed: focused on the perceptions of the individual. This solipsistic phase which asserts that the self is the only thing that cannot be known is in direct contrast to the concept that was to follow that the self is the only thing that can with any certainty be known.¹² The alienation expressed in the early novels of the 1960s is social and universal. These novels, finally, focus on society as a whole in an uncertain time, even as they use individuals to illustrate this focus. Though post-war American fiction is skeptical of its own power to affect society, it is still interested in examining society, and it makes its critique by the development of characters which represent individuals. In this paradigm Bromden and Lee begin their separate narratives as existential humans, encased hopelessly in their own paranoid worlds of perception, while their tutors, McMurphy

¹²Tony Hilfer informs us that the alienation in the solipsistic existential novels of the 1950s such as Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, 'is personal and metaphysical rather than political' (11).

and Hank, represent post-existential human beings.

There are three important elements developed in *Cuckoo's Nest*: prosody, point-of-view, and the creation of the Combine. Among the aesthetic devices employed in *Cuckoo's Nest* a number of critics have noted Kesey's use of poetics within his early prose. Though other novelists have inserted lines of poetry interspersed with prose, Kesey imbeds his prosody within the prose paragraphs of his fiction. Often these poetics remain unnoticed by the conscious reader, yet still have an effect on the writing's reception. John C. Pratt mentions the poetic use of rhyme in *Cuckoo's Nest* as shown in Strelow's *Kesey*, and Gilbert Porter does a more or less complete treatment of a long rhyming passage. Throughout Kesey's works we find aesthetic poetic forms including rhyme, meter, and alliteration deployed in order to heighten moments of conclusion/climax. Alliteration is used more pervasively than rhyme throughout Kesey's career as a way of making the prose more artful, as well as heightening dramatic tension, though *Cuckoo's Nest* deploys rhyme to a greater extent than his later works. Prose which incorporates aesthetic poetic forms in general have the effect of making their contents more memorable and vivid than prose that does not use such devices, and thus in a novelistic context the use of poetic forms acts as an aesthetic mixing of a language from outside of the novel's traditional boundaries. According to Porter the impulse to rhyme is an impulse to order, and Kesey's rhyming illustrates the post-war mind, here Chief Bromden, using modernist aesthetics to make sense of the nuclear world (Porter 17).

Gilbert Porter accurately explains that there is a split in Bromden's narration between first-person narrator as observer and first-person narrator as participant (12). This split shows the beginnings of existentialist form evolving toward a post-existentialist aesthetic. It is with this split in narration that Kesey explores the existential import of

perception on the individual. The modernist move to break narrative into component parts was not performed within an individual's point-of-view so much as expressed through large blocks of experiments in narrative style, like Joyce's shifting of style from chapter to chapter in *Ulysses* (1922). Bromden's split in a less structured, almost simultaneous manner illustrates the move, which Kesey would perfect in *Notion*, of making it possible for all narrative points-of-view to encompass a wider range of purposes. The roots of this narrative play can be seen in a letter by Kesey to Ken Babbs written while conducting research for *Cuckoo's Nest*, a letter that expresses a unique and complex point-of-view:

. . . I tried something that will be extremely difficult to pull off, and, to my knowledge, has never been tried before—the narrator is going to be a character. He will not take part in the action, or ever speak as I, but he will be a character to be influenced by the events that take place, he will have a position and personality, and a character that is not essentially mine (though it may, by chance, be). Think of this: I, me ken kesey, is stepped back another step and am writing about a third person author writing about something. Fair makes the mind real [sic], don't it? (Kesey, *Cuckoo's Nest* 337)

The first-person narrator of another's story (as Nick Carraway is of *Gatsby*) in modern American fiction is traditionally a participant in the action. Kesey does set Bromden apart from the action of *Cuckoo's Nest* initially, but even in the first sentence of the novel Bromden uses the first-person 'I', and there is a failure to sustain the proposed aloofness throughout. Interestingly, this 'failure' or inconsistency allows the novel to use a convincing polyvalent point-of-view to describe the evolving conflicts taking place before the narrator.

Another split in Bromden's point-of-view is between the real and the imagined. Bromden hallucinates throughout the novel, as do other emotionally disturbed characters

on the mental ward, especially Martini. Jean-Paul Sartre interprets emotions as:

attempts to transform the world, attempts resulting from frustrations in our immediate dealings with it. Not being able to change it effectively by direct methods, we try to modify it by conferring upon it qualities of a type very different from those we normally encounter. These qualities, to be sure, have less reality than those we meet in the real world; they are parts of a new 'magic' world. (Spiegelberg 501)

This 'new magic world' is an accurate description of Bromden's hallucinations and illustrates Kesey's integration of existential phenomenology through aesthetic means.

Hallucinatory language, in a sense, is a form of linguistic synesthesia. Especially as Kesey develops it in a long tradition including authors such as Coleridge, Poe, the French Symbolists, and Surrealists, hallucinatory language blends the sensory impulses of objective reality with the imaginative interpretation of the mind.

Bromden, acting as interpreter, observes the orderlies feeding men who are incapable of feeding themselves:

The black boys cuss the Vegetables and ream the mouths bigger with a twisting motion of the spoon, like coring a rotten apple: 'This ol' fart Blastic, he's comin' to pieces befo' my eyes. I can't tell no more if I'm feeding him bacon puree or chunks of his own fuckin' tongue.' (30-31)

The 'rotten apple' simile is Bromden's imagistic/metaphoric interpretation of what he sees. In many cases the narrator's hallucinations tip over from the exaggerated mode of simile description to that of metaphor in which the images he receives become, for him, the reality he imagines. Most of the horrific images involve the physical assault on the human body in a way that degrades it and eliminates the potential for retaining dignity. A few nights after the apple coring scene Blastic comes to a most horrific end:

He [a Combine worker] goes to the bed and with one hand grabs the old Vegetable Blastic by the heel and lifts him straight up like Blastic don't

weigh more'n a few pounds; with the other hand the worker drives the hook through the tendon back of the heel, and the old guy's hanging there upside down, his moldy face blown up big, scared, the eyes scummed with mute fear. (85)

When Blastic begins to resist the assault the worker kills him by gutting him with a scalpel like cleaning a fish. Bromden expects to see intestines spill out but instead observes only rust, ash, wire and glass. The ambiguity here complicates the narrative by providing the reader with Bromden's own expectations of the real and then thwarting them with a horrific synthesis.

For the most part the narration carefully presents Bromden's hallucinations as direct interpretations of physical stimulus received by the narrator. At times, Kesey pushes Bromden's narratorial powers beyond his immediate environment. When the nurse with the birthmark finds Bromden wandering the ward at night, 'She's fiddling with the chain that runs down her neck' (157). The chain itself acts as an emblematic idea which Bromden uses to hypothesise about how the nurse treats her birthmark at home alone, by scraping off her own skin. The birthmark's treatment is presented straight-forwardly as fact despite Bromden's inability to have ever witnessed her at home himself. In this manner, through a character's imagination, Bromden can act as a first-person narrator with nearly omniscient powers of observation.

To add yet another level of narrative complexity to Bromden's split point-of-view, the degree of the narrator's paranoia may throw doubts on the malevolence of Nurse Ratched and the Combine. Bromden sees the Combine in terms of electronic machinery. An ex-electrician and electronics student, Bromden may naturally see things in electronic terms and thus be creating much of what he sees on the ward in his mind. However, the reader, having little doubt that controlling agents of the Combine are at work in the world, may be lead to believe that Bromden has already been turned into a machine by his twenty years in the hospital. Despite any doubts the reader may entertain, the heroic escape of Bromden at the end of the novel remains epiphanic. The

reader may be aware that life for Bromden may not be easy, adjusting to Cold War culture after so long an isolation in the mental hospital, but his escape is still portrayed in a positive light. It is an element of the post-war paranoid fictions to cast doubt on reality in general, but *Cuckoo's Nest* maintains a heroic paradigm even as it employs such a complex narrative ambiguity.

Through this first-person point-of-view the reader of the text, as we have seen, experiences a horror of both the assault on individual dignity and socio-symbolic transgressive physical violence, as we have seen. The hands of representatives of an organisation called the Combine commit all of the atrocities witnessed by Bromden. This is the most important innovation in *Cuckoo's Nest*, one that expresses the anxiety caused by the perceived conformity of a Cold War society. R.L. Sassoon describes the Combine as 'some panoramic design which absolutely negates the possibilities of freedom and individuation. . . .'¹³ It is this unmovable wall of control against which the characters must react. In describing *Cuckoo's Nest* Matthew Rick, in his Naropa Institute MFA thesis posted on the world wide web entitled *Tarnished Galahad: the Prose and Pranks of Ken Kesey*, writes, 'The Ward, (or the Combine, as it is also called) is portrayed entirely by cold, mechanical descriptions.'¹⁴ Rick has made an error by equating Bromden's view of the ward with the entirety of the Combine, for it is much more vast than just one mental ward in one hospital in one state. Bromden is only capable of seeing it from his limited view. The Combine is all elements of American society that attempt to control and suppress the individual spirit. President Eisenhower named and warned the world about the military industrial complex, that real world Combine of business, the

13R.L. Sassoon, 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: Review' *Northwest Review* 6 (Spring 1963): 116.

14Matthew Rick, *Tarnished Galahad: The Prose and Pranks of Ken Kesey*: 31 Jan. 2001 <<http://www.ulster.net/~shady/thesis.html>>.

military and other branches of government in his farewell address broadcast on 17 January of 1961, six months before Kesey finished composing *Cuckoo's Nest*. Ironically, like Doctor Frankenstein losing control of his own creation, Eisenhower is historically seen as being primarily responsible for the birth and uncontrollable size of the military industrial complex.¹⁵ In the aforementioned farewell speech Eisenhower says:

But now we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security alone more than the net income of all United States corporations.

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every state house, every office of the federal government In the councils of government we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence whether sought or unsought by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes.¹⁶

Given that it is a conservative President issuing this warning on his way out of office, they seem, in historical retrospect, radical words indeed. The language itself is like the place where Bromden explains a bit about the mental hospital: 'The ward is a factory for the Combine. It's for fixing up mistakes made in the neighborhoods and in the schools and in the churches, the hospital is' (38). It includes a list similar to Eisenhower's, as well as the summing up of the concept of the military industrial complex in the word 'combination'. The fact that Kesey changed the word combination to Combine for the

¹⁵An easily viewable presentation of part of Eisenhower's speech on the military industrial complex can be found at the beginning of Oliver Stone's *JFK* (Warner Brothers, 1991).

¹⁶Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace 1956-1961* (London: Heinemann, 1966) 616.

sake of his novel shows the strong influence of the socio-political environment on the novel. Eisenhower's Presidency makes him in a special way the General of the Combine, which makes McMurphy's declaration that he will vote for him in the November election between Kennedy and Nixon more poignant, since it ironically advocates a continuation of the social environment which the novel criticises (20). As seen from the Eisenhower references, the control the Combine exerts on the citizenry is an unsought influence. Though specific language from this address can be seen to have found its way into *Cuckoo's Nest*, the concept of the military industrial complex became a widely used term for American society after Kennedy took over as President of the United States.

A much closer extra-literary influence exerted a paranoid creative force on Kesey during the composition of *Cuckoo's Nest*. In the post-World War Two era the Central Intelligence Agency directed a number of projects designed to research and develop ways of controlling human behaviour, both civilian and military. These efforts were in the realms of hypnosis, drugs, surgery, electro-shock therapy and sensory deprivation. The projects had names like Artichoke, Bluebird, Chatter, Castigate, and MK-ULTRA.¹⁷ It is the last of these, established by the CIA in April 1953, which Kesey volunteered for in 1959. It is conceivable that MK-ULTRA had both chemical and electro-shock therapy research projects in place at the time Kesey was given psycho-active drugs and subsequently observed by 'scientists' at the Veterans hospital in Menlo Park and while he worked as an aide on the mental ward in the same hospital a few months later.¹⁸

Though Kesey claims not to have known he was involved in CIA experiments until Allen Ginsberg showed him evidence of that fact twenty years later, the presence of secret

¹⁷MK-ULTRA is specifically mentioned as the foundation for the plot of the recent film *Conspiracy Theory* starring Mel Gibson and Julia Roberts (Richard Donner, dir. Tristar, 1997).

¹⁸Ken Babbs, *On the Bus* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1990) 11.

government projects must have been felt by Kesey as some nebulous aura behind the corners of the hospital where Kesey did his research for the novel, and thus the metaphor of the Combine has real world correlations to Cold War human behavioural studies.¹⁹

Matthew Rick suggests 'that the Big Nurse does not merely represent a cog in the machine that is the Combine, but is herself the machine' (*Tarnished Galahad*). Again, this is not an altogether accurate portrayal. Rick may be thinking of the following sentence in making Ratched the ultimate power in the Combine: '... I know now there is no real help against her or her Combine' (110). The possessive here does not indicate that the Big Nurse is the commander of the conspiracy, but merely a member of it, just as a pupil in an elementary school calls it 'my school', a church-goer 'my church.' Chief Bromden himself, the novel's narrator, depicts Nurse Ratched as a robotic officer in a vast Combine organisation, but not the leader of it—her power is immediate, not all-encompassing. Big Nurse's first description, some of the earliest 'science fictionised' imagery in mainstream post-war literature contemporaneous with the early work of William Burroughs and Phillip K. Dick, predates some of the best cyberpunk imagery mixing together human anatomy with technological devices of the 1980s and 90s. Ratched has 'equipment' and 'machinery' inside; the end of her finger is 'like the tip of a soldering iron'; in her bag she carries 'wheels and gears, cogs polished to a hard glitter'; she 'walks stiff' (4).²⁰ These initial descriptions set up Big Nurse as an agent for the Combine with the hardware for fixing broken men, or at least controlling those not able to fit into

¹⁹Ken Kesey, Letter to the author. (Sept. 2000) 2.

²⁰An example of this cybernetic imagery in Kesey's work that predates even *Cuckoo's Nest* is found in *Zoo*: 'I could see the intricate network of organs and tubes and dials pulsating inside his body . . . so many parts wiggling and working inside that little animal!' (Strelow 187).

society.²¹

The satirical social critique of the mental health ‘industry’ is downplayed here because the hospital in *Cuckoo’s Nest* is a metaphor for an outpost of social control akin to schools and churches, and Kesey does not see it as an issue within psychiatry, but an issue of the world, of existence. The hospital is a crucible for the workings of all of society. Critics of modern psychiatry like R.D. Laing, David Cooper and others would come along in the 1960s and 70s with whom Kesey might be in agreement, but for Kesey the hospital is a literary symbol, not directly transferable to hospital issues but intended to represent society at large.

Bromden lets the reader know early on that Nurse Ratched has allies in the hospital—that there is a conspiracy going on: ‘When you got something under your belt you’re stronger and more wide awake, and the bastards who work for the Combine aren’t so apt to slip one of their machines in on you in place of an electric shaver’ (6). There are many aspects to the Combine in *Cuckoo’s Nest*, but the most interesting deals with it as conspiracy. Though Bromden’s hallucinations of the way the Combine works in the hospital are metaphoric, the reader is left with no doubt that in the ‘real world’ there are ‘agents’ in schools, hospitals, and the military bent on controlling the individual spirit that have the potential to shake up the status quo. Bromden’s perception is symbolic of actual systematic means of society’s control over the individual.

In a lucid passage where Bromden comes closest to describing the Combine in conspiratorial terms, we see Big Nurse’s position in the way the world is put together. Bromden tells the reader that she is, ‘Working alongside others like her who I call the

²¹It is interesting that later in the narrative McMurphy establishes himself, ironically, as the son of Frankenstein’s monster when he describes his father as having ‘an iron bolt through his jawbone’ (109).

“Combine,” which is a huge organization that aims to adjust the Outside as well as the Inside, has made her a real veteran at adjusting things’ (26). Nurse Ratched is an ‘adjuster’, one of many, who wants her ward to operate ‘like a smooth, accurate, precision-made machine’, just as she wants society Outside to operate (26). Her ward is the place where broken citizens are taken for fixing and thus the hospital must run even more precisely than the Outside. So she sits in the center of a ‘web of wires like a watchful robot, ^λtend her network with mechanical insect skill’ (26). The web is an essential Combine metaphor throughout the novel, and the science fiction imagery of robots and alien insects reflects the Cold War anxiety of invasion from 1950s science fiction B-movies. In McMurphy’s first minor victory over Nurse Ratched in the arena of the group therapy session, Bromden sees that the Big Nurse cannot lose, ‘She’ll go on winning, just like the Combine, because she has all the power of the Combine behind her’ (109). The strength of the decentralised organisation rests in the fact that the power can flow in any direction on the web of wires to any agent as need arises.

A reminiscence Bromden entertains of a cotton mill he visited in high school introduces language and terms from the world of business or capitalism. Initiated by the hospital’s hum, Bromden thinks back on a young woman he met there.²² When she is pulled back to her function in the mill, the cotton thread makes a web connecting the components of the factory like Nurse Ratched’s web centred at her control panel on the ward. Just as the similarity between the ward’s sound and that of the cotton mill begins the flashback, the resemblance of the web of threads to the ward’s ‘web of wires’ brings Bromden back to the hospital in current time. Here Bromden declares, in the quotation previously mentioned in reference to the Eisenhower speech, ‘The ward is a factory’, that

²²In *Nausea* Roquentin also hears ‘the low hum of their voices’ coming from out of his paranoid fog (98).

the ward is a factory for the Combine. In essence, the ward is a repair factory (38).

Bromden describes the men who have been deposited on the ward permanently thus:

‘Across the room from the Acutes are the culls of the Combine’s product, the Chronicles.

Not in the hospital, these, to get fixed, but just to keep them from walking around the streets giving the product a bad name’ (14). Culls are usually stock animals, as opposed to companion animals, like sheep and cattle, or vegetables that are eliminated from a group in order to raise the overall standard of the product. Bromden’s use of the word ‘product’ for citizens emphasises the capitalistic nature of the Combine’s corporate system of control, and the level of objectification at play in the ward.

Later, when the conflict between McMurphy and the Big Nurse is clearly defined, Bromden explains more explicitly Ratched’s position: ‘McMurphy doesn’t know it, but he’s onto what I realized a long time back, that it’s not just the Big Nurse by herself, but it’s the whole Combine, the nation-wide Combine that’s the really big force, and the nurse is just a high-ranking official for them’ (181). This passage explains Ratched’s position in military terms—‘high-ranking’, as well as governmental ‘official’.

Harding, one of the patients on the ward, refers to the Combine in governmental terms when he says, ‘And that will make nearly a week our friend McMurphy has been with us without succeeding in throwing over the government, is that what you’re saying Cheswickle?’ (116). The patients on the ward see clearly that all organisational metaphors can be applied to an organism that is as large and complex as society itself, so that the Combine, a metaphor for society, is described in terms of schools, churches, hospitals, factories, and governments.

All of the realms of the Combine seen thus far are viewed by characters from inside the ward. On the way to the fishing trip, the novel’s climactic scene, Bromden sees

evidence of the Combine on the Outside—evidence that has no direct relation to Big Nurse: ‘Maybe the guys weren’t able to see it either, just feel the pressures of the different beams and frequencies coming from all directions, working to push and bend you one way or another, feel the Combine at work—but I was able to see it’ (227).

Bromden’s special hallucinatory sensory powers allow him to see what others can only feel. The means used to control Bromden give him the ability to see the controlling methods themselves. Thus the clearer one perceives control the more fully one is controlled. This is the cycle that the Chief breaks, perhaps by resisting the Combine by not fully acknowledging it in realistic, sane terms. McMurphy sees it clearly and so his end is inevitable. Continuing with his analysis of the Outside, Bromden provides the reader with an example:

All up the coast I could see the signs of what the Combine had accomplished since I was last through this country, things like, for example—a train stopping at a station and laying a string of full-grown men in mirrored suits and machined hats, laying them like a hatch of identical insects, half-life things coming pht-pht-pht out of the last car, then hooting its electric whistle and moving on down the spoiled land to deposit another hatch. (227-228)

This one passage presents a wide range of twentieth-century apocalyptic imagery. The train is an often used modernist image of a technological device encroaching on human lives. In one Futurist manifesto, for instance, Umbro Apollonio describes trains in the following manner: ‘deep-chested locomotives whose wheels paw the tracks like the hooves of enormous steel horses bridled by tubing.’²³ Unlike the modernist train, Bromden’s is not seen as a monster in and of itself, but rather as producing monsters in

²³Umbro Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973) 19-20.

human form—insects like Nurse Ratched. These human monsters are described as ‘half-life things’ evoking images of both zombies or cyborgs and radioactivity bringing in the particular nuclear anxiety of Cold War America. When the train has done its evil deed and moves on it does so through ‘the spoiled land’ indicating ruin on human and perhaps even ecological levels.

Cuckoo's Nest presents a shift from a passive, fatalistic approach to dealing with an all powerful Combine to a heroic, active one. Initially the novel advocates passivity, flexibility as the best way of coping. When white government agents ignore Bromden in his home village he begins to close down his senses, until he finds himself acting deaf and dumb on the ward of the mental hospital. Already mentioned in regards to *Nausea*, the fog, used as a defensive weapon in the Second World War by Bromden, is created on the ward as an offensive weapon.²⁴ The unreliable nature of Bromden as narrator allows the fog to be created by two agents simultaneously, for diametrically opposed purposes. Along the line of the passive response to oppression Bromden describes Pete's retardism, from his skull being pinched with tongs at child birth: ‘But one good thing—being simple like that put him out of the clutch of the Combine. They weren't able to mold him into a slot’ (49). The Combine has little control over Pete because of his simple mind.

At the climax of the first section (there are four sections in the novel replicating the structure of some sporting events, basketball for instance), when McMurphy wins his bet by disrupting the ward, Nurse Ratched attempts an invocation of the ‘truth’ in order to regain her hold on power: ‘You're committed, you realize. You are . . . under the jurisdiction of me . . . the staff. . . . Under jurisdiction and control—’ (138).²⁵ This curse

²⁴The fog as a defensive weapon is also described in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*.

²⁵The use of the basketball metaphor for the structure of the novel has resonances in the fact that the patients on the ward play the game in the narrative, and McMurphy's attempt to overthrow Nurse Ratched is first posed in sporting terms, as a bet.

fails to stop the momentary rebellion by the patients on the ward, but does keep the patients from attempting escape, which is not their desire at that moment. The patients come to realise that they are as much a part of society as 'sane' people.

In contrast to the passive modes of resistance that Bromden and Pete represent, McMurphy works actively at fouling up the gears of the machinery. On his second morning on the ward, Bromden wonders at the activity of McMurphy's singing:

He's a man made outa skin and bone that's due to get weak and pale and die, just like the rest of us. He lives under the same laws, gotta eat, bumps up against the same troubles; these things make him just as vulnerable to the Combine as anybody else, don't they? (88)

McMurphy's mortality should make him vulnerable to the Combine's ways of persuasion, but McMurphy seems oblivious. Bromden speculates that the free lifestyle McMurphy has engaged in has somehow kept him out of the Combine's influence:

He's just as vulnerable, maybe, but the Combine didn't get him . . . Maybe, like old Pete, the Combine missed getting to him soon enough with controls. Maybe he grew up so wild all over the country, batting around from one place to another, never around one town longer'n a few months when he was a kid so a school never got much a hold on him, logging, gambling, running carnival wheels, traveling lightfooted and fast, keeping on the move so much that the Combine never had a chance to get anything installed. Maybe that's it, he never gave the Combine a chance, just like he never gave the black boy a chance to get to him with the thermometer yesterday morning, because a moving target is hard to hit. (89)

This places emphasis on early life, especially in the schools, for establishing the Combine's influence over citizens, and allows Bromden his first glimpse at a possible way of escaping the Combine's controls—flight. 'Keeping on the move' in this instance

is similar to the tactic used for liberation in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, which is ‘keeping on the bounce.’ Here Bromden is expressing the evolution of Sartre’s ‘way out a person invents in desperate cases.’ In yet another metaphoric instance, which literally links the cotton mill, a factory, with the Combine, Bromden notes McMurphy’s early resistance to society’s molding: ‘He hadn’t let what he looked like run his life one way or the other, any more than he’s let the Combine mill him into fitting where they wanted him to fit’ (153). McMurphy can still use laughter as a weapon against control because he has not been molded. Laughter contradicts control because it represents a profound non-logical lack of seriousness.

In a metaphor for the natural world’s continuance beyond the temporal limitations of the Combine, McMurphy’s laughter at the end of singing his song from the previous scene elicits in Bromden a memory of his father using laughter against ‘government men’—agents of the Combine who have come to purchase the rights to build a dam over the Indians’ traditional fishing grounds on the Columbia River (92). At this stage Bromden is seeing the ways possible in actively opposing the Combine.

In the second section of the novel, Bromden has moments where McMurphy’s laughter shatters his fear of the Combine: ‘I’d quit worrying about the Big Nurse and the Combine behind her’ (152). McMurphy has a profound impact on all the patients, but especially Bromden. Later in the novel Bromden’s estimation of McMurphy rises to messianic proportions:

I still had my own notions—how McMurphy was a giant come out of the sky to save us from the Combine that was networking the land with copper wire and crystal, how he was too big to be bothered with something as measly as money—but even I came halfway to thinking like the others. (255)

Even within this sentence Bromden's opinion of McMurphy fluctuates from heavenly deification to half doubt. Here, through the other inmates doubting McMurphy, the text avoids any conclusions by which Western individualist charisma and personal magnetism leads in authoritarian directions.

Laughter is not the only weapon used to combat the Combine's controlling efforts. Gambling, an activity that occurs in a number of Kesey texts with significance, in *Cuckoo's Nest* is one way men can compete socially, integrate with one another—create a bond. McMurphy has been jailed for gambling and runs the ward card games. The gambling bet over the control panel acts as a teaching aid for the other patients. The major conflict between McMurphy and Nurse Ratched is the basis of a bet between the men on the ward. This conflict specifically embodies the social battles between conservative Cold War values and unbridled individualism.

Kesey is infamous for his interest in chemical experimentation, and gained much inspiration for *Cuckoo's Nest* through his participation in government drug experiments and his own recreational research with Peyote and LSD while working as an orderly in the mental ward. In the novel, intoxicants act as a weapon against the control of the Combine in much the same manner that laughter does. On the fishing trip, nature and alcohol work together to cut the wires of the Combine from the men on the boat, but because the Combine is so vast, as large as the ocean, the boat is still surrounded by a 'chrome' sea (235). Later, when intoxicants, laughter, and sex, embodied in the women Candy and Sandy, are all mingled together in the hospital, McMurphy's overthrow is more or less complete, at least in Bromden's eyes: 'Drunk and running and laughing and carrying on with women square in the center of the Combine's most powerful stronghold! . . . Maybe

the Combine wasn't all-powerful' (292).²⁶ Stronghold has a specifically militaristic connotation attributed to it. Even here, in that 'maybe', Bromden retains at least an ounce of doubt. Through the use of mind altering chemicals, the individual's perceptions change and thus the frame of control can be manipulated for advantage in the struggle for liberation.

In the end, Bromden's skepticism is rewarded by his realisation that, in fact, the Combine cannot be overcome: 'The thing he was fighting, you couldn't whip it for good. All you could do was keep on whipping it, till you couldn't come out any more and somebody else had to take your place' (303). With this revelation Bromden decides that he is the one to take McMurphy's place by escaping from the hospital and returning to his natural roots. It is here, with the image of Bromden on the Outside fighting the Combine by the simple expression of his freedom and individuality, that Kesey makes his stand.²⁷ The Combine cannot be beaten, but must be fought with the full force of every individual living as free, and being as big as each person can be. A number of critics have, understandably, read the Combine as a metaphor for postwar American society, but none have looked at the wide range of language in which that metaphor is cast. The Combine is an extended metaphor for post-war American society, but with Bromden's final realisation it can also be considered a metaphor for human existence itself. By developing this metaphor with prosaic language through a polyvalent point-of-view relating horrific imagery, Kesey creates in *Cuckoo's Nest* one of the cornerstones of twentieth-century American fiction, which begins him on a thirty-year exploration of the individual in

²⁶Much has been written on both sides of the question of *Cuckoo's Nest's*, and thus Kesey's, basic misogyny. Though Candy and Sandy can be seen as mere sexual tools for the men to use as a means of combatting the Combine, convincing arguments can be made for positive readings of several women characters in the novel.

²⁷Here Bromden and his family embody a certain transcendental return of the Human Being in a state at one with Nature.

relation to society and of the nature of art.

CHAPTER TWO:

SOMETIMES A GREAT NOTION

But freedom and fate are promised to each other and embrace each other to constitute meaning; caprice and doom, the spook of the soul and the nightmare of the world, get along with each other, living next door and avoiding each other, without connection and friction, at home in meaninglessness—until in one instant eye meets eye, madly, and the confession erupts from both that they are unredeemed.

Martin Buber *I and Thou* ¹

Sometimes a Great Notion, Kesey's largest and most ambitious book, is an intricate weave of narrative voices and devices. Written immediately after the publication of his first novel, and published two years later, *Notion* represents the development of the post-war American novel to its most complex and at the same time powerful level. This chapter will explore the aesthetics that make the novel so complex, including its literary allusions and narrative structure, and the social expression that those aesthetics attempt to convey. Like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* before it, *Notion* is a paranoid response to the anxiety of conspiracy and atomic fear at the time when the Cold War was at its most fevered pitch. Paranoia is a central thematic aspect of much American fiction written in the early 1960s as practiced especially by William S. Burroughs, Ken Kesey,

¹Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (1922. 2nd ed. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1970) 108.

Thomas Pynchon, as well as others. More so than perhaps *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, one of *Sometimes a Great Notion's* main concerns is with the paranoid angst present in the world in the ontological uncertainty of the Cold War period. *Notion's* anxiety is specifically that fear, whether warranted or unwarranted, of being destroyed in a global nuclear firefight. *Sometimes a Great Notion* exemplifies all of the aesthetic characteristics of the paranoid post-war period without losing the power of narrative that texts like Burroughs' *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962) display.

In notes made during the composition of *Sometimes a Great Notion*, Kesey expresses his identification of French existentialism and his desire to go beyond it:

People are gonna die—not just me, but also other people—this is where the French leave off. Xistance is okay for one alone, but it doesn't help Moma and daddy or Chuck or Faye—each of those words, when touched with death, rip a sound like a bell in my head I can't hardly stand
 Lee has come this far; I have a notion I — and Hank — have gone farther . . . This is an argument for Xist again, but I want to be beyond Xist, using it. (Strelow 70-71)

This statement comes closest to expressing Kesey's conscious interest in using existentialism of the French origin as a foundation for *Notion*. It also expresses Kesey's desire to use existentialism as a methodology for his novel. The statement identifies Lee's stage of psychological development as the existential one, and both Kesey, as author and perhaps narrator in the places where he does narrate parts of the novel, and Hank as being and thus expressing a stage of development beyond existentialism. Hank's engagement with the world and its troubles is directed toward living life; Lee's is a nihilistic anarchism fixated on death. What the statement does not do, or only hints at, is explain what this stage beyond existentialism entails. The assumption is that the nearly unbearable angst centred on the individual's death on which existentialism focuses in a debilitating way,

in as much as it keeps the individual from engaging with the continuing social world, is surpassed only with a stoical acceptance of all death, especially those close to one, a kind of post-existential fatalism, which goes beyond existentialism by being social rather than egocentric.

Early post-war American novels that are primarily existentialist in mode, like *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and *On the Road*, express this solipsistic grappling with mortality. Chief Bromden in *Cuckoo's Nest* begins the action at the 'existentialist level of development' and, it has been argued, emerges beyond it at the end of the novel. *Notion* tries to move even farther beyond the bounds of this solipsism, or the subjective consciousness of Husserl or the individual unconscious of Sartre's 'consciousness is a nothingness', by employing a complex polyvalent mixing of narrative forms and levels. Kesey's success in this endeavor is debatable. However, in that the journalistic (as in diary-keeping) stream of consciousness, which exemplifies French existentialist novels is a modern form of expression, *Notion* does formally move beyond an exploration of single consciousnesses into the ontological experiment of collective conscience.

Kesey himself, again in his own notes, asks a question in the form of a statement, 'How to get around meaninglessness' (Strelow 57). Kesey here is struggling with the meaninglessness that comes, in fiction at any rate, from describing a subjective reality, which does not necessarily relate to a universal reader. He provides the answer, which results in *Notion*'s unique narrative display, thus: 'I don't want to sacrifice my book to prose, character or plot—the more important thing must show through which is ? STORY' (Strelow 57). Story, here, is different for Kesey from plot alone by encompassing the structure through which a plot is elaborated. Kesey develops a method of telling a narrative that uses prose, character, and plot, but does not sacrifice the

meaning of the book to those elements. In other words, Kesey develops a deconstructed narrative form, where he literally cuts and pastes segments of different characters' stories together, that preserves a commitment to plot and story while enhancing the connections between characters' thoughts and actions.

As seen in the introduction to this thesis, Tony Hilfer tells us that one of the most important stylistic characteristics of post-war American fiction is the 'disorienting games with narrative conventions' (11). *Sometimes a Great Notion* exemplifies all the aesthetic characteristics of a paranoid post-war novel, including fragmentation of plot structures, maximalism, which is characterised by an overwhelming of the senses through sheer volume of detail, experiments with typology, conspiracy, and paranoia, yet retains the ability to develop characters with whom the reader can identify.

INFLUENCES

Stephen Tanner reports that, Kesey's forebears migrated 'from Tennessee and Arkansas to Texas and New Mexico, then to Colorado, and finally to Oregon,' when Kesey's father mustered out of the military in 1946, and the Kesey family moved from Eastern Colorado to Springfield, Oregon (*Kesey* 3). The 1930s films of John Wayne, one of Kesey's heroes, romanticised Oregon as a place of opportunity. *The Oregon Trail* (1936) described the nineteenth-century pioneer picture of Oregon life in the past, and *Three Faces West* (1939) depicts dust bowl farmers moving to better land in Oregon at the beginning of World War Two.² The Stamper family in *Notion* makes a similar migration. In this context both Kesey's father and John Wayne represent an archetypal

²Mark Ricci, et al. *The Films of John Wayne* (New York: Citadel Press, 1970).

Western cowboy figure and his responsibility in relation to others. Tanner also relates to us that Kesey developed an appreciation for homespun tales and Christian ethics, by describing family gatherings at Grandpa Kesey's at which; 'plenty of anecdotes and yarns were exchanged, told in a colorful rural vernacular rich in homely but arresting similes and analogies' (*Kesey* 4). *Cuckoo's Nest* and *Notion* both employ the rural storytelling voice Kesey gained by listening to his grandparents. Tanner declares that, 'This talk [Kesey's colorful rural vernacular], an outgrowth of a long tradition of frontier American oral storytelling, shaped Kesey's patterns of expression' (*Kesey* 4). He goes on to discuss how Kesey's life influenced his early novels: 'He [Kesey] suggests that fact and fiction blend well and both are essential in presenting "The True Happening of the moment"' (*Kesey* 5). It is this blending that Kesey experiments with throughout his career, but especially in *Notion*.

There are a number of other biographical parallels between Kesey and the characters in *Notion*. Stephen Tanner, again, tells us that, 'He played football only during his freshman year [in college] and then focused his attention on wrestling, eventually receiving the Fred Lowe Scholarship as the outstanding college wrestler of the Northwest' (*Kesey* 8). In 1960 Kesey just failed to make the Olympic wrestling team, while Hank Stamper is a high school state sports champion in football, wrestling, and swimming. Joe Ben and Janice have difficulty conceiving a child, as did Faye and Ken until they adopted their first daughter Shannon, after which Faye gave birth to their boys Zane and Jed. Though Kesey did not serve in the military himself (incidentally because of injuries incurred while wrestling) his best friend, Ken Babbs, went on a tour of duty in Vietnam from 1962-63—the time period in which Kesey began composition of *Notion*. In *Notion* Hank serves in Korea, as does McMurphy in *Cuckoo's Nest* (Wolfe, *Acid* 56). Some of

the minor references that at first seem to be biographical in nature actually predate events or habits in Kesey's life—references to buses falling apart and wild painting for instance. Such similarities between Kesey's fiction and events in his later life raise interesting speculations about how much Kesey enacted ideas he had had in his fiction. The fact is that Kesey used material gained from his own life experiences in order to explore 'The True Happening of the moment.'

As with *Cuckoo's Nest*, comic books, specifically Captain Marvel and the Wolfman, are influential to *Sometimes a Great Notion*. The use of comic books is one example of the post-war predilection for blending high culture with popular culture. Though not discussed at length here, it is interesting that the character who brings in the comic book references, Lee, is the graduate student in literature at Yale and the most erudite character in the novel; the learning Lee wields comes from both classic literature and comic books. In a letter to his brother from March 1961 Kesey describes a skin-diving suit he made: '... until I resemble some kind of under-water Captain Marvel ... KAPTAN KELP' (*Correspondence*, 'Letter 15'). Captain Marvel is the comic book superhero with whom Lee identifies most closely in *Notion*; his brother, on the other hand, is the Wolfman. As such, these comic book figures bring to the novel a whole range of cultural signs of importance, from connection with nature and wildness to arcane knowledge and power.

The Grapes of Wrath (1939) and Wallace Stegner's *Big Rock Candy Mountain* are also texts that shaped *Notion*. *The Grapes of Wrath* is most easily compared to *Notion* as a dustbowl epic of migration to the West. In a climactic scene at the end of Steinbeck's novel the Joad family make a last ditch attempt at building a dam to keep the rising water of the creek from driving them out of their makeshift home in an abandoned railroad

boxcar (388). This may have given Kesey the idea for the central metaphor of struggle with both nature and society in *Notion*, that of the Wakonda River.³ In a note in the manuscript of *One Lane*, Kesey mentions Steinbeck in regards to the development of his own style of writing: ‘That would be the Steinbeck way of starting it, is what I had intended to say at the first line, but that isn’t true. It got on into my style, a style that is definitely becoming mine even when I try to copy someone else’s.’⁴ This statement sums up concisely the way in which successive generations of writers are influenced by and develop new modes of writing out of one another. Wallace Stegner’s *Big Rock Candy Mountain* is influential to *Notion* for two reasons: one, obviously, because Stegner was Kesey’s teacher at Stanford his first year there, and two, Stegner’s novel uses an envelope device of a family photo album to begin and end the action of the novel much as Viv turns the pages of the photo album for Draeger at the opposing ends of *Notion*.⁵

Similarities can also be found with the work of John Dos Passos and James Joyce, but to what extent Kesey was aware of these works remains uncertain. Malcolm Cowley, Kesey’s editor and teacher at Stanford, was personally acquainted with Dos Passos, whose cut and paste montage techniques in his *USA* trilogy, where brief extracts from media sources are presented in a scattered and filtered sequence, bear significant resemblance to those employed in *Notion* (Babbs 16).⁶ As will be discussed in this chapter, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, admittedly one of the most influential novels of the twentieth century, shows similar structural characteristics with *Notion* as well. Alliteration, Nelson

³Kesey, always interested in Native American characters, has embodied a connection with the powers of nature in Indian Jenny and her family that the White men of *Notion* would be envious of if they were aware of the fact.

⁴Ken Kesey, *One Lane* (unpublished and unfinished novel circa 1960-61 from the Ken Kesey Collection, Knight Library, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon) 48.

⁵More will be said presently about the importance of Viv’s action of page turning, or presenting the images of the novel itself. It should be mentioned here only that her name itself means ‘Life’.

⁶The works of John Dos Passos most likely to have influenced Kesey are the *USA* trilogy.

Algren's main stylistic trademark in *A Walk on the Wild Side* (1958), also plays a considerable role in *Notion*; it is used as a way of both making the prose more artful, and heightening dramatic tension. An alliterative sentence from *A Walk on the Wild Side* like, 'Lost long ago, in some colder country', can artfully increase the dramatic effect of a simple description by expressing it in a complex style.⁷ This device is used ubiquitously in *Wild Side*, and in *Notion* alliteration has the additional effect of aiding in the identification of characters—making them distinct from one another. Alliteration is one of many aesthetic forms, here from the realm of poetry, imported into the novel as a formal layer of complexity.

Kesey wrote in his notes for the novel that 'Hank's style—is Algren's style—read Algren to write Hank' (Strelow 61). What Kesey means by Algren's style, acknowledged as very complex, is probably the straight-forward, working-class tone rather than purely aesthetic technique. Algren's profuse use of alliteration comes through in the language of Lee rather than Hank, especially Lee's written language in the form of letters to his friend Peters—a profusion of which Lee himself is even aware:

I mean not only have I suffered all these physical horrors, but I have, if anything, in this land where I came to give my mind a rest, increased my mental menaces a millionfold! (Pardon my bad alliterative [sic] and endure my brief intermission while I um umm puff puff relight this joint . . . there we go.) (275)⁸

Not only is Kesey cutting up sections of character's thoughts and actions and weaving them together, he is also using different styles adopted from other writers and distributing

⁷Nelson Algren, *A Walk on the Wild Side* (1958. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978) 3.

⁸During the composition of *Notion* Kesey asked his friend Ken Babbs to act as a surrogate Peters in order for him to practice Lee's correspondence in his own.

them among the characters populating his novel.

It is not surprising that some of the texts that influenced *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* were also influential to *Sometimes a Great Notion* because they were written within two years of each other. As seen in the previous chapter, Tom Wolfe identifies Kesey's method of collecting material for his novels in a Faulknerian fashion (Scura 62). In addition to journalistic technique, Faulkner's application of multiple narrative style (stream-of-consciousness, point-of-view, exposition, dialogue) from works such as *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) can also be clearly seen. In his notes for the novel Kesey asks himself what he wants for the novel—his answer: 'A cross between Faulkner and Burroughs and also me' (Strelow 50). The result of Kesey's attempt to fuse all three together in one novel is a 'prisming of P.V. [Point-of-View],' which is a complex deployment of points of view combined with narrative styles and typographical codes (Strelow 45). *Notion's* prisming of point-of-view is to show all aspects of a given moment from as many points of view as possible—as many different characters as are pertinent to a 'scene', from as many temporal vantage points (past, present, and future), as well as an omniscient narrator where necessary—and always with the plot or story in mind.

The American modernist master of multiple perspective strategies is William Faulkner, Ken Kesey's admitted favourite author. Fifty-nine interior monologues of fifteen different characters make up *As I Lay Dying* (1930). The ratio of fifteen perspectives to fifty-nine distinct sections is an easily graspable level of complexity well within the bounds of the modernist novel. In contrast, Kesey's most complex novel, *Notion*, presents a wide range of modes (dialogue, narration, epistolary, internal monologue, etc.) from a larger number of personae (twenty-two) than Faulkner's work.

Unlike the modernist segment, which in Faulkner averages between two to ten pages per monologue, *Notion*'s segments of perspective can be as short as a single word and rarely ever longer than two pages.

One of the most important of the styles employed in *Notion* comes from William S. Burroughs. *Naked Lunch*, as we have seen with *Cuckoo's Nest*, affected Kesey's hallucinatory imagery, but in addition *Naked Lunch* uses non-cognitive techniques to disrupt language to the greatest degree. The plotlessness of *Naked Lunch*, because of its cut-up narrative style, similar to the Newsreels' sections of Dos Passos but on a more global scale, has already been argued. *Naked Lunch*, uses a variety of narrative techniques—description, dialogue, script, notes, shifts in tense—but with no overarching plot to hold together the ever-present element of Addiction. *Notion* uses a similar cut-up method to do exactly the opposite—to fuse different character's stories together, rather than split narrative apart. It is difficult to cite a specific containable instance of this fusion, but because Kesey is concerned with story, and character as part of it, the multiple aesthetic techniques and juxtaposition of many points of view do work globally to have a fusing effect.

It appears some clear lines can be drawn from earlier texts to *Notion*; an appearance that gives the impression that Kesey's second novel is less 'original' than his first. Some of the blatant literary allusions are foregrounded, premeditated, and deliberate; others, perhaps fewer of them, are simply naturalised, a part of the process of compilation. As mentioned in the present study's introduction, Kesey does not have a great anxiety of influence, but rather freely uses material he finds from wherever he conveniently finds it. In the end, it does not matter whether the reader is already aware of the sources of the borrowed literary material since most of the literary allusions are

conscious, with the author deciding which material to incorporate in such a way that any reader will know its source and which material can remain more or less anonymous. The influences clearly seen in *Notion* are part of the innovative mode of borrowing material from different sources and pulling them into an integrated whole.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

In as much as it develops the narrative devices of the Cold War era (fragmentation, maximalism, experiments with typology, conspiracy, paranoia, etc.), *Sometimes a Great Notion* is an important example of the development of the novel. According to Matthew Rick: 'Critically, the novel [*Notion*] met with mixed regards, and it never quite reached the level of commercial success of *Cuckoo's Nest*' (*Tarnished Galahad*). Kesey himself, despite its reception, believes in the significance of the book:

The best long piece is *Sometimes a Great Notion*. I'll never come up with a better book. It was exciting. Gurney Norman, a good writer friend of mine (*Divine Right's Trip*) said he really envied me that book because there's something about taking a plow and breaking new ground. It gives you energy.⁹

The ground Kesey was breaking in *Notion* is the complex narrative structure of the novel unlike any previously seen. Heavily rooted in forms from the works of his predecessors, as we have seen, *Notion* combines existing aesthetic techniques to become an original work of literature.

Sometimes a Great Notion is admittedly a complex narrative, but at its core is the

⁹Matthew Rick and Mary Jane Fenex, *Interview with Ken Kesey conducted on 21 Jan. 1993*. Online posting 30 Sept. 1997. 16 Feb. 2001 <<http://www.ulster.net/~shady/keezintv.html>>.

story of how individuals in the Cold War era can reconcile their desire to live as independently and freely as possible with their social responsibilities on filial and economic scales. In a letter to Ken Babbs from July of 1961, in the first month of composing *Notion*, Kesey discusses the twentieth-century writer's dilemma in the face of disillusionment with traditional culture:

To write anything true, you have to have your feet in Truth. Solidly. And all the old truths are fled. Face it, what rules hold anymore? When you put them to the test you find the Foundation has been eaten away and we are following them out of habit, out of fear, out of a need to follow something, but not out of respect for their rock-hard, unvarying, unswerving Truth. (*Correspondence*, 'Letter 17')

Truth may seem a rather ambitious goal for such a young writer, he was only twenty-six years old at the time, and for one who had yet to have a novel in print, but it is a testament to Kesey's genius that he was focused on the most important of contemporary literary concerns.¹⁰

It may be helpful to analyse some of the overall structure of the novel in order to further illuminate *Notion*'s complexity. There are eleven sections or chapters in the novel, each with an italicised introduction from the narrator. There is no table of contents or chapter numbers given with these sections, only the beginning of a new page and the narrator's preamble reminiscent of John Dos Passos' use of the disjointed language in the Newsreel and Camera Eye sections of his *USA* trilogy. There is actually one place where the introductory narrator interrupts the sixth chapter in a manner so similar to the other sections that the choice to not make it its own section seems to be a glaring error.

¹⁰Earlier in the same letter Kesey is discussing the recent acceptance of *Cuckoo's Nest* by Viking for publication.

Typographically a paragraph is presented as a block indentation, just as each of the sections begins, only here the first letter is a normal sized capital, rather than the oversized capitals used at the beginning of the other eleven sections of the novel: ‘Which bring to mind one more notion to add to the bit about Singers of echoes and Echoers of songs; the notion of Dance’ (322). The capital letters here indicate symbolic elements, ‘notions’, particularly significant to the workings of the novel. This embedding of a section within a section may be Kesey’s attempt to avoid any possible conclusions being drawn from a book in twelve sections because of the heavy Christian symbolism attributed to *Cuckoo’s Nest* in criticism after its publication. Like Joyce’s *Ulysses* which has distinct elements shaping each chapter, each of the twelve sections of *Notion* is written in what Kesey would refer to as a distinct Key.¹¹ These Keys are written in different thematic structures reflecting the mood of each section, for example sight, time, or sound. As Kesey is interested in the subjectivity of perception, sections written in sensual Keys highlight effects of the sense within them. The Keys of some sections are more easily identifiable from the words of the introductory narration than others and can be as complex as that of the eleventh section: the Atomic Bomb. These Keys, as identified, can represent something not named in the introductory section but only alluded to anecdotally. The Key of Dance, in the subsection of the sixth chapter, for instance, means action, physical movement of at least two objects or persons in relation to one another. In addition to having a thematic Key for each section, there is usually a single character with whom the section is more closely aligned than others, though every section gives some thoughts or actions from all the major characters in the novel, and sections nine and ten appear to be muddled or split between characters. The reason for this

¹¹ See Stuart Gilbert’s reprint of James Joyce’s own tongue-in-cheek schematic for the structure of sections in *Ulysses: James Joyce, Ulysses* (1922. London: Penguin, 1992) xxiii.

alteration of its own structure is that the novel itself purposefully deconstructs as the plot itself falls apart or reaches a climax.¹²

Notion works to create a complex web of parallels in the novel, especially as the narrative moves rapidly from the innermost thoughts and actions of character after character. One could spend much time creating patterns from the relationships and the way they resemble others in the text. For instance, Lee represents death in his utter fascination with it. Hank, on the other hand, stands for Survival. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Lee is the existentialist, while Hank the post-existentialist. The symbolic representations which characters can take on are only a part of the overall narrative structure of the novel.

Among the other notable features of *Notion*, though not analysed in detail here, are the development of extended metaphors including bells, fog, the moon, the heart, and the river, the ubiquitous use of animals as metaphors, foreshadowing, the already mentioned use of alliteration, gambling, ghosts, and ambiguity of the narratorial identity. Of these the narratorial identity is the most important and innovative in terms of style because the intricacies of the deliberate and subtle identification or obfuscation of the narrator's identity at any intersection of the text has profound implications to the story being told. Kesey's experiences with psychedelic drugs contributed to his fooling 'around with reality and what reality can be' in *Notion*. His foolings take the form of narrative play. This play complicates and challenges the reader's process of making meaning from the narrative. Elaine B. Safer writes, in *The Contemporary American Comic Epic: The Novels of Barth, Pynchon, Gaddis & Kesey*, that this results in, 'The reader's disorientation when

¹²See Appendix A for a diagram of the elements of the novel's structure including sections, page numbers, Keys, and character alignments.

they cannot find meaning.’¹³ This disorientation simulates the anxiety and paranoia the characters in the novel experience, especially Lee’s, and allows connections between characters and actions to be made in unconventional ways by juxtaposing the elements of different characters’ stories with each other. In order to ease the reader into this world of potential confusion, the novel begins with what Gilbert Porter has identified as the Tutelary-Spirit (40). In the draft of *One Lane* Kesey describes a *Notion*-like Tutelary-Spirit narrator, but the narrator in *Notion* is more complex than that identification implies.

The point-of-view in *Notion* shifts from person to person to omniscience; there is a narrator, but it is often unclear who, if anyone, can be identified as this narrator. Also, individual characters often take over the narration of long passages within chapters. Ronald G. Billingsley identifies narratorial cinematic devices employed in *Notion* including ‘dissolve’, ‘cross cut’, ‘direct cut montage and flash-forward’ (Tanner, *Kesey* 60). Billingsley also identifies twelve distinct points of view in *Notion*. Stephen Tanner goes on from this identification to mention in relation to *Notion* that ‘In his notes Kesey uses such phrases as “Now the camera directs toward . . .” and “the camera then cuts to . . .” “I could put it all down like a screen play practically”’ (60). Unlike Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch*, which presents occasional dialogue as script text, *Notion* never duplicates either stage or screenplay writing typographics. So Kesey’s narration sometimes takes on cinematic direction in its description of scenes, but the typography remains that of the novel. Typography in *Notion* is also used to aid the reader with the problem of navigating through this experimental flow between the multiple first-person personae. Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* makes use of the standard type face, italics, and parentheses to cut-up the narrative in a similar way to *Notion*. Though no rule of typography is maintained

¹³Elaine B. Safer, *The Contemporary American Comic Epic: The Novels of Barth, Pynchon, Gaddis & Kesey* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988) 24.

universally throughout *Notion*, sections do create, and then sustain for as long as is useful, a logic of the blend of application of typographies. Standard print tends to be used for dialogue, description reported by narrators, and topical allusion; italics are used for character reflections, especially those of Lee; italics in parentheses—the Tutelary Spirit narrator. In another section standard print in parentheses is used for Hank’s reflections.

According to Granville Hicks, Kesey ‘uses italics, parenthesis and capitals to introduce elements from one story into another, and the reader doesn’t know who’s who or what’s what.’¹⁴ Yet Kesey recognised the problems of following a non-chronological narrative, and, wanting readers to be able to follow the characters through the story, he employs a map created by the use of icons that any reader can follow if willing. These complex icons are employed to identify certain passages with certain characters beyond the typographical clues given. For instance Joe Ben, for whom the icons are most intricately developed, is associated with radios, the State park, brush knives, and a ‘mouth held right.’ Henry, Hank, and Lee all complete the action of massaging ‘the bridge of his nose with thumb and finger’ as an icon that identifies a character as a Stamper. In a concise example the old boltcutter character smells liver and onions (332). Two pages later the reader gets only: “‘It tolls for horseshit,” contradicted a thinner voice from a gray beard at the back of the bar, thinking of liver and onions’ (334). Through the use of a constructional icon the character can be identified without naming him or her, and for the rest of the novel the icon can be invoked for this kind of identification. In a different use of the same principle, the application of alliteration actually becomes an icon of sorts for Lee. Though there are similarities in the construction of these emblematic leitmotifs with those used by James Joyce and Nathaniel West, neither of these authors employ icons in

¹⁴Granville Hicks, ‘Beatnik in Lumberjack Country’ *Saturday Review*, 47 (25 July, 1964) 21.

such a complex manner. Main characters in modern novels are often given identifying features, but rarely are they used in so many ways for so many different characters. *Sometimes a Great Notion* uses rhyme and alliteration to help reinforce the use of typography and icons implemented to aid the reader in navigating through the multiplicity of narratives.

Returning to cinematic motifs, along directorial lines, sometimes characters seem to possess an omniscient ability to overlook an entire scene of the novel. For instance, the opening section of the novel presents a narrator describing the world by using the word ‘look’ several times in the first pages. Gilbert Porter explains how this exhortation of the narratorial voice is that of the Tutelary Spirit, an apparently omniscient narrator by whom the reader will be guided, but this narrator evaporates as soon as a character, Draeger, takes over as first-person narrator (42-43). Then Draeger meets Vivian, who shows him the Stamper family album, which partially acts as an enveloping device to contain the novel. Vivian says, ‘Use your imagination, Mr. Draeger; that’s what I’ve been doing. Come on, it’s fun. Look’ (13). With Vivian’s utterance of the word ‘look’ the reader must go back and reassess whether Vivian is the narrator of the novel. The novel is too complex, in a way that keeps the reader suspended throughout the action, to focus only on Viv’s struggle, but it is significant that she is the teller of the story—in effect the novel all leads up to Viv’s dramatic act. She moves full circle, with the novel, and learns something from the journey, something neither Hank nor Lee learn—making her the true hero of the novel—she turns herself from objectified battleground between the rival brothers into a feminist hero. The novel is tragic in the fact that the men cannot ever win because of their own nature; the women cannot lose once they acknowledge their alignment with the Natural world and their strength within it.

Though an argument can be made for Vivian's importance in the novel in this way, it becomes clear that she is not the narrator in many, perhaps most, cases. In the narrative introduction to the final section of the novel Kesey himself, identified by relating an anecdote from 'the nuthouse,' which 'has nothing to do with the story,' clearly acts as narrator, but this does not make the narrator Kesey for the entire novel (573). In the end it is this ambiguous, polyvalent narrator which makes the novel such an important landmark in the development of novelistic style.

PARANOIA

Sometimes a Great Notion focuses on the balance between the needs and desires of the individual versus those of society as a whole; the battleground for this conflict is the forest. The ego-driven, senseless destruction of the forest through logging shows a mentality overwhelmed by the ecological devastation of the modern age. Conspiracies populate this wooded world. Hank and the Stammers have conspired with the big lumber companies in the face of the Union strike, and in turn the Union leaders conspire to sabotage the Stammers' efforts to fulfill their contract. *Notion's* conspiratorial paranoia is particularly social in nature, partially because of the fact that groups of people *are* conspiring together in the novel. The potential for characters to perceive non-existent conspiracies is heightened because conspiracies actually do exist in the novel's world. The expression of alternate realities is rooted in individual perception, through different ways of decoding human gesture and in perceiving variant sensations. The fight Hank has with Biggy Newton midway through the book acts as a prime example of this expression. In one instant just before the brawl Hank sends a glance to Lee, a facial gesture. Hank

intends the glance to transmit a simple, benevolent message to his younger brother showing Lee how to stand up for himself and his family. Lee 'misinterprets' the look as meaning, 'Hank wanted me to witness first-hand the wrath to come should I continue my advances toward his wife' (340). What is most interesting about the clash of versions of reality here is that Lee's interpretation acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy; Hank *does* fight Lee when the younger brother seduces Viv. There ends up being no hierarchy of actions and their intentions, but merely a negotiation of all possible paranoias.

The central, defining paranoia which pervades *Notion* is that of nuclear anxiety. Faulkner acknowledges this specific variety of angst brought on by the Cold War. In his 1950 Nobel Prize acceptance speech he hints at the nuclear fears of the Cold War era: 'Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up?'¹⁵ It is this question that plagues Lee in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, and which overshadows the entire novel. It is partially an existential anxiety concerning the end of personal existence, as well as being a culturally specific fear. As *Cuckoo's Nest* was most profoundly affected by Eisenhower's farewell address, *Notion* is a reflection of anxiety represented by President Kennedy's rhetoric, especially rhetoric directed at the Soviet Union. A quotation from Kennedy's inauguration speech gives us some sense of how dire the language of nuclear apocalypse was at the time: 'Finally, to those nations who would make themselves our adversary, we offer not a pledge, but a request: that both sides, begin anew the quest for peace before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental

¹⁵William Faulkner, *The Portable Faulkner* (1946. Ed. Malcolm Cowley. New York: Viking, 1977) 723.

self-destruction.’¹⁶ The last phrase of this quotation, with science obviously referring to nuclear weapons, succinctly expresses the fear underlying all action in *Sometimes a Great Notion*. It should be remembered here that numerous examples of such rhetoric of the time could be cited, and this one only particularly significant in the extremely high profile of the speaker, whose inauguration heralded the beginning of what was hoped to be the New Camelot.

Leaving the specific conspiratorial world which is presented by Lee’s point-of-view alone, we come to the multiple response to the particular nuclear anxiety from which the novel speaks. Kesey’s correspondence shows the author’s interest or fixation on nuclear concerns outside of the early novels. In a letter to President Kennedy, which was never mailed yet written at the height of the Cuban missile crisis in October of 1962, Kesey warns the President against using football metaphors in his rhetoric with the Soviets.¹⁷ Kesey’s fear is that the harsh terms of touchdowns and yardage gained will provoke the Russians to an apocalyptic conflict in which both sides will lose.¹⁸ Only fifty of Kesey’s letters survive from the period between 1959 and 1964, but these are most likely nearly all of the letters written by Kesey during that five-year period. That Kesey would write one of his few letters to the President over such concerns attests to its importance in Kesey’s mind at the time, as well as that of Cold War American culture. In another letter to Ken Babbs of November 1962 Kesey uses, the phrase ‘like locusts blown gigantic by nuclear mutation’ (*Correspondence*, ‘Letter 25’). Obviously the nuclear world created anxiety for Kesey, and nuclear powerplants were being built all over

¹⁶John Fitzgerald Kennedy, ‘Inauguration speech: 20 January, 1961.’ *The [London] Times* 21 Jan. 1961: 5.

¹⁷See Appendix B for the complete text of this letter, printed with the author’s permission, as well as two other pertinent pieces of correspondence from the period.

¹⁸Kesey’s rhetoric here anticipates Don DeLillo’s *Endzone* (1986).

the country at the time. Here we are not simply talking about the temporal coincidence of when the novel was written (1961-1963) or when the novel is set (Autumn 1961) and the historical events taking place at this time (1962 saw both the Cuban missile crisis and the first placement of active U.S. military troops in Vietnam), but the expression of the novel itself.

Kesey's dire concerns at this time are expressed retrospectively in an interview with Paul Krassner reprinted in *Kesey's Garage Sale*:

'Q. Didn't you once believe that writing is an old-fashioned and artificial occupation?

'A. I was counting on the millenium [sic]. Now I guess I'm tired of waiting.'¹⁹

Krassner's question here spans the phases in which Kesey ceased being a writer to pursue film and performance art strains of aesthetics. Kesey's return to writing along the lines of the New Journalism practiced by Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson is one phase that took place after the Acid Test period. Before these two later phases, in which Kesey was writing his first two novels, he still had faith in the novelistic art form, and was developing it in *Notion* in the face of fear of the nuclear apocalypse—the millennium.

In *Cuckoo's Nest* Bromden's paranoid world-view colors the entire universe, and ultimately the novel advocates Bromden's adopted philosophy, of active resistance to oppressive society through individual, rather than collective, action. A similar philosophy is attained through the process of *Sometimes a Great Notion*, but because the reader accesses the philosophy through a polyvalent narrator it is more convincing and profound. We cannot dismiss the paranoia as the result of one character's derangement.

¹⁹Ken Kesey, Interview with Paul Krassner. 'An Impolite Interview with Ken Kesey.' *The Realist*, No. 90, May-June, 1971 (Rpt. in *Garage Sale* 217-25; part Rpt. in *Cuckoo's Nest* 352-61) 53.

In Sartre's *Nausea* Roquentin experiences the paranoia of the feeling that something is behind you just beyond the reach of your peripheral vision: 'Sometimes, my heart pounding, I made a sudden right-about-turn: what was happening behind my back? Maybe it would start behind me and when I would turn around, suddenly, it would be too late' (107). Though 'real' enough for Roquentin, this common feeling of paranoia is created by his own perception of the world, his own derangement if you will. Lee in *Notion*, the most existentially paranoid character in the novel, has similar feelings to Roquentin. As comic book superheros are representative of a modern mythology of the inner power of the human spirit, monsters find their place in representing the overwhelming nature of the perceived world. In Lee's case this perspectival paranoia is embodied in the name of a mythic creature, the 'Hide-behind' (113). The significant difference between Roquentin's self-created paranoia and Lee's resides in the fact that the latter's is created for him, by his nemesis Hank. In *Notion* there is a necessary element of perception in paranoia, but in Kesey's novel it is invariably translated and given language, even transmitted from one character to another, by the clash of varying personal perception.

The 'Hide-behind' is imposed upon Lee by his brother in childhood. Upon returning to Stamper soil as an adult for the first time since leaving home at the age of twelve, Lee's autonomous powers of perception embed him firmly in a socially constructed paranoia. He remarks skeptically: 'Who played at Dan'l Boone in a forest full of fallout?' (122). Elaine B. Safer, commenting on this same line in *Notion* says, 'In a nuclear world no one . . .' (34). Lee's starting point, riding the wave of his attempt at suicide, which is one of Albert Camus' foci in his existentialist writing, is that no one would play nineteenth-century games in a radioactive world. Lee here reacts to the sight

of 'coon and fox and muskrat hides dried and stiffened' on the door of the barn (122). Lee goes on to ask the same question in more ambiguous terms allowing the possibility for the world to be polluted by radioactive or toxic waste in addition to nuclear fallout from war or atomic testing: 'But who chopped that firewood and slopped those pigs and raised those apples from the crippled earth?' (124). Obviously someone is actively pursuing pioneer games regardless of the level of nuclear waste or nuclear conflict present in the world; someone who has little time for the stultifying effects of an existentialist philosophy acts out a pioneer dream.

Lee is not the only character who expresses the particular angst of Cold War fears. Lee's feelings are in the 'present' of the novel; Hank's depression comes upon his return from the Korean War in the novel's 'past':

Dammit, he'd just returned from a police action that had taken more lives than the First World War, to find the Dodgers in a slump, frozen apple pie just like Mom useta make in all the supermarkets, and a sour stench in the sweet land of liberty he'd risked his life defending. Plus an unusual foreign worry on the Average American Guy he'd just saved from the insidious peril of Communism. What the hell was wrong? There was a kind of bland despair and the sky was filled with tinfoil. (151)

The prose here packs it in tightly with Hank expressing discouragement from a conflict not even called a proper war, the commodification of motherhood in the form of frozen pie (replicating a commodity produced by mothers for the mass market), and always the spectre of the larger Cold War affecting his perception. Like Bromden's sea being filled with 'chrome' waves Hank's sky is filled with tinfoil, which may be evoking images of World War Two defensive weapons, falling aircraft, or Soviet satellites in orbit above American soil. At this point in the novel Hank is allowed to express an existentialist anxiety, which he has outgrown by the novel's 'present'. Lee and Hank form a

representation of the postwar American male generation. The difference in their observations of the world, separated by a dozen years or so, acts as a bridge between the family narrative and the historical context of the novel, most significantly influenced by the atomic bomb.

One of the narrative techniques used in *Notion*, as well as many other novels of the period, is the inclusion of small segments of language from the realm of mass culture: from advertising jingles and slogans to excerpts from popular songs. *Notion* includes lyrics from popular songs always, except for the title and epigram from ‘Good Night, Irene’, played in the presence of characters in scenes over either a radio or jukebox. These lyrics make a commentary on the action taking place in their sphere of influence. At the lunch break on Lee’s first day as choker setter, Joe Ben’s radio ‘insists’: ‘Ah got a radiation burn / On my pore pore heart’ (187). At this point in the novel the reader has seen expressions of anxiety from both Lee and Hank. Here the radio broadcasts a song that comments on the nuclear anxiety of the context in which the characters live.²⁰ At this point the two men have their first real chance to talk since Lee’s arrival and Lee, synchronistically with the radio, is trying to reach out with part of himself to tell Hank of his hurt, his fear. At lunch, like most of Lee’s interactions, what he verbalises is so tainted by his paranoia that he ends up telling Hank to go to hell rather than express his need.

Despite Lee’s words there is a warming period between the brothers, which ends

20David Seed makes note of a similar device in Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1971. London: Jonathan Cape, 1973): ‘Gretel rallies the audience as a V-rocket drops outside with a song that begins: “Oh, don’t let it get you,/it will if they let you [. . .]” (174). The explicit recognition of fear by its conversion into song temporarily mutes that fear. Throughout the novel song, play and comedy in general are the intermittent signs of human resistance to the war. They possess an implicit political dimension in establishing “we-systems”, however briefly, against the exploiting and threatening forces denoted by “they” (Seed, *Pynchon* 198). In both Kesey’s and Pynchon’s novels songs elicit a context from the fear of advanced technological bombing.

with an argument the night of the bear hunt. In a long letter to his friend, Peters, Lee puts his conflict with Hank in contemporary terms appropriate to the anxieties thus far described:

He [Joe] had missed the hostilities last night and had gone to bed ignorant of the redeclaration of the cold war between Hank and me, and had spent a night dreaming visionary dreams of brotherhood while his relatives wrangled below Joe's Utopia: a color-filled world of garlands and maypoles, of bluebirds and marigolds, where Man Is Good to His Brother Simply Because It Is More Fun. (297)

Joe Ben, always the peace maker, is the perfect fulcrum between Lee and Hank, and his motto expresses the philosophy found at the heart of most of Kesey's work. There are other more direct expressions of the Cold War anxiety verbalised in the novel. 'As far as us woods boys are concerned—an' the rest of you who make a livin' off the woods payroll—this rain coming might as well be an atom bomb' (351). The rain, one of the two water enemies in the novel, stops logging work, which is required for loggers to make a living. Given the anxieties at play in the context of the novel, long-term unemployment is as devastating as the detonation of a thermonuclear device. This utterance creates a bridge between nature and Western industry (rain and logging) to the unnatural and military industry (the detonation of a nuclear device).

Elements of the nuclear age pervade *Notion* to such an extent that phrases and words like 'Cold War' and 'radiation' come casually into play from unexpected and unconventional angles: 'Maybe the old fellow has flipped; maybe there is no specific risk, and the overall radiation of the scene has become high enough to blow his wiring and set him to hallucinating horrors that never existed at all . . .' (428). Reminiscent of Chief Bromden's sensibility, with its wiring and hallucinated horrors, the correlation between

the particular atomic anxiety and the military industrial complex is made here more explicit. In a passage where Lee confronts Viv with his need as expressed in a depression brought on by existential anxiety, he identifies this anxiety specifically in Faulknerian Cold War terms. After voicing the ‘sound and fury’ of modern life Lee says:

Or, say, Nikita [Kruschev] has one vodka too many and decides what-the-hell, then what? I’ll tell you. Zap; that’s all it takes. The little red button and zap. Right? And this little button makes a definite difference in our world; in our generation, ever since we’ve been old enough to read, our tomorrows have been at the mercy of this button. (435)

Lee, embodying the Cold War anxiety and paranoia most of all characters here, specifically points to the Soviet premier. Lee was eight-years-old in 1945, about the time he would have been able to read and coinciding with the beginning of the Atomic era. Section eleven of *Notion* is in the Key of the Atomic Bomb. In the introduction to that section Kesey points to the loss of meaning in our world, one tarnished by the annihilation caused by the atom bomb: ‘suburban survivors of Hiroshima described the blast as a “mighty first boom” . . . that mighty first boom was only the first faintest murmur of an explosion that is still roaring down on us, and always will be’ (529). This time the book, in the words of the novel’s narrator, is attempting to express in as many ways as possible, from as many potential viewpoints, the specifically Atomic anxiety that influences all thinking in the age.

The novel’s narrator makes a connection between the weather and Cold War anxieties in a purely paranoid manner:

A winter just like last year (But last year we was able to blame them Reds and their bomb tests, screwing up the weather), and just like the winter before that (But *that* winter, think back now, there was all them *hurricanes*

down in Florida that blew us up more than our share of rain), and just like the winters a thousand years before these little coast towns ever existed. (399)

It is difficult to say, at this early date, what affect nuclear tests have on weather, though above ground detonations do deteriorate the ozone layer. The parenthetical remarks here come as the voice of the unemployed loggers of the town, and their small town American paranoia. This passage expresses ambivalence ranging from typical paranoia to total doubt, including with it the colloquial phrase for explosion separated by only one word in 'blew us up.' However powerful this expressiveness may be, the paranoia continues: 'It's all them frigging satellites the government keeps shooting up in the air, is what's causing it' (399). When Sputnik, the world's first man-made satellite, was launched into orbit by the Soviets in 1958 it sent a message to America that all was not well. In this utterance it is the U.S. government's race with the Soviets that is to blame for the unemployed loggers' problems, and in effect all of America's troubles.

In exploring the thematic content of the nuclear era pervading the novel we can see the cultural underpinnings at play. The aesthetic device at work that allows such themes to be expressed most effectively is the polyvalent point-of-view, in which the reader's literary senses are overwhelmed allowing for non-cognitive connections to be made. The 1960s drug culture motto 'tune in, turn on, drop out', coined by Timothy Leary, reflected the counterculture's desire to find a positive social space outside of conservative Cold War society. Kesey's individualistic approach, in line with Leary's, believed that a rejection of mainstream society, which is seen in terms of either the military industrial complex or the Cold War or both, was the best response to the horrors of post-war life. This rejection of society at large required a range of aesthetic devices for communication that would avoid didacticism. In *Notion* these are most easily conceived in relation to

narration and the resulting polyvalent point-of-view employed by the novel. In order to achieve a more spontaneous positive vehicle for the individual to explore philosophical ideals Kesey would move from the complexity of the novel to the illusory impetus of psychedelic performance art.

CHAPTER THREE:

KESEY'S PSYCHEDELIC AESTHETICS

The deepest confusion is the threshold of insight.

From Herbert Molderings' 'Life Is No Performance'¹

In his fiction as well, but especially in his extra-literary artwork, Ken Kesey illustrates a fascination with a psychedelic aesthetic. Psychedelia is any aesthetic approach to an art form, be it the novel, music, film, or two-dimensional visual art, that is either directly affected by the sensations associated with the ingesting of drugs, especially, but not limited to, the so-called psycho-active ones; or it is that which attempts to represent or give the effect of being on such drugs. Psychedelia is the physiological side-effect of psycho-active drugs, which can produce synesthetic responses to external stimulus. His fascination with psychedelics also emerges from illusory ideas of the 'real', and leads to his continued exploration of the hidden parts of reality. Kesey explores sensation as an aesthetic project both linguistically, topically, and through the application of media from different sensual realms.²

Inspired by his Beat roots, Kesey took notice of government-funded drug experimentation and turned it to artistic ends. From the science fictionized imagery of his early novels to his quasi-mythic trip across America in the summer of 1964 and beyond, Kesey's life and work both provide an innovative theoretical context for studying the

¹ Herbert Molderings, 'Life Is No Performance: Performance by Jochen Gerz.' Trans. Ulrich Keller. Eds. Gregory Battcock and Robert Nickas. *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc. 1984) 178.

² In trying to define the poetics of Symbolism in 1886 Anatole Baju 'spoke of indicating the greatest number of sensations in the fewest possible words, noting the most delicate shadings, and exploring the rare, intimate, and hidden parts of reality' (Cornell 47).

relationship between drugs and aesthetic development, especially in regard to Kesey's interest in the primacy of perception. The theoretical meanings of Kesey's aesthetic as it relates to, and is affected by, drug consciousness will be examined by looking briefly at passages from Kesey's early correspondence, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Sometimes a Great Notion*, and Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. It will be necessary to examine extra-literary materials, including videos produced using Merry Prankster footage, Compact Discs made from recordings taken by Kesey during and outside Acid Tests, and one poster advertising the Muir Beach Acid Test, as 'texts' which express Kesey's changing artistic modes in the mid-1960s because this chapter attempts to analyse the development of Kesey's aesthetics beyond the novel. This chapter examines Kesey's extra-literary phase of artistic development by charting the personal and cultural events that inspired his departure from the literary arts, discussing the influence of drugs on his first two novels, and finally exploring the performance art aesthetics Kesey used in this phase and the social messages that they express.

BACKGROUND

The psychedelic aesthetic is a post-war mode of art which takes into consideration different realms of sensation; visual, auditory, etc. Many of the broad characteristic strokes of art made after the Second World War—the apparently incongruous mixing of high culture with low culture, the use of new technologies in art—can be seen in psychedelic art as well. The psychedelic period began around the end of World War Two with the development of new technologies. The Atomic bomb and the computer, which had the potential respectively to wreak more collateral damage, or process more information, than any other devices previously, came into being in 1945 and 1946. Albert Hofmann invented LSD-25, a drug that can shatter consciousness more thoroughly and for a longer period of time from a smaller dose than other hallucinogenic drugs, while being able to return its user to normality afterward, in 1943 (Babbs, *Bus* 3). Timothy Leary, the Harvard University professor who became the East Coast's most prominent advocate of the 1960s psychedelic

movement, told Paul Perry that:

technological developments helped create an environment where psychedelic counterculture was possible. I think that all these things [were] pretty historically inevitable, when you had modern technology producing psychedelic drugs mass-market and then you had electronic amplification [recording and broadcast] of sound. (Babbs, *Bus* xix)

Leary was one of the first major motivators in the 60s psychedelic movement, who first met Kesey, his West Coast counterpart, in 1964, and though the psychedelic counterculture may have evolved without Kesey's participation, Kesey was one of the movement's earliest innovators experimenting with a combination of drugs, aesthetics, and electronics.

In Kesey's works the application of psychedelia takes a variety of aesthetic expressions from the hallucinatory imagery of his first novel, to the cut-up narrative technique and paranoia expressed in his second, to the visual, musical, and electronic sensory stimulations of his subsequent extra-literary phase.³ The novelistic techniques employed were inspired from a combination of Kesey's reading of novels by Burroughs, Sartre, and others, and his experiments with psycho-active drugs. These works illustrate an influence of many of the different kinds of drugs ingested by Kesey, not just those commonly categorised as psychedelics, but others such as amphetamines and marijuana.

Kesey's exposure to drugs and his exploration with drug-related aesthetics started immediately before he began composing his early novels. In 1959 Kesey took marijuana for the first time and got drunk for the second; the first being his wedding night in 1956 (Babbs, *Bus* 10). Shortly thereafter Kesey became a participant in the CIA's MK-ULTRA project at the Veterans Hospital in Menlo Park, California. In this program researchers gave Kesey and other subjects a variety of psycho-active drugs including psilocybin, mescaline, ditran, LSD-25, and the amphetamine IT-290.⁴ During the sessions where Kesey ingested

³The term 'cut-up' as a narrative technique has developed from Surrealist experiments with automatic writing, Dos Passos' filtering images and language in his *USA* trilogy, and, most important for Kesey, Burroughs' literally cutting segments of prose into small units and rearranging them in automatic and conscious ways.

⁴William Plummer, *The Holy Goof: A Biography of Neal Cassady* (New York: Paragon House, 1990) 117.

these various chemicals researchers observed his reaction, asking questions and taking notes. The following year Kesey was taking preludein, a type of speed, and growing his own marijuana and peyote, presumably because he had taken these in recent months and wanted to propagate more for further consumption and experimentation (*Correspondence* 'Letter 6'). In this environment Kesey began working as an aide in the mental ward of the same hospital where the drug research had been conducted in Menlo Park, which precipitated the writing of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. These experiences, and his own later experimentation, if not obsession, with drugs influenced Kesey's writing early on.

Kesey wrote the first draft of the opening passage of *Cuckoo's Nest* under the influence of peyote (Kesey, *Garage* 14). Other drugs that Kesey took before and during the composition of *Cuckoo's Nest* included LSD and IT-290, which Kesey smuggled out of the MK-ULTRA project. Kesey also smoked marijuana at this time. This drug consumption contributed to the development of the novel's unique point-of-view and the hallucinatory imagery used in both the horrific content and descriptions of the Combine. In Kesey's notes and letters of the time he describes writing draft material of the novel while on drugs while working on the mental ward (Kesey, *Garage* 7-15). Kesey's drug experimentation, while not solely responsible for this theme in his work (we have seen Kesey's primary concerns of the time were with the Cold War and the military industrial complex), is, coupled with Kesey's reading of William Burroughs' heavily drug influenced novel *Naked Lunch*, primarily responsible for the hallucinatory language and cut-up aesthetics in *Cuckoo's Nest*.

Gilbert Porter accurately notes, as seen in chapter one, that Chief Bromden's point-of-view is split into narrator-participant and narrator-observer (11-12). Porter's analysis of *Cuckoo's Nest's* point-of-view in purely poetic terms makes no mention of its being influenced by Kesey's chemical research. However, it is this bifurcated point-of-view that allows the novel to describe both the real and the hallucinated trace of the real. Bromden describes the horrific psychic torture of life on the mental ward and his imagined physical horrors of treatment by the Combine. The metaphors used to describe the Combine reflect an imagination seeing beyond the physical surface of what one normally sees. The Big

Nurse is described as a machine. Chief Bromden depicts Nurse Ratched as a robotic officer in a vast Combine organisation. When she first encounters the black orderlies on the ward she erupts into a transformer-like monster: 'She's going to tear the black bastards limb from limb, she's so furious. She's swelling up, swells till her back's splitting out the white uniform and she's let her arms section out long enough to wrap around the three of them five, six times' (4-5). These initial descriptions set up the very hallucinatory perception required for Bromden to play his role as participant in the drama and also be the novel's narrator. Here psychedelic drugs helped Kesey develop an aesthetic environment in which it would be possible to abolish the boundary between the real and the imagined. The drugs did not create the structure of Bromden's point-of-view or even specific imagery in *Cuckoo's Nest* on their own. The psychedelic experiences Kesey engaged in created a perceptual reality capable of transforming sensory stimulus into aesthetic expression by opening up a new range of sensations to the author's poetic arsenal.

While influential on the author's narrative technique, chemical intoxicants also find their way into the action of the novel itself. In *Cuckoo's Nest* intoxicants act as a weapon against the control of the Combine. Bromden's beer drinking on the fishing trip begins to have revolutionary effects: 'I smelt the air and felt the four cans of beer I'd drunk shorting out dozens of control leads down inside me: all around, the chrome sides of the swells flickered and flashed in the sun' (235). Later, at the party on the ward with Mr. Turkle, characters smoke marijuana (283) and drink vodka mixed with codeine-laced cough syrup (287-288). The mixing of all of these intoxicants helps bring about McMurphy's revolution. Kesey would return to this intoxicant-laced revolution later in his career.

In June of 1961 Kesey finished writing *Cuckoo's Nest*. In Kesey's second novel, *Sometimes a Great Notion*, Kesey's primary chemical tutors were marijuana and amphetamines. The amphetamines allowed Kesey to focus his already developed talents as a writer for long periods of time, and any prolonged euphoria or schizophrenia contributed to, but are not solely responsible for, the disjointed aesthetics expressed in the novel. While not normally considered a psychedelic drug, very high doses of amphetamines can cause hallucinations, especially when combined with drugs like marijuana. Specifically

psychedelic influence made Kesey in *Notion* fool 'around with reality and what reality can be' (Kesey, 'Daisy' 23). The focus of *Sometimes a Great Notion* has little to do with drugs, though Lee, one of the main characters in the novel, is a marijuana user, but midway through the novel mention of drugs begins to find its way into the book more and more. Indian Jenny recalls a peyote jolt she had once had trying to attain enlightenment (288). Lee describes Joe Ben's hyperactivity thus: 'Joe Ben constituted a phenomenon to me in more ways than one; quite apart from his appearance, he was one of those extremely remarkable beings whose hearts pump pure elixir of Benzedrine through a body made of latex rubber' (295). Kesey took Benzedrine, a type of amphetamine, during the composition and revision of *Notion*.⁵ When old Henry Stamper takes his last fall, has lost his arm in a logging accident and is in hospital on his death bed, chemicals help preserve in him a never-say-die attitude: 'Look out for me, Boney, they been shootin' me fulla dope an' I'm a caution' (554), and later 'Get me another shot o' that dope, and where the hell's that caw-fee!' (556). Morphine is not enough for the dying Henry; he wants caffeine so he can be wide awake for the business of dying.

Despite the presence of drugs in the action of the book, the cut-up narrative style which emerges from Kesey's drug use is of more interest along the lines of their influence on Kesey's aesthetic. Most of the important aspects of this have been explored in the previous chapter. The nexus of drug experimentation and the narrative stylistics of William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* resulted in the use of hallucinatory language in *Cuckoo's Nest*. In *Notion* the same two elements encouraged Kesey to embrace the play with cut-up narrative conventions, literally cutting and pasting different story-lines together while still trying to maintain a strict plot. Where Burroughs, a heroin addict for many years, implements non-cognitive techniques to disrupt language to the greatest degree, Kesey uses the cut-up method to fuse different characters' stories together, rather than split narrative apart.

⁵Though difficult to prove definitively, there may be a correspondence imbedded subtextually in the names of characters in *Notion* with those of *Naked Lunch*. Lee is the existentially paranoid character in *Notion* with similarities to Bull Lee, the protagonist in *Naked Lunch*, who is a paranoid heroin addict. Lee's description of Joe Ben as a remarkable being may be signaling a relationship to Burroughs' Doctor Benway, a maniacal figure behind much of the conspiracy in *Naked Lunch*.

In an interview with Ellis Conklin, Kesey discussed his amphetamine and marijuana use in writing: 'It's stamina. When I wrote "Great Notion," I could go 30 hours at a whack and just grind it out, and I could keep those ideas in the air like balls. I can't do it anymore. I can't work anywhere near that hard.'⁶ Kesey's use of speed aided the author in terms of concentration that allowed him to hold the complex novelistic material together over time. Pharmacologically speaking, the use of amphetamines allows sustained, focused attention for prolonged periods beyond the limits of ordinary metabolism. At high doses, amphetamines may cause anxiety, headache, palpitations, and chest pain. In addition to hallucinations, very large doses may cause delusions and delirium; these can be seen primarily in the paranoia of Lee's character. Scientific data concerning marijuana use suggests that it affects the hippocampus area of the brain and its ability to imprint experience into memory.⁷ Without these imprints, holding a world as complex as *Notion*'s in the author's mind over months and years becomes exceedingly difficult. Thus Kesey's shift from amphetamines to marijuana as his daily drug of choice may be partially responsible for the move to the more fluid and spontaneous outlets provided by performance art.

After completing his first two novels Kesey's third distinct phase of artistic endeavour began with his uniquely public decision to 'Prove nothing' (Strelow 95). The coincidence of four events, all within a very short period of time, contributed as impetus to Kesey's radical departure. Kesey had at hand the living image of Neal Cassady, the literary figure that had drawn him to the San Francisco Bay Area in the first place. Kesey had met Cassady in person just months before beginning composition of *Cuckoo's Nest*, but the first event that encouraged Kesey to go beyond the conventional novel was an increased frequency of Cassady in Kesey's life.⁸ Neal Cassady, the model for Jack Kerouac's hero

⁶Ellis. E. Conklin, 'Kesey's Great Notion.' *Seattle Post Intelligencer* 18 Jan. 1990: C3.

⁷H.P. Rang, et al, eds. *Pharmacology* (Third edition. London: Churchill Livingstone, 1995) 438.

⁸ William Plummer places the date of the two men initially meeting in 1962, after Kesey finished work on *Cuckoo's Nest*. Whatever the year of their meeting, Cassady's influence on Kesey moving away from the novel as an artform remains unchanged. *The Holy Goof: A Biography of Neal Cassady* 119.

and his prose style in *On the Road*, would also become Kesey's model for an extra-literary art form. Stephen Tanner informs us that for Kesey:

Neal Cassady was an important influence, at first as Dean Moriarty in *On the Road* and later as a close friend and companion in escapades that constituted a kind of sequel to Kerouac's novels. Some of those involved in the Prankster activities have mentioned that Cassady was the real energizing force in the group. (Tanner, *Kesey* 137)

The 'Beat life-style at North Beach' had made a tremendous impression on Kesey early on, evidenced by his unpublished novel *Zoo*. To have the real Cassady standing before him talking a mile a minute astounded Kesey. Kesey said: 'Neal's path was the yoga of a man driven to the cliff edge by the grassfire of an entire nation's burning material madness. Rather than be consumed by this he jumped, choosing to sort things out in the fast flying but smog free moments of a life with no retreat.'⁹ This statement indicates Kesey's grappling with late capitalism by acknowledging Cassady's life choices as a response to 'material madness.' By choosing to go beyond the novel, Kesey attempted to reject the polluting influences of capitalist culture. Elsewhere Kesey said: 'I saw that Cassady did everything a novel does, except that he did it better because he was living it and not writing about it' (Plummer 135). Cassady, a drug enthusiast without rival, influenced Kesey away from the literary arts much as he had influenced Kerouac to write about Cassady's road-going lifestyle.

In the Fall of 1963 Kesey finished *Notion*. It had been a monumental task for him, months on end maintaining an amphetamine high in order to keep at the manuscript for twenty to thirty hours at a stretch. Kesey suggested in a letter written to novelist Larry McMurtry in the summer of 1963, while still at work on *Notion*, that he was aware of his desire to make art in a form different from that of the novel, perhaps by drawing novels (*Correspondence* 'Letter 34'). In the same letter Kesey expresses his urge to develop spontaneous new forms of art:

⁹Quoted from *The Realist*, May-June 1971: 51, as Rpt. in McNally, Dennis. *Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, The Beat Generation, and America* (New York: Delta, 1979) 314-315.

“But is it art?” I hear a crow on my shoulder ask. “Sure,” the crow says, “It’s wild, but is it the fuck art?” And I tell the crow, “I’m damned if I know if it’s art. I’m not even certain it’s making sense. All I know for sure,” I tell that crow, “Is that this is the way it comes into me, why not let it be the same way it goes out?” (*Correspondence* ‘Letter 34’ 3)¹⁰

Though this dialogue between Kesey and his artistic conscience could have lead him to the Beat failing of ‘first thought, best thought’ in the written word, a trait Malcolm Cowley was pleased to see Kesey did not duplicate in his early work, *Notion*’s completion acted as the second event that freed him up to work in a new, more spontaneous medium.

At almost the same time as *Notion* was being delivered to the publishers, Kesey’s best friend Ken Babbs returned from a tour of duty as a marine helicopter pilot in Vietnam. Babbs’ reappearance acted as the third catalyst toward Kesey’s next phase being a non-literary one. Kesey describes the post-Vietnam Babbs in a letter from the Fall of 1963: ‘War has made him [Babbs] take his goofing-off very serious, serious enough to push it near art’ (*Correspondence* ‘Letter 38’). The ‘goofing-off’ that Babbs performed was of a similar type of verbal antics that Neal Cassady practiced, both as characterised in *On the Road* as the HOLY GOOF, and in person. So, with Babbs’ return Kesey had a rapping performance artist at each elbow, one who had just come from the war that would be a focus for the radical Left in a couple of short years.

Just a few short weeks after the completion of *Notion* and Babbs’ reappearance on the social scene, the final event to push Kesey fully into his new phase of artistic endeavor occurred on 22 November, 1963. In a letter written shortly after that date Kesey describes how he and George Walker, about to become one of the core members of the Merry Pranksters, were driving west from New York on the Pennsylvania turnpike when the news of President Kennedy’s assassination came over the radio.¹¹ Kesey, like so many, had been swept up in the enthusiasm of Kennedy’s administration of the Presidency, and was angered by his senseless death. Kesey said, ‘On the drive back west Kennedy was being

¹⁰Kesey’s interest in using crows as a figure of conscience persists throughout his career as evidenced by the presence of talking crows in the 1998 stageplay *Twister*.

¹¹The Merry Pranksters is the self-given name of those people who surrounded and worked with Kesey.

killed' as if it were a prolonged action performed by American society itself (*Pranksters* video). During the years of Kennedy's Presidency Kesey had been primarily concerned with nuclear holocaust, and Kennedy's handling of the Cuban missile crisis had allayed his fears to some small degree. Kesey and George listened to the updates—transport of the body, confirmation of the death, the swearing in of Johnson as President, the State funeral—for the next 2500 miles. Kesey goes on about this drive: 'Everybody was on the same trip. Everybody was thinking about America and what was happening to America' (*Pranksters* video). This collective consciousness would later inspire Kesey with ideas of presenting a spontaneous real-time performance art that anyone could understand.

With Kennedy dead and Johnson in the White House it seemed to many literally that some form of apocalypse was impending. Hunter Thompson, at this point aware of Kesey only as a novelist, described the 'fear and loathing'—using the famous phrase for perhaps the first time—that Kennedy's death evoked for everyone, but especially writers like Kesey and Thompson himself, in a letter written on the day of the assassination:

There is no human being within 500 miles to whom I can communicate anything—much less the fear and loathing that is on me after today's murder . . . I was not prepared at this time for the death of hope, but here it is. . . . This is the end of reason, the dirtiest hour in our time. . . . No matter what, today is the end of an era. . . . Fiction is dead.¹²

Kennedy's death convinced Thompson to embrace journalism, rather than the novel, as his calling. For Kesey, Kennedy's death was also the death of hope, which required an instantaneous art form in order to keep up with the changes the apocalypse was apparently bringing. This feeling was a confirmation of what Kesey had punningly suggested in the title of *Sometimes a Great Notion*, which plays on the nostalgic Camelot-mythology of the phrase 'Once a great nation,' and indicates a sense of both the American Dream and the American Empire in terminal decline.

One could argue that the emergence of the performance art form called Happenings in 1959 was a theatrical response to the uncertainties of the Cold War. Happenings

¹²Hunter S. Thompson, *The Proud Highway: Saga of a Desperate Southern Gentleman, The Fear and Loathing Letters, Vol. 1* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997) 420-421.

flourished in the two to three years after Kennedy's death, not coincidentally the same time Kesey began his performance art phase. Though Happenings share some of the same cultural impetus as Kesey's performance art, the actual form of performances bear considerable differences. All of these events—his friendship with Cassady, completion of *Notion*, Babbs' return, the death of Kennedy—in a highly technologised society that allowed the mass production of psychedelic drugs created a crucial nexus which inspired Kesey to explore fully new artistic media.

BEYOND THE NOVEL

Thus at the end of composing his first two published novels Kesey made a conscious choice to turn away from that art form in favour of others. Matthew Rick writes: 'The period [after *Notion*] marked for Kesey a departure from writing novels into a period of living theater, in which he was actively engaged in comic book heroism and prankster theatrics as a means of jarring reality out of the restrictions of middle-class American society' (*Tarnished Galahad*). The exploration of this living theater, an impulse to transcend formal restrictions, was primarily fueled by LSD. Roy Seburn, responsible for the Acid Tests' 'audioptics', moving light images to accompany the sound, said that he was attracted to Kesey's activities at Perry Lane, where Kesey lived while attending Stanford University, because the people involved were trying to 'Shake loose from the old forms' (*Pranksters* video). The result of this exploration of living theatre took two primary forms: the trip across America in a wildly painted bus in the summer of 1964 and the film made on that journey; as well as the series of rock music ritual Happenings known as the Acid Tests, which took place between the late Fall of 1965 and the Acid Test Graduation on 31 October, 1966. 'The Movie', as the footage taken on the bus trip is often called, though at other times it goes by the more formal title 'The Merry Pranksters' Search for a Kool Place,' has

only recently been presented in a successful, if limited manner.¹³ The Acid Tests attracted little widespread attention initially, but they sowed the seeds of a cultural revolution that became known as a movement called the Sixties and the multimillion dollar career of, at least, the Grateful Dead, if not a dozen other bands.

Kesey began developing the features of his new phase when he moved to a house surrounded by woods in La Honda, California in July 1963. Prior to this he had been living in the Beat/Bohemian atmosphere that existed in Stanford's Perry Lane. Wolfe reports that: 'It was more like he [Kesey] had a vision of the forest as a fantastic stage setting . . . in which every day would be a happening, an art form . . .' (51). Wolfe's use of the term Happening comes from his awareness of those going on in New York in the early 1960s rather than Kesey's overt adoption of that term for his performance art. After an apprenticeship at his forest home, a time spent attuning himself to the initial possibilities of living theatre, Kesey took this spontaneous act on the road. The elements of this phase include amplification of pre-recorded music as well as live music, broadcast indoors as well as out, the human voice amplified through microphones, lights, projection of films, sculptures constructed from a wide range of materials and the use of drugs. Kesey describes the forest environment at La Honda as a place in which one could make all the noise they wanted surrounded by redwoods: 'I don't think that what came out of the 60s could have come out of any other place. It had to come from a place of Oriental solitude' (*Pranksters* video). Developed along a path originating in the found objects of Marcel Duchamp, the Merry Pranksters constructed sculptures along the lines of a bedstead painted gold with nothing in it set in a clearing in the forest.

During this period Kesey orchestrated the Merry Pranksters in order to experiment with new spontaneous forms of expression. Barney Hoskyns writes that: 'Kesey gradually began to abandon writing, seeing it as an essentially bourgeois exercise and instead

¹³British television's Channel 4 produced a documentary version of 'The Movie' called 'Tripping' in 1999, and with the help of digital technology Kesey and the Merry Pranksters have finally produced their own version of 'Intrepid Traveler and His Merry Band of Pranksters Look for a Kool Place' Ken Kesey, dir. Pleasant Hill: Intrepid Trips, 1999.

embracing something altogether more primordial and existential.’¹⁴ His activities were seen as a ‘systematic irrationality.’ Already extremely interested in audio tape recordings and motion picture film, after the initial phase of experimentation, from roughly November 1963 to the late spring of 1964, Kesey purchased a 1939 International Harvester bus converted to a camper. Painted wild colors, fitted with a platform on the roof for outdoor passengers, and wired for sound, the subsequent trip to New York for the World’s Fair and the publication celebrations of Kesey’s *Sometimes a Great Notion* instantly became an aesthetic performance from beginning to end (Wolfe, *Acid* 60).¹⁵ Everyone associated with this corporation, called the Intrepid Trips Information Service, started with money primarily from Kesey’s book sales and movie options, involved themselves equally with the directing or non-directing of the recording and ‘performance’ of every event on the trip.¹⁶ After that journey the bus made various other performances/tours including trips to Mexico in 1966, Washington State with Allen Ginsberg in 1967, and to Woodstock in 1969, this last trip without Kesey onboard. In 1990 Kesey purchased another bus and continued making performance tours to San Francisco, Washington State, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio in 1997, and even to Britain in the summer of 1999. Barry Leeds writes that: ‘The 1964 bus trip marked the point at which Kesey began to devote his energies primarily to shaping his own life and those of his satellites as an art form and a search for new perceptions’ (4). Kesey had been primarily interested in new perceptions in his first two novels, and his continuous pursuit of the same in other media illustrates the seriousness of his activities during this period. On the bus Kesey developed the technique of the variable-lag tape setup which could reproduce audio input in compelling feedback ways that digital effects boxes cannot duplicate. In the end the bus turns out to be an elusive art form that Kesey could reproduce for the rest of his life; an art form that hundreds of young

¹⁴Barney Hoskyns, *Beneath the Diamond Sky: Haight-Ashbury 1965-1970* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997) 33.

¹⁵Furthur was the first painted bus which has become an American icon. The Who’s ‘Magic Bus’ and the Beatles’ 1967 *Magical Mystery Tour* were references or outgrowths of the artform began by Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters. It has also been suggested that Cliff Richards’ part in *Summer Holiday* (1962) may have been influenced by Kesey’s bus trip, but it must be remembered that Sir Cliff made his film two years before Kesey’s journey.

¹⁶Intrepid Trips Information Service is pronounced ‘it is’.

people in the 1960s and after would take up less as an art form than as a lifestyle. Blair Jackson, in *Grateful Dead: The Music Never Stopped*, writes: 'Keseey and the Pranksters were practically living an ever-changing conceptual art piece totally outside of society's constraints.'¹⁷ Their living proceeded outside of the constraints of most of the art world as well. This living theater, propelled by drugs, possessed a spontaneous aesthetic which the novel could not contain.

Though Keseey did not write a novelised version of the bus trip performance, the journey did produce 'The Movie' taken on the trip. Tom Wolfe describes 'The Movie' as 'the world's first acid film, taken under conditions of total spontaneity barreling through the heartlands of America, recording all now, in the moment' (122). He says Keseey conceived of it as 'a total breakthrough in terms of expression' (122). Separating out the wheat from the chaff has turned out to be a difficult task, and it has taken thirty-five years for the film to be seen as a successful product.¹⁸ The 1999 version of 'The Movie' edited by Keseey himself, which presents nearly an hour of the original footage, is, in essence, a talking book in which the Merry Pranksters play the parts of themselves before the camera accompanied by musical instruments moving through the drama of America and interacting with it. Keseey viewed the interaction between individuals in the world as a ready-made play in which he and his associates, as conscious actors, could enter at any spatial or temporal intersection. The actors do not portray themselves, per se, but nicknamed alter egos playing a part in a self-conscious parody or exploration of the social Self. In this version of 'The Movie' there is also an archaeological envelope in which the Merry Pranksters of the 1990s, dressed in white safety suits, 'unearth' the images of the film as a relic of time. The 60s Pranksters all wear red and white or red, white, and blue T-shirts and sometimes American flags. George Walker said, 'We saw the shirts as an image of America in terms of an icon, an entity—the flag is a being with power' (*Pranksters* video). In some scenes of 'The Movie' the Pranksters wear fantastical make-up and act out expressionistic dramas before

¹⁷Blair Jackson, *Grateful Dead: The Music Never Stopped* (New York: Delilah Communications Ltd., 1983) 52.

¹⁸The psychedelic film which most closely approximates what the Pranksters' 'Movie' was intended to be like is the far superior *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, dir. Film. Columbia/Pando/Raybert 1969).

the camera. Other shots show Mike Hagen or some other Prankster with a camera filming some other Pranksters. Like the multiple images of something caught between two mirrors, this consciously self-conscious capturing of the process of 'The Movie' being made as part of the film reflects the post-war loss of formal and formulaic centre. Ultimately the application of the psychedelic aesthetic that would be more successful for Kesey came in the Acid Tests.

Ken Babbs described their intentions at the time of the bus trip and subsequent Acid Tests thus: 'Our purpose was to use the drug [LSD] to break up established patterns and, while in a heightened state of awareness, do our work as writers, musicians, rappers, cinematographers, social engineers, still photographers, and dramatists—and to record it while it was happening' (Babbs, *Bus* xxii). In this endeavor the Pranksters viewed LSD as a tool to aid in learning how to make an aesthetic art for people who were not high on psychedelic drugs by accessing a 'heightened' realm of consciousness. One of Kesey's sayings during the period between the bus trip and the Acid Tests was, 'See with your ears and hear with your eyes' (Wolfe, *Acid* 112). Kesey himself expressed his reasoning for this shift from the written word to living art in a letter from sometime in 1964, probably after the bus trip itself:

So my reasons for laying off fiction writing is a long way from believing that I have written a couple of good-enough books. I like the books and have faith in them, but for all my faith I see holes; more than you or anyone else I can see the holes. Those holes are what interest me now. And the worms that bored them. (*Correspondence* 'Letter 47')

The holes Kesey refers to are the pieces of reality that invariably get edited out of novels. Just as the Surrealists tried to express the psychological rupture in reality in aesthetic form, Kesey attempted to develop forms that could express those parts of experience which are not included in the foundation of Realist art forms. It is perhaps ironic that Kesey attempts to overcome the perspectival distortions of fiction in his move to other art forms through the perception distorting door of psychedelic drugs.

The Pranksters developed the art form of switching on a television programme without the sound on while playing a recording of someone's previous spontaneous

rapping (long before rap music would dominate popular music charts), which duplicates in real time the fiction technique of splicing together apparently incongruous material creating its own narrative. By appealing to the non-cognitive consciousness, synchronous connections would invariably be made between the television and the tape, but outsiders complained it was meaningless or coincidental. At a certain point Kesey recognised that for people to appreciate these forms requires some degree of education into the subtle qualities of free associational art.

Shortly after performing on stage at the Vietnam Day Committee's protest rally at Berkeley, California on 16 October, 1965 the Merry Pranksters recorded two audio pieces which represented the performance. Called 'Hawgs Are Comin' parts One and Two, together these two 'texts' tell the story of the Merry Pranksters and the Hell's Angels' participations in the demonstration. To the outside observer both groups opposed the demonstration—the Merry Pranksters on rhetorical grounds, the Hell's Angels on patriotic ones. Kesey was initially attracted to the Hell's Angels for their non-conformity as expressing an alternative individualism in an overly structured society. Eventually their anarchic use of violence was rejected by Kesey as overstepping the bounds of social responsibility. Narrative plays a central role in Kesey's audio works. Part One begins with harmonica and guitar blues with drums blended with the reverberation vocal sounds particular to the early acid rock music. In an audio montage the vocals begin by imitating a Native American chanting song alternating with moaning and glossolalia. The piece then settles into Kesey singing a song about the honour peculiar to the Hell's Angels. After the song, of which small segments are spliced into the piece at apparently random intervals as it continues offering partial continuity to the piece as a whole, Kesey contextualises the narrative by saying, accompanied by piano and horns, 'Believe it or not there was a brief little period there, couple/three weeks, where the whole future of the country, maybe the world, depended on a handful of outlaws, beatniks, bums, queers and junkies and all of the leftover crumbs of the loaf of society' (*Acid Test* CD). Kesey here is colouring the events that surrounded the Vietnam Day demonstration with cultural importance on a global scale. This piece exemplifies the birth of the psychedelic sound, which, though not as polished as

either the Grateful Dead or the Beatles, began the aesthetic audio exploration of many professional musicians.

Part Two of 'Hawgs Are Comin' uses the reverb vocals accompanied by electric guitar, xylophone, Wurlitzer organ, trumpet, animal voices imitated by musical instruments, cello, stand-up bass, and piano. Usually only one or two instruments accompany the vocals at any given time. The vocals alternate between straight reportage, to singing, to rapping. Presumably no score was written out prior to recording or in the process of editing afterward. Despite the chaotic approach to the composition of the piece there is remarkable restraint and a spareness one would not expect from psychedelia. In addition to the musical accompaniment to the narrative, which alternates freely between Kesey and Babbs, other sounds have been cut into the track including a recording of Allen Ginsberg talking about his involvement in the events and his Buddhist chanting and a television report. The splicing and overlapping of different vocal and instrumental sounds, as well as media sound bites, overwhelms the ear purposefully, disallowing logical comprehension of some of the material presented.

The Pranksters' development with psychedelic drugs and alternative forms of expression culminated in the aesthetics of the performance art happenings Kesey went on to orchestrate upon their return from the bus trip. Among the sensory manipulations in the Tests were flashing lights and moving screens playing more than one movie simultaneously (including 'The Movie') while the Pranksters or other of San Francisco's growing acid rock bands played. The rock band of choice for these performances was the Grateful Dead. Through the stimulation of all the senses the Acid Tests attempted to make 'the audience forget it was an audience, and become part of the action' (Wolfe, *Acid* 208).

To announce the Acid Tests Kesey developed his collaging talents in the form of posters. Collaged images include comic book characters and designs from other printed matter. The primary image, hand printed, hand colored and pasted together includes text on a horizontal plane as well as text at forty-five and ninety degrees to the horizontal. The main message in the upper left-hand quarter asks: 'Can you pass the Acid Test?' Below this, in the lower left-hand quarter the poster states: 'happenings are likely to include.' The use of

the word 'happenings' is making a conscious allusion to the avant-garde performance art Happenings that John Cage, Nam June Paik, Yoko Ono, and many others had been or would be running in New York and Los Angeles. Happenings were a highly formalised kind of theatre with scripts and scores, where the Acid Tests remained a much more fluid and spontaneous performance without scripts of any kind. In the extreme upper left-hand corner of the Acid Test poster, presumably intended to be read first, an instruction to the viewer says: 'Read Every Word of This.' And finally, below a small image from ancient Egypt, at a ninety-degree angle to the horizontal, is a small printed matter: 'William Burroughs becomes / control, however much it's / you mean by a sense of / clusion [sic]. It's one conclusion / in their lives, in all senses.' This small cut-up 'poem' both pays tribute to Burroughs as influential on Kesey as novelist and performance artist and gives the potential participant in the Acid Test a glimpse at the kind of aesthetic sub-cognitive experience they will be exposed to and the impact it might have 'in their lives, in all senses.' By presenting such text at an angle different from the standard horizontal it is illustrating the alternative sensory avenues through which this new non-textual psychedelia works. As we will see the techniques ultimately developed and employed in the Acid Tests are most closely concerned with simultaneously stimulating as many senses as possible.

Humans are primarily visual beings, and thus one of the most broad uses of an element of stimulus in the Acid Tests themselves was that of light projections. Roy Seburn projected light on an overhead projector through oil and water and food coloring pressed between plates of glass to create vast ectoplasmic ooze creations (Wolfe, *Acid* 216).¹⁹ Two other types of lights employed at the Acid Tests were the black light, which enhances the reflection of ultra-violet radiation, at the high end of the human eye's visual spectrum, and the stroboscopic light. The strobe light at certain frequencies can be so synchronised with the pattern of human brain waves that it can cause epileptics to seizure. Kesey and the Merry Pranksters learned that strobe lights can project people into many of the sensations of an LSD experience without the LSD. In the Acid Tests the Pranksters used mirrors and prisms to reflect and alter light waves. They used spotlights, both mounted and stationary

¹⁹This can also be seen in Ken Kesey's video *The Acid Test* (Eugene: Key-Z Productions, 1990).

and handheld ones so that the light technician could emphasise different activities at will. Motion pictures is another source of light projection, which can transmit impressionistic imagery or narrative orientated materials. In the Acid Tests the Pranksters had three film projectors set up and playing simultaneously. Sometimes the images were projected on different walls and sometimes two films would be shown over each other in a palimpsestic fashion in which images blended to create a synthetic vision. The material in the films included scientific pictures of timelapsed crystals growing and excerpts from 'The Movie.' The projection of images of the Merry Pranksters in 'The Movie' on the walls of the Acid Test space created an aesthetic continuity between the art presented and the activity itself. The Grateful Dead played their blues-influenced early acid rock or the Pranksters played their 'Chinese' rock music. As with *Sometimes a Great Notion* there is a sense of confusion to the Acid Tests, a spontaneousness to the event. This confusion is an orderly chaos rather than total formlessness aimed at individual as well as communal enlightenment. Like Kesey's fiction, the cut-up material is held together in the Acid Tests by a narrator or commentator, usually Babbs, making sense of the events in the performance space.

The Acid Tests were a marriage of sensory stimulus and narrative play. Since the aesthetics of the musical and visual presentation at the Acid Tests was so chaotic in a non-cognitive sense Kesey and Babbs found they could be direct in their speech to counter-balance the chaos. As with his return to the written word as an art form after this phase Kesey began to be more explicative in the Acid Tests. His explanations came in the midst of the sensory confusion presented in the space. A bootleg audio album produced from recordings of the 1965 Sound City Studios Acid Test preserves some excellent examples of Kesey and Babbs' direct style of explaining or commentating on the meaning of activity being presented (*Acid Test CD*). Track three of *Acid Tests Volume One* presents an interview conducted during the Acid Test. Kesey encouraged this direct exploration of the meaning of their apparently meaningless activity. Kesey's first statement expresses the ideal the Pranksters hoped to achieve:

I figure that our function on this earth is to reflect the other fellow, whatever instrument we can use be it that tape recorder, a camera, or a pencil, or a

mirror. If I can reflect you and the places where I see the barbs and the hangups and do it with some amount of love and not with hostility so there's as little pain as possible it means that you can move on. (*Acid Test* CD 3)

Here Kesey explains the Acid Test as a completely 'therapeutic' endeavor of progressive action intended to move individuals beyond their current state of emotional or philosophical development.

Kesey goes on to describe 'The Trip' as an open circle because of its spontaneous nature in current time:

The Trip means that there is still a place in what is happening for me to fit into, or for you to fit into. If you're listening to the radio it's a closed circle; it's already happened. . . . [like] Beethoven's Fifth which is finished; there's no place for me in it except as an audience. (*Acid Test* CD 3)

Kesey designed the Acid Tests, like his later theatre works, in order to abolish the distinction between audience and performer by giving all participants equal opportunity to be part of the action. In part Kesey desired to go beyond the novel because he had come to see the novel form as a closed circle, as closed as the radio or recorded music.²⁰

Tom Wolfe reports that there came a moment the Pranksters had to push the limits of aesthetics past the frontier: 'At one point Kesey and the Pranksters were taking it [LSD] every Sunday. It was like a sacrament. That's one of the things that interested me about the Pranksters: their acid tests were designed exactly the same way ceremonies were designed in the early days of Christianity, the early days of Buddhism, the early days of Zoroastrianism' (*Acid* 196). The Acid Tests had form and design much as a religious ceremony, especially as practiced by ancient Greek dramatists, has a dramatic structure. They attempted to transcend spiritually, as well as artistically, through a predisposition to mysticism focused on intuitive and eclectic aesthetic forms of self and group expression. The effect transcended even the purely sensual level of achievement and spilled over into virtual or philosophical forms because of this mystical element of combining chemicals in an aesthetic situation. Descartes' concept of the instantaneous *cogito* expressed, as related

²⁰Fortunately for us Kesey did not take his belief in the value of the open circle forms of art to such an extreme level that he failed to record some of his pieces for us to examine today.

by Merleau-Ponty, ‘. . . that I am certain that I exist during the whole time that I am thinking of it’ is derailed by the psychedelic moment when the conscious mind, overwhelmed by the sensations under the influence of psycho-active drugs, perceives the opposite conclusion.²¹ That the self is certain that it does not exist even as it is thinking of existence is just the kind of absurd non-cognitive reasoning possible under the influence of psycho-active drugs and which finds its way into the logic of Kesey’s psychedelic products.

Kesey’s Acid Tests gave the Grateful Dead and other acid rock bands the start of a musical evolution which would become the counterculture itself. Referring to drugs’ influence on popular music, Wolfe attributes to the West Coast drug culture the world’s most successful pop group: ‘It [the San Francisco psychedelic movement] created musical styles. Without that world, without Ken Kesey and the Grateful Dead, there would have been no serious music by the Beatles’ (Scura 235). It remains unclear whether the Beatles’ sound came out of the drug itself or exposure to San Francisco psychedelic music, but as time goes on the significance of Kesey’s contribution to artforms in a variety of media is growing to near mythic proportions.²² In the final analysis the intersubjectivity aspired to by the Acid Tests, experiments as the word ‘test’ implies, could not recreate the experience of the drug without ingesting it. By the end of 1966 Kesey was moving ‘beyond Acid’, a phrase none of the majority of people taking it at the time could comprehend. Despite his ambivalence about the collective value of psychedelic drugs, Wolfe’s book on the Acid Tests galvanised Kesey’s reputation as a leader of countercultural social values and psychedelic drugs. His leadership role continues today through Wolfe’s book and Kesey’s continued advocacy of psychedelic drugs’ value for individuals on a spiritual level. In returning to the textual arts Kesey continues, as seen in the next chapter, to develop psychedelic aesthetics in combining the written word with comic book graphic imagery, as well as more complicated rhetorical literary tactics with which to more directly express himself.

21 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Primacy of Perception and Its Philosophical Consequences.’ as printed in *The Primacy of Perception* (Ed. James M. Edie. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964) 21.

22 See Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 482-483.

CHAPTER FOUR:

KESEY'S GARAGE SALE

So political differences and principles guaranteed nothing at all. What had to be posited instead was a human now-ness, Leary's turning on and dropping out lest the whole dark quackery of political side-taking burn us all in our noble motives.

from Arthur Miller's introduction to *Kesey's Garage Sale* (Kesey, *Garage* xvi)

In 1973 Ken Kesey published a book, largely ignored by most critics and quickly forgotten by almost all of them, called *Kesey's Garage Sale*. The critical response to the book, or lack thereof, is indicative of the experimental, and apparently chaotic nature of the text. Following Kesey's extra-literary phase in which he pursued the development of psychedelic aesthetics in performance art, collaging, film, and musical forms, *Garage Sale* presents a range of textual material collected, as the title indicates, in an informal manner. The book itself constructs many layers of presentation by pulling together disparate concepts through a unique application of comic book aesthetics and anecdotes. Like a rummage or estate sale in which objects from a person or family's life-history are thrown together at random, *Garage Sale* seems to present every scrap of Kesey's literary production in an unmediated manner. Kesey has, through a roughly chronological sequence of presentation and the application of intricate anecdotal information, subtly constructed a master narrative from the detritus of his real life. The text contains a

collection of written pieces in a variety of genre and using a wide range of styles, held together by a self-conscious presentation rarely encountered, with every section given the benefit of a brief introduction. This chapter explains how the value of the material in *Garage Sale* in context is dependent upon the unique translation through its form.

IMPLICATIONS OF FORM

Though much of the material in *Garage Sale* confronts serious subjects (racism, feminism, ecology), the book's presentation uses every possible opportunity to wield irony, which has the tendency to create a layer of ambiguity on the text and thus challenge readers in their drawing of meaningful conclusions. In the cover, overleaf of the cover, the table of contents, acknowledgements page, preface, and even in Arthur Miller's introduction to the book, in every possible aspect of traditional book form *Garage Sale* expresses the meaning of the text. The five sections of the book are divided into 'hot items' with the last section being composed of 'leftovers.'¹ Hot items, implying a freshness or time specificity for the artifacts, over-values the book's contents, while 'leftovers' underestimates the same about the last contributions; both identifications are ironically directed at the mass reception of such a book by a trendy or trend-conscious public.² Throughout these identifications Kesey is confronting the capitalistic assumptions in publishing any text, but by the act of commodifying his own products. Kesey describes his role in the opinion pieces of Hot Item Number Three, entitled 'Tools From My Chest', as being to 'function primarily as a pointer rather than a seller' (173).

¹ See Appendix C for a breakdown of the contents of all sections of *Kesey's Garage Sale*.

² At the section of Kesey's webpage <<http://www.intrepidtrips.com>> that offers Prankster products for sale, called 'The Company Store', Kesey writes that the items for sale are 'hot, but will not burn you.'

His emphasis on selling, which comes from the language of the *Whole Earth Catalog*'s creator, Stewart Brand, points to his concerns throughout with late capitalism.

The cover photograph of Ken Babbs extracting, with the aid of five Merry Pranksters, materials for the book from Kesey's abdomen, presents a metaphor for the volume's construction. Babbs and the Merry Pranksters wear white medical garb and two of the Pranksters are using gas tanks, presumably filled with nitrous oxide.³ Kesey developed his psychedelic aesthetics with the help of the Merry Pranksters and this photographic image gives the relationship between him and them much credit.⁴

On the overleaf of the cover Kesey explains who helped him with the project and admits that the collaborative experiment has the potential for failure: 'Owing to the obvious glaring drawbacks of such notoriously untrustworthy teammates, the chances of bungling the whole business are admittedly great . . . but, for all the bum odds and double switchbacks, it is obviously the Only Game in Town.' Kesey is making an admission of his desire to experiment, and experiment collaboratively, regardless of the costs to the product or his career. Following his performance art experimentations Kesey became very suspicious of the concept of success. The publishing company, naturally, wanted to make a profit by publishing the book, but Kesey himself never allows the segues between sections to forget that the meaning of success is open to interpretation through a wide range of criteria. Kesey said of the Acid Tests that they were an art product in the form of an open circle (Kesey/Babbs *Acid Tests* Vol. 1 CD). Since a published text is set once printed it is a closed circle, and Kesey expresses his wariness of such a presentation. The

³In the 1999 version of their film *Intrepid Traveller and his Merry Band of Pranksters Search for a Kool Place*, Kesey the Pranksters wear medical or environmental hazard gear similar to that used in this image from *Garage Sale*.

⁴This image appears at least two other times in the book, once on the title page and again with the preface.

Acid Tests had been the expenditure of a great deal of energy in a self-defeating endeavour, trying to circumvent success (Kesey/Babbs *Acid Tests* Vol. 1 CD).

On the overleaf of the cover Kesey discusses *Garage Sale* as a 'product.' His ambivalence with late capitalism continues in the page preceding the title page, which presents a primitive combination of drawing, hand written text and typescript. This image begins with 'The ancient search for and subsequent discovery, application, loss, and reappearance of' followed by a dollar sign in a small cloud bubble. This indicates the journey Kesey and his associates went through between the publication of both *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion* and that of *Garage Sale*, which, in plain terms could be expressed as something like, 'We spent all the money from Kesey's best sellers, so now we're trying to peddle the second hand pieces of text to try to raise some more cash.'⁵ The dollar sign is followed by 'presents for your: 1. curiosity, exploration, absorption; 2. interest, pleasure, revery; 3. information, analysis, and utilization.' This page attempts to frame the contents of the book in a variety of ways with a range of functions and purposes. The range itself represents the framing of varying vantage points through which the text can be appreciated. To the extent that this text presents a range of pieces from a wide chronology of production, it fails to provide sufficient direction for the average reader to find the value of the objects being offered; Kesey rarely backs up his assertions.

The acknowledgements page of the book contains a drawing/note reproduced from Kesey's distinctive hand which presents a letter 'T' as the first letter in the message as a plant emerging from a ground in which grows the rest of the message which reads: 'The desire for Success Insures Failure!' This ideogram confronts Kesey's attempt in *Garage*

⁵Both *Cuckoo's Nest* and *Notion* were 'best sellers' at the time of their initial publication, though *Cuckoo's Nest* has always sold better than *Notion*.

Sale to present writing that uses the tactics of directness and different narrative forms in alternation to express his social visions. As well, Kesey had developed purely linguistic emblems for characters in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, and here employs the visual as well as the motto aspects of the literary emblem tradition to frame the work. The motto here is suggesting that the unorthodox text has been shaped with conceptions of success in mind.

In the Preface to *Garage Sale* Ken Babbs, wearing a lab coat and presenting himself as Professor Kenneth Justus Barnes, introduces the book adopting the academic language of science in an obvious parody of that form—treating Prankster material as if it were an archaeological artifact to be explored from an alien culture, rather than a creation of his own. Babbs himself, in a reproduction of a photograph of himself pointing at a reproduction of a photograph of the book's cover, discusses the scientific process undertaken to put the book together. Babbs quotes in an academic manner from notes to and from the publishers encouraging the presentation of archival material. In one of these notes Kesey introduces the idea of 'building a new structure' (x). He means a new literary structure consisting of a collection of screenwriting with letters, parody, and direct commentary on the text and the world at large. These notes describe, humourously and self-consciously, the process of creating pages of the text that include drawings amongst the words. The second note in the Preface, dated 27 April, 1972, puts forth the idea that *Garage Sale* will 'shock and delight an entire generation' (x). The shock value of the book rests primarily in its unconventional inclusion of disparate material with photographic and hand drawn images; the delight was conceivably experienced by only those readers most intimately informed of the issues with which Kesey and the counterculture were concerned.

Later, in a two-page panel introduction to Hot Item Number Two (a literary screenplay discussed at length in the following chapter of this thesis) Professor Barnes gives a hint of the book's structure. He directs the reader, from the excerpts of *Cuckoo's Nest* in the first Item, past the handwritten manuscript of *Notion* to Mal Function, aka Mike Hagen, who points out the footage in reels on shelves of 'The Movie'. In this way it seems clear that, at least initially, *Garage Sale* moves through time chronologically from Kesey's drug and mental ward research circa 1960, to *Cuckoo's Nest* itself (1962), past *Notion* (1964), to 'The Movie' film of 1964 to 1965. To complete this chronology the panel says that Hot Item Number Two is 'A few nostalgia flicks from 1966' (29).

Though not discussed here at length, Professor Barnes' introduction to the screenplay is of interest in that it describes an aesthetic emerging out of psychedelia: '... words and images were deliberately placed in odd juxtapositions, requiring the reader-viewer to make a conscious attempt to link the two in coherent meaning' (28). By separating the two parts of the word 'incoherent' Babbs is accentuating the reader's importance in putting together meaning in a text, especially one which incorporates visual imagery into its form, and especially imagery that is either purposefully incongruous or that emerges from a particularly individual response to the text. Many of the performance art techniques developed for the Acid Tests applied themselves to the non-cognitive aspect of human consciousness. In performance the moving images projected on a wall and the random sounds which accompanied them were intended to create their own narrative; audience members were expected to create their own partially unique, partially collective narrative from the visual and audio stimulus. In *Garage Sale* the reader is intended to make similar connections between the words on the page and the drawn or photographic images around them. A similar achievement was the aim in *Notion's* cut-up narrative structure, but the

images in *Garage Sale* are not as keenly crafted in a way that makes connections easy to make for even the most informed of readers.

Arthur Miller's Introduction to *Garage Sale* follows Babbs' Preface. In it Miller touches on the book as it relates to social and literary history. He contextualises the different elements of Kesey's work by saying that Kesey was pursuing a 'vision and not an ideology' in the 1960s (xiii). Miller compares two generations of writers engaged in social issues; his own and Kesey's. He writes: 'Dope stops time. More accurately, money time and production time and social time' (xv). Miller here relates the perception, and involvement in the process, of how Kesey's drug use and subsequent writing served as tools to stop the movement of capitalism and society as a way of analysing and then responding to them.⁶ Miller makes note of Kesey's 'jokiness' in his writing style and attributes this to a loss of faith in systems in the face of nuclear apocalypse and the holocaust.⁷ By continuing to compare his own generation with Kesey's, Miller marks the distinct generational concerns of the changing nation. The earlier generation concerned itself with fascism; the 1960s generation was concerned with global nuclear annihilation and ecological destruction. Miller goes on: '... this book is a piece of evidence ... it can mean that even despair, from which it springs, is still for us a kind of frontier to be crossed when in other places it is a permanent condition of life' (xviii). Here Miller hints at the particular Cold War despair that differed from the concerns of the first half of the century. Finally, Miller identifies the particular desire expressed by Kesey in *Garage Sale*: 'His work wants to save the country, and its prophecy is not at all the jeremiad of coming doom but is of available grace. And so it breaks out of the worn circle of nihilism .

⁶Naturally capitalist time ceases for no one, but Miller is correct in explaining the perceived attempt at responding to late capitalism.

⁷See the second of Kesey's letters in Appendix B for the author's own brief discussion of these same two influences on culture.

..’ (xviii). The nihilism to which Miller refers is the perceived self-centred nature of earlier cultural and literary movements. Taken as a whole *Garage Sale* addresses nihilism using a wide variety of literary forms in order to instruct a nation about a new individualism through the literary arts. The most interesting aspect of this new individualism resides in its complex relationship to the society or societies around it. Given the aesthetics employed and counterculture nature of the book, Miller’s introduction is seamlessly absorbed into the main text’s method and message.

Writing of Miller’s introduction Stephen Tanner writes: ‘Moreover, the political perspective in an important sense misses the mark, for although Kesey was involved in a movement with political implications, his interests and objectives were not political. The revolution that concerned him was one of individual consciousness’ (*Kesey* 106). What Tanner fails to understand, a failing that permeates his detailed study of Kesey, is that for Kesey conscious individualism is the only viable agenda for a revolution that values human freedom above all other things. Any other mode of consciousness and change would be just another dogmatic kind of oppression rather than an enlightened consensus. Perhaps for the Movement it is unfortunate that their rhetoric includes the word ‘revolution’, for the very moderate nature of their aims, wanting not to abolish the basic democratic structure of American society but make changes within it, contradicts the connotations associated with revolutions, yet Kesey still expresses a legitimate ideal of progressive action.

COMIC BOOKS

Kesey has called *Garage Sale* a Psychedelic Comic Book.⁸ Despite the fact that in this phase of development Kesey is directly, 'constructing opinions on social issues' as an art form he maintains an appreciation of other forms. In reference to the underground comics of the late 1960s and early 70s he says that they were 'the only stuff I'd seen with any of the raw excitement that you feel from when art is in there dealing with the issues . . . ' (223). As with his novels, Kesey believes that art should engage with real problems. Professor Barnes introduces Hot Item Number One, the first major section of *Garage Sale* after Miller's introduction, by relating a conversation with Viking's Science Advisor in which the Advisor presents the text of the Introduction as a starting point for construction of the book. Barnes suggests they begin with comic books. He expresses the idea that in the 1960s writers and scholars began reading comic books 'as if they were real books' (2) suggesting an intellectual joining of high culture with mass culture. He makes specific reference to the section in Marvel Comics 'where Stan Lee personally talked with the readers. Told them what was happening with Peter Parker's Aunt May that didn't get into the story' (2). Here Barnes is discussing how Marvel Comics began using self-referential aesthetics by using the letters page to tell part of the story that the frames of the comic book did not tell. In a sense by providing readers with a behind-the-scenes look at Kesey and the Pranksters' world the letters and other items in *Garage Sale* act as a comic book letters page to Kesey's novels and performance art. Kesey began his psychedelic performances in search of the holes that traditional fiction excludes. His return to written forms began in an inherently visual genre, comics necessarily incorporating pictures with words, by focusing on the part of comics which exemplify the very holes of which Kesey was in search.

⁸Ken Kesey, Personal Interview. 24 Aug. 1998.

The beginning of Hot Item Number One, after Barnes' introduction to it, opens with three frames from an actual *Avengers* comic book. Below these frames is printed, what convincingly appears to be, a letters page from an issue of *The Avengers*. The tone is true to Marvel Comics letter page style and there are only two hints on the first page that the letters may be a fabrication: one that the second fan letter is attributed to Steve Schuster, the wind instrumentalist on the Intrepidtrips production video *Still Kesity*, and the lengthiness of the third fan letter.⁹ Schuster's letter discusses the idea of introducing an American Indian super-hero to the Avengers. The second and third pages of the Item continue with the fan letters bordered on either side with comic book advertisements for such things as magic kits, model rockets, bike decals, ghost costumes, blackhead removers and other such kitsch items (4). As these two pages proceed the text grows visibly larger. The last of the editor's letters is signed 'The Vision', but the casual tone is not like the Vision's usual android manner of speaking. By the time the reader gets to the word 'fucking' it is clear that the whole piece is a clever hoax. By using commentary to discuss comic book editorials and then presenting fabricated comic book letters pages Hot Item Number One discusses the desire to join the cause of freedom fighting in which the Avengers are engaged, to encourage the reader to consider a social revolution seriously, and the reading of books as engaging with issues of individual freedom within society.

The letter from the Vision ends by presenting the second half of Hot Item Number One, a piece of text by Kesity entitled 'Who Flew Over What?' This piece marks the beginning of a new literary phase for Kesity. It is his first published literary work in book form since *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964). In the intervening years between *Notion's* publication and that of *Garage Sale* in 1973, nearly a decade, most of Kesity's published

⁹Ken Kesity, perf. *Still Kesity* (Videocassette. Pleasant Hill: Intrepid Trips Information Service, 1987); Schuster was also an instrumentalist on the 1999 *Where's Merlin* tour.

pieces are of a distinct, direct style.¹⁰ These pieces could be called essays, though that term has a formal connotation that the tone of these writings does not warrant. Casual in tone, like the comics letters pages, these opinion pieces tend to be direct expressions of philosophical or nostalgic ideals. They still use some of the aesthetic devices found in Kesey's fiction, alliteration for example in order to enhance the poetic sense of the language, and occasionally, as we shall see, they adopt fictional modes, but their style is a direct engagement with a wide variety of issues.

In 'Who Flew Over What?' Kesey talks directly as himself of his experiences with drugs and mental patients while conducting research for his first published novel. The pages present a personal view of his first novel by including quotations from *Cuckoo's Nest* as well as Kesey's own drawings he made of the faces of men on the ward, collages, and drawings by Paul Foster and Rick Griffin. Kesey presents the chemical roots of *Cuckoo's Nest's* paranoia, as well as giving voice to the spirit of Chief Bromden itself: 'It was my task to acquaint your people with this particular transgression upon the human soul' (15). Kesey is specifically referring to the way the Combine treats the mentally ill in its institutions.¹¹ The piece ends Hot Item Number One with Professor Barnes speaking directly to Chief Bromden, telling him that he will call if there is need for an Indian Super-Hero, referring to the Steve Schuster letter as an envelope of continuity from the realm of comic books. This and similar threads of continuity are woven throughout *Garage Sale* in unrelated contexts, attempting, perhaps less than wholly successfully, to

¹⁰I am excluding Kesey's literary screenplay writing, especially that of *Over the Border* which comprises the body of Hot Item Number Two in *Garage Sale*, and *The Further Inquiry*, published as a separate text in 1990, in order to treat the screenplays on their own in the following chapter.

¹¹Though Chief Bromden's internment in the mental institution can be partially seen as a misunderstanding of his identity by the White hegemony, the comment here is concerning all mental patients without reference to race or culture.

pull the book together as a whole across its disparate sections.¹²

In a very short section of 'Tools From My Chest' on the 'novo cartoon' art of S. Clay Wilson Kesey expresses a value in being human. The example provided with the paragraph is an image of a woman with her arms wrapped around the neck of a man in dark sunglasses on the back of a motorcycle. The woman says, 'Gotta check my lipstick.' The man responds, 'Sit down, shut up, and RELAX!' (182). Even if the material, of a sexist or bigoted nature, in this case illustrating an overt oppression of the feminine, tends to outrage certain sensibilities, Kesey values the raw look into the subject that these cartoons represent. Here Kesey is advocating art which is purposefully offensive in order to raise consciousness about current social issues.

The first section of Hot Item Number Four reprints a Kesey excerpt from *Ramparts* magazine of November, 1967, and is followed by original printings of Kesey's drawings with text including poems, dialogues, and descriptions from his jail term at the San Mateo County Sheriff's Honor Farm from June to November of 1967, part of a graphic novel Kesey produced in jail called *Cut the Motherf**kers Loose*, which deals with racial issues between Blacks and Whites in America.¹³ Here Kesey freely flows from modernist poetics to journalistic reportage to fictional description. The gossip is told in the first-person. The first section was reprinted while Kesey was still in prison. The next section describes Kesey's last time in the county jail before parole.¹⁴ In a rhyming poem also reprinted in *Demon Box*, with the refrain that is the same as the title

¹²At the end of this section Professor Barnes suggests that Kesey's sketches might some day be included in an edition of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. No illustrated edition has ever been published, though the 1996 critical edition does reprint some of Kesey's sketches from *Kesey's Garage Sale*.

¹³Though Viking had planned to publish *Cut the Motherf**kers Loose* as early as 2001, it remains unclear if this will ever happen.

¹⁴This section was reprinted at the beginning of *Demon Box* in slightly different form with the names of the characters changed.

of the forthcoming graphic novel, Kesey's philosophy expressed at the Vietnam Day Committee rally comes into clear focus:

Back off from Johnson all you peace freaks
 So he'll back off from Vietnam
 Cut loose the squares, cut loose the hippies
 Cut loose the dove, cut loose the bomb. (201, lines 29-32)

Johnson is obviously the current President of the United States at the time of composition. The stanza presents a series of dialectical oppositions. Beneath the violence in *Cut the Motherf**kers Loose* is an assumption that social structures put people in opposition to one another in an artificial and unnecessary way. Expressing an attitude that might be considered moderate by later standards, Kesey suggests that by turning down the heat between the parties in conflict a compromise can emerge which will allow all citizens a greater degree of freedom.

In the end Kesey makes reference to working on *Cut the Motherf**kers Loose* by saying: 'Passing off what-might-be-true as fiction seems a better vocation to me than passing off what-is-quite-possibly-fiction as truth' (225). Fascinated by the paradoxes inherent in presenting events from real life in fictional form Kesey uses the concept at least, and occasionally the aesthetic forms of the comic book to engage in social issues of the day.

RHETORICAL ANECDOTES

Another structural method *Garage Sale* employs in order to make meaning is the construction of groupings of rhetorical anecdotes in relation to one another, in which

Kesey provides stories from his own life and expertise as a means of contextualising social issues. The place in the book where this is most easily identifiable, and effective, is in Hot Item Number Three, 'Tools From My Chest', introduced by Barnes as reprinted from *The Last Supplement to the Whole Earth Catalog* (1971), which Kesey and Paul Krassner of *The Realist* magazine co-edited. The Item amounts to a series of opinion pieces in alignment with 'Who Flew Over What', in which each piece is clearly identified by a subject title in varying fonts and graphic design and often accompanied by a graphic or photographic image corresponding to the section's subject. These subjects include the Bible, the I Ching, Dawgs, Dope, and a number of authors and famous personalities.

The section of 'Tools From My Chest' which best exemplifies Kesey's use of rhetorical anecdotes is not the first one presented. The most exemplary section begins with a tintype photograph reproduction of Frederick Douglass, the Nineteenth century Black leader, underneath which a caption explains how he was, 'the first true leader of his race in America' (181). Below the caption is a respectful letter from Kesey to Malcolm X, already three years dead by the time of the letter's composition. Kesey's example of understanding how Black and White Americans can meet with mutual respect is presented in the form of an anecdote in which Kesey spent 'one long gritty weekend' in the holding tank at the San Mateo County Jail and experienced a kind of equality between the races he had not known before:

Because on a Saturday night in a county jail everybody is doing time, black and white, cop and con alike, and respect goes to those who do it well, and with the style and honesty that is drawn from roots that go down past the topsoil to the bedrock of humanity. (181)

With this section Kesey expands the technical repertoire of his direct style with the

advent of the epistle. He does not explain by what ‘the style and honesty’ of people who do good time are exemplified, but he does focus on a sense of humanity which believes that there is goodness at the root of all people, and does so by using the metaphor of ‘topsoil’ to represent the color of one’s skin. Now, to an extent Kesey is uncritically sloganeering, but the rhetorical structure does work to present a synthesis of contemporary issues of race. The three elements of this particular structure are: 1) Frederick Douglass, an emblematic figure representing Black social action of the Nineteenth century, 2) Malcolm X, representing radical Black social action of the Twentieth century, and 3) Kesey’s anecdote from his own experience putting forth his own social philosophy. Kesey may not know much about the realities behind Frederick Douglass’ story, he may know even less about the intricacies of Malcolm X’s philosophy, but the section does not make great claims to either—he merely evokes the icons in order to contextualise his philosophy, and thus gains instant value by evoking allusion to emblems of cultural value. He pulls the icons together with a synthesis of autobiographical analogue. The strength of each section is that Kesey relies on his own experience; something he is more qualified to use as the basis of a philosophy than anything else.

In most of the items of ‘Tools From My Chest’, and subsequently in the interviews presented in *Garage Sale*, Kesey makes use of this same kind of anecdotal material to express his philosophy by relying on the authority of his own experience. In the first ‘Tool’, devoted to the Bible, Kesey weaves his most complex sequence by stringing together a number of groupings within a section. He begins by hesitantly trying to make sense of his role as editor of the *Whole Earth Catalog*’s last supplement. Into this pedestrian subject is subtly insinuated the narrative of complications of the

pregnancy of his wife, Faye, six-hundred miles away in Oregon. Kesey says he has been praying, consulting the I Ching, and reading the Bible in his anxiety over his wife's condition. So this first grouping is: editorial concerns, Faye's pregnancy, and prayer in the form of throwing the I Ching. The third point of this group is where Kesey directly confronts social issues. He throws the I Ching three times seeking guidance as to why he is away from his farm and family. Each time he gets the same reading: '18. KU--WORK ON WHAT HAS BEEN SPOILED (DECAY)' (173). For Kesey decay is associated with his fascination of entropy. He identifies the 'what' of the I Ching reading to 'the revolution' or what he elsewhere calls The Movement, which Kesey fails to describe, but is clearly associated with the social consciousness of the 1960s counterculture, which Kesey felt was suffering from a perceived growing apathy or ambivalence by the early years of the 1970s.

The second group in this section concerns ecology. Kesey embarks on a tutorial role pointing out areas of failure and lessons to be learned concerning contemporary social issues. His first lesson is a comparison of the nature photographs of Eliot Porter with the advertising images of the Weyerhaeuser lumber company, which Kesey calls a 'tree-eating empire' (174). He is clearly straying from his subject of the Bible, but not from his engagement with current issues. Kesey writes of the two images: 'Now since they are both pictures of the same thing, what exactly is the difference in the two pictures? The consciousness on the other end, excellent!' (174). He says the tangible difference between Porter's work and the Weyerhaeuser images is that Porter takes his photographs by being 'in relation to the world' where Weyerhaeuser is trying to be 'in possession' of it. Kesey presents a thesis (Porter's work), the antithesis (Weyerhaeuser), and synthesis (Kesey's own philosophy). The philosophy expressed here, perhaps similar to certain strains of

Eastern mysticism, is that one should try to be in relation to anything one encounters in the world rather than attempt to possess it; and Kesey suggests that this is the position from which all of his opinion pieces are being expressed.

Kesey provides three examples of 'revolutionary issues' of current concern, three issues he deals with in his fiction before or after the writing of the piece in 1971:

'Women's Lib', the 'American Negro', and 'Our ecological fuck-up' (174). Using the I/Thou and I/It paradigms of Martin Buber, Kesey suggests that steadfastness combined with maturity and an awareness of the battle to be fought are the tools to be most valued. Here the structure of presenting a series of elements followed by Kesey's synthesis of the relation between the elements is maintained.

By 1971 Kesey had seen a great deal of the drug culture, which for him was initially a profound philosophical liberation, devolve into meaninglessness, addiction, and death. By directly quoting or making allusions to the poets William Carlos Williams, Bob Hunter, of the Grateful Dead, Robert Service, Jerry Garcia, also of the Grateful Dead, and Robert Frost, Kesey contextualises this devolution by letting other writers contribute to his argument, often with little or no introduction or transition between allusions. In the case of Robert Frost Kesey simply quotes a line from 'Mending Wall', 'But something there is that doesn't love a wall', without even identifying the author or the source.¹⁵ It is a cumulative tactic, piling up examples without much synthesis of analysis to hold them together, in terms of presenting an argument; one that can easily be derailed, but here the very subject of his diatribe is the derailment of social movements he has witnessed over ten years. Here Kesey offers five poets as icons through which he can synthesise a response to the drug issue.

¹⁵Robert Frost, 'Mending Wall' (1914. Rpt. *The Poetry of Robert Frost*. Ed. Edmund Connery Latham. London: Jonathan Cape, 1930) 33.

Eventually, after presenting the ‘shapes’, elements of life required for socially responsible living, revolution, relation, steadfastness and maturity, and drugs, Kesey gets to the main narrative of his piece. The smaller segments at the beginning of the Item act as emblematic points of a structure preparing a philosophical context for his main anecdote. He relates an emotionally moving story of an accident involving an automobile and a train. Kesey effectively reminisces about how he used to look out his bedroom window as a boy and watch a lumber train go by. He is driving near these old tracks that have become less and less used as he has grown older. Now, as an adult, he remembers:

I could see past the raccoon cage, the blinking radio tower of KEED and beyond that the friendly outline of the Couburg hills where a little logging train used to come from a few times a week at 11:45 and then fewer times and fewer times until, well, I guess it’s been clear back in high school I can last remember hearing a train on that track about a block from my house and thirty feet from the front of my mom’s Bonneville and when I’d hear that whistle, lying there. . . . (175)

This description alternates back and forth between the childhood memories and the adult Kesey behind the wheel of his mother’s car. Kesey is so lost in thought that he does not quite register the fact that the train is bearing down on him in the ‘present’ until nearly too late. The train demolishes the rear of the car and Kesey’s young son, Jed, is injured, in shock, with no signs of life. Kesey simply says: ‘O dear Lord, please don’t let him die’ and proceeds to administer mouth to mouth resuscitation until the boy begins breathing again. Kesey says he was ‘amazed’ by this event, not so much because he saved Jed’s life, but because he knew where to call when his situation was dire.¹⁶ For Kesey, who uses the word three times in the same paragraph, ‘amazed’ means more to be

¹⁶Kesey would use the word ‘amazed’ in *Twister* many years later, though his faith along Christian lines suffered considerably when Jed lost his life in another car accident in 1984.

filled with wonder, to have a bolstering of faith than to be bewildered or confused. Kesey ends the section by saying the Bible is a text that will amaze its reader. Ultimately it is Kesey's relating and translating for his reader an event from his own life that remains with us. The introductory elements of the groupings act to contextualise the way in which the anecdote should be taken.

Though the 'Tools' use autobiographical analogue to transmit ideas they are not always told in a directly non-fictional manner. The second section of 'Tools' is 'The I Ching', which introduces Kesey's fictional alter ego Devlin Deboree, an Oregon farmer, exemplifying the American man of the soil, perhaps particularly that of the West. In later writings Deboree is used as a way for Kesey to fictionalise his own life; here Kesey includes himself as the narrator of Deboree's story. It is unclear in this first incarnation of Deboree just how close he is to Kesey's own character. Subsequent Deboree stories are told either in first-person solely from Deboree's point-of-view, or by an omniscient narrator relating the 'Old Man's' tale.

In this piece Deboree is concerned that a heavy rain is going to erode more of the topsoil of his recently plowed fields. Despite the fact that the anecdotal material in this piece is told in fictional form it is still expressing Kesey's social vision. Deboree's identification as a farmer, and the concern he expresses in his anxiety about the coming rain, which will ruin his newly plowed fields, is paramount, because the reader is given so little detail about the man's life initially. Kesey's philosophy is expressed in various ways in this piece. First, and most importantly, in a description of Deboree's worklife: 'He works his land alone, except for, of course, his dogs, and cows, and horses and chickens and the clouds that drop by, and for the huge catfish that lives in the bathtub where the other animals water at the pump' (176). Looked at closely this sentence

illustrates the unique philosophical relationship present in Kesey's literary farm.

Humans may be given a privileged position in this farming initially with 'He works his land alone'—his solitary activity and responsibility is emphasised with the possessive pronoun indicating ownership in a capitalist culture—but the exception, and its casting as a natural condition with the phrase 'of course' gives other figures a shared responsibility in the act of farming. Among the figures who share in this work are first, and perhaps most importantly for Deboree at this stage, his dogs.¹⁷ Though working dogs are a familiar figure in farming, it remains unstated exactly what kind of work Deboree's dogs perform in collaboration with him. Separated by commas are the second group of helpers on the farm—cows. The dogs are cast in the same possessive relation to Deboree as the land he owns, but the cows remain more independent in the absence of the possessive pronoun. Yet still in the list of helpers the cows work the land as do the dogs and Deboree. With these three figures we have a rhetorical relationship expressed in which the work is the holistic activity of living.¹⁸ Continuing to analyse the entire picture of Deboree's farm we have connected through the omission of commas 'horses and chickens and the clouds that drop by.' This phrase creates a second grouping of figures contributing to the farming. The use of the possessive pronoun before the word 'dogs' can be linguistically attached to all the figures that follow them in the list. If this is the case, then the article 'the' preceding 'clouds' separates them from the figures that Deboree possesses. The most obvious function of clouds on a farm is in watering the crops, hay in Kesey's case, which is interesting here because the anxiety of the story rests in the farmer's concern about the rain being *detrimental* to the crop rather than a

¹⁷The section of 'Tools' which immediately follows this one is devoted to 'Dawgs' (spelled D-A-W-G-S).

¹⁸Later it becomes clear that Kesey's cows are cattle raised for food and not dairy cattle like those of Kesey's brother which are husbanded for their produce but not for their lives.

benefit. The last figure in the list is the pet catfish, representing an Oriental wisdom, in an outdoor bathtub, who speaks to itself and to Deboree.¹⁹ Here the reiteration of the word ‘for’ in introducing the catfish separates its importance in helping Deboree with the farm from all the other animals in the list. In another sense this creates yet another structural relationship in which Deboree, then the other animals, and finally the catfish on its own all have equal standing in the working of the farm—Deboree directing the animals in the physical workings of the farm, the animals accomplishing that work, and the Catfish remaining responsible for the meta-physical or philosophical aspects of the farm.

These complex structures all point toward Kesey developing the farm as a philosophical realm. When Deboree is on the verge of a curse at the weather the catfish says, ‘You don’t need a hint, Devlin old boy, you need an oracle!’ (177). At this point Kesey interjects, giving the Oriental background of the catfish and the identification of the oracle—the I Ching. The catfish’s contribution to the working of the farm illustrates Kesey’s concept of the farm as a philosophical zone where the work being done is not always necessarily the raising of a product, though it is that as well. Toward the end of the section Kesey draws attention to current social trends and events by referring to ‘city hall’, ‘grassroots’, and particularly contemporary for its time he writes, ‘we can’t stop the boys in the smoke-filled rotunda from tapping our line’ (177). Where the other sections of ‘Tools’ use literary allusion and direct personal anecdote to transmit his message, here he is using the techniques of fiction and autobiographical fabrication to deliver a social message concerning a spiritual text and accompanying ritual—the I Ching. Though the section is given in fictional terms the effect of the rhetorical structure is the same as the anecdotes in other sections.

¹⁹Talking animals are an integral part of Kesey’s literary cosmology; for another instance see the section on Marley the talking dog in the chapter of this thesis on *Sailor Song*.

Where Kesey fails to use his own complex rhetorical structure the anecdote related has no framework to which it is acting as synthesis, and thus fails to achieve the expression of a complete thought. In the section of 'Tools' entitled 'Dawgs' for example, which begins without introduction as a complete DeBoree story, there is no Kesey narration to tell why the dog in the story should be valued as a tool and the meaning of the section remains overly ambiguous.

CONCLUSION

Part of the reason why *Garage Sale* has been so forgotten by critics is because its unusual format of piecing together such a wide range of aesthetic forms overtly challenges critics to make sense of them, especially as they are presented using a complex rhetorical structure unfamiliar to the average reader. Critics who know Kesey first as a novelist approaching to his work here do not know what to make of comics, anecdotes, or even a screenplay, especially one which incorporates drawings into its fabric. The very diffuse nature of the text has made the choice to treat Kesey's screenplay aesthetics as a separate chapter in this thesis sensible. Despite the challenges to the critic, *Garage Sale*, by enacting them, sheds light on Kesey's aesthetics and philosophy that other texts do not. He admits that he abandoned writing in 1963 because he was 'counting on the millenium' [sic], that is anticipating a nuclear apocalypse, but that nearly ten years later he is 'tired of waiting' and prepared to embark on literary works once again as a means of engaging with the social world (225). *Garage Sale's* form remains mystifying for readers, even as its intricacies have been unravelled here, but Kesey's weariness with waiting for the apocalypse points directly to his return to more conventional, and thus more

comprehensible, literary forms. The techniques Kesey develops in his screenwriting and New Journalism both find more effective and concrete ways of engaging in social ideals.

CHAPTER FIVE:
SCREENPLAYS

SUZY SONG: ‘What do you want? Lies, or do you want the truth?’
THOMAS BUILDS-THE-FIRE: ‘I want both.’

From the film *Smoke Signals*.¹

During Ken Kesey’s forty-year long writing career he published two screenplays, *Over the Border* (1972) and *The Further Inquiry* (1990), neither of which have been produced as films. Like his earlier writings, Kesey’s screenplays continue to explore the issues of the 1960s counterculture. They both employ unique visual texture in their presentation as well as experimentation with narratorial identity, employment of key mythological structures, comic book tropes, and extended metaphors in conveying their ideas. To some degree, because of the limitations in terms of the natural omission of description and commentary inherent in the form, Kesey’s screenplays are not as sophisticated as the early novels. Their visual uniqueness, however, acts to compensate for this lack of literary sophistication.

VISUAL TEXTURE

¹Chris Eyre, dir. *Smoke Signals* (Film. Miramax. 1998).

Both of Kesey's screenplays are visual in nature, and thus fit into the tradition of the illustrated book, a form that goes back to ancient times, and that of the illuminated manuscript of the middle ages, both of which bear a great relationship to the illustrated book of today. William Blake is probably the best example of a literary author from the nineteenth century who employed the technique of combining his poetry with his own artistic images. In the twentieth century printing technology developed to allow a wider range of experimentation with the synthesis of words and images in books. Wassily Kandinsky's *Sounds* (1912), composed of thirty-eight prose poems accompanied by twelve color and forty-four black-and-white woodcuts, is one of the early attempts at synthesis in the century.² Edward Dahlberg's book of prose on a variety of subjects, entitled *Can These Bones Live* (1941), includes interspersed with the writing only forty-two drawings, most caricatures on the literary figures about which the sections speak. John Wieners' *Behind the State Capitol: or Cincinnati Pike* (1975), though more like *Garage Sale* in humour, wit, and experimentation, uses mostly photographs, photographic collage, newsprint, and magazine drawings, some of them pornographic in nature, to occasionally relate to individual poems. These brief examples help to contextualise the extent to which illustrations had been a part of 'literary' texts during the period. *Over the Border* makes a much greater use of the integration of the images that accompany its text than those of either its predecessors or its contemporaries.

Over the Border (as suggested on the page) employs a complex presentation by combining typography with handwriting and marginalia drawings, making it clear that the action is intended to remain on the page. Kesey wrote the text, and Paul Foster provided the majority of the illustrations. Gilbert Porter describes the marginalia thus:

²Lindsay, Kenneth C. and Peter Vergo, eds. *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994) 291-340.

Illustrations by Paul Foster appear in the margins within simulated filmstrip frames. A zany cross between Peter Max improvisations and R. Crumb comics, these drawings are designed to complement the text in elaborate cross-reference. The effect approximates philosophical cartoons for part-time adults. (84)

At times these drawings compete with the text as much as complement it. This competition makes for a certain balance between the textual and visual, though the text ultimately takes precedence.

The Further Inquiry, as well, has a unique textual presentation, but is more clearly intended for the screen. Like *Over the Border*, *The Further Inquiry* is a literary screenplay making use of photographic images to accompany the text. Rather than have an illustrator provide images for Kesey's second flirtation with the illustrated book form, *The Further Inquiry* incorporates graphic and photographic images and aesthetics from various sources. The basic page layout is a light blue sky with white wispy clouds spreading across it. This gives the page a heavenly setting for the trial of a spirit to take place and upon which the screenplay's text is centred on a lighter blue frame. In the lower right corner of every right facing page in the book is a photographic 'flipbook' image of Neal Cassady apparently in the pumphouse of Kesey's La Honda house. By quickly turning the pages of the book, faster than one can read the text, Neal Cassady's image silently raps and dances before the eye, ending by looking and moving, eerily, straight toward the viewer. The insertion of images occurs throughout the book, sometimes in the margins, sometimes in the light-blue frame with the text, sometimes taking up entire pages and series of pages so that there is no text at all. The images are of the actual people the play discusses; some images from the trip itself, others from different occasions. These images come from a number of sources, including film footage

shot by the Merry Pranksters on their trip.³ Others are photos taken by Ron Bevirt on the trip, and some are photos taken by Allen Ginsberg. Still other images are coloured in a psychedelic manner. Like the disparate mixing of different sensual stimuli in an Acid Test, the effect of the 'flipbook' and the photographs create an object that works on a sub-cognitive level; in order to get the full effect of the various media being presented the reader must experience the screenplay more than one time. The photographs' occasional dominance over the text makes an enhanced story that would be considerably different, aesthetically speaking, were the images not present. There is a sense in which Kesey's rare screenplays predict the growing close relationship between film and the graphic novel.

OVER THE BORDER

This screenplay chronicles Kesey's adventures while evading the United States' authorities by running to Mexico in 1966. It uses flashbacks, voice-overs, and even the animated imaginations of one of the child characters to weave a complex social parable. Though there is a kind of psychedelic elite described in *Over the Border*, Kesey uses fictional names for the real-life persons on which the action is based as a technique of allowing the author the freedom to fictionalise historical events, in the tradition of Kerouac, rather than to create a distance for readers not in the know. *Over the Border* uses Kesey's cinematic description, developed in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, to explore the dangers in pursuing the psychedelic revolution on a massive scale. *Over the Border*, within its context of being printed with the direct social commentary in the rest of

³Gus Van Sant has expressed interest in making *The Further Inquiry* into a major motion picture, but at this time such a project seems unlikely (Personal Interview. 15 Aug. 1995).

Kesey's Garage Sale, is the first critical analysis of the counterculture written by Kesey himself. Prior to this period he was actively and seriously engaged in what Elliot Zashin describes as the creation of a 'new social reality.'⁴ With *Border* Kesey moved from living such an active life to retrospectively discussing the possible drawbacks of a social movement based on a foundation of autocratic mentality. *Over the Border* confronts the most complex contradictions that arise from the individualism expressed by the counterculture's vision of transcendental consciousness. The negotiation of this paradox is the subject of the screenplay, but its transmission is complicated by many of its aesthetic features, most importantly the identification of the film's narrator, which is neither Kesey nor his fictional alter ego Deboree.

One of the most common cinematic devices adopted from the aesthetics of the novel is that of the Voice Over narrator. In most cases this narrator is a clearly identifiable character in the action, what would be first or second person narration in a novel. In *Over the Border* the narrator is neither a character directly involved in the action of the screenplay nor any kind of God-like omniscient narrator, but rather a historical figure whose identification brings profound significance to the meaning of the text.

Kesey's presence in the form of Devlin Deboree in the screenplay is strong, but it is the narrator, called the Voice in the Sky, who becomes a profoundly disturbing figure in the end. The Voice in the Sky acts to direct action in a simple manner on occasion, but also expounds a serious overview of the symbolism at play. The Voice uses the metaphor of the development of flight as comparison with Deboree's attempts to transcend his merely human limitations. Act Two begins with the Voice in the Sky

⁴Elliot M. Zashin, 'Political Theorist and Demiurge: the Rise and Fall of Ken Kesey' (*The Centennial Review* 17.2 Spring 1973) 200.

uttering this motto: 'It is better to fail with faith than succeed with security . . .' (89).

One reason for the confusion between the Voice in the Sky as narrator with Kesey's own voice resides in the similarity between this motto and the epigraph to *Kesey's Garage Sale*, in which *Over the Border* appeared, which, written in Kesey's own hand reads: 'The desire for Success Insures Failure!'⁵ Kesey probably agrees with both slogans, and DeBoree's pursuit of power ensures its failure to achieve his aims.

Mythological figures are icons for different characteristics found universally in humankind or life itself. In a similar way, especially for Kesey, comic book characters or historical persons can act as emblematic figures through the parables their literary or historical actions tell. Positioning himself in a hierarchal relationship, midway through the screenplay the Voice narrator begins to refer to the reader as 'students'. At the beginning of Act Three Scene Two the Voice introduces a comparison between the mythological figures of Icarus and Faustus advocating Faustus' more profound transgression of the natural world as the more admirable. The fates of both characters should be remembered by the reader: Icarus, though brought down by the sun, ends in the sea; Faustus ends in fire (Hell). Consequently, it is here that the reader may first begin to doubt this narrator's reliability. The use of these mythological figures is helpful in analysis, but the application of comic book and historical figures ends up working more effectively at transmitting the screenplay's moral message.

In the final scene of Act Three the Voice in the Sky pushes its reliability to the limit by introducing the image of a red, white, and blue kite flown by Houlihan (Neal Cassady): '. . . consider it as the flawed symbol of a sentimental nation's so-called free flight' (150). Where the sentimentalism rests is unclear, but it may be with the Animal

⁵The epigraph in *Kesey's Garage Sale* does read 'Insures', making the desire for success a kind of contract to guarantee failure.

Friends themselves. 'Master the mistake of the Great American Kite and your wings of diploma are as good as bestowed' urges the Voice (151). The reader is propelled on toward erroneous conclusions because the rhetoric employed by the Voice uses terminology from within the counterculture vocabulary. The Voice goes on to explain that the flaw in the American Kite metaphor is in the string, the 'superfluous Kitestring of Compassion' (156). Compassion means simply the sorrow one feels for the suffering or trouble of another. Abandonment of compassion is in direct conflict with the basic tenet that Kesey has always expressed in his work, which is the basic goodness in every individual. This paradox remains in the air until the screenplay's conclusion. The Voice goes on: '. . . clip the old Party Line that your flight needs a heartstring to Mother Earth to keep your front to the respiration of heaven!' (156-157). Kesey's ecological emphasis, his basic transcendental belief that nature teaches the most important truths, is in direct conflict with the Voice's urgings here, and by the end the Voice is proved to be wrong, leaving little room for the audience to draw the 'wrong' conclusions. Ultimately, though no specific didactic scheme for finding truth can be supplied for one individual by another, Kesey makes it clear that the plan put forth by the screenplay's narrator is not that which he advocates and Nature merely one possible alternative.

By the time DeBoree has achieved the ability to direct bolts of lightning at will and begins sending flashes at physical symbols of governmental oppression (a Federal Building, the White House, the Pentagon, his drug bust arresting officer, his trial judge) it is clear that he has become as evil as that which he opposes. There is a hint that the Voice may be much less than benevolent, because the protagonist's actions are seen as evil and in alignment with the advice given by the narrator.

At the moment when DeBoree gets carried away with his own new powers the

metaphor of waves, to be discussed shortly, in the actual form of an ocean storm, brings the realization of human limits. Deboree's youngest son Quiston (Jed) is forgotten on the beach and stranded on the rocks with the rising tide at sunset. Before anyone can save the boy a final wave crushes the life from him. Those around Deboree blame him for the death, but Deboree expresses no remorse; he has taken the Voice in the Sky's advice and cut the Kitestring of Compassion. Deboree has become compassionless and irresponsible in his quest for power, and thus ultimately corrupted: 'I'm a volunteer for Liberation of the Universe and I don't care how many eggs get cracked' (161). It is this lack of caring which finally turns Deboree's supporters against him.

In a 'synched' mystical trial of Deboree at this point his best friend Claude (Ken Babbs) advocates withdrawing support from their leader by calling him another 'Mr. Charley', obviously Charles Manson (163).⁶ The parallels between Kesey and Manson are compelling: both were mid-1960s musicians and performance artists, and more importantly hippie and LSD gurus living in California. The two men knew each other before Manson's arrest and conviction for ordering his followers to murder actress Sharon Tate. Deboree's supporters are split between those agreeing that he has become another Mr. Charley and those pleading for mercy by retaining their support of their leader. The initial vote is sealed in favour of abandonment by Houlihan, putting Deboree on the same standing as Charles Manson.

The Animal Friends give Deboree a second chance, deciding that he is not as evil as Manson after all, and collectively they all turn away from the philosophy advocated by the Voice in the Sky. When the film is clearly drawing to an end the Voice in the Sky

⁶Mr. Charley is not in any way a reference to James Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1965), which, though in the public domain at the time *Border* was written, is based on the 1955 murder case of Emmett Till.

protests: 'But this troupe's departure doesn't end our course. This was only a demonstration of ways not to fly. Don't leave!' (169). The Voice suggests the entire narrative is simply a negative example of a group of people unable to cut the Kitestring of Compassion, and thus unable to learn the kind of freedom that the Voice advocates, which is a social anarchy Kesey does not support. The Voice in the Sky represents a warning of how not to achieve a righteous social freedom because Kesey, and ultimately DeBoree, do not agree with this narrator's version of freedom. To send this message home, because it has been confusing for the reader from the beginning, 'Another Bigger Voice in the Sky' interrupts the initial voice by identifying the Voice in the Sky as Mr. Charles, Charlie Manson, previously mentioned in comparison to DeBoree (169). Ultimately three voices bigger than Mr. Charles tell him that his time as narrator, and thus the movie of *Over the Border*, is over.⁷ It is a risky device to have the narrator of the screenplay be a demiurge of the counterculture with such a negative image as Charles Manson because of the powerful nature of narratorial authority. Kesey does, however, make his ideals clear in the end despite the risks he takes in employing this somewhat unreliable narrator.

As with his early novels, one of the most striking aspects of *Over the Border* is the role of comic book images. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* Bromden uses cartoon and Western images to describe the novel's hero, McMurphy; in *Sometimes a Great Notion* Lee uses the comic book characters Captain Marvel and the Werewolf to explore his own yearnings for a heroic paradigm; *Over the Border* begins with an image of Reddy Kilowatt growing out of a plant pot in a self-contained system which provides it with water and light, an ecological metaphor that combines plant growth with electricity

⁷As in *Border*, Charles Manson is mentioned in *Further*. Here he is identified directly and discussed in relation to the purposeful tactic of 'psychochemillogical breakdown', a kind of brainwashing performed through the use of chemicals, especially hallucinogenic ones like LSD (117).

(31). The Reddy Kilowatt image is significant because it uses a domestic comic figure in combination with the two major metaphors of the screenplay—water and lightning. Also in *Border*, it is the X-men, from Marvel Comics, which act as the model for Deboree and the Animal Friends. A synchronistic moment is presented in which Behema (Mountain Girl) is reading an X-men comic while everyone listens to a tape from the exiled Deboree who invokes the X-men at the moment that she reads (44-45).⁸ The symbolic nature of the X-men, mutant superheros, literally freaks of nature, devoted to saving all of humanity, is apt because the Animal Friends are hippies, 'freaks', tacitly concerned with individual transcendence for the common good. Later Deboree becomes the Neon Prophet by donning a superhero costume with the lightning bolt as his symbol, just as it is Captain Marvel's.

Interwoven with the introduction of ideas of costume imagery, in the first scene of *Over the Border* Deboree develops his ideas of a 'Full Revolution', which relates to a social change in the world, in terms of metaphoric waves. At first he simply hints at the metaphor for his identification of the power source for this 'revolution' and his initial insights into being able to control or direct the revolutionary forces: 'But you gotta go with it. You can't go against the waves and expect to blow it over, no matter how much force you use. You've got to hear the waves to have the revolution' (35). Kesey's initial interest in visual metaphor, is interesting here in that Kesey chooses the word 'hear' rather than any other sense, as if alluding to the communicative or musical form in which the power can be presented. Waves continue to be the metaphor used for an understanding of social philosophy throughout *Over the Border*. At first this seems to be an atypical promotion of a specific programme, something Kesey rarely does; ordinarily

⁸Behema's willingness to unconventionally bare Deboree's, aka Ken Kesey, illegitimate child, Sunshine, exemplifies the young Bohemian hippie forging a lifestyle beyond conservative parameters.

he expresses non-dogmatic ideas to keep the concepts open to shifts in time, shifts in personalities. In a sense, because of the elusive identification of the values presented in the screenplay, *Over the Border* takes Deboree to the edge of a personal apocalypse caused by a betrayal of his own professed values.

Deboree continues to use waves as his metaphor for the first half of the screenplay. When asked by his lawyer what it is he will do in exile while evading the law on drug charges Deboree says: 'I'll rest and meditate and feel the waves of the silent earth and seek after the Way, seek quietly after the Way . . .' (38). *Over the Border* offers few answers in its exploration of revolution, but here, initially, Deboree expresses an understanding of an ecologically sympathetic approach to seeking natural wisdoms, philosophical ideas that spring from the metaphors provided by nature.⁹ These psychologically powerful concepts can have a strong motivational effect in human interactions. Unmediated, the wave metaphor is a more or less calm and benevolent image. Deboree advocates acceptance of the wave's motion, conforming to its rhythm.

Deboree continues to develop the metaphor of waves when he refers to the signals thus:

I know it has something to do with waves, with becoming aware of all the waves and then actually willing, willpowering these waves like rocking gently in a bathtub, until you are controlling the waves . . . getting in step with the forces of nature until you're calling the cadence hup two three four. . . . (49)

Here the text introduces the idea of the personal will, which may or may not be capable of taking into consideration individual freedom for others. The march which ends this description tells of the militaristic downfall of trying to take a profound understanding or

⁹Here Kesey's interests in ecology foreground his novel *Sailor Song*.

connectedness with nature into the social arena for social gains. This is the moment where Deboree takes his first step from prophet to demiurge.

Behema paraphrases Deboree's thought by saying:

. . . that man can't become Superman apart from the earth and sea and stuff—natural things! that it isn't by getting out of the world that we become enlightened, but by getting into the world . . . by getting so tuned in that we can ride the waves of our existence and never get tossed because we become the waves. (95)

This wisdom comes from Deboree, but it is unclear at which point he communicates this idea to Behema; whether or not what she utters represents a move toward wisdom or a leftover from before Deboree's autocratic conversion. Regardless, an ecologically sympathetic approach to enlightenment remains expressed by the text. Behema is pregnant and is representative of nature in her connectedness to it; she gives birth to Deboree's daughter on *La Noche de la Viuda Verde*, the Night of the Green Widow, when the crabs spawn in a festival of fertility.¹⁰ A unification of ecology and the self represents existence. The screenplay is thus complicated, in order to keep the reader's sympathies with Deboree to the climactic scene, by having him step back and forth severally between two opposed roles of benevolent prophet and demiurge.

One of the central components of the social dynamics in the screenplay has to do with support. In essence Deboree is on an exploration to discover whether his status as an LSD guru can be converted into that of social leader. At one point he rejects his power base by telling the Animal Friends to remain in California until he can work out the secret of the wave metaphor: 'Also, I'm onto something with these waves. A kind of . . . power yoga; I want to be able to pursue for a period in relative peace this idea of waves as a

¹⁰The link between Woman and the natural world is very typical and a topic feminism debates hotly; as such the female is associated with fertility, life force, and the earth itself.

manifestation of unconscious purpose . . .’ (84). The idea of a yoga with power seems paradoxical, like many of the quirks of the screenplay. Waves are probably a ‘manifestation of unconscious purpose’ and as such Deboree seeks to change from the ebb and flow images of waves for something more permanently effective, even damaging. It is only when Deboree shifts from the metaphor of waves to that of lightning, a symbol of technological power despite its natural sources, that the revolution becomes derailed by the desire for the mastering of personal power. Deboree discovers that when he abandons the wave metaphor for that of the one-off strike of power, the moment he attempts consciously to control the physical manifestations of nature, lightning not waves, they become nothing but the conscious forcing of one’s own will upon the natural and social worlds. By presenting two distinct metaphors from nature Kesey is able to discuss community succinctly in what often remains a muddled text.

At the point where the Animal Friends are debating their support of Deboree after Quiston’s drowning, the associates of Deboree and the Animal Friends, until now peripheral to the plot, reappear to advocate an alternative sentence to Deboree’s crime: reversal, a solution the Animal Friends had not considered. All agree to the alternate sentence, and make a toast of ‘power to the free’, which means, unlike Deboree’s corruptible power to lethally wield lightning bolts, the power of the individual to make life choices beyond social agendas. After the reversal, where time runs backward far enough for Deboree to save his son, the hero is repentant for his transgression against his own corrupted values: ‘I’m an American and just like any American I’ll use anything I lay my hands on to get me elected President but that’s not me!’ (168). Kesey, like Ginsberg before him, felt a certain kind of ambivalent patriotism for the ideal of America, illustrated most graphically by his adoption of the stars and stripes imagery of the American flag.

His aim was to reclaim the ‘true spirit’ of America from the perversion of the military industrial complex. *Over the Border* entertains metaphors of America and ends up rejecting America’s power hungry aspect by advocating, not the freedom of the individual to ‘drop out’, nor the desire to take control, but the individual’s right and responsibility to participate in the democratic process. Though this may not sound radical from a Leftist point-of-view, it does challenge the nihilistic aspects of the counterculture dominant in the late 1960s. The Deboree plot uses the American ideal which declares that anyone can be President and presents it as a corruptor of idealism by urging citizens to *want* to be President. *Over the Border* is presented in a context that urges readers to join the Movement; not to gain personal power, but for the sake of society at large.

Though Deboree is not the narrator of the screenplay, he remains its focal point. Kesey’s early novels had expressed their Cold War anxieties in the form of a cultural paranoia expressed and misdirected by individual characters upon other characters: in *Cuckoo’s Nest* in the embodiment of the Combine; in *Notion* through Lee’s personal sense of reality. Just as *Cuckoo’s Nest* and *Notion* both deal with paranoia, Deboree is also a paranoid character. One major difference, however, is that Deboree *is* being hunted by the Law, and thus has every reason to be paranoid. Anticipating his friends’ concerns about his paranoia, Deboree responds with: ‘And this possibility isn’t nearly as paranoid as it sounds. We were recognized the first time we stopped in a Mexican bar’ (47). By the end of the screenplay the government, though not redeemed in any way, is not the villain; the screenplay is not inherently anti-government. In *Over the Border* Houlihan expresses, uncritically, the Cold War nuclear fear that underlies the text’s conflicts: ‘And launches a new space program with atomic warheads. . .’ (51). Mention of Astronauts occurs a number of times in a positive light. Just like Deboree trying to harness the

power of lightning for his own self-righteous aims, Houlihan's imagined space program is fuelled by barely controllable weapons of mass destruction. Cold War apocalypse, a major influence on his first two novels, is still present in 1972 when *Over the Border* was written, though no longer a central focus.

Paranoia is not the only ideological theme to shape Kesey's text. Existentialism, which was the major philosophical consideration of *Cuckoo's Nest* and *Notion*, is still present in *Over the Border*, but not as central to the plot as in the early novels: 'Sandy Pawku drowns him [Houlihan] out with a rising wail of pure Animal Friend frustration that strings out across the crags and canyons like the existential statement of every frightened jack rabbit and hungry lynx and thwarted coyote that ever prowled the desert' (79). The early novels use cultural anxieties as the impetus for an aesthetic expression of existential fear, where here, in *Over the Border*, existentialism has taken a back seat along with the Cold War in favour of a more direct exploration of societal process and its perversion.

This is not, however, to say that existentialism's concerns with sensation is unimportant to the screenplay, in fact it embraces psychedelia's obsession with it more explicitly than the novels. This makes for some fairly creaking intellectualizing by characters in the screenplay, but nonetheless illustrates Kesey's philosophical concerns. In one scene Deboree and Undine hold a philosophical discussion. Undine, who represents a significant symbol from nature both in that the word comes from the Latin for 'wave' and is the name of a water-spirit in a Romantic love tragedy, says, 'There's just you, and what you are perceiving at the moment' (92). Here Undine expresses an ideal in which perception is considered to be reality. Deboree complicates this discussion by introducing the concept of hallucinogenic drugs and their ability to alter perceptions or

allow the imbiber of the drugs to perceive differently from sober consciousness: ‘The very existence of psychedelics presupposes various levels of consciousness, and that some are to be sought and some . . . are to be left behind’ (92). *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* focuses on aberrant psychological perceptions; *Sometimes a Great Notion* explores varying perceptions of ‘normal’ consciousness. Here, DeBoree, as the LSD guru, says that the perceptions made available by psychedelic drugs indicate actual and distinct planes of reality—something which neither Freudian psychology could support nor Kesey himself probably believe. DeBoree is on a psychedelic exploration, which clearly moves beyond reason. His words are complicated by the fact that some of them are wise and reasonable, others either fascistic or simply self-centred.

Merleau-Ponty explains, reasonably enough on the surface, how classical psychology describes individual psyches as impenetrable of one another.¹¹ Classical psychology’s only recourse for this impenetrability is in the learned decoding or projection of the subtle gestures expressed by the other and recognised from the Self (115). This process relates to Kesey’s aesthetic in the realm of synchronicity. Under the influence of psycho-active chemicals the individual or individuals can feel the coenesthetic decoding so vividly as to reach mystical levels of significance for the subjects involved. It seems the chemicals break down the barriers that keep the mind in line with classical psychology’s common sense of the ‘rule’ of impenetrability and come close to liberation making telepathy, even if it is nothing more than a heightened ability of decoding gesture, possible.

The adults are not the only characters to express a psychedelic philosophy. Quiston imagines the Mexican police as described by his father afterwards as cartoon

¹¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964) 114.

animals, and the script directs that these figures be presented on screen in exactly that way, ie. through Quiston's perception. Before that, Claude scares the children into believing in a mythical monster called the gottaswallerus, to whom the screenplay is significantly dedicated. The gottaswallerus, like the 'Hide-behind' of *Sometimes a Great Notion*, is a particularly existential creature that acts as the counterpart to Kesey's obsession with the mythological implications of the costumed superhero. This creature, as its very name indicates, represents the consciousness consuming tendency of the natural world—drawing the mind to sense its existence. Quiston argues for the existence of the creature based on his faith in it: ' . . . if I thought there was a gottaswallerus outside the window, that's the same thing as there being one there' (116). The power of the imagination is paramount; in terms of belief, if one acts as if a gottaswallerus is present, if one perceives its existence, there is little difference in terms of one's actions whether one is there or not, though there is much difference in terms of reality and self-delusion. This solipsistic argument is much more convincing when expressed from the mind of a three-year old, than when presented as philosophy by adults.

THE FURTHER INQUIRY

The connection between *Over the Border* and *The Further Inquiry*, Kesey's second screenplay, is deeper than the mere fact that they share characters and a bus; the central theme of the later work is imbedded in Act One, Scene One of *Over the Border*. In the scene the Animal Friends have a mystical meeting with their leader Deboree, in exile in Mexico, during a Rat Fest (Acid Test) in Los Angeles. All participants in the meeting are transported to the same virtual space through the ingestion of LSD. During this

meeting Houlihan asks Deboree a question: 'Now, let's say it isn't Easter 1965. Let's say it's . . . 1972 . . . and I've been dead a couple of years . . . you're reading an article in *Playboy* about psychopaths and find poor deceased me put down as a bored nut . . . what would you do to avenge this affront?' (65). Since *Over the Border* is set in 1965 Houlihan is talking from a precognitive vantage point. Evoking the fact that Cassady did die four years before 1972, when it was written, *Over the Border* can present the facts from a truly temporally free omniscient point-of-view.

Houlihan's request is that the author of the article defaming his character be dosed, surreptitiously given hallucinogenic drugs. What Kesey does is write *The Further Inquiry*, which plays out a mystical trial of Neal Cassady's soul for corrupting the young people who accompanied him on the famous 1964 bus trip from La Honda, California across country to New York. *Over the Border* explores Deboree's responsibility to the counterculture Movement and those around him, while *The Further Inquiry* plays out a similar theme for Cassady's actions, almost a sort of sequel to the earlier screenplay. Unlike *Over the Border* or Kesey's New Journalism, *The Further Inquiry* uses the real life names of people who participated in the 1964 bus trip.

The omission of Kesey as a witness in Cassady's trial at first seems curious. The reason for his omission is probably due to his authorship of the screenplay itself, but may also be the restriction he felt from the lack of footage of him from the forty-eight hours of film the Pranksters took on the journey across America in 1964. Like the 'synched' mystical trial of Deboree in *Border*, Cassady's trial in *Further* is presented in an allegorical fabrication of Kesey's imagination, but the names and photographic images accompanying the text come from real life. It may be Kesey's reliance on documentary materials that helped make him decide to use the real names of historical characters. Here

Kesey keeps more closely to historical fact in presenting Cassady's spiritual trial.

There are a number of thematic connections between the two screenplays. Both illustrate a fascination with comic book superheros and the power associated with them. In *Further*, when Roy gives testimony concerning the naming of the bus he says, 'I had this very strong feeling that having a name like Further would contribute impetus to keeping it going — when it might get stuck, or broken down — that word would have power — like Shazam . . .' (14). Shazam is one of Lee's key words in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, and actively willing power is one of *Border*'s primary concerns. As a form of modern mythology, the comic book superhero can have an emblematic or symbolic effect on characters in literature. Captain Marvel, who derives his superhuman powers from six of the ancient Greek gods, is a figure of importance to Kesey spanning the entire period of the 60s counterculture.

Though Kesey's interest in French existentialism is expressed most effectively in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, Kesey does not let the reader forget the point of departure for his artistic endeavours in *Further*. Stark Naked, in the throes of an LSD high wails, 'And how lonnggg can it go on, how longggg can we wait for help, when no help is coming forth, and Jean-Paul Sartre is dead, oh yes . . .' (69). Kesey has written that, 'The psychedilic [sic] movement springboarded from the bleak, dead end of the Existencialism [sic]', especially that of Sartre.¹² In *Further* a character is asking for an end to the wait for a response or solution to the existentialist dead end. Sartre's death marks the end of existentialism as a useful philosophical point-of-view for Kesey, and Stark Naked sees no alternative. She gets off the bus shortly afterwards, and thus misses the journey which is the Merry Pranksters' quest for that very answer.

¹²Ken Kesey, 'Re: PhD answers.' E-mail to the author. 26 Nov. 1999.

Jane Burton is a levelheaded voice in the screenplay. She shows her admiration for Cassady's feminine side with a statement that pinpoints Kesey's interest in developing the idea of individualism as a culturally charged concept: 'I think he must've represented some kind of individualism that seemed real far out from that masculine point of view' (79). Individualism is at the centre of *Further's* debate, and here Cassady represents male individualism that, contrary to expectations, takes the female world into full consideration. She goes on to develop a communalism which integrates as much diversity as possible while taking full responsibility for the individual's needs:

You know, individualism is a deadly thing! In what-ever form. I believe in the social revolution. This mighty, individualistic 'Lone Cry to the Heavens!'—That's not the way. Because you can't make your fucking lone cry to the heavens without approximately 50,000 people making your food, your house, your clothes, your car, your gasoline, your everything.
(79)

Jane advocates a reciprocal eco-system which, unlike the hippy idealism that attempted to drop-out of American society while still reaping the technological benefits of the post-industrial world, tries to accommodate both individualism and the environment. What is most interesting here is that Cassady represents the individualism of the Beats, which was an existential and nihilistic solipsism. Kesey here is trying to express a post-existential ontology similar to those expressed by Merleau-Ponty, both authors responding to the dead end of the existentialists.

The Further Inquiry is similar to *Over the Border* aesthetically, in that they both present characters or real-life figures from the counterculture on trial for their actions in the Movement. *The Further Inquiry* especially expresses Kesey's interest in metaphoric, mystical realities, and Cassady is ultimately redeemed by the jury of his peers as an individualist encouraging individualism in others through his living example. When Kesey

moves to the form of New Journalism, which Tom Wolfe and others had developed in writing about his own activities in the 1960s, he chooses to use both objective and subjective reality, in the form of his own life experience, as the vehicle for exploring social progress through the evolution of the individual.

CHAPTER SIX:
NEW JOURNALISM

It is up to you how much of the immeasurable becomes reality for you.

Martin Buber *I and Thou* (83)

In the late 1960s and 1970s New Journalists began using the techniques of fiction, such as the fragmentation of sequence and point-of-view, application of various literary tones, and typographic experimentation to examine journalistic subjects. In the third part of his introduction to *The New Journalism* (1973), entitled ‘Seizing the Power’, Tom Wolfe outlines four devices that journalists developed or adopted from the realist novel. These devices include scene-by-scene construction, realistic dialogue, third-person point of view, and the description or use of symbolic gestures and manners that might exist within a scene.¹ Journalists were not the only writers leaning toward a synthesis of different forms; novelists began taking up journalistic subjects and approaching them from a fictional perspective. In the Introduction to *Postmodern American Fiction: a Norton Anthology* (1998) Paula Geyh explains how the works of both kinds of New Journalists ‘foreground the self-conscious attempt to make sense of events the writers observed and participated in, and leave open the gaps or contradictions in their experiences, rather than

¹Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson, eds. *The New Journalism* (1973. London: Picador, 1980) 46-47.

eliding or resolving them into a single meaning or interpretation' (xxv).² It is in this direction that Kesey's aesthetic search took him in the 1970s and early 1980s. This chapter examines individual pieces of Kesey's journalistic prose in relation to the New Journalism in order to show that it is really, for Kesey, fiction which uses a synthesis of 'subjective reality' and techniques of journalism for social messages.

In the anthology *The New Journalism*, pieces are included ranging from authors like Terry Southern from as early as 1955, to pieces by Truman Capote and Norman Mailer from 1965 and 1968 respectively (184-194, 135-146, 212-220). Robert Scholes discusses this same group of authors in relation to Neo-Fabulism, which is portrayed as an over-reaction to the 'loss of faith in realistic possibilities.'³ Among these pieces, which include many from the mid to late 1960s by lesser known authors, are excerpts from the works of the two most prominent figures in New Journalism—Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe. These two authors figure prominently in this study for a number of reasons.

Hunter Thompson was a disappointed ex-military journalist living in San Francisco during crucial years of the development of the early 1960s counterculture. His lifestyle choices paralleled Kesey's and their social circles eventually brought them into contact with one another while Thompson was riding with a motorcycle gang as part of his research for a book on them, which would be one of the first major works of the New Journalism.⁴ Kesey became a prominent figure in Thompson's book because of Kesey's

²John Kuehl treats New Journalism in a postmodern context in his chapter 'Fictitious History.' *Alternate Worlds: A Study of Postmodern Antirealistic American Fiction* 216-221.

³Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975) 9.

⁴Hunter S. Thompson, *Hell's Angels* (1966. New York: Ballantine Books, 1981).

how can
journalistic
prose be really
fiction? After to
avoid this problem?

connection with the Hell's Angels.⁵ Kesey and Thompson re-established their relationship in the early 1970s. Thompson went on from writing about the Hell's Angels to take New Journalism beyond even Wolfe's ideal of it, to create the masterpiece of Gonzo Journalism *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971), in which Kesey is mentioned at least once.⁶ Gonzo Journalism, a term coined by Thompson himself to describe his own work, refers to the highly idiosyncratic attitudes expressed in reacting to the people, situations, and events that make up Thompson's subject.⁷ This book represents an extreme of subjectivity that implodes the notion of journalistic objectivity from within. Thompson would continue to produce books of Gonzo Journalism after *Las Vegas*, but none with the acerbic focus of the earlier work.

Tom Wolfe's life and personality are nothing like either Kesey's or Thompson's. A committed East Coaster, Wolfe's ever-present neckties and pure white suits create a strong contrast to the image of West Coast hippies about whom Wolfe would write his most successful work, save for perhaps *Bonfire of the Vanities* (1988). *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968) focuses on Ken Kesey as both a literary figure of New Journalism and as the hero in a novel-like narrative; that is to say the book treats Kesey as fictional material while simultaneously presenting his life as biography. *Acid Test* became the single most important document to promote Kesey into the public imagination as a counterculture figure; without Wolfe's book Kesey would be known only as the author of two fine novels from the early 1960s, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*.

⁵On 7 August, 1965 Kesey had a party with the Hell's Angels at his house in La Honda, California that began an unusual phase of contact between the motorcycle gang and the counterculture.

⁶Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (1971. New York: Warner Books, 1982) 89, 179.

⁷Thompson coined the word 'Gonzo' to mean a specific kind of journalism in which the writer refuses to hide his or her participation in the events being described.

In *Acid Test* Wolfe presents Kesey as both a character from real life and as a mystic leader engaged in a dramatic narrative of the creation of a new religious cult. Readers have been critical of Wolfe's heroising of Kesey in *Acid Test*, in which he essentially creates a piece of Neo-Fabulism, but by all subsequent accounts Kesey and the Merry Pranksters were indeed engaged in a plot of high drama. Wolfe's presentation of Kesey thus is especially important because it is the first public image of Kesey, and the image still dominant in the public imagination. *Acid Test* was also Wolfe's most solid achievement in the new literary form to which he could point as a proof for its superiority over what he considered the worn-out novel. Thompson and Wolfe are the two figures who most effectively define New Journalism as a genre, especially as their early work on Kesey was establishing the genre that Kesey turned to in the 1970s and early 1980s.

In the preface to *The New Journalism* Wolfe boldly states that, '... the most important literature being written in America today is in nonfiction, in the form that has been tagged, however ungracefully, the New Journalism' (preface *Journalism* i). Though Wolfe is shamelessly championing himself in this statement, he has a point. In this brief preface he places Realism in direct conflict with Neo-Fabulism, according to Wolfe a type of twentieth-century literature that uses fantastical narrative devices to tell contemporary fables. Wolfe uses devices of Neo-Fabulism, especially in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, but only to get closer to a sense of the 'real' and not in a symbolic manner. While Realism is part of New Journalism in its engagement with contemporary social issues, New Journalists, especially Hunter Thompson, but also Wolfe himself, employ experimental literary techniques to a great extent as well.

Wolfe cites *Esquire* magazine as the publication where in 1962 he read journalism

no such word - replace

This doesn't really make sense. If Realism is opposed

to neofabulism + Wolfe is a

realist then can he be a neofabulist too? As elsewhere

this probably can't be changed now ... ?

that ‘opened with the tone and mood of a short story’ (*Journalism* 23). The article used dialogue and description in the manner that fiction does. In light of the fact that fiction writers began playing with form, incorporating a wide variety of tones from various sources (scientific writing, advertising, legalese, etc.), to a great extent in the twentieth century it is not surprising that journalism would begin to adopt the forms used in fiction as well as other sources. Wolfe explains the various chameleon-like points-of-view he used a great deal from 1963 to 1965. In addition to his own narratorial point-of-view, and the external point-of-view of the subjects he writes about, is also a Jamesian internal point-of-view of the subjects about whom he writes. The latter technique, achieved through meticulous interviews, is not a representation of objective reality; rather these internal monologues are, according to some of the people about whom he wrote including Phil Specter and Ken Kesey, accurate portrayals of the things and manners which composed Wolfe’s subjects’ thoughts (*Journalism* 33). Wolfe goes on to describe his use of punctuation to simulate the way people speak and think. Dashes and ellipses help to create abrupt shifts and skipped beats in the flow of ideas and images. In essence Wolfe was developing these typographical techniques, just after or, at the same time (1963-65) as Kesey (1962-63) and Burroughs (1959-62) in their early fiction.

For the most part we have been discussing the evolution of fictional literary techniques in journalism. During this crucial period of development of the genre, two novelists entered into dialogue with journalism in book form. In Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* (1966) the author reconstructs the story of a murder, the killers’ subsequent attempts to evade capture, and their ultimate execution. By using exhaustive interviews similar to the way Wolfe works, Capote extends the experiments of the New Journalism and further undermines the distinctions between journalism and literature, fact and fiction

by creating a novelistic chronicle where the figure of Capote himself enters the narrative, though only obliquely. Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* (1968) focuses on the anti-Vietnam War activities of Mailer himself, and represents a conscientious effort to reveal the deeply subjective nature of historical and journalistic narrative. In order to effect such revelation Mailer employs the polysemous narrative techniques of the omnisciently perceived character by the name of 'Mailer' and a third person 'Novelist'. Kesey's work in this form is most closely related to Mailer's here, yet still distinct from it for a number of reasons.

Kesey's magazine pieces most closely resemble the kind of autobiography that predates the New Journalism. However, though Kesey himself, in the guise of Devlin Deboree, is often telling some story from his own life, he does not stick to the autobiographer's first person point-of-view; in fact he uses a wide range of the techniques of the New Journalism and contemporary fiction. Stories like 'The Day After Superman Died' (1979) also use the kind of symbolism necessary to create fables out of objective reality into the kind of Neo-Fabulism of which Wolfe has been critical. Kesey's work in this vein practically works backward from the real genuineness of the autobiographer by implementing vague attempts to veil the real from his own life with the fictional. In this way Kesey's work can talk more universally about much more than just one man's experience.

It is in this context, from the publication of *Kesey's Garage Sale* (1973) to the early 1980s, after his largely performance art phase, that Kesey returned to writing and publishing; his published materials took the form of short magazine pieces of, with a few exceptions, his own brand of New/Gonzo Journalism. While aware of the dangers of becoming the character Wolfe had created in writing about him, Kesey's New Journalism

is distinct from that of Wolfe's and Thompson's in that it combines Kesey's vast talents as a fiction writer with contemporary social subjects in a purposefully ambiguous semi-autobiography. Kesey also writes pieces in which he is not the main subject, though he often includes himself as a character. In all cases, Kesey uses a wide range of literary techniques to talk of philosophical ideas.

The published document that collects these journalistic pieces for public consumption is a book entitled *Demon Box* (1986). One of the interesting elements of *Demon Box* is the ambiguous manner in which it is printed. The book offers no table of contents to guide the reader as to either where to find individual pieces in the text or to give the reader clues as to what kind of pieces the book contains. The back cover categorizes the book only as 'literature', and even the Library of Congress Publication Cataloging Data is sparse and cryptic giving the reader only 'Title' at which to guess. Without a contents page to direct the reader the tendency appears to be that the text should be read as a novel from beginning to end. This can certainly be done, as the pieces in the book follow a vague chronology beginning in 1966 and moving to 1982, with a few exceptions, but the result of reading the book is not that of reading a novel. Kesey, himself, had wanted to make a more flexible reading of the text possible; he had suggested to the publisher that each piece within the text be bound separately as a sort of pamphlet and sold as a boxed set—literally the Demon Box.⁸ Such a production would have allowed a free arrangement of readings of the text as the pamphlets could be organised, or simply not organised, in any random order. This form turned out to be too costly for the publisher to produce. The only other clue as to what the pieces within the book are comes on the page following the title page where previous publication of pieces receives

⁸Ken Kesey, Personal Interview. 25 April 1996.

acknowledgement. On this page it reads: 'Some of the essays in this collection were previously published in slightly different form as follows . . .' indicating that *Demon Box* is a collection of essays. Through this ambiguous packaging Kesey, and his publishers in collusion with him, attempted to have the text occupy as much literary space as possible in a wide range of genres including short fiction, journalism, and the novel.

The list of publications in which pieces from *Demon Box* were first published includes *Spit in the Ocean*, Kesey's own literary journal, *Playboy*, *Wonders*, *Running*, *Esquire*, and *Rolling Stone*.⁹ The two main pieces discussed here are told from Kesey's own point-of-view as a subject; the first of these from *Esquire*, which was the magazine that first published Tom Wolfe's New Journalism, and the second *Rolling Stone*, which published Hunter Thompson's Gonzo Journalism from the early 1970s to the present.

To begin let us take note briefly of three pieces from *Demon Box* that have an overtly social element to them. 'Run Into Great Wall' [sic] (1982) is Kesey's journalistic coverage of the 1982 Beijing marathon. The piece follows three figures through the process of the race: Kesey, as a journalist covering the marathon, a Chinese runner named Yang, and Magapius Dasong, a runner from Tanzania. The New Journalism technique of following the thoughts and actions of characters that the author did not actually witness is similar to the techniques of Wolfe. The social element of the piece is portrayed, and enlarged upon, openly in the fact that the marathon was a cultural opening of relations between Communist China and the rest of the world. Another piece written after Kesey's trip to China is 'Finding Dr. Fung' (1982). In the piece Kesey tries to interview

⁹Ken Kesey, publ. *Spit in the Ocean*. Vols. 1-6 (Issue One, *Old in the Streets*, edited by Ken Kesey) Pleasant Hill: Intrepid Trips Information Service, 1974 to 1981. There are a few points of interest surrounding Kesey's journal which are not developed here. Among them is the fact that Kesey serialised six episodes of a novel entitled *Seven Prayers by Grandma Whittier*, which was never completed.

an aging Chinese philosopher who had not been heard from in the West since the cultural revolution of the late 1960s. Like Hunter Thompson's writing, the process of the interview told from the reporter's point-of-view is given more attention than the subject itself. The reporter in this piece focuses on the evolutionary hierarchy of human awareness developed by Dr. Fung. The punchline at the end has Dr. Fung saying that his response to the atrocity of the cultural revolution was to 'become very broadminded' (216). This is typical of Kesey's philosophy that unconquerable evil should be ignored in order not to feed it with greater power. Finally, 'Demon Box: An Essay', which was not published previous to its inclusion in *Demon Box*, focuses on entropy, a concept of concern for Kesey since *Cuckoo's Nest*. 'Demon Box' is the only piece in the collection calling itself an essay. Entropy is seen as an inexorable force of decay throughout the piece. The punchline at the end declares that 'Entropy . . . is only a problem in a closed system' (374). The meaning of this is that the depressing problems seen throughout the piece have only seemed unsolvable because of the frame in which they are presented—if one re-frames the problems then they are under the framer's control and thus solvable, rather than simply becoming something else and thus defying entropy altogether. A seemingly vague message, Kesey may be advocating New Journalism as a way of re-framing problems like the Vietnam War, which he had spoken out against unconventionally in the 1960s, and which he felt need not have gone on as long as it did. In other words Kesey is suggesting that New Journalism be used as a tool for social debate only in issues which can actually be solved. These three pieces exemplify the philosophical aspects of a number of Kesey's shorter works. Two other pieces from *Demon Box* explore the relationship between aesthetics and society in greater depth.

When Kesey returned to writing after his 1960s experiments with performance art

he resumed his activity as a responder to culture rather than being the cultural trend-setter as he had previously been. Many of *Demon Box*'s retrospective pieces accentuate the ambiguous potentialities in a series of diads: Kesey as author/character—pieces of prose as essays/fiction. What follows is analysis of the two most culturally charged essays within *Demon Box*: 'The Day After Superman Died' and 'Now We Know How Many Holes It Takes to Fill the Albert Hall' (1981). These two pieces in particular emphasise the relationship between cultural responder and artistic vanguard.

'The Day After Superman Died'

Generally reluctant to be nailed down to a limited philosophy or system, Kesey's elusiveness in this regard does not in any way work to dispel the fact that he is responding to cultural impulses and entertaining social solutions. The word revolution comes up repeatedly in regards to Kesey and his work, from *Cuckoo's Nest*, with the word revolution camouflaged in the initials of McMurphy's name, R.P.M.—revolutions per minute—to the aesthetic and social revolution of the 1960s counterculture. In 'The Day After Superman Died', which makes reference to the death of Neal Cassady, the narrative persona describes a character called Devlin Deboree, the most vague of attempts at concealing Kesey's fictive alter ego, attempting to respond to a letter he received from author/friend Larry McMurtry. 'What has the Good Old Revolution been doing lately?' McMurtry asks in his letter, and Deboree spends the rest of the piece trying to answer just that question.¹⁰

In 'The Day After Superman Died' Neal Cassady, called Houlihan, obviously

¹⁰Ken Kesey, 'The Day After Superman Died' (*Esquire* Oct. 1979 and Rpt. as a book *The Day After Superman Died* Northridge: Lord John Press, 1980, and in *Demon Box*) 58.

represents 'The Movement' of the 1960s, and the earlier Beat Generation. Written in 1979, at the end of the 'Me' decade, the piece occurs in the late summer of 1969, the end of another decade. And the piece makes reference to two events that happened in the late summer of 1969 that came to represent the highest and lowest points of the counterculture's influence on the world. The lowest is a brief mention in McMurtry's letter of Charles Manson, whom Kesey knew in the mid-1960s and whose infamous crimes were committed in August of 1969. The high point is Woodstock, which took place from 15 to 18 August of that same year. Woodstock is more than just a cultural emblem here, the massive rock concert holds special significance to Kesey personally that is mentioned only subtly in the piece. A character called M'kehla has left his dogs with Devlin Deboree, who says: 'M'kehla left them here while he went gallivantin' to Woodstock with everybody else' (67). The quiet of the farm described thus far in the piece shows a greater significance, if only subtextually. Since moving to Oregon after his trouble with the law in California in the mid-1960s Kesey's farm had become of kind of laissez-faire commune with people living in impromptu shacks and cubby-holes spread across the property. Kesey had expected to take the bus to Woodstock, but by the time he boarded it the bus was so full of people that he let it go on without him. While the commune members were off on the road Kesey had time to survey his property. He tore down all the shacks and all the stuff in them and made a huge pile in front of the house bearing a sign reading, 'No'. When the bus returned the appearance of the pile told a clear message: get your stuff and find your own place to live. Even Babbs, who felt exempt somehow as Kesey's closest friend, was forced to live under Kesey's brother Chuck's dining room table for a time (Kesey, Interview 1998). In light of this subtext Kesey is actively analyzing his participation in the communal aspects of the counterculture by

confronting his own sympathies with the 'Me' decade and his dissatisfaction with the ideas of the 1960s.

This actual dissolution of Kesey's commune presumably takes place after the action in 'The Day After Superman Died', so the piece becomes a symbol for the end of two decades, the 1960s and 1970s, the hippie generation, and Kesey's commune—in effect an entire way of life. Gilbert Porter appropriately conjectures that this piece can also symbolise 'the demise of idealism, of revolutionary zeal, of creative social experimentation, maybe even of innocence and optimism' (82). These temporal and philosophical endings are laid bare by the narrator with no simple solutions being offered, but rather the sentiments of a veteran of 'The Movement.' The date of Kesey's shift from a wholly optimistic embrace of counterculture values to more tentative feelings is located between 1971 and 1973. In 1972 Kesey made a speaking tour of America in which he encouraged people to start their own independent political parties in order to effect social change within the existing democratic system. At one of these speeches he said, 'where do they get their juries? We've got to start doing things like that [sitting on juries], and it starts by registering to vote.'¹¹ A journalist describing the same speech wrote, 'But politics, as he [Kesey] sees it, is the politics of actually getting it all together — getting your head and your heart and the outer world — and of finally taking the personal responsibility to assume control of America's destiny.'¹² Kesey's writing about these shifts at the end of the 1970s is an attempt to reinvigorate his zeal in engaging with social movements.

A significant difference between the styles of Thompson and Wolfe and that of

11 Susan Berman, 'It's a New Kesey--"Drop In, Not Out".' *San Francisco Examiner* 4 Mar. 1972: 5.

12 Dick Hallgren, 'Getting It All Together: Ken Kesey's New Politics.' *San Francisco Chronicle* 4 Mar. 1972: D1.

Kesey's appears at this juncture. Wolfe feels that New Journalism's strength rests in the reader's idea that what they are reading really happened. Thompson too, even in the most unbelievable of adventures, writes about what really happens, even if filtered through massive quantities of mind altering drugs. Kesey changes the names of the figures in a Kerouacian manner so that readers know who the real people are that the characters represent and so that Kesey does not always have to tell the truth exactly as it happened. In order to heighten this story's element of era ending Kesey has moved the piece's central event, the death of Neal Cassady, back by more than a year so that instead of 4 February, 1968 Cassady's death coincides with the end of the 1960s and Woodstock.¹³

'The Day After Superman Died' begins in third person, past-tense. The abundance of alliterative phrases, especially in the first sentence, but prevailing throughout the piece, draws a self-conscious literary attention to itself. On one level these devices work to aid the author in making reality seem fictional, artful—something more than just reporting a day in the life of an ex-novelist—as well as subliminally aiding the prose's imprinting power in the reader's mind. Kesey has long been fascinated with mystical synchronicity, and some of the coincidences in this piece could be attributed to an awareness of it, but again the narrator seems to be describing specific details in order to make literary use of them as the narrative progresses. The beginning of the story introduces unexplained images that become significant later on. And after their initial introduction the narrator can luxuriate over each element of the story. The peacock, for instance, acts as a barometer of tension for the humans in the narrative: Deboree listens for its scream to be a release of the potential energy building on the farm.

The narrator's name does not appear until the second page, and the framing of the

¹³Michael Schumacher, *Dharma Lion: A Biography of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992) 500.

story, the letter from McMurtry, does not come for yet another page after that. The pacing is very particular, careful. After the initial establishment of the social context in which the narrator is seeing every action in his limited view the essay returns to moments past to catch the reader up on two key figures in the story: a pair of hitchhiking hippies. One is young and blond, milk-fed and wearing new motorcycle boots; he represents a young and innocent kind of early 1970s hippie, someone from the country middle-class who has been swept up by the enthusiasm of 'The Movement' and does not know any better. The other one is older and blackbearded, wearing old motorcycle boots. Deboree watches the older hitchhiker as 'two long incisors grow from the black bramble of his mouth' (60). This vampiric figure has foul breath, a spider tattoo covering his hand, and a scar pointing down his stomach toward his genitals (61). Blackbeard is clearly a malevolent representation of the decay from which 'The Movement' suffers. The narrator dislikes many qualities about these intruders to the peace of his farm; their California-ness, their long hair, their filth, their poverty. The blond hitchhiker tells how the two of them are waiting for Blackbeard's 'old lady' to die so they can inherit enough money to retire to some property of their own. This expression of the desire for profit from mortal loss is repulsive. Deboree is honestly portrayed as an old strung out and unhip hippie; there is an obvious connection between part of himself and Blackbeard. Deboree wonders if the older hippie might not have been an athlete in his younger days, just as Kesey had been an Olympic wrestler in his twenties. Deboree is forced into a physical confrontation with the older hippie over a stick the dog, Stewart, has been fetching. At first this sounds petty, but for the narrator the stick represents the respect of property ownership and the rules of conduct and respect of the people who live in a settled place, including animals. Kesey here is confronting the capitalistic aspects of the

counterculture; he has always earned enough money from literary projects not to have to rely on the charity of others.

After the hitchhikers leave the farm an old Merry Prankster turns up, by the name of Sandy Pawku, to tell Deboree of Houlihan's death. In another piece to be discussed in this chapter, 'Now We Know How Many Holes It Takes to Fill the Albert Hall', Deboree explains the oriental herbalist concept of sanpaku, which means 'a body out of balance and bound for doom' (319).¹⁴ Sandy Pawku clearly represents this unbalance. As he feels ambivalent toward the hitchhikers, Deboree also dislikes many aspects of Sandy's character. She is a burn out, but she has also been part of Deboree's inner social circle, so he is unable to resist her infiltration into his pastoral peace. Her matching luggage is presented in order to offer clear contrast to the patched Levi's of the hitchhikers. The destruction of her rented car's transmission from her own ignorance and uncaring is just the tip of the iceberg. Her tale of killing an anonymous dog with the same car, a dog that Deboree knows from the neighborhood, is horrifically described in vivid detail. So Sandy more closely represents the ills of the Movement's vanguard, and like Kesey himself, cannot use poverty as an excuse for uncaring. Stephen Tanner expresses Kesey's point of view here thus: 'His perspective from a farm in Oregon, devoting himself to his family and to establishing a responsible relationship with his environment and community, makes the carelessness, irresponsibility, and self-deception of the movement more glaringly apparent' (129). Hippiedom, however, is not replaced by conservative values wholesale, but rather individualism is turned into a responsibility in relating to one's community—all have worth and so command respect, not all can free-load because nothing matters. This accurate portrayal of Kesey's perspective illustrates

¹⁴The title is taken from a line in a song by the Beatles, 'A Day in the Life.' from the *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album (1967).

the personal and social forces pulling against one another in DeBoree's character.

The clear, journalistic descriptions of the events in the piece do not keep Kesey from pushing the limits of the New Journalism form. The high number of instances of symbolism in the piece stresses the reader's sense of believability, but Kesey masterfully writes the language in an easily acceptable style. Partially responsible for this acceptability is the oral voice inherent in the language. The fact that the piece occurs on a Sunday combined with the theme of the dead lamb's burial woven throughout works to make the entire story a ceremony of funereal proportions.¹⁵ With Sandy's departure for town to score more drugs the piece turns from past to present tense, a moment after the action catches up to the present in the story, bringing the action of the dead lamb's burial up to the reader's closer scrutiny. Here the narrator finds and reads some of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, a seminal text of the counterculture. In this present tense section DeBoree recalls an encounter with an unglamorised Houlihan from many years earlier in which the hero figure was fallible and human. Toward the end of this reminiscence DeBoree, or Kesey as narrator, it remains unclear, makes a parenthetical interjection: 'yes, damn it, revolution! as surely as Fidel and Che had been comrades, against the same tyranny of inertia, in the guerrilla war that was being fought, as Burroughs put it, in "the space between our cells"' (86). DeBoree is coming to grips with the realities of the post-1960s world, re-evaluating the era's social assumptions and myths. This interjection asserts that Kesey and his compatriots' actions were of a highly socially conscious nature.

The piece concludes with an eloquent, if enigmatic, list of participants from 1960s

¹⁵After being confronted with readings of Christian symbolism by critics in *Cuckoo's Nest*, and purposefully trying to avoid such readings in *Notion*, it is interesting that Kesey encourages such readings here.

culture and before including enemies (LBJ, Lee Harvey Oswald, Charlie Manson) as well as comrades (Fritz Perls, Norman Mailer, John Lennon), some living and some dead. The list concludes with the sentence: 'Attendance mandatory but not required' (90). This paradoxical statement exemplifies Kesey's evasiveness. The attendance in the sentence is participation in a war for personal freedoms, and in such a war nothing can be required of the warriors. However, for there to be battles won someone, the reader by implication, must stand up and fight, or at least be counted. Here Kesey ambiguously tries to reinvigorate his sense of social action while admitting his attitude as landowner and family man.

'Now We Know How Many Holes It Takes to Fill the Albert Hall'

Another 'story', the narrator calls it so in the text, in *Demon Box*, 'Now We Know How Many Holes It Takes to Fill the Albert Hall', presents a theme similar to 'The Day After Superman Died'.¹⁶ The central issue concerns the death of another one of Kesey's real life heroes: John Lennon. The story is a complex weaving between three visitors Kesey has around the time of Lennon's death in December of 1980. Although generally patterned on the three ghosts of Charles Dickens, there are no immediately apparent stylistic borrowings from *A Christmas Carol* (1843). The text invokes Dickens' story by saying, '. . . like the three ghosts from *A Christmas Carol*' making the connection obvious for the reader (310). The three visitors in Kesey's piece do have the same effect on DeBoree as that of the ghosts on Scrooge, though DeBoree remains far more grounded in the harshness of reality by the end of his story. Both Kesey's and Dickens'

¹⁶Ken Kesey, 'Now We Know How Many Holes it Takes to Fill the Albert Hall.' (*Rolling Stone* 5 Mar. 1981, Rpt. in *Demon Box*) 310.

tales are told in the first person.

Kesey's story begins by relating the first person narrator's experiences with Lennon in 1968. This narrator is called, again, Devlin Deboree, but is certainly Kesey himself. Aside from the reference to the Beatles gleaned from the story's title, the reader has little idea as to what its main subject is from the introduction. It was originally published in *Rolling Stone* shortly after Lennon's death, so in that context Lennon as a subject would have been obvious. Though the story seems to be centred on Lennon's death to begin with, it first focuses on Kesey's own fame and the effect it has on him. The third paragraph discusses the 'high' fame gives and how addictive that feeling can be. Fame is referred to as an eye. The paragraph concludes with: 'if you go around to the other end of that eye and look through at the star shining there so elevated, you see that this adoring telescope has a cross hair built in it, and notches in the barrel filed for luminaries: Kennedy . . . King . . . Joplin . . . Hemingway . . .' (304-305). The first two on this list were politicians assassinated by gunshot at opposite ends of the 1960s. The last two were artists who committed suicide—Joplin, like Kerouac, from drinking, and Hemingway, again, by gunshot, but this time self-inflicted. The implication, once the reader understands that this story is about Lennon's death, is that Lennon was both assassinated for the views he expressed and as an artist who may have destroyed himself by his addiction to the spotlight.

The order of the first two of Deboree's visitors seems somewhat skewed. At first it seems ambiguous as to which represents the past and which the present. In effect they are so similar as to be nearly interchangeable, but the first visitor is more flexible in this respect than the second. The first visitor is the 'Definitive Panhandler', a person named Bible Bill. Bible Bill could represent the ever present because the narrator says that,

‘versions of this spook have probably been around since the first campfire’ (310). Bible Bill’s brief visit occurs before Lennon’s death, which places it in the past, as well as the fact that, like in *A Christmas Carol*, the first ghost represents the past. Deboree rejects Bible Bill’s request for hospitality outright, similar to his initial response to the hitchhikers in ‘The Day After Superman Died’, playing the role with a scrooge-like straight-forwardness.

The second visitor claims, probably truthfully, to have met Deboree fifteen years earlier—in the past. We have been looking mostly at the fictional aesthetics of the story and should not forget that this is also New Journalism. The narrator is constantly invoking objective reality. When the second visitor introduces himself Deboree says: ‘He said he was called—no lie!—John the Groupie’ (312). The truth implied here is that the entire story is a report on events that actually happened in true Gonzo style. It is implied that fifteen years past, compared to pre-historical or Biblical past, is really the present. The news of Lennon’s death comes literally in the middle of John the Groupie’s visit sealing the visitation’s placement in the present of the story, as John the Groupie attempts to integrate Deboree’s recent past with the present. When broadcast of Lennon’s death appears on the television Deboree’s role as ‘scowling landowner’ providing reluctant charity to the ‘ingratiating tramp’ from the past and John the Groupie’s role as bum fall away. They rise up, transformed, as ‘old allies’ in the same revolution discussed in ‘The Day After Superman Died’.

As with the previous piece, synchronicity is something that Kesey has long been interested in as a spiritual phenomenon. At the beginning of this second visitation John the Groupie tries to give Deboree a phone number, an act Deboree regards as a ruse to create a tie with him—a tie Deboree does not want, as he ardently

refuses the phone number. Deboree expresses with utter conviction his certainty that he will have no need for such a number. Upon his return from putting John the Groupie on the Interstate hitchhiking back to California the phone rings: it is someone in San Francisco trying to organise a vigil for John Lennon. Ironically, given the anti-fame motif of the story, Deboree's first reaction is to assume he himself is being asked to lead the vigil. This someone asks Deboree simply for the same phone number John the Groupie had been trying to give him. This second visitation ends without any melancholic words of regret for not having taken the number from John the Groupie, but that regret nevertheless permeates the finale of this section.

The ghost of future times comes in the form of a young ignorant East Coast punk who knows very little of Deboree and seems to have no respect for anyone or anything. Deboree remains ambivalent toward Patrick the Punk, but because of Lennon's death and the visitors he has recently had he tries to be generous. The ambivalence continues as Deboree and Patrick express conflicting philosophies. Deboree believes Patrick to be carrying a gun, and Patrick clearly represents the potential assassin of the famous personality. Like the blackbearded hitchhiker in 'The Day After Superman Died' Patrick is described in vampiric terms, and himself refers to others as vampires. Light hurts his eyes, and the calamine lotion he wears gives him a gothic look (320). In the face of Patrick's 'antagonistic' [sic] Deboree can verbalise some rare and direct philosophical advice:

Don't you know you got to change your mind? That the way you're thinking, tomorrow is gonna be worse than today? And next week worse than this and next year worse than last? And your next life—if you get another one—worse than this one . . . until you're going to simply, finally go out? (318-319)

The social solution offered here is not concrete; in fact it is more a philosophy than anything else. As with 'The Day After Superman Died' the narrator suggests that a positive attitude is the best kind of positive social action an individual can take. The implication here is that social change comes out of the individual and the philosophies by which individuals live.

There is no real resolution with Patrick; he is not converted to Deboree's way of thinking, though Deboree, like Scrooge, ends in a more idealistic frame of mind. The piece ends with a Gonzo journalist tribute to Hunter S. Thompson by including him as a character in the piece. Thompson, Dobbs (Ken Babbs), and Deboree discuss the issues brought up by Deboree's three visitors, especially the ominous problem of Patrick. Thompson cynically suggests that 'Today's wiseman . . . has too much brains to talk himself out on that kind of dead-end limb' (321). The dead-end limb Thompson refers to are the promises of World Peace and Universal Love of the kind that John Lennon spoke and sang of in the 1960s and 1970s. Deboree decides, despite the homicidal punks of the world, that 'it was time to talk a little of that old sky pie once more, for all the danger of dead ends or cross hairs' (321). In the twenty years since writing *Cuckoo's Nest* Kesey's philosophy had not changed; despite growing negativity and danger the only reasonable response is to stand up and actively and/or verbally conduct positive social action. Neither Tom Wolfe nor Hunter Thompson's brands of New Journalism ever express such a concrete opinion.

Demon Box ends with a piece entitled 'Last Time the Angels Came Up' in which Kesey betrays his former openness to the anarchic nature represented by the lifestyle and philosophy of the Hell's Angels. Pavement is contrasted with dirt road, boots with moccasins until the farm silence that spreads over the spread is referred to as 'civilization'

(384).

Kesey continued to write magazine pieces in the New Journalism vein after the publication of *Demon Box* because the New Journalistic form provided opportunities to directly confront current social issues. One of the best of these pieces is 'Skid-Row Santa' (1997), which, like 'Now We Know How Many Holes it Takes to Fill the Albert Hall', offers an attitude of charity toward the homeless problem, despite Kesey's throwing his friends off the farm in 1969.¹⁷ 'Skid-Row Santa', a story in which Kesey meets a down-and-out Indian in a wheelchair, uses the real names of figures from the author's life, namely his wife Faye, instead of the fictionalised alter-egos of the earlier New Journalism pieces. Another is 'Home Front' (1998), which uses the fatal shooting spree at an Oregon high school to put forth a real-life solution to the problem of gun ownership and gun-related deaths in America.¹⁸ More immediately after *Demon Box*'s publication, explored in the following chapter, Kesey returned to novel writing.

¹⁷'Skid-Row Santa' is printed in full for the first time with permission of the author in Appendix D of this thesis. It can also be read at Ken Kesey's webpage <<http://www.intrepidtrips.com.html>>.

¹⁸Ken Kesey, 'Land of the Free, Home of the Bullets.' (*Rolling Stone* 9-23 Jul. 1998) 51-56, Rpt. as 'Home Front' at <<http://www.intrepidtrips.com.html>>.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CAVERNS

Fabulation . . . means not a turning away from reality, but an attempt to find more subtle correspondences between the reality which is fiction and the fiction which is reality.

Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction*¹

From September 1987 to June 1988 Ken Kesey wrote a collaborative novel in the historical thriller genre, entitled *Caverns*, with thirteen graduate students enrolled in a Master of Fine Arts degree program in Creative Writing at the University of Oregon.² At the time of composing *Caverns* Kesey perceived that the central unifying anxiety of the Cold War began to evaporate in the American consciousness with Glasnost and the impending fall of the Berlin Wall. The Cold War had provided a kind of structure of anxiety for Black Humour authors who experimented with novelistic structures in the early 1960s. With Kesey's return to the novel in this historical context it may be that he felt the new, hopeful changes in the Soviet Union allowed a return to genre as a structure in fiction. All three novels Kesey wrote and published in the 1990s are genre fiction: historical thriller, science fiction, and Western. It may also be that John Barth's ideas of the 'Literature of Exhaustion' made it conducive for authors in the 1980s and 90s to move

¹Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979) 8.

²I was one of those thirteen graduate students.

to one form after another.³ Barth intimates a correlation between history and aesthetic evolution: ‘. . . art and its forms and techniques live in history and certainly do change’ (21). Seen thus one can make a connection between literary production and social change by examining the use of genre over an author’s career in its historical context. In the 1960s, when public rhetoric, the language of the Presidents of the United States and those people commenting on their rhetoric, was focused on the Cold War Kesey, and other writers, wrote non-generic novels. With radical shifts in the Cold War power structure, Kesey felt liberated in a way that allowed him to return to writing novels, but novels with foci different from his earlier works. *Caverns* deals with racism, capitalism, and other real world issues, but it also concerns itself with spiritualism and matters of the spirit to a great extent. This is because, as Kesey explains from an interview published in 1994, the central unifying force of the Cold War had evaporated:

As we came to the end of the continent, we manufactured our terror. We put together the bomb. Now even that bomb is betraying us. We don’t have the bomb hanging over our heads to terrify us and give us reason to dress up in manly deerskin and go forth to battle it. There’s something we’re afraid of, but it doesn’t have the clear delineation of the terror the Hurons gave us or the hydrogen bomb in the cold war. (Plimpton 227)

By the late 1980s Kesey saw the need to create a ‘clear delineation’ for the subject of the socially conscious novel and chose to develop it in generic form; in this case the historical thriller. Conscious of the shift in the culture’s anxiety, Kesey and his associates took a genre form and combined it with parodic literary techniques to create a literary synthesis which could express contemporary ideas through fictional fabulation. *Caverns* explores a series of dyads, both issue pairings and symbolic images, in order to express an evolving

³John Barth, ‘The Literature of Exhaustion.’ as Rpt. in *Surfiction: Fiction Now . . . and Tomorrow* (Ed. Raymond Federman. Chicago: The Swallow Press, inc. 1975) 19-33.

social conscience.

In the early 1980s, Kesey proposed to teach a novel writing class at his alma mater, the University of Oregon. In 1987, he was finally given the chance to do so. The result of the class is the most in-depth collaborative literary experiment with which Kesey has ever been involved. Rather than teach a class in a traditional writing workshop mode, where students bring in chapters of their own novels for the class to criticise, Kesey spent nine months developing, writing, and editing a full-length novel with his students. The process that Kesey and the students went through in order to write *Caverns* is a complex and fascinating one. Kesey and his wife own a two-story house two blocks from the University of Oregon campus. The class met there two afternoons a week. At the beginning Kesey assigned everyone to write a brief character sketch on a three-by-five inch card. These characters were fused or eliminated as the class roughly blocked out the plot. At first individuals went off to write brief sections on their own. During the first three months the class spent much of its time trying to write segues between these sections—bits of prose radically different from one another in terms of content and style. In an attempt to bring everyone's writing style in line with one another an experiment was performed whereby a video camera transmitted the image of a computer screen onto a large monitor in the main room. Three people would compose prose at the computer while the rest of the class watched on the monitor and shouted out suggestions. This cumbersome arrangement failed to produce any material of significance. The floundering of the first few months, which produced only sixty odd pages of creaky prose, allowed all members of the collaborative team to get up to date on the motivations behind all of the characters in the novel and in line with the style or voice eventually adopted overall. One day early in 1988 Kesey asked co-author Neil Lidstrom to read the

section of the novel he had been writing. Kesey suggested that the authorial voice used in this section was the one that the collective author should adopt for the novel, and all collaborators concurred. In January 1988, after a weekend meeting at Kesey's coast house, a method of composition was attempted and ultimately adopted by the group that made it possible for the novel to emerge successfully. One person would outline a chapter into fourteen parts. The class would review the outline, make changes to it, and then draw lots to see which section an individual was to write. In Kesey's introduction to the novel he describes how:

We'd look up on the board, see what our task was ('Dr. Jo gets up, goes outside, looks at the sky, thinks about what happened the night before, gets ready for the trip'), then bend down and write. No talking, thirty minutes, then read it aloud. An immediate presentation before your peers . . . not of your ability to rewrite, but to write. (Kesey, *Caverns* xviii)

The first day the class tried this new configuration they achieved sixty pages of solid prose in one afternoon—as much as had been accumulated in the whole of the first three months. The person who originally outlined the chapter would take the prose home with them and work out the roughest transitions before putting it back into the computer at Kesey's house in Eugene. The rest of the winter the group performed the same process twice a week. By April they had a manuscript amounting to more than four hundred pages. The last three months of the year were spent editing the draft on the computer in such a way that identifying an individual's prose became less and less possible.⁴ A key was hidden on the back porch and any member of the class could let him or herself in through the back door at any time of night or day and work on the novel. Kesey may

⁴The book sold, but not terribly well—the decision to publish the book under a pseudonym rather than Kesey's own name may have had something to do with it.

have had more time at the computer than other members of the team, because he actually lived in the house, but he did not, as some reports later claimed, write half of the book. The novel, though purely collaborative, has a unified voice which does not show the hand of its many authors coming through.⁵

Especially after the publication of Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* Kesey has had the problem of being considered in an objective light, especially where reviewers are concerned. Reviewers tend to look for connections or allusions to Kesey's counterculture persona, which is often not relevant to his literary production. Reviews of *Caverns* were particularly problematised by the fact that readers of the text are made aware of the unique compositional history by the cover and introduction to the novel. Alfred Bendixen's review illustrates this point by two separate observations. Concerning the collaborative technique used to compose the novel Bendixen writes: 'The result is that "Caverns" is, in some respects, superior to the average first novel: the prose is clean and usually pleasant to read, and the plot is moderately entertaining.'⁶ This statement, while not overly enthusiastic, reads objectively enough. His subsequent observation betrays his prejudice: 'The chief problem seems to be the absence of a recognizable authorial style' (29). Knowing the unusual composition history of the novel reviewers like Bendixen were looking for traces of an uneven authorial voice in the novel. However, in this critic's view, there is no perceivable problem with the authorial style of *Caverns*. Were one to read it without its cover or introduction they would not guess that it was not written by a single author.

⁵I have thus considered *Caverns* as a Kesey text in this study, though the other thirteen authors contributed equally to the development of the novel's stylistics and themes.

⁶Alfred Bendixen, 'There Goes the Cave.' Rev. of *Caverns*, by Ken Kesey, et al. *New York Times Book Review* 21 Jan. 1990: 28-29.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

As a novel in the thriller genre *Caverns* tends to be more straight-forward than Kesey's earlier novels. With an omniscient narrator and a chronological order *Caverns* chooses not to challenge the stylistic definitions of the novel. This is partially in keeping with writing within an identifiable generic form, but may also be out of a consensual idea of the novel arrived at by the fourteen authors. *Caverns* follows an archaeological expedition in the desert of the American West conducted in a large military surplus vehicle called a Casualty Carrier, which was originally designed as an ambulance and then converted for civilians. In a symbolic sense this vehicle carries the casualties of the modern age, souls who are in search of meaning in an ever more alienating world.⁷

There are narrative similarities between *Caverns* and Kesey's other works. The geological description of the cavern at the outset of 'Chapter last' is very similar to the appendix to *Sailor Song*, which describes the natural environment of the future Alaska (Kesey, *Sailor* 529-533). Like the sections of *Notion*, which align themselves with particular characters, chapters of *Caverns* settle into being told over the shoulder of specific characters during the mid-section of the novel. As the narrative progresses large sections and then smaller ones begin to be told by different characters within a chapter. The climactic Chapter Fourteen begins quickly shifting, in a style similar to that employed in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, from character to character devoting a sentence to each character's thoughts or reactions to the events of the previous scene.

Caverns begins by contextualizing its place in history with a series of dyads or comparisons: 'America is halfway out of the Depression, beginning to hope again' (1)

⁷It is almost too easy to make a comparison between *Caverns*' vehicle and Kesey's bus *Further*. I will leave it at a mere mention here.

reads the first sentence. Set in October of 1934, a list of other historical relationships, which characterise the time, acts to emphasise this intermediate state. The novel's narrator contrasts new fashion and good Fall weather in America with ominous political movements overseas: 'The summer has been filled with news of dark happenings in Europe—antisemitism and pro-fascism . . .' (1). Though both of these movements oppose the philosophy the novel advocates, they too are placed in an oppositional dyad of 'anti' and 'pro'. Racism is one of the main subjects of *Caverns* and thus Europe's shadow casting is appropriate for the opening of the novel. This description moves from America generally to Europe and back to America, but more specifically San Francisco as the narrator uses the cinematic screenplay language of present tense to zoom slowly in on the room that becomes the focus and setting of the novel's initial action.

The word 'half' appears eight different times on the novel's second page emphasising a kind of diametrical ambivalence to everything in its world. The word 'half' comes most densely, six times in four sentences, where the narration begins describing the Victorian house that is the headquarters for the defunct Society of the Cavern. This house is literally divided in half—residence on the top floors, black secret society meeting place below. The prologue and first two chapters of the novel introduce the background of the story and its many characters, each introduction presenting in each of the characters an issue of bifurcated conflict. The novel explores each character's search for either which half of them is 'true', or ways in which to accept the disparate halves of the self. Within the meeting room for the Society hangs a photograph of the novel's chief protagonist, a Doctor of Theosophy by the name of Charles Loach: 'Near the top of the photograph two ambiguous shadows flutter, face-to-face, unfocused in movement. They might be bats, they might have been a blemish on the camera lens' (4). This image

symbolises the novel's play with ambiguity and confrontation of varying sides of the self. There are two shadows in keeping with the dyad structure created from the first page of the text. These shadows flutter 'face-to-face' in confrontation as two distinct objects, yet blurred by movement or the lens through which they are viewed. The novel suggests that life itself is a process by which the bifurcated self can only be examined in movement, action, and perspective.

Juke, the first character described in the novel, is done so through a two-coloured dyad: 'The hair is white, the face is blue' (4). Juke's complexion comes from damage to his lungs from mustard gas in the First World War, but this odd coloration raises doubts, especially disconcerting to the racist characters in the book, about the makeup of his racial background. As with most characters Juke has good qualities and bad. He is a musician, loyal friend, and war hero. In an instance of purposeful ambiguity the narratorial voice implies that Juke is also an opium addict, which he may be or may have been. The reader tends to judge Juke's character negatively when directed by the initial description of him and his addiction, only to be redirected later on when the narration purposefully sheds a different light on what had formerly been shrouded in ambiguity, that is to say when the narration changes its lens. Doctor Jocelyn Caine, the National Geographic archaeologist hired to verify the significance of the cavern's prehistoric art, possesses a highly educated scientific mind that takes in details of all kinds more astutely than many of the other characters.⁸ When Jocelyn first encounters Juke with his meerschaum pipe she simply notices that he is smoking Asthmador; not an illicit substance, but an herbal blend distributed by the Veterans Administration to victims of mustard gas (114-115). Though not treated in any serious depth, his addiction is presented as the thing which keeps him

⁸Doctor Caine has fought her way through a professional field dominated by men in the 1930s.

from realising his musical ambition, thus clearly revealing the conflict within his character.

The most aesthetically intricate aspect of the novel is the use of internal monologues by a variety of characters that, through syntax and icons, transmit the essence of character. Juke, at the wheel of the Casualty Carrier on a mission to save Ned from the radical racists called the Whiteshirts, receives one of the longest such passages in the book, a small portion of which follows:

Right. Beautiful music even if it wasn't jazz. Johann Sebastian. Right. That's a start. First things first. But orders is orders. Ned pinned down. Another puff now the blue cloud. Then there's the white shirts. The white shirts. Well, twist 'er tail and throw her in gear, any gear'll do. (75)

This excerpt from a long paragraph is not printed inside quotation marks in the text leaving it unclear whether Juke is talking to himself or whether, more likely, this is his silent internal monologue. The clipped phrases and repetitions, in addition to the mention of jazz, which is a Juke emblem established earlier in the novel, tell clearly that this is Juke's thinking. The paragraphs previous to this one contextualise the music concert the expedition had been listening to and Ned's trouble with the Whiteshirts. Even action is expressed in this internal monologue. With 'That's a start' Juke turns the ignition key and starts the engine of the Casualty Carrier.

FABLE

As a less formally experimental novel than his earlier fiction, the emphasis of *Caverns*' action resides in the characters presented, and thus makes analysis of them worthy of pursuit. Ned Blue is the Casualty Carrier's black hired driver. His 'trouble' is

present even when not being assaulted by overtly racist protestors in Salt Lake City. Rodney constantly makes snide comments about him not carrying his weight as a 'colored boy' should. Though the other characters on the expedition socialise more freely and warmly with Ned, his absence at the first dinner in Moab, Utah, relates volumes. Perhaps it is an attempt to concede to the social realities of 1934, but regardless his omission denotes the tacit racism tolerated by all of the White characters in the regiment. Ned, as driver, has a great deal of control despite his marginalised racial position. Ned delivers the Casualty Carrier to the museum of natural curiosities in the desert with, 'A simply apocalyptic road maneuver that made that bloated conveyance grunt and should either have left the metal monster of Dog's stone wall on its side or at least shredded all of the beast's rubber, but nothing happened' (80). On the verge of the Second World War and in anticipation of a spiritual millennium, the vehicle the expedition travels in, with a black man at the helm, carries with it an apocalyptic cohort — a moveable feast of sorts full of visions for enlightenment.

The first conflict of religion comes in Salt Lake City. The expedition is there to rendezvous with Jocelyn Caine. At the Mormon tabernacle the group meets a man by the name of Boyle, metaphorically representative of a volatile, reactionary nature, who at first seems to befriend the expedition members, and then turns out to be the leader of the radical White supremacist faction of the Latter Day Saints called the Whiteshirts. Boyle, as leader of the Whiteshirts, says, 'Actually, I got some close associates in Germany still into the old dame's brand of spiritual soup' (70). He is referring to Madam Blavatsky and those Wagnerian spiritualists who consulted with Hitler in Nazi Germany. Boyle makes his German connections clear mentioning 'the last millennium', 'a new age', and 'a bright golden dawn' (70-71). The conservative faction here, obviously aligned with the

Nazi Brownshirts of Germany, serves a simple dramatic function of having a group of villains trying to oppose the group's mission. Father Paul's Catholicism and the racial uncertainties of Ned Blue and Juke are clearly threatening to the Mormon racists, but at the heart of the Whiteshirts' opposition to the expedition is their fear that the findings of the cavern might threaten both Mormon mythology and their theories of White supremacy. The Whiteshirts do not care about any high-minded exploratory process the results of which might conflict with their belief system, and thus any means of stopping the expedition justifies their aim to preserve their faith.

Boyle, the novel's obvious villain, boisterously declares his philosophies of greed and racial purity. He suggests that joining something, like a religious sect or political movement, is a safe, if less than wholly honest, move to success. Loach, in contrast, represents the individualist's pursuit of truth—along with the sacrifices that solitary approach can take, like Loach's six-year prison term. Confronted with the link between racism and greed by Loach, Boyle asks directly: 'Don't you believe in a Chosen People, as it says in the bible? God's Chosen People?' (180). Loach does not; his contact with both belief and truth, he says, resides in poker, which is a pun on the card game and the flaming fire stick Loach uses to hypnotise the belligerent Boyle. Loach suggests here that life should be a game in which every person gets the same opportunities and plays by the same rules.⁹

Charles Loach is released on parole early in his prison sentence for homicide in order to lead the expedition to prove the spiritualist significance of the cavern. Loach is clearly the novel's protagonist, a man who, while attractive to other characters because of his charismatic commitment to his own spiritualist faith, questions his own legitimacy. It

⁹This idea of equality expressed through a gambling metaphor is similar to that developed in more depth in his last novel, to be discussed later, *Last Go Round*.

is because so many characters focus their faith on Loach that his own doubts are most poignantly elaborated. Loach's faults have more severe consequences than other characters because of this, so the reader too must come to terms with whether homicide, which Loach freely admits to, is a crime forgivable for one's faith.

The point in making Loach emerge from incarceration in his prison uniform seems to be to emphasise his status as a prisoner beyond the prison walls (17). Loach never denies the fact that he killed a man. This essential dilemma is whether that murder was somehow justified or not. In its spiritualist themes, imprisonment, confinement, whether in a penitentiary or a cavern, does not inhibit spiritual exploration. Physical, geographical exploration in the novel acts as an opposite to confinement in which a contradiction is established. The traveling to a site of spiritual meaning within a confined space provides as much or more tutoring than any actual revelation found at the end of the journey. Here process is privileged over the end product.

In Moab Loach's brother Dogeye, so named because of the way light reflects in his eyes in the dark, muses on the value of the desert, 'This land was the disappearance of systems and structures, time tables and agendas' (79). In his view, clearly important to the novel's constructed meaning, the desert is where social structures fall apart and truth can be revealed to the pilgrim. Varying conceptions of 'truth' is a theme seen throughout Kesey's work, especially his first two novels, and the truth becomes increasingly important as *Caverns* progresses. Dogeye is the novel's chief prankster, and it is his philosophical ideas that tend to rise above those of the other characters as the ones that the novel most authentically advocates. In alignment with his ecologically sympathetic feelings about the value of the desert are his sentiments about human contact with animals. On the verge of their departure for the expedition, Dogeye releases the animals

of his small zoo: 'The smell of this animal stillness soothed him, the way it always did' (107). In addition to an appreciation of animal nature this scene offers a philosophy of acceptance. Dogeye worries about the fate of the animals he releases into the wild, but he accepts his own fate as well as that of his animals. This emphasis placed on animals shows heightened significance when social or anti-social behaviour is illuminated later on in the narrative. He says that this acceptance is, 'like letting go of the wheel at highway speeds' (107). He reinforces this statement in a one sentence paragraph, always significant in Kesey's work, after his chore is completed: 'Just got to open your hands' (108).¹⁰ Dogeye can take nothing too serious; he accepts his own fate as Loach, his brother, accepted his for six years in prison. Yet Dogeye is the person responsible for the indeterminacy of the cave paintings. At Loach's mention of the paint used on the cavern's wall being 'perhaps tens of thousands of years old' Dogeye breaks out into a coughing fit—presumably because it is a bald-faced lie (138-139). Though Dogeye has a flexible philosophy in place he still has a stake in the real world.

Jocelyn Caine's Achilles heel, ironically for an archaeologist, is a fear of caves or closed spaces. The first hint of this comes in a scene where Jocelyn volunteers to get some groceries out of Dogeye's cellar, which, perhaps also alluding to Dogeye's part in the cavern's wall painting, is described as a perfect double of the secret cavern in miniature:

At the back of the hole was a small spring, diked off with stones. In this shallow pool she found a tub of butter, a basket of odd-sized eggs and a stone crock, its lid held firmly in place with a wire clamp. She opened the crock and the unmistakable smell of sourdough bloomed up. (120-121)

¹⁰Single sentence paragraphs, as well as single sentence or single paragraph chapters, in Kesey's work often carry as much weight in the development of plot as vastly larger amounts of language.

The pool in the cavern is at the very end, as is this 'diked off' spring in the cellar. The mason jars used to fashion primitive explosive devices, which are also present in the cellar, are held with the same wire clamps as the crock. This scene serves two functions: to foreshadow the general description of the secret cavern, and, what is more important, to develop Jocelyn's phobia.

When the expedition attains the opening of the cavern Dogeye guesses at Jocelyn's being afraid of caves. She claims she has a different fear: 'It's the humanity. I'm an anthropophobe . . . I have a fear of being around people' (252). With Dogeye's philosophy of open spaces one would think he might not like caves any more than Jocelyn. So his response to her of 'That ain't a sickness . . . That's a blessing' (253) makes the two coincide on both speleological and anthropological levels. As a scientist her philosophy does not allow for faith in true magic, but she does have unconventional ideas about the migration of early humans across the face of the earth. Here her searching is akin to others on the journey, a search for verification of something thus far unproved in an individual's realm of importance. To complicate Doctor Caine's searching is a feminist counter-plot in the fact that she is a woman working in a nearly all-male field.

At the end of the Temple scene in San Francisco Rodney asks for some proof that Loach still has, essentially, the magic required to lead this mystical expedition. In order to give evidence of this Loach performs a blindfolded divination trick, in which he sightlessly finds an object chosen silently by the group gathered. All this is done with apparent fidelity, and Loach finds the chosen object. As written, it seems to be an example of true magic, and it effectively convinces all characters who might have doubted that Loach still has what it takes and thus the expedition can continue. While composing the novel Kesey performed just such a trick for the benefit of his collaborators. For all involved, save for

the shill, Jim Finley, a fellow collaborator who had been briefly trained in subtly clicking his fingernails as a directing aid to the blindfolded Kesey, the magic trick convincingly illustrated the power of magic and magic tricks. No one in the room heard the clicking for which they were unfamiliar. Loach's trick is performed in the same way. Juke, Loach's long time partner, who served in Europe in the Great War with Loach, acts as shill.¹¹

This example of a magic trick performed to appear to be true magic symbolises one of the central paradigms of the novel. Loach, the performer, knows that it is merely a trick and is in search of true magic. Others are skeptical of the trick, but know not how it is performed. Still others believe it is true magic. By subtly placing judgements on different characters, the novel privileges the first and last of these approaches; favouring curiosity over skepticism, as well as faith. Kesey likes magic as an idea, as well as trickery and practice. Exemplified here not only in demonstrating magic to his collaborators, but also the decision to put such magic in *Caverns*, and of course in the concept of Further the Magic Bus, Kesey shows us that magic is an exultation of the power of the individual imagination and how such can be shared.

The Makai sisters offer significant contrast to Loach. According to Kesey himself in interview, 'We [O.U. Levon] became very fascinated [with spiritualist art] and got a lot of books and these two sisters are based on two actual sisters, called the Fox sisters, that did this at the first of the century and bamboozled people for a long time' (Kesey, Interview 1996). At the Moab Museum the sisters act as mediums for a seance lead by Loach. In answer to questions concerning their expedition loud knockings report yes and no answers (103-104). Afterward Loach confesses that he does not know how the sisters perform the trick and calls it an 'act' acknowledging his own disbelief in their magic as

11 The hired driver, Ned Blue, also served in the military during the war. Most of Kesey's fictional heros, McMurphy and Hank Stamper, are military heros as well.

authentic. More than simply declaring his disbelief in the sisters' magic, Loach's confession betrays his knowledge of magic as trickery; as a practitioner of such he is bound to be skeptical. Loach's own compass trick performed at the crossroads to give the correct direction the expedition should go is revealed as a simple magnet in Loach's sock used to turn the needle from magnetic north (185). The more impressive feat of magic is at the end of the same chapter when Loach hypnotises Boyle, but even this gets demystified by Gaby in Chapter Fourteen as a mere trick.

There is a kind of entropy expressed as *Caverns* progresses. The forms and structures of society, as Dogeye philosophises about open spaces, fall slowly apart as the expedition moves farther and farther from recognizable civilization. The clearest expression of this is in characters' attire. Rodney's loss of a button symbolises his loss of power as the group moves far beyond the power of capital. Rodney is a self-proclaimed businessman and empiricist, incapable of the faith required of truly searching for ancient mysteries through archaeology (130). When he asks of Ned, 'Where's that black-assed driver?' Loach expresses the position of the anti-racist faction: 'The color of a man's skin has nothing to do with his heart' (190-191). When the literalist Rodney quips, 'I didn't say his heart . . . I said his ass' Loach grabs the cigar out of Rodney's mouth and throws it out the window (191). The cigar is a phallic symbol of capitalistic and patriarchal power that Loach actively abolishes, leaving Rodney speechless and without power.

Father Paul D'Angelo, Paul of the Angels, who becomes the most beatific character at the end of the novel, is a priest at odds with the Catholic church for its rigidity. Paul drinks too much and plays cards and swears. To symbolise Father Paul's conflict he has a gold chalice 'Bent six ways from Sunday' (7). It is Father Paul, the most

outwardly religious character on the expedition, wearing the traditional collar of a Catholic priest, who first begins to change his outward appearance. When confronted with the idea of entering the Mormon Tabernacle he removes his collar and leaves it behind in the Casualty Carrier (64). This is only the first article of his priestly identity he loses. Paul, because of his religious affiliation, most clearly represents the Christian pilgrim and ends up most clearly changing his life radically as a result of his journey. Like Dogeye's environmental philosophy Paul comes to feel closest to God in the wilderness: 'All those years bottled up in that cloister, mildewing like a rancid dream. One had but to step outside, into the sweet high sky, to see God in every leaf, every star, every breath . . . The sin is to turn your back on nature' (216). Here Father Paul's revelation is clearly that of the man rejecting his institution for a transcendental faith in the natural world in relation to the individual. The cloister is simply another form of prison cell; both Father Paul and Loach being confined by civilization as a result of their faith. Without his glasses, a technological object he loses two-thirds of the way through the novel, he can clearly see, or myopically see what for him is a greater, more profound, truth—a most modern way of seeing the relationship between technology, institutions, and individual truth. Most of the characters in *Caverns* are looking for some kind of verification that there is a true magic in the world to which they can bestow their faith. Few find it, but for Father Paul: 'Feeling clean and sure as never before in his life, he walked on, washed by the dark magic of nature' (216). Here magic, even possibly black magic, when combined with nature creates the most profound, and convincing, conversion in the novel. Ironically it occurs before the expedition even reaches the cavern where the other characters hope to find their truths.

It is at this point that the humorous conversation between Father Paul and Gaby

takes place. Just at the point where Paul finds a new salvation in a new truth, a new interpretation of Christianity, Gaby has found that the truth of Loach's magic is all an old carnival lie. This revelation comes when she reads his journal. She and Father Paul sit looking over the book. Father Paul, without his glasses, cannot clearly see that at which he looks. The humour comes from the polysemous nature of their conversation. Every time Gaby reveals some falsehood or trick from Loach's book Father Paul interprets her pronouns to be referring to God. So, when Gaby says, 'There isn't a shred of truth in any of it!' Father Paul takes it to mean truth in the Church, which he has just a moment before rejected in favour of a personal, transcendental Christianity. Black Humour, which was identified as one of the clearest aesthetic principles of Kesey's earliest writings, is never entirely abandoned in Kesey's career. The element of humour here is further heightened by Gaby's trust in Father Paul's chastity coming into conflict with Paul's new found amorousness.

Father Paul's conversion gives him energy and makes him impervious to the night's cold. As his conversion continues the next article he discards is his prayer missal: 'He sent the book fluttering away, a scripted dove in the mountains' (231). His spontaneous prayers begin to splice freely together disparate parts of the Bible with events from the expedition, which he embraces with religious significance. Next goes his jacket (238), then his collarless shirt (240). All of Father Paul's structures fall away, more so than any other character in the novel, until by the end he walks alone in the wilderness entirely naked.

Paul never makes it into the cavern at all, because his conversion occurs before reaching it. Another character who goes through a significant conversion is Chick Ferrel, who never leaves the cavern. Chick, the *ex-San Francisco Chronicle* reporter and

expedition photographer who dies on the journey, is sympathetic to Loach from the beginning. Chick like Father Paul, 'was seeing things more clearly than he could ever recall' (232). As if party to Gaby and Paul's conversation of the previous night, Chick sees some things in religious terms, 'The stunted pines among the lichen-spotted boulders looked like hands lifted in bleak prayer' (233). He also sees the world in terms of humour and nobility. Also like Paul, Chick has a surge of energy on the hike to the cavern opening and his nose ceases running for the first time in years. Paul's philosophy changes when, through the loss of his glasses, his visual perspective shifts; the realm of Chick's conversion is olfactory. Unlike Father Paul, who completely abandons the expedition as an anchor for meaning, Chick comes alive with purpose through the process of searching for the cavern's secrets. Obviously the cavern, what it represents as a mystery which tempts people to find its solution, is needed as a point of pilgrimage rather than the answers it provides. What happens to the individual en route is more important than the destination itself.¹²

When Loach notices that Paul begins losing articles of clothing Gaby comments, 'We're all shedding things' (239). In essence each character loses some artificial or untrue part of his or her self in the process of the journey. Gaby becomes lost and separated from the rest of the expedition in the total darkness of the cavern. In her description she expresses her choice of attitude in the face of this adversity in a modern world: 'I can accept my fate as a helpless being in the face of this callous, amoral, mechanized, messed-up universe, or I can break down and weep like a woman' (289). Needless to say she both accepts her fate with cynical stoicism and alternately cries. Despite her emotional breakdown at this point she never gives up the strength needed for her and her unborn

¹²Kesey's performance art practices express this same emphasis on process over product.

child's survival, and thus collapses the problem of the oppositional dyad that *Caverns* exhibits at the beginning as its foundational structure. Prior to this Gaby confronts Loach with his cynical carney cons written in his journal. When he says that those sentiments had been written a long time ago he, like his brother Dogeye, admits what new object has grown in importance in his life: 'Open sky. That's what matters' (239).

In contrast to open sky the cavern is a space where all light from the world is shut out, thus causing the characters to confront their own dark psyches: 'Crawling back up the throat of the unknown erased their individuality' (280). The novel advocates a philosophy of individualism, and ironically it is the cavern itself that brings the characters closer together in a group as more whole individuals. The ultimate revelation of the cavern's painted wall is a pieced together symbol:

The stickman hunter shooting an arrow? She'd seen him herself, in the Gasulla Gorge in Spain. Why was his arrow sticking out of the Michelin Man? It was as if someone had simply shuffled an archeological textbook in with the funny papers. The wall was some kind of cosmic joke, short-circuiting, one age across another, a vomit of our collective unconscious, all of the images potent and familiar and crazed. (300)

The text remains ambiguous as to exactly how this artifact came about. It is assumed that Loach and Dogeye had discovered some authentic wall paintings in the past, and that during Loach's incarceration Dogeye added significantly to the painting, thus destroying any legitimate cultural estimation it might have. The splicing together of comic strip imagery with archaeological icons make up the imaginative mysticism of Dogeye's creative mind as well as that of the collective unconscious.

Characters who begin the novel with a more or less solid purpose, like Paul, Chick, and Rodney, end up losing their heads in the process of the expedition. Juke, who begins the novel with the most addled brain of all the characters, ends up regaining some

of the mental capacity lost in the Great War. When Juke descends into the cavern he begins putting his memory back in order. We see him from Loach's point-of-view: 'He watched the little man light a match, throw it to the ground. Light another, throw it to the ground. Little truths, flaring and burning out, one after another' (247). This symbol works to represent Juke's mental process as well as the mental structures of each character; the expedition's characters and their truths are abandoned one after another.

A number of literary techniques including symbolism, metaphor, foreshadowing, genre, shifts in narratorial perspective, and paranoia are employed in *Caverns* to examine and promote a philosophy based on transcendent individualism within a community, rather than in opposition to it. Kesey's next novel, illustrating some influence from *Caverns*, would promote a similar approach to an apocalyptic theme written in the science fiction genre.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

SAILOR SONG:

ECOLOGY IN THE SCIENCE FICTION GENRE

It is generally forgotten that ecological consciousness was first fostered as an urgent theme by science fiction writers.

George Hay, back cover of Michael Coney's *Syzygy* (1973).

It is suggested that ecologically-minded texts, especially those written in the science fiction genre, are explicitly activist in their orientation and intent, and are thus pedagogic warnings about the coming realities of the planet's ecological demise and ways in which humans will have to deal with it. Brian McHale describes a feedback loop in the aesthetic development of the novel by which mainstream novelists William S. Burroughs and Thomas Pynchon directly influenced the generation of cyberpunk novelists who then influenced Burroughs and Pynchon to write in more clearly science fiction modes.¹ Ken Kesey, a contemporary of both Burroughs and Pynchon, is the post-war mainstream novelist who is most clearly ecologically minded in his early work.² Kesey then, responding to science fiction as a literary genre that has fostered ecological ideas, turns to

¹For an excellent discussion on science fiction's adoption of mainstream postmodern fiction's language and subsequent adoption of science fiction motifs by mainstream postmodern novelists see Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1992) 225-242.

²Kesey also mentions his specific appreciation of science fiction New Wave and Cyberpunk writing in Carolyn Knox-Quinn, 'Collaboration in the Writing Classroom: An Interview with Ken Kesey.' *College Composition and Communication* 41.3 (Oct. 1990) 316.

the eco-science fiction novel as the form with which to shift from Cold War concerns of superpowers and nuclear holocaust to those of ecological disaster.

There is a long history of disasters in science fiction dating at least from the early nineteenth century. During the last thirty-five years of the twentieth century cultural impulses shifted their attention in environmentally conscious ways. In the 1970s, as the Cold War cooled down, the domestic fear from radioactive pollution as well as other toxic pollutants grew, and in the 1980s and 90s, as the Cold War anxieties nearly disappeared altogether, environmental fear continued to grow with ideas of global warming becoming more widely accepted. As mainstream novelists began adopting science fiction themes and imagery into their texts, and then science fiction authors began responding to science fiction influenced aesthetics, the eco-science fiction novel genre reached a flourishing in the 1990s. Jonathan Bate's introduction to *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) pinpoints the historical moment of 1989-90, the time in which the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall was one of the most significant global cultural events to occur, coincidentally the time in which Kesey began devoting his energies to the composition of *Sailor Song*, as the period in which the West's (mainly U.S. and British) primary anxiety shifted from that of Marxist ideology generally and Soviet nuclear aggression specifically to fears concerning the global environment.³ Al Gore has made a convincing argument for making environmental anxiety the central defining force for the global village to fill the vacuum left in the wake of the Cold War, an idea reflected in the literature of the 1990s.⁴

³Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991) 1.

⁴Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Ken Kesey's last large solo-novel *Sailor Song* weaves a tale of apocalyptic survival at the end of the earth. Kesey's only science fiction novel, *Sailor Song* incorporates elements of science fiction to make both ecological and social commentary. Composed between 1981, when Kesey worked as a consultant for the shooting of the film version of Farley Mowat's *Never Cry Wolf* (Disney 1983), and its publication in 1992, the majority of writing took place between 1989 and 1991.⁵ During the composition of *Caverns* most of its many authors were working on fiction projects of their own. I showed Kesey a draft of an, as yet, unpublished science fiction novel I was working on at the time. Shortly after looking at my draft Kesey found inspiration to make one major change to *Sailor Song*: 'Alaskans are so proud of their own lore that you've got to make sure every detail of history is absolutely correct. So, I decided to set my Alaska Book [*Sailor Song*] in the future to free me from such constraints' (Kesey, Interview 1996).

Sailor Song's release elicited mixed reviews. *The Washington Post* chided that Kesey had written the novel in a style '... that is so ill at ease on the page that it seems on the verge of converting itself into a bad television mini-series and then being canceled for lack of interest before we can put it down.'⁶ Matthew Rick writes: 'While a great many passages demonstrate that Kesey still has a flair for "turning a phrase," this is not enough to save the novel's overall weak storyline. The story frequently loses the reader and the ending is particularly confusing and unresolved' (*Tarnished Galahad*). In

⁵Derek Elley, ed., *Variety Movie Guide* (London: Hamlyn, 1994) 628.

⁶David Streitfield, *The Washington Post* 9 Sept. 1992: C7.

actuality, and it is mystifying why so many readers reported confusion when the book came out, Kesey's prose in *Sailor Song* is amazingly lucid, especially compared with the complex cut-up methods employed in *Sometimes a Great Notion*. In *Sailor Song* Kesey uses cut-up only at the climax of the novel during the apocalyptic catastrophe. In one paragraph in the final chapter of the work there are five characters' points of view expressed in two cycles:

. . . here was a target worthy of her wrath. *Benedicta tu in mulieribus*
 Shoola made the candle flame quiver *et benedictus fructus ventris tui* Jesus
 you'll swamp me! Out, out, out! And the rest of you back off, off, off!
 GASES DETECTED MT LASSEN LITMUS STATION (510)

In this example, the most complex in the novel, the use of icons such as 'her wrath' for Alice and 'swamp me' for Ike, a language other than English, Latin in this case, for Father Pribilof, the use of a character's name for Shoola, and uppercase typography for the radio transmissions received by the Radio Man keeps the reader, following the context of the narrative, directly on track with the action that jumps between different settings. Other than these variations on traditional narrative technique, each chapter of the novel is told over the shoulder of a different character.

Set in a small fishing village on the coast of Alaska some unknown place somewhere between Skagway and Kodiak Island ten or twenty years into the twenty-first century, the location of the city in which the novel is set is fictitious. Like Waconda of *Sometimes a Great Notion*'s Oregon coast, Kuinak is a vivid and believable place. In order to make it so the narrator gives clues as to its location as if it were real. The second of these comes from the 600 mile plane ride the hero and his sidekick make from Kuinak east to Skagway, which would place Kuinak somewhere west of Prince William Sound

near Seward, Alaska. The first, and most specific, indicator of the town's location is a reference to the Russian explorer after whom the Bering Strait is named: 'Vitus Bering was the first man to set spyglass to this bay, tucked away like an elephant's mouth up under the curving trunk of the Aleutians—July 20, 1741—but he sailed on when his men rowed back with reports of no ermine sign' (45). As for the real Bering, his ship made a landing on Kayak Island, two hundred miles east of Seward, on 20 July, 1741, but all Steller, the ship's naturalist, found was a fox and some grass, and there is no city there today.⁷

Speaking of why Alaska is the setting for an apocalyptic novel, the narrator explains that, 'there used to be Brazil, but they cut it down to pay their Third World debt to the First and Second, who fed it to McDonald's' (43). These hints at ecological destruction occurring in the twentieth century are sparsely used. 'The moon? Mars? The Fractal Farm? No game, sorry. The planet Earth is the ball we were pitched—it's the ball we have to play' (43). Alaska is the true Final Frontier; the perfect place to play out the end of an era. The last words of the novel are: 'Most of the similar slopes south of Kuinak are already stricken or wounded at this story's start—festering along road cuts, choked by thick air, cooked and confused by the Anarchy of the Age' (533). Alaska, while not entirely free from such problems in the near future, is freer than most places.

TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

The elements of science fiction presented in *Sailor Song* fall into two basic categories. One is along the lines of technological development, and the other descriptions

⁷F.A. Golder, *Bering's Voyages: An Account of the Effects of the Russians to Determine the Relation of Asia and America* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1968) 96.

of the natural catastrophe that brings on the social upheaval of a more or less typical science fiction apocalypse. Many science fiction novels of this kind are post-apocalyptic in nature, that is, taking place after the disaster or event which has made the social changes that are this type of novel's main subject. *Sailor Song* is set around the event itself, though the main purpose is to illustrate human reaction to it.⁸ One interesting twist to the genre in *Sailor Song* resides in the fact that the action, and thus the characters, forgets the apocalypse for long segments, sometimes as long as whole chapters of the novel. In addition to the natural catastrophe and the technological developments in place at the time the novel's action occurs, there are also a few social changes that have taken place in the score years between publication and the recent future in which the novel is set. These events include: an earthquake and tsunami in Alaska in 1994 (which did not happen); a new Japanese Current (bringing warmer waters to the Gulf of Alaska); a radiation leak from a nuclear submarine known as the Trident Rupture; a worldwide cure for the AIDS virus; a United States war with Israel and the extinction of cannabis and cocaine based drug plant life. The last of these developments is the most interesting: 'Genetic spray flights were already introducing the unisex recombinants by then, setting off a botanical chain reaction that was so successful it rendered all dangerous vegetables fruitless within a few years' (457). It becomes difficult to separate social developments from technological innovations at this point because Kesey links so closely the cause and effect message of the way in which solutions to problems of the twentieth century ironically create new problems in the twenty-first.

None of the technological developments in *Sailor Song* revolutionise our view of the world radically. For the most part they are evolutions of technical achievements very

⁸Eco-science fiction novels as a genre fall into these two categories with a fair degree of consistency: one post-apocalyptic, the other disaster stories.

close to those in existence at the time of publication. Some examples of technology in the next century are: Israeli produced Uziettes, a .22 caliber-sized pistol more easily concealable than any contemporary semi-automatic weapon, but capable of oozing out dozens of tiny yet lethal rounds of ammunition in seconds; beepboards, a computer smaller than today's laptops yet larger than Apple's Newton; and the computerised Loranav ship's navigation system linking sonar depth graphic imaging with shoreline radio beam beacons and orbital satellite global positioning systems which is basically a description of contemporary state-of-the-art systems currently employed (See Appendix E).

ECOLOGICAL DISASTER

Sailor Song hints at its ecologically minded motto early on:

The Thing itself, here at last, both hell-whelped and man-made, right in front of him . . . the unnatural spawn of meddling as Claude Rains had meddled in that horror classic *The Invisible Man* "With Things Man Was Meant to Leave alone." (4)

The description is that of a cat with its head stuck in a mayonnaise jar: a humorous domestic metaphor told in Gothic terms of importance to nature. As humorous as it may seem, and one finds the novel riddled with humour, it stands as a metaphor for more serious human meddling woven from the beginning of the book to the end. The clash between Gothic seriousness and Black Humour here comes from the perspectival suspension of confirmation of the cat's identity.

Part of what Kesey is doing in *Sailor Song* is following up on that which he foregrounded in *Sometimes a Great Notion*, in which he describes eco-terrorist tactics of

combating the logging industry in Oregon; tactics that had been used by the Wobblies, the International Workers of the World, active early in the twentieth century in the Northwest, and which the Earthfirst! people later adopted in their fight to preserve old growth forest from destruction. In *Sometimes a Great Notion* the heroes are members of the family run, small logging operations, against whom organised union members use the eco-terrorist tactics. The plot of the novel pitches these two rival logging organisations in battle against one another with little or no concern for the natural environment.

Thirty years after Kesey's heroes are loggers attacking the land, the hero of *Sailor Song* is an ex-eco-terrorist, retired from direct action in defense of nature. When Ike Sallas, the 'Bakatcha Bandit', meets Clark B Clark, the flunky of the novel's primary human villain, Nicholas Levertov, Clark tries to imply a connection between himself and Sallas by mentioning his own protests of infractions against the environment: "Yeah, keep it under your hat, but ol' Clark B was expelled from San Jose State for dynamiting the outlet of their grey water shunt that I found out was running directly into the bay" (108). Clark here serves to imply that all causes involve both villains and heroes.

Sometime in the late 1990s, Sallas acted as the figurehead of an eco-terrorist movement. His own actions were stunts of outrage directed at the average citizen, but the people who follow him take the eco-terrorism to another level. Flying over the site of the 1989 Exxon-Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound, Sallas reminisces about his followers:

There had even been bandit strikes on the tankers themselves that came steaming into the sound—minor computer-jamming usually, by radical hackers with virtual dish-ins—but some Big Oilers had been torpedoed outright. Unmanned outboards were loaded with plastics and aimed in collision course through the dark. You grease us, we grease right back atcha. (124)

There is an implied support by Sallas of these radical measures, though he seems not to have had the inclination to do more than get attendees at the State fair stinky and dirty himself. He calls the season when he was doing direct action 'his summer of vengeful folly' suggesting that his efforts, and those of the people who followed him, had little or no impact on the global environmental crisis at hand (124). The 'vengeful' quality of Sallas' activity also raises issues of the extent to which the individual should act from personal conviction. As a war veteran Sallas also parallels McMurphy in a number of ways. Both characters are charismatic men representative of the rugged Western individualist whose personal magnetism is sought out by others in the face of social struggle. Where McMurphy's ultimate rise to the challenge results in the escape of most of the ward's inmates Sallas is ignored by those who had sought his leadership at an earlier time.

Sallas is a fisherman at the outset of the novel, but a fisherman with a past. He is still a pilot, and a pilot with a varied and illustrious career. His first flying experience comes from his work for the CIA dropping pamphlets, false currency, an occasional bomb, and spraying a chemical over cocaine and marijuana fields in Central and South America in order to render the drug producing plants extinct (121). He also flew rescue missions in the war with Israel (122).⁹ Sallas works as a cropduster in California after his military service. It is during this period that his daughter is born 'a spina bifida baby, with enlarged cranium and a section of her lower backbone exposed' (127-128). When the baby is hospitalised Sallas begins to make a connection between his CIA work and his

⁹Kesey's three most clear fictional heroes are war veterans (McMurphy and Hank Stamper of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion* respectively served in Korea), though Kesey himself was kept out of the military by a wrestling injury. The fact that Kesey's father served in the Navy during World War Two combined with his close relationship with Vietnam veteran, Ken Babbs, may be two particular reasons for his veneration of military men.

child's deformity: ' . . . Ike was fretting if the defect might not have come from him (all those runs over the coke slopes in Ecuador, for example? spraying those botanical recombinants?) . . . ' (128). And when the baby dies he continues with the same thinking:

The clandestine flights in the venomous little Nightmoths; the pesticido planes; the subversion of a natural process in the name of a Bug-Free Drug-Free Thug-Free World. And it works—infinitesimal alterations at the genetic level. And why not? It makes sense, it preserves personnel, it saves money and it keeps the collateral damage at a minimum. Of course, there was always the possibility that if you mess around with it long enough you might get some of it on you. (129)

In the tangled web connecting the individual (Sallas) to the social (Drug-War) the specific example of one man's loss through 'the subversion of a natural process' represents human interference with the entire eco-sphere. The narrative here suggests that Sallas is the one infected by the pesticides from his Drug-War work, but it is his daughter who bears the consequences: a more pernicious, less traceable, less comfortable outcome.

Sallas feels himself retired from social action and concern about the environment. He states that it was not the jail-time he did that forced him to move to Alaska and retire, but the breakup of his marriage, and thus the breaking of his heart. For Sallas the CIA work, the death of his daughter, his environmental activism, and heartbreak are an unseverable sequence. The novel's tension resides in the potential for that heart's spark to be re-ignited. Accepting a ride from Alice, who becomes Sallas' first lover in years in the course of the novel, the little Alaskan girl, Nell hugs his chest: 'Not fair, he thought, not fair at all. One side says it's running down, then the other side says "Oh yeah?"' (309).¹⁰ These two sides are halves of his heart. One side has given up, resigned itself to

¹⁰Alice Carmody, part Indian, runs her own business, though co-owned by her husband, with whom she manages to negotiate a relationship open enough to allow both of them to explore sexual relations outside of the marriage and even, apparently, find other loves.

the entropic fact that the Earth is dying and love long dead. The other side thinks that the Earth might just still be worth saving, love possible. At the end of this ride Sallas discovers the stakes that have been driven into his front yard telling of the new construction that is threatening to change the natural shape of the land in Kuinak in the wake of development that has followed the movie crew to Alaska to make a film. Here Hollywood is seen as a symbol of capitalist culture robbing the Native American of its ritualistic culture, as well as causing environmental change in its wake. Faced with sudden, local, personal affronts to the land Sallas begins to reinvest in the cause.

Part of the main plot of the novel centers around a Hollywood film company coming to Kuinak to make a movie of a traditional Alaskan aboriginal story 'Shoola and the Sea Lion.' Midway through the novel a character takes the time to read the entire story, which is beautifully and originally told.¹¹ As the centre-piece of the novel, the native fable serves as a fulcrum at a number of levels in the action. At one level its non-native authorship discusses ritualistic and transferable aspects of culture in general. At another level the potlatch exchange of totemistic objects with actual power foregrounds more complex exchanges in Kesey's subsequent novel.

'Shoola and the Sea Lion' is set in a coastal village in ancient Alaska. As Eemook, the village's crippled spoon maker, works on the beach he hears the men of the village chant: '... a song in praise of the sea. It called the sea an adversary that should be ever battled, a "Great Warrior" from whom the victories of food must be won' (186). This view, placed in ancient thinking by the novel, is that of male domination which has led the world to its current environmental crisis. The women of the village sing a song as

11 Kesey published this story under the title *The Sea Lion* as an illustrated book the year before *Sailor Song*'s release. As in the novel, the story rings with native American authenticity though written by a White man from the lower forty-eight.

well: 'Their song claimed that the sea was a Mighty Mother that should be feared for her ferocity, and honored for the care and nourishment she granted her children' (186). The Green thinking here of honor, care and nourishment, as well as due wariness, expresses clear opposition in diametric relation to the masculine. Eemook, like the novel itself early on, seems to have a less serious, more ambivalent view: "'The sea is nothing but a great big bowl of fish stew!'" (186).

The natural disaster at *Sailor Song*'s apocalyptic end is sparsely explained, primarily because the novel's concern is with how humans deal with adversity and not the adversity itself. The clues as to what this phenomenon is can be found foregrounded early on in the novel. Greer, a fisherman afraid of the water and taking Tonto's role as sidekick in the traditional Western narrative paradigm (also similar to that of Bromden to McMurphy in *Cuckoo's Nest*), exchanges views about the mice that have been climbing into the fishing boat's fuel tank with his partner Sallas:

The mice have become gas-heads, mon . . . Another symptom of the Ee-fect, is what New Light claims. Even the animals be committing suicide. . . Hey, all those beached greys in San Diego? The deer laying down on highways in Idaho and Utah? . . . The Effect starved them down out of the mountains . . . It depresses 'em . . . I feel de heavy pressure drop coming. (24-25)

Greer knows some catastrophe is coming, but he knows not what it will be. Greer, like the 'Shoola' fable, is an authentic fake representing a native cultural value while being a surface fabrication. Sallas remains sceptical of Greer's environmental warnings; that is until he sees the effects of the Effect first hand. Greer goes on to worry about a new natural, yet unexplained phenomenon:

. . . he fretted about those new oddities called Tinkerbells that had been reported by some Arctic crabbers. New Light proclaimed these must be manifestations of insulted Undines, these Tinkerbell things—vengeful elementals rising up against seafarers for the way they had misused the Mother Sea. (26)

Whether the Tinkerbells are a direct result of human destruction of the eco-sphere is not divulged directly in the novel, though the ecological stance remains clear.

Some critics have said that the natural disaster which brings on a reducing and reorganising of Earth's social systems causes confusion for readers of the novel. At the end of the work the descriptions are from a purely human point-of-view. No mad scientist appears to tell the characters or the reader what is really happening, but an explanation is foregrounded in the text nonetheless. The Effect is the Earth's way of adjusting to the stress imposed upon it by millennia of use and abuse. The largest example we have to illustrate this comes from plate tectonic theory. An earthquake is a sudden shifting of hundreds of square miles of the earth's surface and sub-surface to relieve the tension built up as large sections of the earth move in opposition to one another. On a regional scale an earthquake can level houses and buildings, kill thousands, and reduce life to a primitive level by severing all forms of technological infrastructure: gas lines, electric lines, telephone lines, watermains. The Effect in *Sailor Song* has a similar result, but on a global scale. It is not tectonic plates that are readjusting to stress but the magnetic field that surrounds the entire globe and affects every atom within its sphere of influence. The symptoms of this shift in the magnetic field are expressed metaphorically and meteorologically. Foregrounding for this is present in the novel:

Such stories. Some long and slow, like that million-year-long saga of the Supercontinents' heartbreaking breakup; some of them quick cryptic puzzlers, like why should the molecules in a certain stratum of clamshell fossils (circa twelve thousand five hundred years ago), after eons of

pointing their little negative molecular tails one direction, north, all of a sudden in the very next layer above, turn and point negative south? (44)

The answer to the puzzle is the explanation for the shifting of magnetic poles that takes place at the end of the novel. The result is that all technology developed with contemporary circuit boards (thus the importance of presenting technological developments in the novel and the characters' dependence upon them) fails in an instant. The explanation, never explicitly stated in the novel, is that circuits made before the shift of magnetic poles can only flow in the direction under which they were made. The closest theoretical parallel would be an Electro-Magnetic Pulse created by the detonation of a thermonuclear device in the upper atmosphere. When the Effect occurs we see the technology failing first: 'The phones have been fritzing all morning like everything else' (455). With the introduction of the Tinkerbells, wind, and purple mist which signifies the beginning of the Effect coming on, the technologically advanced ships, driven by turbo-magnetic motors, lose both navigational power and movement abilities.

Michael Carmody, the Captain of the main characters' fishing boat, tries to make light of the irreversible changes that occur: 'It was just some kind of freakish storm, Mr Steubins. Spot of sheet lightning gave our electronics a power surge' (467). This power surge is permanent however, or twelve thousand five hundred years long at any rate. His crew give more guttural descriptions of the sensation they have when the positive and negative poles in all of their atoms shift 180 degrees in an instant. Greer asks: 'You ever unwrap a stick of gum and get a little piece of tinfoil in your mouth? . . . You know the way it feels when the foil hits a filling? Like something's got cross-wired?' (474). Ike uses a different experience to describe the sensation:

It's like the silence that preceded an eclipse of the sun. . . . just before it goes total a thing happens. It's called the Ripple Effect. . . . For miles around every entity sucks in its breath and goes dead quiet. Singers, drinkers, birds, donkeys, dogs; the cells in the flesh and probably the charged particles in the cells. (475)

The charged particles felt in a solar eclipse react less drastically than the change happening when the magnetic poles shift. The Effect renders motorised vehicles useless because they use ignition cards to be started: 'Its [the outboard motor's] magnetic strip had become a twisted moire design. "Yeah, it's screwed up"' (478). However, the Effect does not render the motors inoperable completely; if the design is primitive enough the motor can be hot-wired to restart. Further evidence suggesting that the Effect is that of the magnetic poles shifting comes from one of the devices aboard ship that fail; the compass, which points constantly to magnetic north: 'There was a three-gallon tank of spare gas, some hand flares, a chemical flashlight, a sea anchor and another little compass with its needle spinning crazily' (485). Quartzware crystal wristwatches also go a little awry, spinning counterclockwise.¹² Back in Kuinak the old fashioned tube shortwave radio picks up transmissions from a few outposts around the world with a report: '. . . all magnetic memory systems deleted, tape and disk, mainframe and backup; all digital chipware scrambled; all nations in turmoil, all people in godless despair' (494). All these bits of explanation and evaluation provided by the narrator or characters in the novel make it clear, for any reader of the text, what the Effect is and why.

Before the suddenness of the Effect we see only the slow, subtle symptoms of the stress under which the planet suffers—global warming for example. In Kuinak:

¹²The image of chronometers running backwards is found in earlier eco-science fiction novels like those of J.G. Ballard: *The Drowned World* (1963. Leister: Dragon Dream B.V., 1981) 31; *The Drought* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965) 41.

The temperatures are still much like always, average thirty-seven to sixty-five degrees in summer, and seven to thirty degrees in winter, extremes varying from a record of forty-five below zero in the winter of '89 to a not-uncomfortable ninety-nine on the famous Firecracker Fourth when the mercury reached 119 in DC and all the cherry trees died. (48)

Being set in the not too distant future the level of warming is not made that much higher than temperatures today, but the implication is that the temperatures will continue to rise until some pressure in the system is relieved. Gerhardt Steubins, the motion picture magnate trying to pitch the making of a film in Kuinak, uses global warming as a selling point for why Alaska is still, or newly, a paradise: ““You know what the temperature was in New York yesterday? One-twelve. It never dropped below a hundred until just before dawn”” (113). Summer in Alaska, even today, is pleasant; in a warmer near future it could be a paradise.

The changes in climate are not limited to temperature alone. On the 600 mile plane ride to Skagway Sallas notes that, ‘The motor sounded reliable but you could never tell about the weather, not these days’ (124). This is not a scientific assessment of the situation, but an observation by a character who works in the elements. When the two Captains, Carmody and Steubins, meet the studio magnate asks Carmody if he is the highliner, big fisherman, that people have told him about. Carmody’s response is: ‘Nobody can be a real highliner anymore, not like you used to could. There’s not enough fish left in the ol’ barrel’ (320). Many species other than humans are on the decline in the context of the novel. When the apocalypse occurs radio messages report: ‘OZONE OFF THE SCALE’ (510). It is the magnetic field which is the explanation for the phenomena occurring, and because everything in the system is so integrally linked so many different symptoms are seen.

ENVIRONMENTAL SELF-RECLAMATION

The action of the novel ends by advocating a resignation to the natural disaster by placing its faith in the environmental self-reclamation of the Earth. When the novel is making light of social order at large it seems to be thumbing its nose: ‘His only piece of wall art was a comic postcard common in a lot of souvenir shops: a black-and-white aerial photograph of Kuinak and its ragged environs, with the joke line in big red capitals: GREETINGS FROM THE END OF THE WORLD!’ (176). This is where location meets event. When Sallas finally decides to resist development in Kuinak his shift from Eemook’s child-like over-simplification to the female Nurturing is clear. He quotes Thomas Paine in his speech before the town: ‘O ye that love mankind, that honor the earth and respect the general denizens thereof!’ (414). Sallas believes, again, that love of mankind (the heart) must go along with honouring both the earth and the beings that share it with Man.

One technological development not mentioned so far, or even in the appendix, centers on Marley, the talking dog. The one time the dog literally speaks, and it is a revolutionary moment in the book, there is no mention of how this is possible.¹³ Mention of recombinant botanicals occurs a number of times, but recombinant DNA in a mammal as sophisticated as that of a dog fails to receive mention; perhaps the characters in the novel simply take it for granted:

“This yard is worthless, fool!” Ike told the old dog. “Why the hell watch over it?”

Watching, the old dog answered, “Seems to fill space between

¹³A similar, more naturalised, that is to say even more unexplainable, instance of such a talking dog can be found in Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* (44).

what's now and what's to come, sir, like sniffing old tracks and scratching old bites . . . It seems to pad out the hard, unupholstered relentless space just a little . . . sir." (312)

Marley's speech, and it seems like such being the final word in the chapter, delivers one part of the novel's motto—that people should relax and enjoy troubled times as best as they can. When Sallas is stranded in a small inflatable motorboat at the height of the storm, which is the result of the Effect, he lies back in the bottom of the boat and lets it run into the wind: 'Might as well try to get comfortable. You never know how long the End of the World is liable to take' (481). He seems to have learned this philosophy from Marley.

Michael Carmody constantly sings a song of the heart on their return from the fishing trip to Kuinak. As in the fishing trip in *Cuckoo's Nest*, in *Sailor Song* it occurs three quarters of the way through the novel, effecting a structural role in the narrative whereby its action establishes the terms of the novel's final conflict. In its presentation 'The Prickle-Eye Bush' song represents the novel's motto for dealing with the apocalyptic end of the world through metaphor:

The ballad's narrative continues right out over the precipice, into the void. The trap drops, but your futile vow still keeps on, squeaking out of your stretched neck like a corkscrew squeaking back out of a cork, vowing, even from the black beyond, that if you ever get out of the prickle-eye bush . . . you'll never go in it anymore. (230)

The ballad's narrative is not only that of the song, but of the novel as well, foreshadowing the continuation of *Sailor Song's* narrative after the natural disaster. The black beyond is the pseudo-dark ages which will be the era after the technology fails. The vow, ultimately, is that given some kind of reprieve, if human kind survives the dark times that will come with the ecological collapse in the wake of human's destruction of the eco-

sphere, then humans will never go back to destroying the Earth as they once did.

One bit of foregrounding for environmental self-reclamation comes in the form of a description of the Underdog Cemetery on the hill above the town of Kuinak. Relating a bit of the town's history, the passage explains the building of a road up the hill to access the water tower at the hill's top:

Then the night after the road was finished a little tremor twitched down the flank of the Pyrites. A 3.6 or 4. Nothing. Except the next day's dawn revealed that the road was gone. It had been completely rurfed with bright green grass and salal. Everything above the road had simply slid down to conceal the unsightly gash. (367)

The Earth here is nearly personified with a twitch in order to plaster over the wounds Man has made in the planet's surface. The very end of the novel presents a five-page long appendix giving a brief pseudo-scientific view of the natural environment in which the novel is set. These few pages illustrate a number of examples of the sensitivity and resilience of the Earth: 'There used to be an abundance of clams, but the 1994 earthquake tsunami brought down eight inches of new silt and clogged the sucker's suckers. No clams since then. The balance is delicate' (530). No regret, no blame, just a simple statement of the delicate balance maintained within the eco-system. After clams come the woodpecker: 'They were gradually eliminated in the lower forty-eight, coincidentally with the old growth. Woody was traded for pulp-board speaker cabinets made in Korea' (531). Here there is just a hint of blame, but it is not a revenge seeking blame; rather an expression of the Newtonian balance where everything taken from the closed system must inevitably affect another part of that same system. From blameless delicate balance to terrible trade-off the appendix moves to the hope of terrestrial succession: 'This is the term used to describe how life naturally comes back into an area after a full-scale natural

devastation. . . . How long does this putting-back normally take? Forty million years? Forty thousand? Not at all. In less than forty seasons this can happen' (532). It is this hopeful 'putting-back', this environmental self-reclamation, that the novel seems to be relying on. This does not suggest that the destruction is not horrible, that it will not come with a terrible cost; it is suggesting a possibility that we will survive and be able to take better care of the world next time around.

CONCLUSION

The eco-science fiction genre is clearly evolving as environmental concerns emerge as more culturally important. Kesey's interests in the genre are grounded in American attitudes to the unspoilt landscape and connections with Nature—he has a firm sense of Nature as an interlocking, balanced system. Geopolitical events of the last decade of the twentieth century changed perceptions of the Cold War, but how literature will be affected in light of the other stresses, over population and environmental crises to name two of the most prominent, remains to be seen. For the meantime we are, gladly or remorsefully so, left with the dilemma of grappling with the fallout of the Cold War era. As long as we are plagued with environmental, as well as others kinds of angst, mainstream and science fiction novelists will be producing ecologically concerned novels attempting to solve actual social problems in fictional worlds. In Kesey's next novel he addresses two other social issues, those of race and gender conflicts, with equal intensity.

CHAPTER NINE:

RACE AND GENDER IN *LAST GO ROUND*

Just because it's in a book doesn't make it not true.

From Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*¹

In 1994 Ken Kesey published a novel in the Western genre, *Last Go Round*, written with Kesey's long standing associate Ken Babbs. The novel tells the story of the first World Championship rodeo competition that took place in Pendleton, Oregon on the weekend of 16 through 18 September, 1911. The story attends to the competition's three front runners: a black man, George Fletcher, a Nez Perce Indian, Jackson Sundown, and a white man by the name of Jonathan E. Lee Spain, who acts as the novel's narrator.²

Matthew Rick claims that *Last Go Round* is, 'Kesey's finest longer work since *Sometimes a Great Notion*' in part because of its lack of ambition (*Tarnished Galahad*). *Notion's* genius comes in part from its epic scale; *Last Go Round's* ambition resides in its attempt to portray the range of racial and gender tensions at work in a small Western town in a three day period of time.³ The novel flirts with being a moral allegory in which

¹Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1994) 29.

²Spain's surname is historical and probably not intended by Kesey and Babbs to be evocative of any Hispanic background. As far as one can discern all the names in the novel are factually correct, which makes their ripeness for allegorical/symbolic allusion that much more powerful.

³The popular success of novels like Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* (1985) and Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* (1992) indicates a revival of the Western as a serious art form.

the cowboy heroes represent chivalric knights and the rodeo arena acts as medieval tournament. *Last Go Round* also develops the steam train as a metaphor for society, the exchange of metaphysical qualities and the building of relationships through gambling and other means, and the employment of racial linguistic tactics to oppress others or combat oppression. Race and gender are two distinctions of difference; conflicts which are negotiated through novelistic action in a fictionalised historical context.

CHIVALRY

Kesey maintains an interest in chivalric paradigms from *Cuckoo's Nest* to his 1999 pageant play *Where's Merlin*. In order to make a Western setting capable of illustrating a chivalric ethos, Kesey and Babbs mix historical truth with fictional embellishment.

According to Rick:

What gives the novel its unique character is the fact that it is history. Not Textbook history, but genuine American folklore centered entirely around a historical event. Kesey is careful to point out in his Introduction that he is not dealing with facts as they agree in a dusty old history book, because no two tellings of the tale agree. (*Tarnished Galahad*)

This 'genuine American folklore' gives Kesey and Babbs the license to stretch the historical truth for their own purposes. Several times in the course of the novel the narrator, the aged white cowboy and former rodeo contender, challenges the reader to look up the results of the 1911 World Championship, and subsequent Round Ups in the history books, warning that the various versions standing as factual record fail to agree

with one another.⁴ This taunting and the admission of historical discrepancy gives the authors free rein to write this history as they see fit. For example the narrator describes the positioning of the Pendleton courthouse in order: 'to give you [the reader] the benefit of a little trick I have discovered to tell the difference between true history and false; the True is generally uncertain, wishy-washy, vague, while the False is often downright positive' (41). The courthouse location introduces Spain's point by cluing the reader into the ethos that humility is righteous and self-righteousness wrong. As Kesey's *Sailor Song* chooses the future to tell its tale in order to avoid issues of historical accuracy, *Last Go Round* uses this more intricate narrative device to put together its own version of the past. However, it is not just a narrative device to give the authors freedom to use historical figures as fictional characters; one of the novel's themes is how to tell good from evil in a person regardless of their racial origin. Spain says, as present tense narrator, 'I've lived here long enough and often enough to feel proud of the straight and true of it, myself, and critical of the crooked and the false' (41).

At the opening of the novel Spain, now an octogenarian, returns to the Pendleton Round Up to see Drew Washington, a young black rodeo rider of the 1990s compared with the old George Fletcher. When Washington and the elderly Spain end up in the same hospital room, Spain tells the story of the original Round Up to the unconscious roommate. In some sense this storytelling acts as an oral transmission of the struggle of race relations from past to the present. It is from this point that the novel modulates into past tense to relate its bygone tale. Just before the hospital scene Spain is drinking in the Let 'Er Buck room at the contemporary Pendleton rodeo. The manner in which the bartender sizes up a topless tart for a T-shirt seems 'most unchivalrous' to him. Things

⁴Though there is a hint of New Journalistic style in this the authors do not insert their own persons in the text in any way.

seem to have changed in the seventy years since he himself began riding at the rodeo, and for the narrator chivalry is the crux of this difference: 'I'm wondering Whatever in the world happened to the famous cowboy chivalry' (3). When an Indian hands him a drink Spain comments: '... isn't it odd how often survival and chivalry seem to turn up together?' (3). Chivalry in *Last Go Round* is a form of survival: a code for behaving in a social environment of conflict.

The rodeo tournament itself, in which the 'knights' compete, acts as an arena which unites individuals in bonds of chivalry. While being fully rendered individuals in their own right, each character represents a racial type and lives for good or evil—their actions, inside the rodeo arena and out, are essential contributions to light and darkness. Contributions made in the form of simple participation, regardless of winners and losers, elevate the spirit of the community as a whole. The semi-chivalric competition between a black, red, and white man provides the most obvious template for discussion of the position of these three racial groups in the society of the American West, but there are yet other races, and another gender within Western society that the novel includes in its account. Within the rodeo spectacle itself, and in Pendleton society, there are also a number of strong women characters who vie for status within the social structure. The actions and physical positioning of all characters in the novel is significant and symbolic of the groups they represent and their struggle for position within American society.⁵

TRAIN METAPHOR

⁵Ed Dorn's poem 'The Sundering U.P. Tracks' may be a source for some of the physical divisions present in *Last Go Round*. More likely it is simply a shared pattern of observation that leads these authors to describe how the railroad in the Western United States divides many communities according to color. Donald Allen, ed., *Edward Dorn: Selected Poems* (Bolinas: Grey Fox Press, 1978) 79-80.

In the third chapter of the novel the three front runners for the first World Championship rodeo title arrive in Pendleton on the same railcar. The pattern of the order of the cars of the train they ride represents a rough hierarchy of Western social order. The trio move through the train from their own boxcar, where their horses are housed, over another boxcar, into an open-topped wheat gondola, yet another boxcar, a flatcar carrying a Rolls-Royce automobile, and then a private passengercar belonging to Portland, Oregon businessman Oliver Nordstrum.⁶ As in many Kesey novels there are good and bad characters on each side of every type. In Oliver Nordstrum's private car the trio of cowboys are introduced to the villains, major and minor, of the narrative including Nordstrum himself, Buffalo Bill Cody, and champion wrestler Frank Gotch, all of them inherently racists. Gotch's racism is described most vividly by the narrator at their first meeting: 'George stood the pressure of Gotch's heavy blue stare without changing expression—his eyes friendly, his grin good-natured. But I had seen that kind of stare before, through eyeholes in white sheets' (23). Spain is obviously referring to Ku Klux Klan members, which Spain could have seen active at the turn of the century.⁷ After Nordstrum's car is the 'cowpokes' car in which a cockfighting ring has been set up.⁸ In the passengercar one forward from the cowpokes' cockfighting car, Fletcher and Spain meet the 'good guy' Pendleton capitalist to act as counterpart to Portland's Nordstrum. Cecil Kell strikes Spain, 'as both exceptional and regular at the same time, high-minded, but with both boots planted firmly in the dirt' (32). This observation is in contrast to the Eastern and urban sense Spain has of Nordstrum and his like. Spain

⁶Oliver Nordstrum is the historical creator of the department store chain and any kind of allusion to Oliver North should be considered merely coincidental.

⁷On the turn of the century Whitecap Movement see Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) 114-115.

⁸Kesey has written about cockfights as early as 1960 in his unpublished early novel *Zoo* (See Strelow 177-188).

observes that ‘Kell was a Westerner of a special cut—exceptional, but not a bit like Buffalo Bill or Gotch were exceptional’ (32). The next two cars beyond that in which Cecil Kell resides are sleeper cars. At the end of the second of the two sleeper cars Fletcher and Spain find the hired help of the train, all black men save for a single Chinese woman (34). This is as far forward in the train as the pair of cowboys get, presumably because the engine would have been beyond the hired help’s car. The social order configured by the order of the cars becomes apparent at the end of their movement through the train. The trio of champions occupy the extreme rear of the train, and they are clearly the most important figures to the narrative. Next is the Eastern and urban big moneyed gambling car occupied by the novel’s villains, which, by providing considerable trouble for the book’s heroes, becomes the focus of one of the major conflicts in the novel. Then comes the cowboys, who are an essential element for the rodeo to take place, then the smalltown, rural capitalists in their own car, and finally the hired help, Chinese and black. Ironically the black men ride in the front of the train as contrast to the historical positioning of blacks in the back of the bus. Upon arriving at the hired help’s living quarters Spain is transported momentarily to a childhood memory—his earliest in the novel—of playing marbles with black children in Tennessee. The room on the train is transformed so that: ‘The faces were cured hams hanging in our smokehouse, where I wasn’t supposed to play—not with the children of our crop hands, anyway’ (35). This brief memory establishes Spain’s transgression of the Southern social code for whites and blacks not to mix; a transgression he would obviously carry on into adulthood. Throughout the novel Spain spends the major portion of his time with either Fletcher or Sundown, a black man and an Indian.

SYMBOLIC EXCHANGES

The seventeen-year-old Jonathan Spain, constantly referred to by other characters as a Southern gentleman, never shows the least prejudice towards any of the characters of color around him.⁹ Since he is the narrator of the story there is no opportunity to see prejudice from Spain, but rather only from his observation of other's acting prejudiced towards his new found friends. In the initial chapters lines are constantly being drawn between the good guys and the bad guys. No simple B-movie black hat/white hat identification is possible here, but the narrative, filtered through Spain's intuition, makes the heroes and villains clear to the reader. The most important of these lines, initially, is to establish a rapport among the three champions who will become the best of friends and comrades. Fletcher and Sundown, we find out later in the narrative, are practically, though not actually, blood brothers—Sundown's family having raised the orphan Fletcher as a boy (119). The bond between the black man and Indian is strong and clear to each other, and is communicated to the reader through Spain's growing understanding of them and their relationship. In order to bring Spain, a stranger to the Pendleton scene, into the circle occupied by Fletcher and Sundown the narrative uses the device of the exchange of symbolic objects between people to establish bonds of friendship, as well as power over others.

On the night before their arrival in Pendleton the three champions engage in some gambling. In *Last Go Round* gambling serves a variety of purposes including the generation of mutuality (establishing meaningful connections between characters who are

⁹Spain is from Tennessee, the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan, which makes his lack of racism an even greater symbol since he grew up in the hotbed of racism in America during the post-Reconstruction period. See Wade 31.

relative strangers to one another), a means of exchange, competition, and revealing positive and negative aspects in characters. In order to establish the triangular relationship among the three champions Jonathan Spain's cowboy boots are exchanged through a series of wagers. These boots act as both a symbol for cowboys in general, and, because of the Confederate flag 'tooled into their leather fronts,' a symbol for the Old South specifically (9). Sundown and Fletcher both take notice of the special boots early on, more for their artistry than as an emblem of racism. The characters' valuation of the boots is that of cowboys admiring fine cowboy gear, and this blindness to the danger of the symbol represents their attitude to all danger, racial and otherwise, through the novel. On the verge of entering Nordstrum's car Sundown introduces his magic good luck coin and suggests a wager with Spain that he cannot guess whether heads or tails will come up on the coin when flipped in the air once out of twenty-five times. The significance is only in that the odds are astronomically against being able to not guess at least once in twenty-five times which face would show on a coin flipped. Sundown puts up his gold nugget against Spain's Confederate flag cowboy boots. When Sundown wins his bet the men exchange shoes creating a bond between Sundown and Spain (18). More than a symbolic gesture of literally walking a mile in another man's shoes, this exchange of intimate and necessary rodeoing equipment carries with it nearly mystical power.

Gambling over the outcome is one of the essential elements of cockfighting, so when Fletcher and Sundown come to the cockfight in the cowpokes' railcar the veteran rodeo riders must invariably wager on the outcome of the fight before them. When Fletcher's rooster wins he exchanges boots with Sundown so that the black man, ironically, wears the Confederate flag cowboy boots and the Indian wears Fletcher's worn ones. This second exchange of the Southern boots creates an additional, immediate bond

between Sundown and Fletcher, as well as a secondary bond between Spain and Fletcher, since it is Spain's boots Fletcher is actually wearing—though he received them from Sundown. The relationship between the black and white man here is mediated through the native American, as Chief Bromden in *Cuckoo's Nest* mediates relations between black and white races through his narration. Here, the reminiscence of the white narrator achieves a more or less equal mediation among the three races.

At the end of chapter four, when Fletcher and Spain rejoin Sundown and the horses in their own boxcar after kneeling with the black men at the front of the train and gambling with dice on the 'zigzag Indian blanket', the Southern youth realises that he has won his own boots back from Fletcher. Here the cycle of switching boots is made more or less complete. Spain's exchanging boots with Fletcher creates a stronger bond between them. Sundown and Fletcher are now in possession of one another's boots strengthening their bond even more. That Spain ends up the only one of the three wearing his own footwear at this early stage in the novel may be signaling the eventual outcome as to who wins the rodeo, or the idea that if the white man agrees to gamble on equal terms it is to the benefit of all, though he may still win in the end. The most important element of these exchanges is the establishment of the intimate bond between all three riders so that they can collaborate throughout the rodeo rather than fighting against one another as adversaries might do. In the spirit of this good-natured competition various pairings of two out of the three champions occur as the riders team-up on various events during the three-day rodeo. *Last Go Round* also contains exchanges that do not require gambling to occur. In another exchange of rodeo equipment among the three heroes, Fletcher lends Spain his cowboy hat in order to allow the younger man to participate in a riding event. This exchange completes the transformation between the two men from head to foot.

The gang of villains in the novel attends the Pendleton rodeo in part to try to hire the champion for Buffalo Bill's traveling Wild West Extravaganza. In order to achieve their aims they employ certain extortionist techniques to ensure that the champion will be a willing recruit to the show. The villains take Sundown's serge suit and Fletcher's false teeth and hat from them as collateral to ensure that Fletcher will purposefully lose the competition, a kind of negative exchange with an oppressive bonding diametrically opposed to those made through the gambling or lending exchanges. On the last day of the rodeo Buffalo Bill actually wears Fletcher's hat on his head and Gotch wears the false teeth on a string around his neck. Both of these items act to take Fletcher's power from him. He looks beaten, but he still rides like a champion bronc rider.

After the third day tiebreaker between Spain, Sundown, and Fletcher, Spain is announced as the winner of the overall rodeo Championship. He receives a four hundred-dollar championship saddle as his reward. When Fletcher asks for his felt hat back from 'Mars Buffalo' for having lost the rodeo as instructed, though he does not lose on purpose, Buffalo Bill defiles the article of clothing by cutting two pieces out of it as 'a little souvenir keepsake' (225). In one last symbolic exchange the entire audience of the rodeo purchase tiny slivers of Fletcher's hat in order to raise the four hundred dollars to buy the Championship saddle from Spain to replace the saddle that falls apart on Fletcher's last ride (231). In this way the audience exchange the saddle with Spain, making Fletcher the 'true' winner of the rodeo, though Spain's name is the one marked down in the history books. Unlike the earlier exchanges between the heroes that take place through the equalizing realm of gambling, this exchange is distinguished by being a purchase—an exertion of capitalistic power by the working class majority of the town. Spain later finds out from the town barber, one of the five judges of the rodeo, that his

winning the Championship is basically a farce—the barber votes for Spain because he was the only one of the three heroes who might become a potential customer at his barbershop (224).

LINGUISTIC COMBAT

In essence action is meaningless, even between persons of different racial makeup, unless interpreted through a narrator's perception or given meaning by character utterances. Many of the exchanges between characters, accomplished either through gambling or by other means, are interwoven with the use of linguistic tactics of oppressing others or deflecting attempts at oppression. In an episode in Nordstrum's private coach a chalkboard has been set up with rodeo bets written on it (18-28). Spain, the newcomer, is not on the board, but both Fletcher's and Sundown's names are already present when the trio of riders arrive in the car. Both of their names are incomplete and preceded by a racial epithet. Sundown's title on the board is 'Injun Jack Sundown', while Fletcher's title is simply 'Nigger George' (20). The epithet 'Injun' is used in specific derogatory ways in the course of the novel such as when Sundown meets Frank Gotch, who is insulted by the Indian's comment about someone being potentially stronger than Gotch. Buffalo Bill dismisses the statement as 'Just crazy Injun talk' (24). This same dismissal occurs throughout the novel and is especially interesting given that Kesey's most notable Native American character is Chief Bromden from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*—admittedly a crazy, though benevolent, character dismissed to the point of silence. Sundown is referred to as an Indian many times, but that word is not made in the form of a dismissal, but a straight forward tag of the man's racial membership. Gotch

sees clearly that Sundown's words are not dismissable as crazy talk, and Fletcher has to step physically between the two to avoid the eruption of violence. What Fletcher steps forward to do at this moment is place a bet, illustrating the importance of gambling yet again in the narrative. Fletcher's action evokes the power embodied in gambling which suggests that every person has an equal standing. In the process of placing their bets both Fletcher and Sundown reappropriate their names by verbally wagering money on themselves under the names 'Mister George Fletcher' and 'Jackson Sundown, Nation of the Nez Perce' (25). The authors are not suggesting avoiding the use of racial identifications, but only of prejudice as the basis of them. Thus 'Injun' is not good; 'Indian' on the other hand is acceptable.

Just as 'Indian' is differentiated from 'Injun', so 'Nigger' is clearly different from 'nigger', which is the term Louise Jubal (a white woman who it is implied is Fletcher's lover) uses in an affectionate and appropriate manner to Fletcher (52).¹⁰ In her mouth the term is not dismissive, just as Fletcher uses the term to describe the way in which the ranchers he once worked for treated their ranch hands: 'They druv their help like niggers' (69). Here the epithet is used as recognition of that which denigrates, not endorsement of it. In Hookners white dominated bar Fletcher uses two racial epithets to tell the story of a black gunfighter who challenged the white customers to a shootout (91). Fletcher's story clearly and metaphorically challenges the room before him to confront the racism lurking at every turn in the town: 'This is not only historical fact, I myself witnessed it! . . . One decrepit old Negro gunslinger calling out a houseful of Caw-casians, right here!' (90). The result of Fletcher's use of these two racial epithets is for the white customers

¹⁰At the end of a bar scene later in the novel Mr. Handles, a minor villain in the employ of Buffalo Bill, points Fletcher out of a crowd by saying: 'Your own Nigra George yonder made that guarantee' (95). This alteration of the black epithet has the same denigrating effect as Nigger on the gambling chalkboard in Nordstrum's car.

in the saloon to laugh at the black man, and to not serve him—but he is allowed to remain in the white bar without any move to harm or remove him.

Racial epithets are not the only way in which language alters as a way of negotiating racism. When confronted with the novel's villains Fletcher's language devolves into an accentuated black shucking slang. In this way he uses language to deflect any serious harm they intend to do to him. Just as the villains use racial epithets and misuse people's proper names Fletcher turns the same kind of linguistic tactics against them, but not in the form of epithets. In a scene before the final day of the rodeo the villains confront the riders to discuss the chances of who will ultimately win. Gotch warns those in earshot how Buffalo Bill, the Indian scout, acquires new acts for his show: 'He buys 'em. Scouts 'em out and buys them' (115). Fletcher responds by misusing Cody's last name: 'Den listen to me, Mistah Scout' (116). Fletcher also mispronounces the honorable prefix, mister. At the end of this exchange Fletcher gives the last word: 'Dem teepees is a lot like the folks what live in 'em, aint that right, Mars Gotch? Hard to tell 'em apart after dark' (116). Here Fletcher uses another slang term for 'mister' as well as pointedly illuminating Gotch's inherent racism. Oliver Nordstrum actually perpetrates a direct insult when he: '. . . beamed with affection and rubbed George's head', and then calls him a 'monkey' to his face. Fletcher responds by saying, 'Just perposing a few toasts, Mistah Oliver' (144). The language presented/reflected back at those characters identified by the narrator as racists is never delivered in a straightforward dialect, but by using the same shucking slang mentioned earlier acts as a cue for racism. Rhetoric is emphasised as a means of attaining a place within the white dominated social structure.

TREATMENT OF OTHER CONSTITUENCIES

Though the high profile of the races of the three bronc riding heroes focuses the novel's conflict on racial conflict between blacks, whites, and Native Americans, there are other oppressed constituencies in the world of the novel. In a scene that takes place at the Meyerhoff dinner table the patriarch contextualises some of the equality that Fletcher enjoys in Pendleton: '... you must understand George Fletcher has become for some of us out here our hero. Our champion. Quite a rise in status, yes, George? Since the days when they wouldn't let you race riding forwards?' (84). This small speech refers to the few short years before 1911 when black riders could only participate in the humorous events of the rodeos of the West. The reason for the Meyerhoffs in particular needing a hero is nearly lost until Spain himself informs us that the Meyerhoffs are Jewish (the reader cannot determine their ethnicity from their German name alone); a racial group almost invisible in the novel nor given much attention among the other groups on which the novel focuses, but a race needing a hero nonetheless (151).

Sue Lin, the Chinese laundry girl on the train, is the first member of the Chinese race to be introduced in the narrative. The second is the brief passing of a Chinese boy with firecrackers tied to his ponytail (90). After the bar scene at Hookners Fletcher and Spain descend into a Chinese city that exists underground beneath the streets and buildings of Pendleton. While bathing together, an intimate act for a black man and a white Southern gentleman, Fletcher explains the creation of the Chinese city: '... when the city officials passed the ordinance against them owning or developing street property, they just dug down underneath. They developed understreet property' (99). Spain, not having much experience with Orientals in the South, is appalled: 'Even so, living in tunnels? Good Lord, how do people endure living in such abysmal conditions?' (99).

Fletcher explains that they endure, 'Just like a horsetail in the wind, is how. Whichever way that big rear end jumps they keeps supple and stay on . . .' (99). Fletcher seems to be uttering advice for all minorities in Western society, and perhaps that of the novel itself. By presenting various examples of a flexible, non-direct approach to dealing with racism, in slightly different contexts, the narrative implies an attitude of passive resistance, but resistance just the same. The Chinese population acts as an invisible workforce not seen much in the course of the novel. They seem to do much of the work (laundering, cooking, cleaning) of the town, but they have less status in the white world than either blacks, Indians, Jews, or women. Sue Lin, the only Chinese character named in the novel, ends up working in Hookners bar both cleaning and hooking. As we will see later most of the novel's characters, be they heroes or villains, end up in a degraded position after the glory of the rodeo fades.

In many respects women in the narrative are treated as another minority group, exactly like the racial ones discussed thus far, struggling with the white male dominating majority. Sarah Meyerhoff is the Jewish daughter of Papa Meyerhoff, but it is her gender that limits her and not her ethnicity. At her introduction to the novel she is the not-so-conventional Pendleton rodeo Princess, given the honour of presenting the winners of the major events their awards. In her desire and struggle for some kind of equality in a culture focused on a sport dominated by men, Sarah competes in, and wins, the first day's Squaw Race, allowed entry only by Indian women riders. To gain entry into the Squaw Race Sarah wears face paint and a dark wig as a disguise. When her identity is discovered nothing happens until the following day when she enters the semi-finals without any disguise, claiming to be a member of the lost Indian tribe of the Levis. At this point she loses her title and privilege as Rodeo princess, but we are told: '. . . she would rather ride

than reign' (132). Sarah would rather be honoured and evaluated based on her merits in a skill of the West than treated as a token because of her gender—something she has no control over; she desires entrance into a competitive arena where race as well as gender are erased and thus all individuals can gain a sense of equality.

On the third and last day of the rodeo a relay race acts as a women's tiebreaker. The three main women characters, Sarah Meyerhoff, Nurse O'Grady, working for Buffalo Bill, and a Pendleton rider by the name of Prairie Rose Henderson, must ride three different horses each, using the same saddle on each mount. In the last lap Sarah Meyerhoff is in the lead when her saddle slips and she falls from her horse colliding with Nurse O'Grady. Henderson wins the race and Sarah ends up in the hospital in Portland (202).¹¹ In a symbolic way Sarah Meyerhoff is punished for trying to challenge the white male dominated rules of the social order. Prairie Rose ends up receiving one of five votes for the All-Round rodeo Championship that Spain, Fletcher, and Sundown compete for, though as a woman she is not really in the running. In this way, by earning the same number of votes as both Fletcher and Sundown, Henderson's excellence in the rodeo gains her equality with some men, black and Indian, but no degree of excellence can overthrow the white hegemony.

CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of the narrative, before returning briefly to the frame of the present, all the main players, heroes and villains alike, have fallen from grace into a depressing end. Spain travels to Portland after the rodeo to visit the unconscious Sarah

¹¹Of the three women competing Prairie Rose Henderson is the most frontier-white of them, neither Jewish nor Irish.

Meyerhoff. In Portland he sees Frank Gotch in a disappointing wrestling exhibition; Gotch having become a bundle of nerves after his humiliating defeat in Pendleton (234). Upon his return to Pendleton he discovers that the Chinese population has disappeared, all save Sue Lin who took prostitution and cleaning work at Hookners. George Fletcher has become the school district janitor. Sundown bought a new car that he was unable to drive; his wife chauffeuring him around with Sundown in the back seat (235). At these discoveries Spain decides to leave town without even seeing his friends: 'I just wasn't ready to see my heroes labeled as janitors and backseat drivers, either—or imagine my guardian angel [Sue Lin] as a lady of the night' (237). This ambivalent ending seems to suggest that the chivalric magic of the rodeo, with its triumphant struggles of race and gender, cannot be taken beyond the rodeo arena itself. In order to survive the harsh conflicts between power groups in twentieth century society characters can achieve greatness only within the limited context of the competition; the honour of their winnings cannot be truly carried away from it. The triumphs of folktale, history, and fiction, and the empowering and improving forces of literature represented by them, are not easily assimilated or even transferred into the real world and thus continuing in individual lives. The literature and the attitudes recommended still have value, and may be a form for change, they may bring about social equality over many generations, but one cannot expect miracles overnight. *Last Go Round* presents an example of the value of the association made by such texts and an attitude of pessimism about the actual world. The project Kesey embarked on after *Go Round* returns to new conceptions of what the 'real world' actually may be.

CHAPTER TEN:

TWISTER

Inner necessity must sometimes make considerable detours to reach its goal . . . Seen from the stand point of these detours, the path to revolution reveals itself as an evolutionary process.

Wassily Kandinsky in 'Some Remarks on Synthetic Art' (1927)¹

In 1993, after a Grateful Dead concert in Eugene, Oregon, Ken Kesey held the world premiere of *Twister: A Ritual Reality in Four Quarters Plus Overtime If Necessary*. The play's rather long subtitle hints at the complexity with which Kesey envisioned his drama. 'Ritual' in this context is a combination of religious ceremony with the ritual nature inherent in theatre itself. 'Ritual Reality' is a play on words evocative of virtual reality; the play consciously explores ideas of contemporary computer culture in which the 'reality' of the action is constantly in question. The 'Four Quarters' alludes to one of many virtual possibilities for the play, here a televised broadcast of a sports event. A musical play structured loosely around the characters from Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, since its creation *Twister* has explored theatre using technologies in a wide variety of media including text, costuming, music, lighting, lasers, projection of puppet silhouettes, still and video images, pyrotechnics, hypermedia, electronic-mail, and computerised

¹Lindsay and Vergo, eds. 711.

edited video.

In the play each of the major characters, Scarecrow, Tinman, and Frankenstein, face turn-of-the-twenty-first-century crises.² The three crises are The Hungry Wind, The Lonely Virus, and The Restless Earth. These crises deal, respectively, with tornadoes and hurricanes that bring famine, AIDS and other plagues, and earthquakes, all of which Kesey cites as being on the rise. The play is presented in three acts, one each for the major characters and their corresponding crisis. At the beginning of Act One an animate skeleton narrator by the name of Bones relates part of the story of Otto the Great, an eleventh-century dictator who performed strange rituals at the turn of the last millennium in anticipation of the apocalypse. This narration contextualises *Twister* as a ritual in anticipation of the apocalypse at the turn of the third millennium after Christ.

Thematically the crises in *Twister* act to confront the characters with social conflict. They occupy three separate zones, both geographical and social, on the planet and thus make up a web of balance for life. Weather and the Earth are presented as natural phenomena in Acts One and Three increasing their violence in anticipation of the transition to a new millennium. In Act Two diseases, sandwiched between recognizable terrestrial disasters, functions as a more mysterious crisis on the increase, which heightens the tension in the play. After exploring all three of these crises Bones concludes the play with his completion of the story of Otto the Great.

Kesey tries to create with *Twister* revolutionary theatre through the co-opting of ritual. The play's ritual aspects are made possible through the use of new technologies and a rhetoric through which Kesey hopes to re-encode the traditional theatrical customs within which *Twister* has been thus far presented. Images of cultural commodities and

²The decision to include Frankenstein as a main figure instead of the Cowardly Lion was probably determined by the ensemble of actors available for performance.

techniques of presentation promote ideals with which to confront contemporary social problems. For Kesey, challenging his own view of theatre's obsolescence, theatre is neither solely ritual nor completely drama in a traditional sense, and brings forth a critical element to today's new communication channels (Kesey, Interview 1998). Beyond the twentieth-century developments of Brecht and Genet, *Twister* tries to ritualise the theatrical experience of interactive communications by blurring the distinction between actor, creator, character, and audience. Kesey's use of technology attempts to overwhelm the senses and create a dramatic arena that 'redefines the boundaries' between drama and new textualities as the vanguard of contemporary culture.

Twister is a musical stage play, his first ever published, released by Key-Z Productions as a set containing the 99 page text and a two-hour long video of the play that Kesey spent four years editing from footage of the fifteen performances that he produced between August 1993 and September 1997.³ Though *Twister* is Kesey's first published stage play his long literary career has included various intersections with the performing arts and play writing. Kesey's undergraduate degree from the University of Oregon was in drama and communication studies, and he spent the summers of 1955 and 1956 in Hollywood watching the shooting of films like *The Ten Commandments* and trying to break into the movie business (Tanner, *Kesey* 7-8). Kesey has also written two full-length screenplays—*Over the Border* (1973) and *The Further Inquiry* (1990)—both published by Viking, though neither has been produced as a film. While *Twister* is unusual for Kesey in that it emerges from a series of performances of the play, he is no stranger to alternative forms of performance art. In the years between 1963 and 1966

³*Twister: A Ritual Reality* (Eugene: Key-Z Productions, 1999) was intended to be published by Penguin, but the author and the publishing company had a falling-out. Instead Kesey's son, Zane, has published it, and it is readily available on-line from either <<http://www.key-z.com>> or <<http://www.intrepidtrips.com>>.

Kesey developed avant garde living theatre culminating in the Acid Tests. In 1988, on completion of *Caverns*, Kesey said that if he were to teach a class like the one that produced *Caverns* again he would have the class write and produce a play instead of a novel—saying, in effect, that the students would be able more directly to see the fruit of their labour.⁴

Kesey's first major interactive performance art period occurred during the Acid Tests. In a letter Hunter S. Thompson, the New Journalist who first wrote about Kesey publicly in 1966, described one of the pre-Acid Test performance art parties that he attended at Kesey's La Honda forest home:

. . . in all it was pretty depressing—that a man with such a high white sound should be so hung up in this strange campy kind of showbiz. He MC'd the whole bit, testing mikes and tuning flutes here and there as if one slip in any direction might send us all over the cliff in darkness. Like a kid's home circus, a Peter Pan kind of thing, but with sad music somewhere up in the trees above the kiddie controls. (*Highway 512*)

Arguably this was one of the early experiments in Kesey's performance art, 1 May, 1965, which would improve by the time Kesey took his Acid Tests to churches and music halls of the West coast six months later. In contrast, Clair Brush, the then assistant editor for the *Los Angeles Free Press*, described the 12 January, 1966 Watts Acid Test as: 'a master production. Everything was very carefully meshed and calculated to produce the LSD effect, so that I have no idea where the production stopped and my own head took over' (Wolfe, *Acid* 247).⁵ The difference between these two perceptions of Kesey performance art is temporal—the Merry Pranksters had practiced their production

⁴Stephanie Holland, 'Unique Class produces "Caverns".' Rev. of *Caverns*. *Oregon Daily Emerald* 1 June 1988: 1, 6.

⁵Though Kesey was not in attendance at the Watts Acid Test, having fled to Mexico to avoid drugs prosecution, I am considering him the director of the performance in absentia.

for eight months between performances—and chemical—Thompson was drinking only beer the night of Kesey's early party; Clair dropped LSD. *Twister* neither attempts to reproduce the LSD experience as the Acid Tests had done, nor needs drug culture initiation in order to communicate its metaphors. Most of Kesey's production pieces, at least the ones not centred around him reading one of his short stories, retain a 'kid's home circus' feel to them, *Twister* included. Kesey remains committed to a kind of elementary school guerrilla theatre in an effort to achieve a closeness with the audience which, he believes, an overly slick production would prohibit.

During the Acid Test period Kesey performed with a group of friends known as the Merry Pranksters. The cast of *Twister* includes Kesey himself as Oz, Merry Pranksters Ken Babbs, as both Thor and Frankenstein, and George Walker, as the Tinman, as well as occasional appearances by figures like Allen Ginsberg, as Rabbi Judah Buddha Whitman, and Hewey Lewis, as Elvis.⁶ Unlike the Acid Tests, *Twister* has a definite dramatic structure. Essentially a musical play, with a rock and roll score performed by Jambay, *Twister* employs a great deal of technical gadgetry in its production, much of which Kesey and the Pranksters developed in the 1960s. One realm of the evolution of *Twister* and its reception by audiences has been in areas of new media including a webpage and electronic-mail communications.

In the introduction to the text of *Twister*, which is also posted on Kesey's webpage, Kesey discusses the experiences that inspired him to produce the play. He says that he, 'began to notice something different in some of the faces on the evening news, in particular the faces of disaster victims' (2). Disasters are for Kesey spaces of

⁶There exists some confusion concerning Lewis' performance in *Twister*. He played the part, despite being listed as playing 'himself', of Elvis in the first production of the play in 1993. Subsequent performances of the play were produced with Simon Babbs playing the part of Elvis.

high drama. He describes people coming together when confronted with adversity in storms, floods, and earthquakes: ‘strong faces of all colors, ages, and castes, all united in mutual effort’ (3). What Kesey finds in these faces is an expression of strength and sanity in the face of disaster. He goes on to describe a journey to tornado torn Fort Wayne, Texas with writer friend Larry McMurtry in which they drive to see ‘the devastation a twister can leave’ (6). The devastation is not only the devastation of buildings, but also a wounded spirit in the survivors of natural catastrophes. Kesey describes a town in which the people are overwhelmed by the disaster and occasionally unable to rise to the challenge of survival. He says: ‘It had been months since the tornado but the citizens were still dizzy. Divorces had doubled; crime was down by half. Pregnancies were soaring and so were suicides’ (7). The tornado apparently disorients people in such a way that their priorities become radically altered. Kesey says despite the disorientation of the citizenry their voices expressed sanity and strength, as well as dignity—all the elements necessary for survival. Ultimately the responses to world problems that the play promotes are flexibility and adaptability, compassion, and hope. These are specific reactions to the world’s problems, but not actual solutions to any of the real world conflicts explored in the play—there is no call for a cease to the destruction of rain forests, no cry for a cure for AIDS, but rather actions of honour with which to get through difficult times. At the very end of the *Twister* video Jambay sings, ‘Hard times need strong rituals.’ *Twister* is a play that attempts to be a strong ritual that will evoke strength, sanity, and dignity with which people can survive difficulties.

One of the major influences on the concept of *Twister* is the 1986 BBC production of Dennis Potter’s *The Singing Detective* (Kesey, Interview 1996).⁷ In *The*

⁷Dennis Potter, dir. *The Singing Detective*. telecast (6 parts) BBC1 1986. Kesey did not see the film until its American broadcast on Oregon Public Broadcasting 1987-88.

Singing Detective the cutting and fading between fictional worlds, real-time experience, hallucinations, and memories are all channeled through the point-of-view character. Through the six hours of the progression of *The Singing Detective* the 'meaning' and origin of the icons it creates are revealed as one man's story. In *Twister* there are multiple levels present, but no central character through which these worlds are interpreted. Dorothy is the closest figure to a protagonist in the play, but we do not see the action of the play through her eyes. *Twister* is not trying to tell one person's tale, but rather create a more associative space in which to consider different aspects of the play's subject.

According to Kesey's webpage (Intrepidtrips.com) critics have called the stage production of *Twister* a 'technoidal travesty', and Matthew Rick writes that a critic called it a 'musical catastrophe' (*Tarnished Galahad*). The video was produced in a completely unprecedented manner. The special effects, like those employed in the play's animated narrator, display a visual richness of Hollywood level quality. The video is a collage of fifteen individual performances of the play, and because of this there are awkward dubbing moments when a character's voice is not synchronised with the movement on screen. This takes some getting used to, but is understandable with the knowledge of the film's production history. Hollywood film from the 1960s to the present has used such disjointed psychedelic techniques purposefully. John Boorman's *Point Blank* (1967) juxtaposes memories of past moments by linking the similarity of character gestures. Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994) is edited in a dense and complex manner by flashing from different characters' memories and shifting points of view allowing the voices and image to not be aligned without jeopardising the narrative's verisimilitude or the viewer's suspension of disbelief. This same kind of complex mixing in *Twister* progresses toward the end when the montage takes on a beatific grunge quality.

As is true with many plays, the text of *Twister*, initially written by Kesey, was revised to a great extent by the collective group of actors in the process of rehearsals, both at Kesey's home and at theatrical venues on the road. Typical of writing for the stage, Kesey made changes as he and the other actors worked out staging problems encountered in early productions of the play. *Twister's* costuming is elaborate and professional in appearance; especially good is George Walker's Tinman complete with a lighted and beating heart, a quart of gear oil suspended above his shoulder like a plasma canister, and smoke puffing up from his funnel hat. The stage lighting is complex in that it had to consider the multiple projections of the puppet silhouettes of the talking crows, still images, and video images, each of which requires its own projector, and thus its own space on the scrim backdrop. One of these spaces displays an environmental consciousness by its name, the O-zone, playing on the Oz theme and an ecological awareness. All three types of projections require their own station backstage, which caused some extremely crowded situations at different venues on the road.⁸ The play also makes use of a laser at one point to introduce the Angel Gloria. All the different types of projections are included to both present exactly the appropriate image at the desired moment, and to create a dense visual experience which inundate the senses of the audience.

To this end pyrotechnics are also employed in the play. The pyrotechnics used are primarily for Thor's weather map, a large sheet of metal connected to an electrical battery. Thor explains the world's increase of extreme weather patterns with a steel rod as pointer. Sparks fly when the rod comes into contact with the map. Attached to the map are various firecrackers, sparklers, and Catherinewheels, which Thor sets off by

⁸The liquid crystal video projector used was originally lent to Kesey by filmmaker Gus van Sant (*Drugstore Cowboy*, *My Own Private Idaho*; *To Die For*; *Good Will Hunting*; *Finding Forrester*).

immersing them in enough sparks from the pointer. A flash bomb is used for the appearance of Dorothy behind the scrim backdrop in the First Act. There is also green smoke employed in association with the Wizard of Oz himself. This incident reinforces the way in which the Hollywood film version of *The Wizard of Oz* plays with the allegorical aspects of each character, especially here the way in which the Wizard uses technology to control the reception of his image. The pyrotechnics, along with the projected visual imagery, combines to make a dense and whimsical theatrical space, which, combined with the assortment of lighting techniques, contributes to overwhelm the senses of the audience.

Called a 'Ritual Reality,' in addition to the sensory overload in the play, *Twister* pivots on an ever changing rhetorical possibility of what the play virtually is. *Twister* makes reference to many diverse cultural icons and figures, among them: Rush Limbaugh, Pat Robertson, Jim Morrison, John Dillinger, Archie Bunker, O.J. Simpson, the Grateful Dead, Republicans, soap operas, Beauty Rest, Samsonite, Nike, Birkenstocks, Prozac, Madison Square Garden, the Smithsonian Institute, the Department of Environmental Quality, Waco's Branch Dividians, Fedex, and Bosnia. The Borg from *Star Trek the Next Generation* are referred to three times during the play. The science fictional flavour to the entire play complicates the action because unlike *The Wizard of Oz*, in which Dorothy integrates the figures from her waking life, seen at the beginning of the film, into characters in her dream life in Oz, no envelope of objective reality is explained in *Twister*. The video clips from the beginning and end of the play including the actors in other contexts outside the realm of the characters they play makes objective reality itself the envelope, similar to *The Wizard of Oz*, but without the explanation at the beginning. The shotgun effect of the cultural references creates a commercial media environment where the audience has tuned

in to a bandwidth where all stations seem to converge. The First Act opens and closes with the image of the video color bars test pattern making the play on one level a television broadcast.

The projected video at the opening of the play includes footage of the actors backstage and outside of the theatre itself presenting the actors themselves as characters playing characters. Some of the actors are famous from other contexts so their presentation in the video represents a scale of persona ranging from, for instance, Kesey as self, Kesey as countercultural hero, Kesey as actor, Kesey as character: Oz. The preliminary images are of Kesey and other actors and famous personalities outside of the play, like Mountain Girl on the bus, which brings with it a whole counterculture context.⁹ The play tries to bring the audience into the play, as we will see, as well as trying to bring itself into the 'real world.' At one point in the actual text Kesey speaks as himself playing with the distinction between character, actor, and author (84). The video images at the end of the play include a medley of footage from Kesey ventures outside of *Twister* itself including a bonfire night at Kesey's farm as early as 1989, the 1992 Field Trip, the 1994 Hog Farm pig-nic [sic] with Timothy Leary and Wavy Gravy, as well as a string of cultural emblems ranging from Hell's Angels and Mad Max to Geishas and old 'biddies' (95-96). Dorothy is played by an unknown actress who, in the text, refers to her four abortions, and, in an obvious reference to Judy Garland, who played Dorothy originally for the Hollywood film, her drinking problems. All of these devices effectively blur the identities of figures in the play.

Twister is deceptively subtle despite the pervasive kiddie camp feel to it of the

⁹Mountain Girl, aka Carolyn Adams, joined the Merry Pranksters in 1964. Becoming Kesey's lover, she gave birth to their daughter Sunshine in 1966. Mountain Girl was later married to Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia for more than a decade. In 1996, after Garcia's death, she moved to a house in Eugene, Oregon, where she lives today.

type Hunter Thompson had identified in Kesey's early performance art. Just as *Twister* explores a purposefully ambiguous and polysemous determination of character, the play also weaves between the positions of ritual and virtual reality. It self-referentially changes contexts from the original *Wizard of Oz* film, to an Oz sequel, a theatre, a television station (OZTV), a hospital, a sports arena, airport, university classroom, a computer virtual reality, and 'reality' itself. The first instance where the self-reflexivity occurs, when in an echo perhaps of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), Oz tells Dorothy that, 'We have quite an impressive line-up waiting in the wings to assist you tonight' (20). This instance reinforces the theatricality of the play. Much later Dorothy breaks up a fight between Frankenstein and Elvis by saying, 'You can butt heads later backstage' (84). A third of the way through the play Dorothy addresses the audience directly, a trope which has its roots in the habits of Shakespeare and before: "'We're all persuaded, right?'" (she leads the audience)' (37). Here Dorothy, through pantomime combined with dialogue, reinforces the stage presence of the play where earlier she has textualised the setting. She says: 'I don't think I was shanghaied into this script to solve your inner-city situation' (34). Here the action is rhetorically shifted, literally, 'into' the text itself so that the play is virtually taking place on the page, though it is as likely to be viewed on stage or in video format as it is to be read. At this same time, the play invokes the social aspects of the real world using contemporary urban language.

One of the most effective and quick blurring of these contexts, or levels, in which the play is working occurs when the Tinman explains his dilemma: 'No, it was my heart, my foolish heart. It loves not wisely but too much. And too many. Then again it might have come through my modem—I network a lot. And I have shared my oil can a time or

two' (52). Like the Scarecrow who says earlier in the play that he should have asked Oz for a mind instead of a brain, the Tinman has a heart, but, like most hearts, it is unwise.¹⁰ An obvious AIDS reference, which is only named once in the play, the Tinman's language takes the audience quickly through a romantic/sexual context to a virtual reality computer context in which the virus the Tinman has is an electronic one, to an implied academic/business world networked social virus, like Legionnaires' Disease, to drugs—the shared oil can symbolising, obviously, a shared hypodermic needle. This effective mixing of metaphoric contexts through the use of purposefully polysemous lexis is one of the play's most aesthetically complex elements.

The character, Legba, the African god of rhythm, joins the play, he says, because he was: 'clicking through the channels, y'know, when I click across this flick' (61). Here the play becomes itself a process of channel surfing, with the myriad media images inserted in the video images projected on screen and verbal invoking of cultural emblems being media bites in a televised context. Dorothy refers to herself as a kind of Gibsonsque cyborg, or computer game character, when she berates Oz for her situation in the play:

You drag me out of a warm bed and toss me in this snake-pit without so much as even a pardon me ma'am, and then you blindside my dog with a cheap fiddle then you down-load my memory with enough nightmares to last me the sleep of eternity. (70)¹¹

¹⁰This is an obvious reference to the end of *Othello* when he says: 'Then must you speak / Of one that loved not wisely but too well' (Act V, Scene 2, lines 352-353). William Shakespeare, *Othello* (1604. Stanley Wells et al, eds. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 853.

¹¹William Gibson is commonly considered the founder of a branch of science fiction writing known as 'cyber punk' which uses as one of its main themes the manipulation of human and animal biology through technological means. Gibson's novels include *Neuromancer*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, *Johnny Mnemonic*, and *All Tomorrow's Parties*, among others.

Toto has been genetically altered in the play's initial tornado sequence so that he is a hybrid between a dog and a violin. Dorothy's down-loaded memory makes all reality in the play infused with the potential for virtuality. Within this 'technoidal' sensorium the polysemous non-determinacy of the characters constructs an event where ritual can be implemented.

All the technology described earlier, the music, lights, flashing images, and crackling fire, works towards that overthrow of the senses which Kesey employs in order to help the ritualistic aspects of the play have the greatest possible impact upon the audience. Kesey demands that the audience not simply observe the 'ritual' inherent in any theatrical production, but that the experience of the play become cultural ritual itself where the audience participates in cultural instruction. One of the essential elements of *Twister*, according to Kesey, is that it attempts to break beyond theatre and into ritual.

Kesey has said that:

Ritual is necessary for us to know anything. Magic is seeing something that extends beyond the visible. A ritual has to be a little bit dangerous. Everywhere I go, I feel the hunger for people wanting to be a part of a ritual. The rituals we are trying to put together, we don't know what they are, but we feel the hunger for them. (Rick, *Interview*)

For Kesey ritual is an essential element of instruction, and magic, seeing beyond the visible into the virtual, is the aesthetic technique used to create ritual. Part of the dramatic effect Kesey tries to create is through the chaotic overwhelming of the senses, much as a tribal feeling among the participants of the Acid Tests would be achieved through the combination of drugs with lights, music, and staging.

Taken from Classical Greek definitions, Bertolt Brecht, who was also demanding of his audience, identified two impulses in modern Epic drama—one to amuse, the other

to instruct.¹² *Twister* attempts to do both, which at the same time achieves epic proportions through polysemous contextualisation. *Twister* presents itself as a ‘virtual reality’, that is as being created in a semi-magical, computer-generated context, beyond the possibility of actually being contained on a stage. As with Expressionist drama, in which the stage directions evoke the unreal, Kesey’s stage presents itself as an impossibility before the eyes. Despite the impossibility of the play’s production, Kesey chose to produce it as a play rather than write it as a novel in order to emphasise the immediacy of amusement and instruction inherent in the dramatic form (Kesey, Interview 1996). Brecht wrote of Piscator’s experiments with theatre that they, ‘began by causing complete theatrical chaos’ (130). Kesey suggests that the synthesis of responses to the ‘end times’, a non-Christian yet devastating apocalypse, before us should be that ‘It has to be chaotic’ (86). Thus the play ends with a cacophony of all the musical numbers from the play being performed simultaneously.

Kesey is not the first writer to attempt the revitalising of theatrical ritual, though he is one of very few contemporary novelists who have turned to writing for the stage. Attempts at co-opting ritual in order to revolutionise theatre can be found in the theatre of the absurd, the theatre of cruelty, the plays of Brecht, and even Shakespeare’s dramatic works—in fact any theatre of importance in the last four hundred years. Western theatre comes out of a Classical Greek tradition in which ritual and theatre were indivisibly linked. According to John Styan, Jean Genet’s ritual theatre adopts and alters forms so ‘that his stage should mirror the true reality, and tried to dissolve the aesthetic barrier which separates play and audience by shaking the very supports that make it work, its

¹²Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (1964. Trans. John Millet. London: Methuen, 1965) 130.

conventions.’¹³ Kesey’s technique for shaking up the theatrical supports in *Twister* are less symbolic than Genet’s, more direct, because by the time Kesey was composing the play the culture had become so sceptical of determining what the ‘true reality’ was, and Kesey actually wants the house and stage to become one. Others before Kesey, like the Science Fiction Theatre of Liverpool, which comes from the psychedelic aesthetic movement of the 1960s, have tried to do this as well. This unification is not always achieved because the environment within which *Twister* is invariably presented places the audience inexplicably into theatre’s coded world from the moment of entering the theatre or purchasing a ticket; this is very distant from that of any ritual with which the audience can identify. Until *Twister* can be performed in a venue where the stage literally descends to the level of the gallery, or the gallery ascends to the level of the stage, eliminating the physical distinction between stage and audience, and until admission can be completely free, most audiences will continue to remain in their seats. *Twister*, because of its technical complexity, has to be produced in a theatre, which invariably requires seating, staging, and capital. To some extent economics prevents *Twister* from more closely achieving the effect it desires.

Kesey has also said on the subject of ritual theatre that: ‘We need the rituals or else we have to contrive our own because all of our rituals have been co-opted and corrupted and taken from us and used by Coca-Cola and Nike. It’s almost being taken away from us by disco, by MTV, by bottled performances’ (Rick, *Interview*). Just as Kesey’s initial interest in performance art in the 1960s was conceived as a response to what he called ‘material madness,’ *Twister* tries to be socially instructive in an overly commodified culture, outside of traditionally ritualistic environments like churches or

¹³John Louis Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice Volume 2: Symbolism, surrealism and the absurd* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 156.

movie theatres. Kesey is trying to use cultural icons—literary and film figures (Frankenstein, Oz), cultural figures (Whitman, Ginsberg), and commercial emblems (Samsonite, Nike)—to recapture the symbolic meanings devalued by the mass mediated contemporary culture. Both *Twister* and the end of *Sailor Song* provide evidence for Kesey's interest in ritual in the 1990s.¹⁴

Kesey desires that the audience achieve a kind of faith by being overwhelmed by the theatrical experience. At the climax of the play the Angel Gloria appears on stage and her first words are, 'Be amazed' (89). Given as an instruction or order to the audience, it is amazement which seals lessons in Kesey's theatre. It is this kind of magic amazement which Kesey sees as being at the peak of performance art. Kesey has said of magic that:

It doesn't come cheap or free. And my brother and I would travel around with my dad—he was manager of a creamery, and we'd do these shows for these kids—farm kids—before television, hardly any radio. We'd do these shows and the look that would come on these people's faces—it was wonderful. (Rick, *Interview*)

Traveling with his brother in the 1940s, pre-information age, performing magic tricks, Kesey learned the excitement, as a performer, of amazing an audience by purposefully misdirecting their perceptions. Kesey's need to perform fills a void he felt in publishing novels, where the feedback is slanted mostly through critics, and always delayed from the moment of creative action. Kesey goes on to say:

And I remember one time driving the bus through Boise. We were playing ball on top. The cops'd told us to get out of town and we were playing ball on top of the bus, making all of this noise. We saw these kids, and we threw a ball at them. One kid caught one. The other kid caught one and the bus went on. And I always thought about what do they tell their

¹⁴*Sailor Song* is also primarily concerned with survival in the face of global natural disaster.

folks? ‘Where did you get the ball?’ And that to me is art at its peak.
(Rick, *Interview*)

Kesey here is referring specifically to the art form of his 1964 bus tour performance, but his need for feedback, or interaction with the audience inspired him to attempt a similar type of amazement in the theatre. In order to maximise his interaction with the audience his theatre demands their participation.

One of the ways the productions of the play began to attempt to seed the audience with participants was through education on Kesey’s webpage. As people began to read about the play in advance of attending a performance theatre goers began e-mailing Kesey volunteering to participate. There are three specific roles written into the script for these recruits—one for each of the three Acts. They are: Spinners (dancers), Shouters (singers), and Boomers (drummers). On 24 March, 1998, when asked about the success of involving audiences of *Twister* in participating over the course of the fifteen performances of the play, Kesey wrote: ‘With every show [of *Twister*] the audience got more and more into it [being part of the play]. We got better at luring them in, but I think it was the E-mail that made the difference. We were reachin them and teachin ’em.’¹⁵

The presence of audience members who were instantly willing to stand up and participate in the drama helped to encourage a greater amount of the audiences to walk up on stage when invited by Oz to do so toward the end of the play. In the video there are moments not in the text where characters directly address the audience in engagement. Dorothy says, ‘Get into it guys,’ when the audience fails to respond to a joke. This kind of direct confrontation is designed to shake the audience out of their complacency.¹⁶ This

¹⁵Ken Kesey, E-mail to the author. 24 Mar. 1998.

¹⁶David Seed eloquently comments about this kind of rhetorical device in Joseph Heller’s *We Bombed in New Haven* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969) by stating that ‘The use of direct address undermines a spectatorial passivity’ Seed, *Heller* 83.

confrontational technique of directly addressing audience members, and thus breaking the illusion that the stage is a removed play of action, is similar to Steve Martin's play, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* (1996), where the barkeep asks for a program from an audience member so that he can confirm the character's order of appearance.¹⁷ And, again, this confrontation differs greatly from the Shakespearean tradition where characters deliver monologues directly for the benefit of the audience. In Shakespeare characters occasionally ask the audience to suspend their disbelief, use their imagination, and finally to applaud the actors without expecting any kind of participation, other than purely that of spectators, in return.

¹⁷Steve Martin, *Picasso at the Lapin Agile and other Plays* (New York: Grove Press, 1996) 3.

CONCLUSION

At a certain point where thought turns back on itself, they [novelists] raise up the images of their works like the obvious symbols of a limited, mortal, and rebellious thought.

Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* ¹

We have now looked closely at the way in which the aesthetics of Ken Kesey's major works were created out of a specific cultural environment. Kesey's career has not been simply a novelistic one, and in light of the void of theoretical language with which to discuss such diverse artistic activities the challenge comes in evaluating Kesey's work over a lifetime. From the start of his career, Kesey has been working as an outsider, as a West Coaster far from the East Coast Literary establishment, as an Oregonian from a farming background, as a social rebel challenging traditional notions of family and legal ethics. Though seemingly naive at times, Kesey is aware, to varying degrees in varying instances, of both literary and theatrical traditions and the boundaries in and of those traditions that he crosses.

Since the success of Kesey's first two novels, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*, critics have wondered at the author's inability or unwillingness to produce any further great works of literature. Often other post-war

¹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942. Trans. Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin, 1975) 105.

American fiction writers like Pynchon and Heller have been considered worthy of study when Kesey has been overlooked. Other novelists like Mailer, Bellow, Roth, and Barth produced novels in close enough temporal proximity to one another to keep a critical attention focused on them.

Kesey himself believes that *Sometimes a Great Notion* is his best work. His notes on the composition of *Notion* indicate that he was attempting to construct what he considered a great, original piece of literature. It was novel in the sense that it was innovating new ways to negotiate the disparities between the traditional Realist novel and the contrary aesthetics of Modernism. John Barth's 'Literature of Exhaustion' provided us with a context in which to evaluate the post-war novelist's turning to genre fiction forms and experimentations in the extra-literary arts. His 'The Literature of Replenishment' (1980) argues that post-war literature of value cannot be merely a movement of negations.² Barth's ideal for the post-war novel 'is the synthesis or transcension' of the antitheses between nineteenth-century Realism and twentieth-century Modernism ('Replenishment' 430). Kesey's novels clearly attempt to strike just this balance by combining the exploration of personal perspective through aesthetic means with socially engaged matters, and thus the novels fit Barth's criteria for value within his generation. Though *Notion* is Kesey's best novel, he never intended to write a great book again. The excitement the novelist feels at creating valuable work remains as mysterious as the elusiveness of the cultural reception of works of art in general.

Kesey has not been merely a novelist either, despite his achievements in that form. By the year 2000 he had published five novels, a collection of essays, two screenplays, two children's books, and a stage play; certainly this is enough work to be

²John Barth, 'The Literature of Replenishment' (1980) as rpt. in *Essentials of the Theory of Fiction* (Eds. Michael J. Hoffman and Patrick D. Murphy. Durham: Duke University Press, 1988) 419-433.

considered significant for study. In part it is Kesey's departure into experimentation that can be seen as producing objects not valued by the literary establishment, but these products are aesthetically important nonetheless, especially when trying to analyse Kesey's long struggle with defining himself as an artist. Kesey's self-proclaimed desire to 'prove nothing' resulted in a wide variety of experimental performance art and literary products, as diverse as Compact Discs, videocassette tapes, and a unique presence on the internet (Strelow 95). It is hoped that the exploration of the range of Kesey's works, the examination of the productive processes behind them, and analysis of their aesthetic qualities has aided in validating Kesey's synthesis of experimental and traditional literary modes.

At the expense of the literary establishment's estimation of him as a novelist, Kesey has done it all in a generation—collaborative novels, screenplays, drawings, buses, Happenings, literary journals, stageplays, theatrical readings, ballets—illustrating the author and performance artist's commitment to various art forms over the stretch of some forty years. Any historical estimation of his life's work cannot be considered complete by looking only at the three published novels he wrote on his own. Fundamentally at issue with all the different forms in which Kesey has worked is his attempt or struggle with redefining himself as an artist in a form other than that of the novel. As early as 1964, when working on preparing the bus *Furthur* for its cross-country journey, Kesey told Ed McClanahan: 'I have to remind myself these days that I'm not a goddamn carpenter, I'm a writer' (Babbs, *Bus* 62). In 1990, when the original bus, *Furthur*, lay rotting in the swamp at the back of his Oregon farm, Kesey purchased another bus, *Further*, a 1947 International Harvester.³ Working on the much more carefully

³Ken Babbs, 'Re: Further,' E-mail to the author, 16 April 1998; and Zane Kesey, 'Re: Further,' E-mail to the author, 17 April 1998.

constructed paint job on the new bus while he was supposed to be finishing *Sailor Song*, Kesey said, 'I'm not a novelist. This is my art form' (Kesey, Personal Interview 1996). Despite the publication of a number of books in the 1990s, and his unwillingness to give up the book form as an important artistic medium, Kesey's accomplishments in the last decade of the twentieth century show that the author attempted to redefine himself as a theatrical writer, director, and producer from outside the East Coast literary establishment. Like many of Kesey's endeavours there is a certain sense of his trying to reinvent an already established literary form.

This study has tried to draw only the most complex connections between the author's life, his cultural environment, and in response to these both his aesthetic development and influence on the world because, as Merleau-Ponty writes, it is impossible to distinguish between the untraceable stimulus and the influences of a subject's social upbringing or cultural milieu except in the most aberrant of cases (*Primacy* 108). An interesting project would be to delve deeper into the psychological realm of the artist, but this would require greater access to the subject's innermost feelings and biographical history than has been possible in Kesey's case. What we do know from the vast amounts of information available on Kesey, is that he remains obsessed with perception as a tool in creating magical illusions in various art forms throughout his life. Whether through literary devices and verbal trickery, or electronic inundation and slight of hand, Kesey pursues the rights of the individual to make the world a better place for all.

Seen thus, by looking at the aesthetics of Kesey's major works as this thesis has done, Kesey's work engages with post-war art in almost every context for social aims. With Kesey's falling out with his publisher over the publication of the book and video of *Twister*, after which Kesey published the work himself, he has been focusing most of his

artistic energies on his webpage, performance art tours, and video editing. Maintaining a deep interrelation between these three elements, Intrepidtrips.com presents Kesey rants (essays), documentation of performance art tours, and information about upcoming events and Kesey products.

In August of 1999 Kesey, Ken Babbs, and a horde of veteran Merry Pranksters toured Britain performing Kesey's medieval pageant play, *Wheresmerlin*. Channel 4 documented the tour with a budget of £130,000. As part of this tour the television station digitized the entire forty-eight hours of Prankster footage from the 1964 bus trip and made a documentary film from it. When the Channel 4 film was completed they gave Kesey the film back with the digitized footage. Kesey, because he had learned through editing *Twister* how to use digital technology, has been able, after more than thirty-five years, to finally make his film. Perhaps its release will provide a final burst of attention to change the opinion of Kesey as a has-been novelist and give him a greater recognition as a vitally important cultural developer of aesthetics in a wide variety of art forms that emerged in the later part of the twentieth century. As recently as 1998 Kesey said that he, 'wants to write an autobiography told through the voices of animals.'⁴ Like George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) Kesey believes you can, 'tell universal truths through the eyes of animals that you could never tell from a human point of view' (Kesey, Personal Interview 1998). In the meantime Kesey and his friends continue to produce their films and pedal their wares on the internet.

⁴Jeff Barnard, 'Prankster back on the road.' *The Bakersfield Californian*. 1 Aug. 1999: D8.

APPENDIX A

SOMETIMES A GREAT NOTION: STRUCTURE

	PAGES	KEY	CHARACTER
1	(pp. 1-43)	Key of History; Seeing; Sight	Henry
2	(pp. 44-99)	Key of Mythology; Listening; Sound	Lee
3	(pp. 100-47)	Key of Impermanence	Hank
4	(pp. 148-99)	Key of Adjustment	Viv
5	(pp. 200-85)	Key of Time	Molly
6	(pp. 286-345)	Key of Echo (repetition); Memory	Joe Ben
7	(pp. 322-45): a subsection of chapter 6)	Key of Dance	Lee
8	(pp. 346-95)	Key of Intoxication; Polarity; Contradiction	Floyd
9	(pp. 396-473)	Key of Light	Willard
10	(pp. 474-528)	Key of Forget; Hell	Hank/Lee
11	(pp. 529-72)	Key of the Atomic Bomb; Reverberation: Continuance; Radiation	Hank/Henry/Teddy
12	(pp. 573-628)	Key of Acceptance	Jenny

APPENDIX B

SELECTED KESEY CORRESPONDENCE

Presented here are three letters composed by Ken Kesey between October 1962 and December 1963. Though more than two dozen letters by Kesey from the late '50s and early '60s have been preserved, I have selected these three to be printed here in full, with the author's permission, to help illustrate some of the points in this study.

The first of the letters, written to United States President John F. Kennedy at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis and never sent, eloquently shows Kesey's deep concern for the possibilities of nuclear war and his wish that social issues be treated as an alternative to armed conflict. The second, to author John Rechy (*City of Night* 1963), discusses the post-war aim of the generation of writers born at the time Hitler rose to power in Germany and the atomic bomb was first created. Kesey expresses his belief in the power to bring about positive social change, 'make something happen', through the written word. The final letter composed just days after Kennedy's assassination artfully tells of both the anger Kesey felt at the President's needless death and how the loss was connected to the national consciousness.

1)

President Kennedy:

[October 1962]

As one jock to another I'd like to point out that we are involved in a very weird game, where advances are made without possibility of touchdowns, where everybody bats at once and an error, or a knockout, is fatal to all opponants [sic] and the rounds, or the innings, are scored with the point system by millions and millions of judges. Our children will talley the final score.

To effectively play the game it is important to be continually aware of the attitude of all those judges, as well as their criteria for awarding scores or penalties: yards are lost each time a team advances, a foul is declared for not hanging on in the clinches and a beanball can cost a team the game. The penalty rules are severe but subtle and that which might at first look like a successful attack turns out to be a fumble. It is therefore safer, though maybe not so flashy, to stick to the bread-and-butter plays: yards are gained for every hungry man fed, for every sick man healed, for every captive man freed; points are scored for significant retreats from the line of scrimmage, and the game is always subject to be called at any time on account of peace.

I just thought I'd take the liberty to clear up some of these fundamentals [sic] with you; as always, chances for victory will be greatly enhanced by simply knowing the rules and keeping an eye on the ball.

Ken Kesey

2)

John Rechy:

[August 1963]

Two pages from the end of your book. But I know myself--if I don't write now I

will finish the book and dive into my own thoughts. So

My God, but it [*City of Night* 1963] is good. Good the way I want my work to be good--with honesty, and beauty, and message woven neatly into a fabric seeming innocent of direction, and *one more thing*, the most important thing that I cannot list because I'm not certain it has been attempted by any but our generation so it is still as far as I know unnamed. It's like a thing I tired my friends with: "*We have something going. We--us, the heads, the hung-ups, the hassled, the bunch born about thirty years ago at the same time Hitler came into his own and The Bomb was germinated--we are doing something to the scene!*" Which gets me tagged by many as corny, or desperate, or both. Still, I'm convinced. And reading your book made even firmer my conviction that we can *make* something happen--I don't yet know clearly what, but I'm getting some notions.

Anyway, I'll be finished with a book in about three weeks and eager to move around. I want to head back and visit Larry McMurtry in Austin. If I do, I'd like to make it through El Paso and try again to talk with you. Or--and this just came to me--Larry talks of travelling soon to the San Francisco area. He always drives and would more than welcome you as a passenger. I would more than welcome you as a guest. I now have (have had, for three great weeks) a big lonely, log house with two fireplaces and a guest house no less, fronted by a trout stream and backed by five acres of redwoods (movie and play sales), also a wife three kids two dogs frequent people here who dig you and I think you would dig (mention them to Larry), and we're only about 45 minutes from SF.

So what starts out to be a fan letter turns into an invitation. Somehow remarkably typical of many projects, this drift from one intention to another. In this case I hope both intentions are understood and even provoking.

To repeat in closing: it is one hell of a book.

Ken Kesey

3)

BabbsI:

[December 1963]

Faye flew back from New York with grandma and the others; I wanted more earthy feeling of the country so I drove back across with George Walker and Sandi, Carl's younger brother. The first day out wasn't very earthy.¹ Early in the turnpike dawn-- after seeing "How The West Was Won" the night before at Leow's Cinarama, followed by Riply's Believe-It-Or-Not parlor just down the street driving, gassing, looking foreward [sic] to one of those long trips where everybody talks and tells all the secrets of their sinful childhood looking foreward [sic] to listening to teenage radio stations across rock and roll America . . . and hearing instead the murder of Kennedy, all the 3000 miles to Oregon.

I was driving, about half loaded and road happy anyway; George was up front with me and Sandi was in the back of the station wagon along with suitcases, sleeping bags and a set of triangular drums Moondog had made for him.² We were on a turnpike zooming across one of those faceless states between New York and Chicago . . . And we were watching for a Howard Johnson's for coffee and pie . . . and there was an eiry [sic] dreamy light, the freeway swept ahead of us, sifting into a thin ground-mist that fell from the cold sun like pollen from a alien flower . . . and the radio advising us that big girls, they don't cry-yi-yi . . . when the Hot Line interrupted with the bulletin "*Dallas*

¹Kesey has made some handwritten emendations to the letter, probably after sending it to Babbs.

This sentence was added after the fact.

²'at the time' inserted after 'driving'.

President Kennedy was shot today just as his motorcade left downtown Dallas. Shots were fired just as the presidential motorcade entered the triple underpass which leads to the freeway route to the Trade Mart. There is one report . . .

I kept driving. George and Sandi were silent. The turnpike rolled away into the mist. No other cars, no roadsigns or billboards. That dim otherworld blossom overhead. “. . . streets were lined by crowds, the biggest turnout of the Texas tour. The President had landed only a short time before at Dallas’ Love Field and was driving to the Trade Mart . . .” The car warm, steady, fields drifting by with grey cut-outs of animals supposed to resemble cows. “. . . Blood was seen splattered over the limousine which had been flown in specially to carry the President. The driver was Secret Serviceman Bill Greet. This is the famous ‘glass bubble’ car; both the body and glass bubble are proof against most gunfire, but the top was down so the President . . .” Thinking: Glass bubble car? Like the Good Fairy used to get around Oz. Billie Burke. “. . . It has been impossible thus far under the tension to assemble a clearcut story of the incident but onlookers say . . .” The station wagon skimming down this strange black river. Tick tick tick tick of the white line. What’s happening? “. . . Some of the Secret Service agents thought the gunfire was from and [sic] automatic weapon fired to the right of the Chief Executives car, probably from the grassy knoll to which motorcycle policemen raced . . .” Buy some cough drops, too, in one of these goddamned places ever--what?³ “. . . Given blood transfusions at Parkland in an effort . . .” It’s been a good hour now since--what? “. . . Mrs. Kennedy was heard to cry . . .” What! But this is nuts.⁴ “. . . John Connally of Texas also . . .” But what! “. . . two priests stepped out of Parkland’s . . .” But wait

³Capitol ‘What’ in revision.

⁴Sentence added by Kesey here reading: ‘This is insane.’

What! “. . . *first priest announced to the crowd of newsmen . . .*”

“Dead?”

“My god . . .”

And after the long wordless stretch I could only respond to George and Sandi’s comment by adding hoarcely [sic], “The pricks, the dirty pricks, the dirty goddamned *pricks!*”

I realised something about this response a good while later.⁵

By the time the car and that eiry [sic], misty day coasted into down-to-earth Chicago I had worked the fact of the man’s death into my world, but I was still harrowed by that reaccuring taunt “This is nuts. It’s all hopelessly *insane*.” Because, okay, I can handle Sandy’s accident and Faye’s dad being wiped out by a stroke, but how can a man of that size be destroyed by some little worthless *rat*? And other giants--Hemingway, Marilyn Monroe--I can handle their dieing because it is worked somehow into their contract with me, it makes a sort of sense . . . But *what sense is there if Kennedy can be killed?*

And, asking this, I remember tasting the bleak, cold, metallic taste that your mouth recalls from the time you lie awake in your boyhood bed realising for the first time in your life that the future held grief and pain and fear for *you too*.

We bedded down in the car somewhere hundreds of miles on west of Chicago, (we had previously planned to stay and dig raucous Friday-night Chicago, but neither we nor Chicago had felt very raucous) with Sandi and I on bags in the back and George asleep on the front seat. It had been almost two days since I had slept but, after all the recent coffee, amphetamine and emotional stimulation, I knew that the stop was mostly token. I

⁵This sentenced crossed out in Kesey’s editing of the letter after the fact.

lay for a long time recalling pieces out of Kennedy's past three years--statements, pictures, that great Mailer artical [sic] about the democratic convention--then, as I grew more exhausted, my thoughts wandered away from the assassination to three other incidents connected with the trip to New York . . . three scenes that I would continue to revisit during the rest of that night and most of the rest of the trip as I grew more and more disgusted with the political post mortem which filled the airways for the next few days.

[Ken Kesey unsigned]

APPENDIX C

BREAKDOWN OF THE SEPARATE SECTIONS OF THE *KESEY'S GARAGE SALE*.

Section	Synopsis of contents
Preface	Professor Kenneth Justus Barnes introduction to the text (pages ix-xi)
Table of Contents	List (page xi)
Introduction	Essay by Arthur Miller (pages xiii-xviii)
Hot Item Number 1	Introduction to section by Professor Barnes, Marvel Comics Letters pages, essay by Ken Kesey about <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo 's Nest</i> (pages 2-27)
Hot Item Number 2	Introduction to section by Professor Barnes, coloring contest, illustrated screenplay by Ken Kesey entitled <i>Over the Border</i> (page 28-170)
Hot Item Number 3	Introduction to section by Professor Barnes, Ken Kesey commentaries reprinted from <i>Whole Earth Catalog</i> (pages 171-96)
Hot Item Number 4	Introduction to section by Professor Barnes, Ken Kesey commentaries reprinted from <i>Ramparts</i> , <i>The Last Whole Earth Catalogue</i> , <i>The Free You</i> , <i>Country Sense</i> , a letter from Neal Cassady reprinted from <i>The First Third</i> , two poems by Allen Ginsberg (pages 197-213)
Hot Item Number 5	Introduction to section by Professor Barnes, interview with Ken Kesey and Paul Krassner from <i>The Realist</i> magazine, conclusion to section by Professor Barnes (pages 214-27)
Surprise Bonus	Correspondence between Laurence Gonzales of <i>TriQuarterly</i> magazine and Ken Kesey (pages 229-38).

APPENDIX D

SKID-ROW SANTA

By Ken Kesey⁶

At the finale of the Christmas show last year in Eugene, Oregon, I came out as a skid-row Santa, complete with rubber nose, plastic sack full of beer cans, and a pint of peppermint schnapps to fortify the holiday spirit. I also borrowed my wife Faye's blue egg bucket and labelled it 'Homeless.' I'd jangle the cans like a bagful of aluminum sleigh bells while I worked the main-floor aisle seats: 'Hey, come on , buddy. Put something in the bucket, for Chrissakes. Don't you know it's Christmastime? Hey, that's better. God bless you. You're beautiful.'

I ended up with only about seventy-five bucks. Not much of a take for a full house at a Christmas show. But even seventy-five bucks was a wad too big to pocket.

So after I got out of my red suit and rubber snoot I drove off to seek a worthy recipient. I spotted a likely assortment of candidates in the 7-Eleven parking lot, corner of Sixth and Blair. I swung in and held the bucket out the window.

'All right. Who's the hardest-luck case in this lot?'

⁶This is an 'unpublished' 1997 short story by Ken Kesey printed with permission of the author. Quotations are placed around the word unpublished because the text has been, and still is, posted on Ken Kesey's webpage Intrepidtrips.com.

The candidates looked me over and edged away — all but one guy, ponytailed and slope-shouldered, his chin tucked down in the collar of a canvas camouflage jacket. ‘I got a streak of hard luck runs all the way back to New Jersey,’ he said. ‘What about it?’

‘I’m on a mission from St. Nicholas,’ I told him. ‘And if you are, in fact, the least fortunate of the lot’—in the spirit of the season, I refrained from saying ‘biggest loser’—‘then this could be your lucky night.’

‘Right,’ he said. ‘You’re some kind of Holy Roller? Where’s the string? What’s the hustle?’

‘No string, no catch, no hustle. I’m giving. You’re getting. Get it?’

He did. He took the money and ran, taking Faye’s egg bucket into the bargain.

The last I saw of him, he was scurrying away, looking for a hole.

Since then, I’ve wondered about him. Did that little windfall make a difference? Did he rent a cheap room? Get a bath? A companion? Every time I found myself passing through one of Eugene’s hard-luck harbors, I kept half an eye peeled for the sight of a long tail of black hair dragging down the back of a camouflage jacket. Last week, a year later to the day, I made a sighting.

I was in town with Faye and our daughter, getting in some Christmas shopping before we rendezvoused with my mom for supper. We’d done a couple of hours in the malls, and I was shopped out. I announced that I wanted to make some private purchases, and slipped off into the rainy cold — alone. I was headed for the liquor store on Eighth, thinking the spirit could use a little fortification.

But the trusty peppermint wasn’t powerful enough. These home-town streets are just too strange, too vacant, too sad. Corner of Sixth at Olive: empty. The great Darigold Creamery that my dad built up from a little Eugene farmer’s cooperative:

bulldozed down. I ducked my head and kept walking in the rain.

The street in my memory was the clearer path anyway: John Warren's Hardware over there, where you could buy blasting powder across the counter; the Corral Novelty Shop, where you could buy itching powder; the Heilig Theater, with its all-the-way-across-the-street-arch, flashing what we all took to be the Norwegian word for 'hello,' so big it could be read all the way from the windows of the arriving trains: 'Heilig, Heilig, Heilig.' All gone.

When I reached the city center, I noticed that the thing people had finally given up trying to call a fountain was newly disguised with pine boughs and potted plants. But to no avail. It still looked like the remnants of a bombed-out French cathedral. Then, when the rain eased up, I was surprised to discover that the ruins were not quite deserted: I saw a loose black braid hanging down the back of a camouflage jacket. That seemed right. He was in the old fountain's basin, bent in a concealing crouch at one of the potted pines.

I came up from behind and clapped my hand on his shoulder. 'Whatcha doin', Hard Luck? Counting another bucket of money?'

He wheeled around and had my wrist clamped in a bone-breaking grasp before I could finish the word. I saw then that this wasn't a chinless street rat standing down in the basin after all. This was a block-jawed American Indian built like two fireplugs, sitting in a wheelchair.

'Ouch! Man! Let go! I thought you were somebody else!'

He eased the hold, but kept the wrist. I told him about last year's longhair and the matching jacket.

He listened, studying my eyes. 'O.K. Sorry about the twist. I was taking a leak.'

You surprised me. Let's get out of the rain and see what kind of medicine you've got sticking out of your pocket.'

We retired under some scaffolding. He was less than enthusiastic about my choice of pocket medicine. 'I'd rather drink something like Southern Comfort if I have to choose a sugar drink,' he said. But we passed the pint back and forth and watched the rain.

He leaned to spit and a folded Army blanket slipped out of his lap. His legs were as gone as the main gut of my poor home town.

He was a part-time fillet man from the Pike Place Market, up in Seattle, on his way to spend Christmas with family on 'the res,' outside of Albuquerque. His bus was laid up for a couple of hours: 'I think they're getting the Greyhound spayed before she gets to California.'

When the pint was about three-quarters gone, I screwed on the lid and held it out. 'I gotta meet the women. Go ahead and keep it.'

'Ah, I guess not,' he said.

'You're pretty choosy for a thirsty man, aren't you? What would be your best druthers?'

'To have the money and make my own choice.'

I reached for my wallet. 'I think I got a couple of bucks.'

'And a quarter? If I had two bucks and a quarter, I could get a pint of Ten High.

With four and change I'd go on to a fair-to-middlin' fifth. Cream of Kentucky.'

I hesitated. Was I being hustled? 'O.K. Let's see what we've got.'

I emptied the wallet and pockets onto his blanket. He added a few coins and counted the collection.

'Nine seventy-five. If I come up with another two dollars, I can get a bottle of

Bushmill's Irish. Think I can panhandle two dollars between here and the liquor store?'

'Without a doubt,' I assured him. 'With both panhandles tied behind your back.'

We shook hands goodbye and headed off in our separate directions, strolling and rolling through the rain. At the restaurant, my mother wanted to know what I was thinking about that gave me such a goofy grin.

'I was just thinking, if beggars can't be choosers, then it must follow that choosers, by definition, are not beggars.'

This year for the Christmas show, Santa's got himself a classier outfit and wrangled some holiday helpers out of the high-school choir, God bless 'em. And we're gonna work all the aisles. Come on out here you helpers, come on out. Get down there and panhandle! And you guys in the audience start passing your money to the aisles here. This is no time to nickel-and-dime, for Chrissakes! It's Christmastime.

APPENDIX E

TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS ILLUSTRATED IN *SAILOR SONG*

Presented here is a list of the technological developments illustrated in *Sailor Song* and the corresponding page references on which they can be found:

MEDICAL

AIDS inoculations: 3

Implant contraceptives: (Similar to contemporary Norplant, this development has 'all but eliminated unwanted pregnancies' on the planet): 261

Gene-spliced wonder flowers: (Using the same recombinant botanical technology that made cannabis and coca plants extinct, flowers were altered for aesthetic qualities): 304

Inner ear laser surgery: (All but eliminated motion sickness): 502

MANUFACTURING

Molecumar (super-fine, strong material used for netting fish. The Chinese have developed driftnet submarines for illegal fishing): 6, 385

Steelume (an aluminum-steel alloy used for everything from briefcases to ship's hulls): 27, 100

Fiberoptic snake (a flexible video cable like a periscope): 77

Glowloy: (a varnish-like coating for wood cabinets that emits a glow): 107

Teflon: (used to coat Nightmoth planes' floats for landings on water and wet grassy meadows): 122

Glosilk: (an artificial silk-like material that emits a mild glow): 163

Uziette: (miniature uzi semi-automatic weapon): 362

Goldloy: (A synthetic alloy replicating gold): 412

Lumafoam: (Baggy survival suits, like automobile airbags, which inflate to ridiculous, floating proportions when coming into contact with water): 463

Plaztex: (Similar to plastic, but perhaps not made from petrochemicals): 478

Fusionweld: (A nuclear, super-hot method of joining steelume pieces together): 231

Glotope: (A flexible, flourescent light bulb): 242

RECREATIONAL

Holomated cartoons: (Three-dimensional animation entertainment): 224

Lap-fax: (Laptop-sized fax machine): 291

Tranque rifle hunting: (sports hunting using tranquiliser darts instead of lethal bullets):
234

Slitman and Virtual game-goggles: (Virtual video games): 235, 308

wavepan: (an open frying pan using microwave heating technology): 236

Video vandalism: (black-market, cheap, long-range macrotransmitters allowing radio and video broadcasters to 'gobble' up on existing bands and broadcast renegade sounds and images): 335

Scoot (a tea of unknown composition, save for caffeine, spearmint, skullcap and chamomile, simulating the effects of the extinct cocaine plant with the added side effect of eliminating REM sleep while under the drug's influence): 35, 36, 119, 355

Recon: (Reconstituted Alcohol: a substitute for genuine alcohol enforced by the strong UN. Similar to Star Trek's synthahol, it is easier on the liver than distilled liquor, but more fattening): 56, 58, 229, 315, 317

TRANSPORTATION

Ignition Cards: (Like a credit card with a magnetic strip along one side, these have

replaced metal keys for starting automobiles): 219

Turbo Methane Motors: (Produced by Mercedes these cars are literally ‘powered by shit and yeast’): 223

Gyro-hull: (Utilising gyro-scopic wings to stabilise the lateral rocking of sea-going vessels): 306

Turbo-magnetic motors: (Ship’s engines requiring magnetic field to function): 248

Go-ped: (read mo-ped): 282

Chipware: (Electronic hardware replacing traditional wiring in automobiles and most other things, all of which fail to operate after the shift of magnetic poles): 292

GEOGRAPHICAL

Smog: (in Skagway, Alaska): 152

Skagway airport: (expanded to allow jumbo-jets access): 135

APPENDIX F

A Comprehensive Generic Bibliography of Ken Kesey's Works and Criticism on him not necessarily mentioned in this Study.

I have attempted to make this bibliography as complete as possible, though the underground nature of many of these writing makes certainty in such an endeavour quite tenuous. Acknowledgement must be made to Kesey's previous bibliographers without whom this work would be less complete. Most important among these are Joseph Weixlmann and M. Gilbert Porter, Joan Bischoff, Barry Leeds, George Searles, and Stephen Tanner.

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