

**DRIVING FURTHUR INTO THE COUNTERCULTURE:
KEN KESEY ON AND OFF THE BUS IN THE 1960S**

by

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This research is dedicated to the free spirits who share
the same love for history and the counterculture as I do

“I can’t imagine another scene, another period that I would rather be living in. I think we’re living in a wild and wooly time, a time that history students will one day view in retrospect and say, ‘Wow! That 20th Century! Wouldn’t that have been something to make!’”

-Ken Kesey in 1963

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ABSTRACT

In June 1964, a large, kaleidoscopic school bus with fourteen friends on board sailed down the highway at maximum speed while blaring music loud enough to startle people in the next town. The psychedelic ship, also known as Furthur, symbolized the free spirit attitude of the 1960s. Unfortunately, this is the image the name Ken Kesey brings to mind. The LSD-fueled, bestselling author became one of the most recognizable figures of the 1960s. Nonetheless, he was more than an outspoken advocate for psychedelic drugs. He was a performer, artist, and, more importantly, he was a devout father figure to his family. It is necessary to take each of Kesey's roles into consideration in order to understand how he served as a crucial link between the Beat culture of the 1950s and the hippie counterculture of the 1960s.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: “HAPPY CHAOS” : KEN KESEY AND COUNTERCULTURE	
HISTORIOGRAPHY.....	1
Historiography.....	4
Methodology.....	24
CHAPTER II: THE PRANKSTER AS A PERFORMER.....	26
Kesey’s Younger Years.....	28
The Perry Lane Years.....	37
Chapter III: BRIDGE TO THE COUNTERCULTURE, 1963-1967.....	48
The La Honda Years.....	48
Kesey Boards the Bus.....	51
The Psychedelic Experience at La Honda.....	54
Out of the House and onto the Stage.....	59
Hype Over the Haight: The Counterculture Continues Without Kesey.....	63
The Performer Disappears.....	69
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	72

CHAPTER I: “HAPPY CHAOS” : KEN KESEY AND COUNTERCULTURE HISTORIOGRAPHY

To celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the 1967 Summer of Love, former and present-day hippies gathered in Golden Gate Park on Saturday, September 1, 2007 to recapture the spirit of the sixties through song and dance. One original participant recalled in a San Francisco newspaper interview, “all of a sudden the Summer of Love exploded. You could feel it coming.”¹ In that moment, the Summer of Love signified that the American counterculture was well underway. In July 1967, *Time* magazine attempted to define the counterculture as a phenomenon that culminated “in about 18 months as a wholly new subculture, a bizarre permutation of the middle-class American ethos from which it evolved.” The article characterized hippies as, “[preaching] altruism and mysticism, honesty, joy and nonviolence. They find an almost childish fascination in beads, blossoms, and bells, blinding strobe lights and ear-shattering music, exotic clothing and erotic slogans.”² Through similar journalistic accounts, national media outlets appalled adults but inspired thousands of youth runaways to chase the magical hippie lifestyle in California.

Rewind three years to April 1964. In an article for the *National Observer*, journalist Hunter S. Thompson claimed the hip beatniks had faded out of San Francisco. He wrote, “as recently as 1960, San Francisco was the capital of the Beat Generation, and

¹ C.W. Nevius, “Baby Boomers try to recapture youth at Summer of Love anniversary,” *SFGate*, September 1, 2007, <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Baby-Boomers-try-to-recapture-youth-at-Summer-of-2543237.php>.

² “The Hippies,” *Time*, July 7, 1967, Academic Search Premier.

the corner of Grant and Columbus in the section known as North Beach was the crossroads of the ‘beat’ world.” Four years later, in Thompson’s eyes, beatniks went from reigning “social lions” to lowly “social lepers.”³ High rent costs and tourism turned off many North Beach residents, but some ignored the changing conditions and stayed in the area. Others migrated five miles down to Haight-Ashbury, which soon garnered national attention as a hippie hotbed. Nonetheless, those four years comprised a major cultural transition in San Francisco. One journalist observed the shift in a July 1963 *Newsweek* article: “nobody yet knows the name of the movement of the new decade except that it isn’t Beat.”⁴

One man took advantage of the cultural vulnerability between the days of the North Beach beatnik and the Haight-Ashbury hippie. Although he claimed he did not belong to either group, Ken Kesey ultimately served as a bridge between the Beat culture and the emerging hippie counterculture. The progression from Beat to hippie was not as easy as going from one decade to the next, and each group displayed considerable differences including drug and gathering preferences. Parke Puterbaugh, journalist and professor of history of rock at Guilford College, explained that Beats preferred peyote as

³ Hunter S. Thompson, “When the Beatniks Were Social Lions (1964)” in *The Great Shark Hunt: Strange Tales from a Strange Time* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 395.

⁴ “Bye, Bye, Beatnik,” *Newsweek*, July 1, 1963, 65; also cited in: Michael William Doyle, “Debating the Counterculture: Ecstasy and Anxiety Over the Hip Alternative,” in *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s*, eds. David Farber and Beth Bailey (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 143.

their psychedelic drug of choice, while hippies favored LSD.⁵ Beats kept their intellectual circles intimate at coffee shops, whereas hippies congregated and danced together at raucous rock concerts.⁶ But Kesey shared the Beat view of drugs: he believed that psychedelic drugs amplified creativity and that the drugs led to personal enlightenment. At the same time, Kesey also believed LSD was too important to remain a secret as he evangelized the drug's advantages through public performances. Some scholars consider the counterculture's climax to be 1966-67, but Kesey opened the door to a new alternative lifestyle when he experienced LSD for the first time in 1959.⁷

Over fifty years later, the same zealousness mentioned in *Time* fascinated writers and readers alike. The vast body of scholarship on the decade of the 1960s continues to grow with the counterculture, often times, stuck in the middle. Scholars struggle with the issue as to whether the counterculture was a cultural or political movement or if it constituted a movement at all. Countercultural participants also left behind no shortage of primary source material. Oral histories, memoirs, and articles from the underground press

⁵ Peyote is a small, spineless cactus used in American Indian religious sacraments. The cactus, grown in portions of Mexico and the southwest region of the United States, contains a hallucinogenic drug known as mescaline. Under the influence of peyote, Kesey envisioned the character of Chief Bromden and wrote the opening pages of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. These three pages remained untouched despite many rewrites and edits. See Kesey's recollection of peyote in, "Who Flew Over What?" in *Kesey's Garage Sale* (New York: Viking, 1973), 14.

⁶ Parke Puterbaugh, "Beats and Hippies: A Tabular Synopsis," in *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beats: The Beat Generation and American Counterculture*, ed. Holly George-Warren (New York: Hyperion, 1999), 365.

⁷ For a transcription of Kesey's first experience with psychedelic drugs see, "Ken Kesey's First 'Trip' (1959)," in *Conversations with Ken Kesey*, ed. Scott F. Parker (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 3.

paint a vivid picture of the beauty and, at times, ugliness of what it meant to be a hippie. As this chapter will show, writing about the sixties counterculture presents endless possibilities and creates a rich historiographical discussion.

This chapter examines how historians have interpreted Kesey and the counterculture more generally. Scholars have provided diverse interpretations of Kesey, but these understandings continually change over time. As a whole, the argument is complex because Kesey himself was a complex person. It is important to take these viewpoints into account to fully understand Kesey as an individual, his relationship with the counterculture, and his historical significance. In doing so, it becomes apparent that Kesey fused the two cultural scenes together and pushed the counterculture's timeline earlier than previously recognized.

Historiography

Questions about the counterculture's origins arose before the marijuana haze even had a chance to clear the air. Scholars and journalists asked two key questions: when did the counterculture begin? And what exactly caused the widespread cultural phenomenon in the United States? Within this context, some scholars have taken Kesey's involvement into consideration but have not addressed the role he played prior to the start of the counterculture. Other scholars have explored the broader 1960s, but have not examined Kesey's relationship to the counterculture at all. Theodore Roszak and Charles Reich spearheaded the historiographical conversation over what the counterculture was and the source of the youth's dissatisfaction. These two works remain the most recognizable works in the field and offer, perhaps, the earliest scholarly interpretations of Kesey and the American counterculture.

In light of the increased and unfavorable media coverage after the Summer of Love, Roszak, a historian and social critic, considered the popular youth movement worthy of scholarly assessment. Writing in 1968, Roszak introduced the counterculture to the realm of academia as he attempted to make sense of the ongoing dissent in the United States.⁸ Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture* originally began as a series of articles published in *The Nation* and later became a national bestseller after its 1969 release date. Coincidentally, his authoritative work on the counterculture hit shelves three weeks after the iconic Woodstock Music and Art Fair drew hippies from all over the country to upstate New York in August of the same year.⁹

In his work, Roszak coined the term “counter culture” and defined it as “a culture so radically disaffiliated from the mainstream assumptions of our society that it scarcely looks to many as a culture at all, but takes on the alarming appearance of a barbaric intrusion.”¹⁰ This consisted of adolescents all along the cultural spectrum, including hippies and those aligned with the political student New Left Movement. Unlike many spectators at the time, Roszak saw these barbarous youth as an important part of society

⁸ Some scholars argue sociologist J. Milton Yinger initiated the academic discussion of the counterculture in 1960. Yinger maintained that adolescents comprised a more sociological occurrence known as a contraculture instead of a subculture. For more on the difference between contraculture and subculture, see Yinger's essay, “Contraculture and Subculture,” *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 5 (October 1960): 625-35 and Yinger's, *Countercultures: The Promise and Peril of a World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Free Press, 1982).

⁹ Douglas Martin, “Theodore Roszak, ‘60s Scholar, Dies at 77,” *New York Times*, July 13, 2011, A24.

¹⁰ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), 42.

with one common enemy. Technology, for Roszak, created a larger threat than warfare, racial strife, or poverty. Roszak argued the loathsome “technocracy,” comprised of a “regime of experts,” prioritized technological and scientific advancement by “manipulating the securities and creature comforts” of America’s industrialized and affluent society.¹¹

In turn, the technocracy gave rise to a false consciousness that provoked a far-reaching youth rebellion against the technocratic state and its “multi-billion-dollar” think tanks. Roszak argued the counterculture youth were the salvation the country needed to rescue it from the societal ills belonging to their parents’ generation. According to Roszak, the parents who experienced “depression, war, and protracted war scare, cling fast to the technocracy for the myopic sense of prosperous security it allows.”¹² In contrast, the new generation wanted a lifestyle counter to that of their parents. Thus, the American counterculture was born.

Roszak perceived Kesey as a countercultural figure who helped popularize the use of psychedelic drugs. Roszak acknowledged that the widespread usage of LSD use would have happened regardless, but not to the same magnitude without Kesey. However, Roszak was not as sympathetic toward Kesey’s psychedelic parties known as Acid Tests. In Roszak’s view, the Acid Tests represented merely fun and games. He maintained that these public happenings were “at best, aesthetic and entertaining” with little value beyond

¹¹ Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 4, 9.

¹² Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 7, 13.

a good time.¹³ Nonetheless, Roszak's description of the counterculture's "happy chaos" still carries substantial weight in the field and initiated the conversation about psychedelic drugs in counterculture historiography.¹⁴

Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*, published in 1970, presented an additional academic account of the counterculture. Reich, a legal scholar and former professor at Yale Law School, observed the youth movement with admiration. Like Roszak, Reich deemed it possible, through intellectual interpretation, to save the counterculture from the unfavorable publicity and perceptions of the time. He engaged newly written sources from history, as well as the political sciences and sociology, to challenge the preconceived assumptions about countercultural participants. The counterculture, in Reich's eyes, represented more than hallucinogens, hair, and hippies. He argued, "their protest and rebellion, their culture, clothes, music, drugs, ways of thought, and liberated life-style are not a passing fad or form of dissent and refusal, nor are they in any sense irrational."¹⁵

Both Roszak and Reich agreed that a new way of thinking prevailed in the sixties. In fact, Reich's work was built upon the idea that history progresses through different phases of consciousness. According to Reich, "Consciousness I" arose in nineteenth-century America and consisted of individuals who desired release from the village life earlier colonists had established. Those of this phase believed in the American dream and

¹³ Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 166.

¹⁴ Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 166, 145.

¹⁵ Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970), 4.

claimed “success is determined by character, morality, hard work, and self-denial.” Ultimately, “Consciousness I” stressed individualism and release from “rigid social customs and hierarchical forms.”¹⁶

Next, “Consciousness II,” Reich argued, gave rise to the corporate state and no longer focused on self-interest. “Consciousness II” emerged after the Great Depression and represented an America in which “organization predominates, and the individual must make his way through a world directed by others.” More importantly, parents of Baby Boomers and future counterculturists witnessed this transition first-hand. This epoch attracted an assorted list of supporters including “liberal intellectuals, middle-class suburbanites, educated professionals, [and] blue-collar workers, with newly purchased homes.”¹⁷ In this phase, Reich echoed Roszak’s ideas about technocracy as a trigger for the counterculture. At the heart of this phase, Reich argued, “what man produces by means of reason—the state, laws, technology, manufactured goods—constitutes the true reality.” According to Reich, the parent generation’s values “[rested] on the fiction of logic and machinery.”¹⁸

Finally, the sixties counterculture epitomized the configuration of “Consciousness III.” This new phase of consciousness, Reich asserted, began in the sixties with a quest for personal liberation and a passion for environmental and spiritual fulfillment that had been lost in the excitement of material prosperity. The counterculturists rejected their

¹⁶ Reich, *The Greening of America*, 66.

¹⁷ Reich, *The Greening of America*, 59-60, 66.

¹⁸ Reich, *The Greening of America*, 67.

parents' technologically-driven desires and adopted an unparalleled mindset against the previous generation's institutions and constraints. "Consciousness III" focused on the self and upheld the belief that "the individual is free to build his own philosophy and values, his own life-style, and his own culture from a new beginning."¹⁹ Psychedelic drugs offered one way to achieve this personal liberation through an altered state of perception.

Reich offered a less critical interpretation of Kesey's contribution to the furtherance of psychedelic drugs than had Roszak. Reich depicted Kesey as an intellectual who advocated for an unconventional altered state of consciousness for personal and creative growth. Reich argued Kesey "placed a supreme value on the development of consciousness, sensitivity, experience, knowledge." In Kesey's case, Reich added, "no trouble, no expense, no disruption, no uprooting could stand in the way of the continuing growth of one's mind."²⁰ Kesey and countercultural participants found a well-defined purpose for consuming LSD.

By the mid-1980s, scholars had gained enough historical distance from the sixties that their works shifted from philosophical accounts to popular narratives. Some of these works focused on specific themes that arose during the counterculture such as LSD, the decade as a whole, and Kesey himself. Originally published in 1985, Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain took advantage of newly available primary sources to produce one of the most influential studies on LSD itself. The authors conducted numerous interviews and

¹⁹ Reich, *The Greening of America*, 225, 352.

²⁰ Reich, *The Greening of America*, 366.

made use of declassified government documents from the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the military through the Freedom of Information Act.

A nearly twenty-year gap in the literature helped Lee and Shlain contextualize Kesey's position in the counterculture better than either Roszak or Reich. Lee and Shlain acknowledged that by 1965, a cultural transformation was occurring in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. However, in their view, the shift from "community to counterculture" did not officially occur until the January 1967 Human Be-In. The authors located Kesey in the timeframe prior to 1967 and emphasized his Trips Festival one year earlier in January 1966. The three-day, electric event was the spark that ignited both the counterculture and a unique psychedelic experience. Lee and Shlain asserted, the "Trips Festival was a shot of adrenaline for the entire hip scene in the Haight." Kesey's creative combination of loud music and psychedelics drugs created a psychedelic experience and an original form of entertainment that "unified the entire community."²¹

Lee and Shlain also supported Reich's argument that psychedelic drugs offered more than just a way to get high. Reich considered LSD "the most important means for restoring a dulled consciousness."²² Both sets of authors argued that psychedelic drug use created personal meaning. The dominant thought of youth during the 1960s, Lee and Shlain explained, was the need for a new way to see and relate to the world around them.

²¹ Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Press, 1992), 194, 144. The body text of this work was produced in 1985, and a new introduction (Andrei Codrescu) and afterword (Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain) were added in 1992.

²² Reich, *The Greening of America*, 258.

According to Lee and Shlain, “LSD was a means of exciting consciousness and provoking visions, a kind of hurried magic enabling youthful seekers to recapture the resonance of life that society had denied.”²³ Those who used psychedelic drugs felt separated from those who had not experienced the drug’s effects.²⁴ Roszak, in contrast, had argued LSD carried lesser importance to countercultural youth. In his opinion, psychedelic drugs caused drug-dependency and became a “convenient scapegoat for the misbehavior of the young.”²⁵

Three works, all published in 1987, significantly shaped the course of countercultural historiography. The first, Jay Stevens’ *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* built upon *Acid Dreams* as a work of scholarship devoted solely to LSD. Stevens called attention to the psychedelic movement that culminated alongside the counterculture. The psychedelic movement, he argued, achieved such an acclaimed reputation in the sixties due to LSD’s popularity in Haight-Ashbury. Although historians find it difficult to locate the movement’s origins among LSD’s colorful past from the lab to the public, Stevens argues that the movement ultimately peaked in 1966 as Americans became fully aware of LSD and its potent capabilities.²⁶

Stevens viewed Kesey as an important leader in the psychedelic movement. He also deemed Kesey’s choice for a positive, and public, psychedelic experience

²³ Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 131.

²⁴ Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 131-32.

²⁵ Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 169, 172.

²⁶ Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), 272, 300.

fundamental to the movement's success. Stevens found common ground with Lee and Shlain and considered Kesey's Trips Festival a critical moment in the counterculture's origins. According to Stevens, the Trips Festival "had been like throwing a switch that sent a surge of energy through the isolated pockets of hipness surrounding the Bay Area." Through his public happenings, Stevens claimed, Kesey turned more people on to LSD than any government or academic research put together.²⁷

Also in 1987, Todd Gitlin's, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* diverged from narrower themes of the counterculture and concentrated on the sixties as a whole. Gitlin, a sociologist by training, used the historical distance to his advantage as he produced an authoritative work on the decade. He described his style as writing part history and part biography as he used his personal journals and letters as source material.²⁸ Gitlin had played an active role in the student New Left and, in 1963, his peers elected him president of Students for a Democratic Society. At the time, the New Left gathered national support as a group of college-aged students who spoke out for racial equality and passionately opposed the Vietnam War.²⁹

As he viewed the sixties in retrospect, Gitlin did not treat the counterculture with the same optimism as Roszak and Reich. Whereas Roszak had argued hippies were a saving grace for the "endangered civilization," Gitlin saw the counterculture as a threat to

²⁷ Stevens, *Storming Heaven*, 301.

²⁸ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 7.

²⁹ Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 26.

the New Left's survival. He argued the countercultural lifestyle was "in many ways more attractive than radical politics."³⁰ According to Gitlin, most college students in the San Francisco area avoided the hippies' "drop out," free-spirited mentality at all costs. In reality, no matter how much campus intellectuals despised the counterculture, students of the New Left could not avoid LSD's appeal. These students eventually experimented with psychedelics and found themselves more attracted to this new lifestyle. After the Human-Be In, New Leftists intermingled with hippies at concerts and contemplated growing their hair. Gitlin argued that despite any tensions between the two groups, students who used the drug blurred the historical line between the New Left and the hippie counterculture.³¹

Gitlin's political leanings influenced his description of Kesey's eccentric following of friends known as the Merry Pranksters. Kesey and his followers, with wild costumes and painted faces, represented everything the New Leftists resented. The band of Merry Pranksters took large quantities of LSD, chased enlightenment, lived in a personal bohemia, and endorsed traveling across the country. Although their antics appeared outrageous at times, Gitlin noted of the Pranksters that with "their sheer ingenuity and bravado, they were strangely of a piece with the nodules

³⁰ Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 1.

³¹ Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 209, 213.

of the civil rights movement and the New Left—not in ideology, obviously, but in the absolute audacity it took for a small squad to seize the moment and believe they could actually change the world with exemplary acts.”³²

Gitlin’s tendency to cast the Merry Pranksters as political activists did not coincide with Lee and Shlain’s earlier analysis of the counterculture and the New Left. Instead, the two authors stressed the point that both hippies and New Leftists engaged in a common quest for higher consciousness regardless of any strife between the two camps. According to Lee and Shlain, hippies and student activists “shared a contempt for middle-class values, a distain for authority, and a passion for expression.” Furthermore, “each [group] had different ideas about how to achieve personal liberation and remake the world.”³³ Lee and Shlain did not view Kesey as a political activist and instead argued, “Kesey represented those elements of the hip scene that emphasized personal liberation without any strategic concern whatsoever; the task of remodeling themselves took precedence over changing institutions or government policy.”³⁴

Also in 1987, Peter O. Whitmer and Bruce VanWyngarden examined the links among some of the most influential countercultural icons in, *Aquarius Revisited: Seven Who Created the Sixties Counterculture that Changed America*. Timothy Leary, Kesey, Tom Robbins, Allen Ginsberg, Norman Mailer, William S. Burroughs, and Hunter S. Thompson all shared a close connection as cultural and literary figures who shaped the

³² Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 206.

³³ Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 133.

³⁴ Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 134.

way adolescents thought about the world around them. The authors suggested that Kesey identified more with intellectuals of the previous decade. Whitmer and VanWyngarden argued that Kesey bridged the fifties and the sixties and fell into the gap between the Beats and hippies. The authors used a unique analogy to describe Kesey's relationship with the Beat movement. As Whitmer and VanWyngarden explained, "the continuity from Beat to hippie can also be found, in perfect alphabetical order on the shelf of any large bookstore: Kesey comes immediately after Kerouac, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* sits right next to *On the Road*."³⁵

While some scholars have traced the counterculture's origins to the Summer of Love, Whitmer and VanWyngarden argued the summer of 1967 was actually the beginning of the end. They argued that hippie culture quickly integrated into mainstream American culture. In other words, it became hip to be a hippie, and "there was no culture for the hippies to be counter to." In addition, Whitmer and VanWyngarden noted the lack of leaders as a reason for the quick decline of the counterculture. As earlier as 1963, the Merry Pranksters were the first countercultural figures, according to Whitmer and VanWyngarden, to "create perhaps the most colorful, bizarrely tribal, consistently unpredictable attempt at an 'alternative life-style' ever to fall to earth."³⁶ This ended in

³⁵ Peter O. Whitmer and Bruce VanWyngarden, *Aquarius Revisited: Seven Who Created the Sixties Counterculture that Changed America* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 99.

³⁶ Whitmer and VanWyngarden, *Aquarius Revisited*, 99.

1967 when Kesey began his jail sentence for possession marijuana. Other personalities disappeared in 1967 including Leary who was caught up in legal battles of his own, and Ginsberg who was not in the United States at the time.³⁷

In contrast, Timothy Miller's *The Hippies and American Values*, published in 1991, portrayed the Summer of Love as the height of the sixties counterculture. Miller defined the counterculture as a social movement of the "late 1960s and very early 1970s" in which "teenagers and persons in their early twenties, who through their flamboyant lifestyle expressed their alienation from mainstream America."³⁸ He honed in on the youth culture that, in his opinion, ultimately peaked during the Summer of Love in 1967. While Miller highlighted the value of drugs and music, he failed to address Kesey's involvement in the psychedelic experience and the overall counterculture. According to Miller, at the time of Kesey's public psychedelic performances, "the counterculture hardly existed."³⁹

The relationship between drugs and rock music opened the door for an interesting debate among scholars. Kesey's role in the psychedelic experience only made the discussion more convoluted. Lee and Shlain argued that Kesey's Acid Tests established the framework for the psychedelic experience by incorporating as many elements as possible. The authors contended that Kesey's innovative use of live music, lights, and

³⁷ Whitmer and VanWyngarden, *Aquarius Revisited*, 99, 189.

³⁸ Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 6.

³⁹ Miller, *The Hippies*, 47.

projected images made for a complete psychedelic “trip.”⁴⁰ At Kesey’s Acid Tests and future psychedelic dance concerts, standing still was not an option. As Stevens argued in *Storming Heaven*, taking LSD and “dancing to rock music was the perfect illustration of how two people could do their own thing together.”⁴¹

Roszak and Reich failed to agree on the psychedelic experience’s significance as it unfolded in front of them. Roszak claimed that there was more to the counterculture than doing drugs and listening to rock music.⁴² Reich argued that music and psychedelic drugs went hand-in-hand. Miller picked up on this theme and agreed with Reich that hippies found rock music to be the key to unlimited self-expression. According to Reich, “the new music [was] a music of unrestrained creativity and self-expression.”⁴³ Similarly, Miller argued that music ignited the cultural revolution because it allowed listeners to dance, explore their sexuality, and be themselves while under the influence of psychedelic drugs.⁴⁴ Hippies who listened to music under the influence of LSD made deeper connections to the artists and to their everyday world.

In his 1994 book, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s*, historian David Farber, author of numerous works on the sixties, looked at the overarching social and economic conditions to shed light on the counterculture’s foundation. He explained

⁴⁰ Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 125.

⁴¹ Stevens, *Storming Heaven*, 306.

⁴² Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 274.

⁴³ Reich, *The Greening of America*, 247.

⁴⁴ Miller, *The Hippies*, 75-77.

that in the sixties, more than any other decade, young people who participated in social and political movements revolted against what Farber described as the “American way of life.” The youth abandoned the beliefs their parents instilled that “they were the best, most generous, most free people on earth.”⁴⁵ Although he did not assign the counterculture a definitive start date, Farber argued that the counterculture was an episode exclusive to the late 1960s. The counterculture arose as a revolt against the “‘traditional’ verities and ‘traditional’ values of American life [that] produced the war in Vietnam and racism, and a lot of other ugliness and stupidity.”⁴⁶

Farber concurred with Whitmer and VanWyngarden that the hippies shared many similarities with the Beats. Like their hip successors, the Beats wholeheartedly rejected post World War II prosperity and conformity. Farber argued that the Beat message filtered down to the youth through popular poems and writings. According to Farber the Beats offered the next generation “their rejection of American materialism, their embrace of an open sexuality, their love for ‘beautiful losers’ like the American Indians, their appreciation of Eastern mysticism, and their respect for the land.”⁴⁷ Farber attributed Kesey’s success as a countercultural figure to his writing. In the same way the Beats spread their ideas through written works, Kesey had established a reputation through writing and gained respect by the time his Acid Tests become public happenings.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 168.

⁴⁶ Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams*, 168.

⁴⁷ Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams*, 172.

⁴⁸ Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams*, 181.

In 2002, gender studies scholar Alice Echols dismissed Gitlin's interpretation of the 1960s and the counterculture. Echols argued in *Shaky Ground: The '60s and Its Aftershocks* that works by male student politicians dominated in the field, and she called for a new narrative of the sixties less focused on the New Left. In Echols' view, leaders in student political organizations, like Gitlin, derived their narratives mostly from personal experiences. Echols argued that more individuals belonged to hippie enclaves like Haight-Ashbury than political organizations such as Students for a Democratic Society. Therefore, works by male student leaders should not be used as authoritative works on the sixties.⁴⁹

Echols reached the same conclusion as had Whitmer, VanWyngarden, and Farber that the sixties counterculture shared continuity with the Beats of the fifties. She expanded on Farber's argument and added that without the North Beach beatniks, the hippie hedonism of the sixties would have failed to form on the scale that it did.⁵⁰ However, unlike Whitmer and VanWyngarden, Echols identified one important difference between the Beats and the Merry Pranksters. The Pranksters were less inhibited. She explained, "although both Beats and hippies were nomadic, on vacation from work and the consumption it subsidized, the Beats traveled unobtrusively, while the Pranksters advertised their weirdness as only those who feel untouchable can, crossing the country in a 1939 school bus, painted in a rainbow of Day-Glo colors."⁵¹

⁴⁹ Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: The '60s and Its Aftershocks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 18, 72, 64.

⁵⁰ Echols, *Shaky Ground*, 19.

⁵¹ Echols, *Shaky Ground*, 33.

In 2010, John Robert Greene described the counterculture as one of the most misconstrued and most important occurrences of the sixties. He defined the counterculture as young people who lived entirely counter to the straight culture. According to Greene, the counterculture consisted of those who “chose to reject completely the culture of their parents and instead chose a lifestyle that openly, honestly, and in many cases, comically, rejected a life of upper-middle-class luxury.” He advanced his argument as he asserting, “the hippie movement *was* the true counterculture.” Greene did not mention Kesey specifically, but he did allude counterculture hippies and Kesey sharing similar mindsets. Farber had previously noted that the Merry Pranksters used LSD as a way to completely recreate the world around them. Greene argued hippies aspired to create a new culture altogether and one that was uniquely their own.⁵²

In his scholarly assessment of the decade, Greene failed to address Kesey’s role in the counterculture. He did, however, take into account LSD’s influence on the youth’s hearts and minds. He argued that those in the straight culture turned to nicotine and alcohol, but youth used LSD to break away from the straight society of their parents. In addition, Greene examined the link between psychedelic drugs and creativity. He argued psychedelic drugs were viewed as means to “expand creative horizons, free the mind, and literally break the bond with straight society.”⁵³

⁵² John Robert Greene, *America in the Sixties* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 138-39; Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams*, 181.

⁵³ Greene, *America in the Sixties*, 144.

The use of psychedelic drugs for creative purposes had long been a point of contention for scholars. During the counterculture, musicians, writers, and artists, believed LSD had the ability to liberate, as Greene phrased it, the “artistic consciousness.”⁵⁴ Kesey was only one of many who endorsed using altered states to achieve greater creativity. He often turned to drugs for inspiration as he wrote a best-selling novel and, later, an aspiration to make a movie. According to Lee and Shlain, Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* “gave the psychedelic scene a curious legitimacy; one could have one’s cake (LSD) and write the great American novel too.”⁵⁵

Miller argued that sometimes the creative process occurred after the drugs wore off. According to Miller “much of the creativity was believed to come directly from the dope high, but perhaps even more was attributed to dope’s carry-over effect, the sense that insights gained while high influenced, positively, later activities.”⁵⁶ While Roszak previously accepted that counterculturists offered more than just recreational drug use, Reich approved of a liberated consciousness for an artistic purpose. Reich argued, “if life itself, work, culture, community, are to be lived as something creative, as a work of art,” an expanded state of consciousness was necessary.⁵⁷

In 2013, Michael J. Kramer revisited Kesey’s contribution to the counterculture’s musical scene. In *The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties*

⁵⁴ Greene, *America in the Sixties*, 145.

⁵⁵ Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 120.

⁵⁶ Miller, *The Hippies*, 44.

⁵⁷ Reich, *The Greening of America*, 366.

Counterculture, Kramer supplied a fresh interpretation of Kesey as he pointed out that Kesey and the Merry Pranksters were a significant part in the creation of the American counterculture. He argued, “LSD ingestion, rock music, and festive technological experimentation that Kesey and his acquaintances organized in 1965 and 1966... provided the blueprint for rock music in the Bay Area and beyond for years to come.”⁵⁸ He also revisited Roszak’s view that technology created a murky relationship between music and the counterculture. Roszak argued that counterculturists opposed technology but still relied on it for many purposes including music.⁵⁹ According to Kramer, unlike many counterculturists at the time, the Merry Pranksters found a use for the innovative technology of a multimedia performance. Kramer claimed that the Acid Tests “became a way for strangers to establish bonds of affiliation and connection through risk-taking, particularly through drug use and electronically generated chaos.”⁶⁰

Kramer added a new thread to the interpretation of Kesey and rock music during the sixties. He claimed that the Acid Tests generated unconventional ideas of democracy and citizenship. Kramer explained that partygoers wanted to have as much fun as possible but, “pleasures were linked to trying to understand the American ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”⁶¹ Along these same lines, Kramer expanded on Stevens’

⁵⁸ Michael J. Kramer, *The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23.

⁵⁹ Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 274-75.

⁶⁰ Kramer, *The Republic of Rock*, 35.

⁶¹ Kramer, *The Republic of Rock*, 35.

notion that the psychedelic experience allowed people in a common space to have different experiences as they danced together. In Kramer's view, it was through the combination of rock music, collective dancing, and LSD, that the Merry Pranksters "sought to transform what social belonging, individual identity, and collective interaction meant in the United States during the 1960s."⁶²

Rick Dodgson contributed the first academic work and biography dedicated solely to Kesey. In *It's All a Kind of Magic: The Young Ken Kesey*, Dodgson focused on Kesey's life as a teenager growing up in his hometown of Springfield, Oregon and as a flourishing graduate student at Stanford University. Dodgson benefited from letters and journals that Kesey gave to Dodgson before his death in November 2001. Dodgson's work provides new insights into many key aspects of Kesey's personal and collegiate life. But, the book concludes in 1964 as Kesey and the Merry Pranksters conceived an idea for a cross-country bus trip to New York City.

Dodgson directly challenged Stevens' claim that Kesey introduced a large number of people to LSD. He countered Stevens arguing, "the number of people who were initiated into the world of acid—that is, took LSD for the first time—at the Acid Tests courtesy of Kesey and the Pranksters is probably fairly small, a few hundred at most."⁶³ Whereas Dodgson minimized Kesey's contribution to the counterculture, he also initiated a new historical discussion of Kesey's place in the counterculture and allowed the next generation of historians to challenge his current place in the prevalent body of literature.

⁶² Kramer, *The Republic of Rock*, 31.

⁶³ Rick Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic: The Young Ken Kesey* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 7.

Ken Kesey's place in the American counterculture has added to an already diverse historiographical discussion about the 1960s. Some scholars viewed him simply as a man who took psychedelic drugs for fun, while others viewed him as an intellectual who had a clear purpose for his actions. Kesey's historical interpretation continually changes over time, but scholars often miss the values he maintained throughout it all. Kesey essentially walked away from the culture he helped create to pursue a new life with his family in Oregon. This aspect is crucial to Kesey's story and to understanding his place in American cultural history.

Although historians disagree on the counterculture's actual origins, Kesey's involvement should not be overlooked. He came to California at a critical time. He took the time in between the beatniks and hippies and made it his own. He was not ready to let go of the beatnik mentality that celebrated drugs, traveling, and creativity. However, in 1959, Kesey unknowingly discovered a new, alternative culture after he enrolled to be a test-subject for government research. What happened after Kesey ingested the first dose of an uncommon psychoactive drug was history.

Methodology

The 1960s remain one of the most studied eras in American cultural history. This decade witnessed the rise of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, political assassinations, and, more importantly, a dramatic shift in cultural ethos. However, among the abundant popular and scholarly works on the decade, I noticed Ken Kesey lacked well-defined scholarly attention. Additionally, Kesey seemed misrepresented in these works as authors often provided brief and similar interpretations of the countercultural

visionary. I wanted to know more about Kesey beyond his image as an author and psychedelic drug evangelist. The more I researched Kesey, the more I realized there was more to him than historians acknowledge.

This thesis serves two purposes. First, I wanted to argue that, as a performer, Ken Kesey played multiple roles throughout his life, which, in turn, led him to act as a bridge between the Beats and hippies. Secondly, I intended to give Kesey and those who knew him best a voice. As a result, I chose primary and secondary works that I felt best represented those unexpressed voices. Two primary works in particular allowed me to shed light on Kesey's personal experiences during the counterculture and the years that followed: Scott F. Parker's *Conversations with Ken Kesey* and Michael Schwartz and Neil Ortenberg's edited work, *On the Bus: The Complete Guide to the Legendary Trip of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters and the Birth of the Counterculture*. Both of these works contain transcripts of interviews and oral histories with Kesey, and each work contributed significantly to this project.

The secondary material I selected goes beyond the authors' personal understanding of the topic. These works contain interviews the individual author conducted. Therefore, these secondary sources shed light on Kesey that the primary material could not. This thesis is my reading and interpretation of the leading sources in the field, and I treated each source in a manner that allowed me to retell Kesey's story. In the end, I trust readers will gain a new perspective into Kesey's life and the counterculture respectively.

CHAPTER II: THE PRANKSTER AS A PERFORMER

On Friday, January 13, 1967, the *Berkeley Barb* advertised an event organized by student activists and Haight-Ashbury hippies aimed at overcoming violence through “rhythm and dancing” and launching a “spiritual revolution to transform the body and mind of America.” The next day, upwards of twenty thousand people came together in Golden Gate Park’s Polo Fields in San Francisco, California for the Human Be-In. Everyone, regardless of education, economic status, or political affiliation, was invited for an afternoon of the Gathering of the Tribes. Bands such as the Grateful Dead and the Jefferson Airplane provided the soundtrack, and Beat poets Allen Ginsberg and Michael McClure chanted in Tibetan. Dr. Timothy Leary, former Harvard University psychology professor turned psychedelic proselytizer, urged the audience to “Turn on, tune in, and drop out.” This elaborate celebration preceded the Summer of Love, the proclaimed height of the Haight-Ashbury era. To some historians, the two events also signified that a new cultural movement had come of age. The popularity of this culture led to a new hype over Haight-Ashbury.¹

One seminal figure in the American counterculture was absent from the Human Be-In and the pandemonium that followed. The 1967 Summer of Love drew youth, media, and spectators from across the country to Haight-Ashbury, but author Ken Kesey had just begun the second portion of his jail sentence in a San Mateo County work camp for convicted felons. Kesey was arrested in April 1965 for possession of marijuana and a

¹ “Tune in/ Turn Out/ Be-In,” *Berkeley Barb* 4, no. 2 (January 13, 1967): 1-3, Alexander Street Press: The Sixties: Primary Source Documents and Personal Narratives, 1960-1974.

second time in January 1966. After his second arrest, Kesey faked his own suicide, jumped bail, and fled to Mexico. Kesey returned to the United States in October 1966 and managed to avoid an arrest, at least temporarily. Within two weeks of his return, however Kesey was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to six months in prison.² Before his jail term began, Kesey moved his family back to his hometown of Springfield, Oregon and away from the scene in California. Once released, in November of 1967, Kesey returned to Springfield and left the scene forever.³

I argue the best way to describe Kesey is as a performer. He was, at heart, a true performer, and he applied this mindset to everything he did. He starred in many theatrical productions throughout high school and college; he was a magician; he was a writer; he was in the public eye, and he loved it. Although he played multiple roles, the most important to him was that of a devoted family man and father figure. He remained married to his wife, Faye, for forty-five years until his death in 2001. Kesey's dedication to his family led him to perform one of his greatest acts: he disappeared from public life in 1967. He left California just as the counterculture began to flower in San Francisco. Ironically, even though Kesey the man had vanished from the countercultural scene, Kesey the performer continued to serve as a cultural icon for the burgeoning youth culture.

² Ed McClanahan, introduction to *Kesey's Jail Journal*, by Ken Kesey (New York: Viking, 2003), xi-xii.

³ Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), 413-414.

In many ways, Kesey had essentially lived out his place in the counterculture before its culmination in 1967. It is accurate to see Kesey—with his Acid Tests (1965) and Trips Festival (1966)—as sparking the counterculture and then leaving the stage. While he was a well-recognized countercultural icon at the time, it was the memory of Kesey that fueled the psychedelic scene, not the man himself. Because of his performer persona, Kesey served as a crucial link between an earlier Beat culture and the emerging youth culture of the sixties. In this role, Kesey helped usher in a new era altogether.⁴

Kesey's Younger Years

Kesey's life as a performer began on September 17, 1935 in La Junta, Colorado. Fred and Geneva Smith Kesey, two dairy farmers from the South, met and fell in love

⁴ In order to perceive Kesey as both a performer and cultural bridge between the fifties and sixties, it is first necessary to make sense of various interpretations of Kesey himself. Kesey's place in the counterculture began in 1959 when he experienced LSD for the first time. However, it is important to take into account different scholarly accounts to fully understand how Kesey served as an influential figure in the creation of the counterculture. For example, works that view Kesey as a forerunner to the counterculture include: Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Press, 1985) and Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Grove Press, 1987). Both works place Kesey in the timeframe of 1965-66 as he creatively combined psychedelic drugs and music to produce an innovative performance and concert experience. Similarly, Stevens and Lee and Shlain agree that in 1967, the American counterculture had officially matured. In contrast, Rick Dodgson views Kesey as a true performer, but he does not consider Kesey a leading figure in the counterculture. He acknowledges that Kesey's presence was important, but he does not view the Acid Tests and Trips Festival as precursors to the counterculture. See Dodgson's, *It's All a Kind of Magic: The Young Ken Kesey* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013). Peter O. Whitmer and Bruce VanWyngarden identify Kesey as a crucial link between the Beats and hippies and a precursor to the counterculture. The authors locate Kesey in the timeline of 1963-67. See Whitmer and VanWyngarden's, *Aquarius Revisited: Seven Who Created the Sixties Counterculture that Changed America* (New York: Macmillan, 1987).

after simply running into each other. Geneva, who was from Fort Smith, Arkansas, was attracted to Fred, who was somewhat older and from Mobitee, Texas. Fred and Geneva were adventurous and wanted to relocate out of the South. In 1931, the two opted for a change of scenery and made the move to La Junta where they remained until 1946. That same year, the family permanently settled in Springfield, Oregon just outside of the Eugene area to continue their work in the dairy business after Fred's service in World War II.⁵

As a young boy, Kesey never had a problem entertaining or keeping to himself. Geneva described her eldest son as "always creative and doing artwork."⁶ He spent his time drawing, writing poems, and discovering his love for reading. Growing up, Kesey was a comic book and science fiction novel enthusiast. He appreciated the creativity behind the works of Marvel, Zane Grey, and Edgar Rice Burroughs.⁷ But it was Kesey's love for comics, and Batman stickers, that inspired him to pursue magic. The first time

⁵ Steve Grinstead, "One Flew West: Ken Kesey's Colorado Childhood," *Colorado Heritage* (December 2008), 3-4, America: History and Life; Stephen L. Tanner, *Ken Kesey* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 3.

⁶ Grinstead, "One Flew West," 6.

⁷ Gordon Lish, "What the Hell You Looking in Here for, Daisy Mae? (1963)," in *Conversations with Ken Kesey*, ed. Scott F. Parker (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 25.

Kesey ordered Batman decals in the mail, a small book of magic tricks came with his purchase. Unbeknownst to Kesey at the time, one free book of magic roused a lifetime of artistry.⁸

Growing up, Kesey was a well-rounded, all-American boy. Fred and Geneva, who were both grounded in their roots as Southern Baptists, raised Kesey and his brother Chuck in a religious environment. Kesey even considered himself “a hard shell Baptist, born and raised.”⁹ In the Kesey household, reading the Bible was part of everyday life. His maternal grandmother, Grandma Smith, also attended church regularly and read the Bible to her grandchildren. Kesey loved listening to his grandmother, but he took more from Grandma Smith than her knowledge of scripture. Her ability to make stories come to life captivated Kesey.¹⁰

Grandma Smith was also Kesey’s first source of inspiration as a writer and performer. Born and raised in the Ozark Mountains, Grandma Smith picked up the tradition of oral storytelling that she passed along to her family. She frequently told her young grandson stories and nursery rhymes that sparked his vivid imagination and his love for words both written and spoken. Grandma Smith taught Kesey the features of good storytelling including the importance of alliteration and speech rhythms. However,

⁸ Linda Gaboriau, “Ken Kesey Summing Up the ‘60s, Sizing up the ‘70s (1972),” in *Conversations with Ken Kesey*, ed. Scott F. Parker (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 89.

⁹ Gaboriau, “Ken Kesey Summing Up the ‘60s,” 90.

¹⁰ Grinstead, “One Flew West,” 4; Tanner, *Ken Kesey*, 5.

one particular nursery rhyme Grandma Smith told Kesey as a child stuck with him throughout his life: “One flew east, one flew west, one flew over the cuckoo’s nest.”¹¹

As an aspiring magician, Kesey incorporated Grandma Smith’s storytelling techniques into his acts. “A story went with each magic act, and the stories enhanced the act,” Kesey told journalist Robert Faggen in an interview. Kesey believed that his magic acts and storytelling went hand in hand. “For one thing, you have to talk, explain things as you go along,” Kesey explained to Faggen. He relied on his grandmother’s ability to clearly communicate fantasy and wonder to listeners.¹² Grandma Smith inspired Kesey so much that during performances later in his career, Kesey often wrapped a scarf around his head and summoned Grandma Smith and her storytelling before a live audience.¹³

Kesey’s four years at Springfield High School shaped him into a true performer and artist. Until he graduated in 1953, Kesey’s time in high school was spent finding a new love for the spotlight and a home on the stage. He took up extracurricular activities that catered to his outgoing personality. He joined the debate team and served on the student council. As a member of the National Thespian Society, Kesey performed in theatrical productions and talent shows. Not only was he theatrically driven, but he also divided his time between the stage, the football field, and the wrestling mat. Kesey

¹¹ Robert Faggen, “Ken Kesey: The Art of Fiction No. 136,” *Paris Review* 35, no. 130 (Spring 1994), <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1830/the-art-of-fiction-no-136-ken-kesey>; Grinstead, “One Flew West,” 5; Tanner, *Ken Kesey*, 4.

¹² Faggen, “Ken Kesey: The Art of Fiction.”

¹³ Grinstead, “One Flew West,” 5.

played right guard on the varsity football team, and he earned the name “Hooded Terror” as a championed high school wrestler. Kesey’s involvement in numerous school activities led his classmates to vote him “Most Talented.”¹⁴

Kesey’s father helped mold his son into a performer as he encouraged Kesey to practice magic throughout high school. Fred managed Darigold Creamery, which was part of the Eugene Farmer’s Cooperative, one of the most well-known dairy cooperatives in Oregon.¹⁵ Kesey was always willing to lend a helping hand at the family business scooping ice cream or milking cows. But Kesey’s favorite role occurred outside the creamery. Fred often took Kesey and Chuck along when he traveled around the area to meet with other local farmers. Kesey and his brother performed magic tricks for the farmers and their children, and Kesey loved seeing how much his audience enjoyed his performances. He recalled, “We’d do these shows and the look that would come on these people’s faces—it was wonderful.”¹⁶

In the fall of 1953, Kesey began his first semester at the University of Oregon as a speech and communications major. His campus activities mirrored the same creative and athletic interests he pursued in high school. Kesey pledged as a brother of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity his freshman year, he wrestled with the Oregon Ducks throughout college,

¹⁴ Rick Dodgson, *It’s All a Kind of Magic: The Young Ken Kesey* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 26, 67-68.

¹⁵ Grinstead, “One Flew West,” 6.

¹⁶ Dodgson, *It’s All a Kind of Magic*, 25; Matthew Rick and Mary Jane Fenex, “An Interview with Ken Kesey (1993),” in *Conversations with Ken Kesey*, ed. Scott F. Parker (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 144.

and he appeared in many university theatrical productions. Kesey also enjoyed and excelled at classes in improvisation and screenplay writing.¹⁷ However, Kesey faced harsh criticism from his teammates for his love of performing: “The guys on the wrestling team used to say, ‘You write? You act? What the hell you doing over there with those people?’”¹⁸ But the backlash did not stop Kesey from traveling down as many creative avenues as possible, both inside and outside of the classroom.

While Kesey loved wrestling in college, performing remained his hobby of choice. He performed his magic and ventriloquism act at various locations on and off campus including the McDonald Theater in Eugene, Oregon.¹⁹ Kesey turned his show into a part-time job in order to earn some extra money. He told the *Eugene Register Guard* in 1957, “My first two years, I almost put myself through college with magic shows around town.”²⁰ On campus, Kesey crafted magic acts to entertain his peers in other fraternity and sorority houses. During these acts, Kesey performed with his ventriloquist dummy, Dink while his roommate, Boyd Harris, played conga drums, and another friend carried out a fire-eating routine.²¹

¹⁷ Mark Christensen, *Acid Christ: Ken Kesey and the Politics of Ecstasy* (Tucson, Schaffner Press, 2010), 47; Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 227.

¹⁸ Christensen, *Acid Christ*, 39-40.

¹⁹ John Daniel, “The Prankster Moves On,” in *Spit in the Ocean, No. 7: All About Kesey*, ed. Ed McClanahan (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 131.

²⁰ Dodgson, *It’s All a Kind of Magic*, 26.

²¹ Christensen, *Acid Christ*, 42.

It was also at the University of Oregon that Kesey expressed an interest in writing. Kesey wrote poems as a child, and he occasionally submitted stories to his high school newspaper.²² However, college allowed Kesey to explore a new creative venture even further. During his sophomore year (1954-55), Kesey contributed a weekly column to the university newspaper, the *Daily Emerald*. His column, "Gulliver's Trifles," was not much, but it was outside the bounds of traditional journalistic writing. His stories primarily consisted of current events and university news, but Kesey's editors approved of his humorous and satirical style that resembled a work of fiction rather than a regular newspaper article.²³

Kesey maintained his wholesome, conservative values throughout college. Although he belonged to a popular fraternity on campus, Kesey rarely participated in traditional Greek-life antics. He never experimented with drugs or alcohol, and he told Harris that if he ever had an opportunity to use marijuana, he would never do it. Instead, Kesey often hypnotized his fellow fraternity brothers for fun. Kesey was also the only married man among his brothers. The summer after his junior year, on May 20, 1956, Kesey had married his high school sweetheart, Faye Haxby. On his wedding night, Kesey recalled, he drank enough alcohol to be drunk for the first time, but, even then, he was "not too drunk."²⁴

²² Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 62; Lish, "What the Hell You Looking in Here for," 25.

²³ Dodgson, *It's All a Kind of Magic*, 62.

²⁴ Christensen, *Acid Christ*, 41, 46-49.

While in college, Kesey decided to take his writing and acting out of Oregon and into a place full of other artistic dreamers, Hollywood. Kesey regularly spent his summer breaks in California writing screenplays and seeking out roles for the big screen.²⁵ Hollywood's bright lights and vast creativity had appealed to Kesey since high school, and his fascination continued to grow as a result of his acting experience in college. However, the film industry did not welcome him with open arms as he had hoped. It took many failed attempts before Kesey abandoned his screenplays along with his dream of becoming an actor.²⁶ The frustrations Kesey faced in Hollywood did not cause him to give up on California or writing altogether. Instead, the rejections motivated him to write more than ever before. As Kesey approached graduation, he turned away from screenplays and set his sights on writing a novel.

Kesey graduated from the University of Oregon in 1957 without a clear sense of how to put his speech and communications degree to use. The recent college graduate did know, however, that he wanted to write a novel. The summer he graduated, Kesey and his wife moved back to Springfield where he worked in his father's creamery for a year.²⁷ The flexible hours gave Kesey a chance to work on his first novel, *End of Autumn*, modeled after his own experience as a collegiate athlete.²⁸ In early 1958, Kesey received a letter stating a former professor had nominated him for a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship,

²⁵ Tanner, *Ken Kesey*, 7.

²⁶ Robert Stone, "The Prince of Possibility," *New Yorker*, June 14, 2004, 72.

²⁷ Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven*, 225.

²⁸ *End of Autumn* was never published.

a scholarship that allowed the recipient to choose how, and where, to further his or her education. Kesey had not majored in English as an undergraduate, and as a result he did not have the necessary courses to pursue a master's degree in English. Instead, Kesey chose creative writing and sent a selection from *End of Autumn* to Stanford University in California.²⁹

Kesey's skill as a writer developed during his time in Stanford's creative writing program under the direction of famed novelist of the American West, Wallace Stegner. The author established the program in 1946 in order to assist World War II veterans with their education. Stegner noticed the veterans took college courses more seriously than some undergraduates, and he wanted to create a special program independent of the Department of English. Stegner's creative writing program also offered scholarships and a master's degree. Soon, Stanford was the second creative writing program in the country that offered graduate work. Initially, Kesey felt honored to be a part of the esteemed program and work alongside Stegner and author Malcolm Cowley.³⁰ Kesey and Stegner's relationship grew strained, however, shortly after Kesey started spending time in a "ragged little bohemia" known as Perry Lane.³¹

²⁹ Stevens, *Storming Heaven*, 225-26; Tanner, *Ken Kesey*, 11.

³⁰ Malcolm Cowley was an author, literary critic, and social historian who was best known for his work on post-World War I writers known as the Lost Generation. Cowley also served as editor of *The New Republic*, a left-leaning magazine, from 1929 until 1944.

³¹ Philip L. Fradkin, *Wallace Stegner and the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 112, 136.

The Perry Lane Years

Perry Lane, a small neighborhood near Stanford's campus in Palo Alto, California, already had a reputation as a bohemian community before Kesey's arrival. The World-War I-era community contained weathered, two-room cottages that housed Stanford graduate students and part-time faculty members.³² Author Gurney Norman, who was also in the creative writing program, described Perry Lane as more than an area of shacks that endured the war. He recalled, "From 1920 until they were torn down [in 1963], the houses were occupied by artists, writers, and people trying to live cheaply. . . . You had literary types living there, drinking wine and having intelligent discussions."³³ The battered houses came with low rent costs. In 1959 when Kesey and Faye moved to Perry Lane, the couple paid just \$60 a month.³⁴

Perry Lane changed Kesey's life. The "campus wonder-boy" from high school and college rediscovered his inner artist and performer as he found himself caught between two cultural stages. The Kesseys' original plan for California had not included living in an off-beat neighborhood where drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana several times a day was normal. Initially, and just before the start of his first semester at Stanford in fall 1958, Kesey and Faye had settled into a small apartment situated on top of a garage near campus in Palo Alto. Kesey and his wife made the apartment a home

³² Stone, "Prince of Possibility," 70; Wolfe, *Electric Kool-Aid*, 34.

³³ Paul Perry, *On the Bus: The Complete Guide to the Legendary Trip of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters and the Birth of the Counterculture*, eds. Michael Schwartz and Neil Ortenberg (New York: Thunder Mouth's Press, 1990), 25.

³⁴ Wolfe, *Electric Kool-Aid*, 34.

away from their Oregon home. But the couple was eager to buy a house and start a family.³⁵ As Kesey befriended classmates who had ties to Perry Lane—journalist Robert Stone, author Larry McMurtry, and Kesey’s future Prankster-sidekick, Ken Babbs—he embraced the idea of living in a more creative and intellectual environment. Stone described Perry Lane as a happening scene in the midst of post-World War II conformity: “The world was just beginning to be separated into the hip and the square, and we were firmly ensconced in the notion of being hip,”³⁶

California in the late 1950s still showed signs of “hip” visionaries, the Beats. Historians offer diverse perspectives on the cultural forces that led to the start of the counterculture, but the Beat Generation of the 1950s is clearly an important antecedent.³⁷ The youth who rejected the conventionalism of the new postwar American society found common ground with writers of the Beat Generation. As a way to contend with the

³⁵ Dodgson, *It’s All a Kind of Magic*, 71.

³⁶ Robert Stone quoted in, Martin Torgoff, *Can’t Find My Way Home: America in the Great Stoned Age, 1945-2000* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 89.

³⁷ For more general histories of the Beat Generation see, Steven Watson, *The Birth of the Beat Generation: Visionaries, Rebels, and Hipsters, 1944-1960* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995), James Campbell, *This is the Beat Generation: New York, San Francisco, Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), Bill Morgan, *The Typewriter is Holy: The Complete Uncensored History of the Beat Generation* (New York: Free Press, 2010). For more works pertaining to the Beats and the counterculture see, Alice Echols’s essay, “Hope and Hype in Sixties Haight-Ashbury,” in *Shaky Ground: The ‘60s and Its Aftershocks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), Simon Warner, *Text and Drugs and Rock ‘n’ Roll: the Beats and Rock Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), Parke Puterbaugh’s essay, “The Beats and the Birth of the Counterculture,” in *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beats: The Beat Generation and American Culture*, ed. Holly George-Warren (New York: Hyperion, 1999).

societal ills, the Beats stressed self-liberation through artistic avenues.³⁸ Jack Kerouac, perhaps the most acclaimed leader among the Beat writers, defined his cohort and its following as, “Members of the generation that came of age after World War II, who, supposedly as a result of disillusionment stemming from the Cold War, espouse mystical detachment and relaxation of social and sexual tensions.”³⁹ Kesey witnessed the formation of this culture first-hand as he admired the works of Beat writers including his favorite, William S. Burroughs.⁴⁰

Although the Beat Generation occurred on both the East and West Coasts, it was San Francisco where the movement ultimately matured. The City Lights Bookstore, owned by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, along with hip coffee houses and jazz bars, attracted the attention of discontented youth. By the late 1950s, those who respected the writings of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and McClure traveled to the North Beach neighborhood in San Francisco to experience a lifestyle similar to their Beat heroes. Even though the existing Beat culture was fading out of North Beach by the time, admirers attempted to revive the bohemia. These enthusiasts even acquired the name junior hipsters, or hippies, by the Beats who used the term in a derogatory sense.⁴¹

³⁸ Simon Warner, *Text and Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll: The Beats and Rock Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 34.

³⁹ Steven Watson, *The Birth of the Beat Generation: Visionaries, Rebels, and Hipsters, 1944-1960* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995), 5.

⁴⁰ Christensen, *Acid Christ*, 41.

⁴¹ Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and Its Aftershocks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 19; Irwin Unger and Debi Unger, *America in the 1960s* (New York: Brandywine Press, 1988), 260-62.

The first piece of fiction Kesey crafted at Stanford was a new novel, *Zoo*.⁴² In his writing, Kesey wanted to capture the aesthetic of communalism in the North Beach area during the height of the Beat Generation. The story's protagonist, the son of a rodeo rider, moved to the area to experience the celebrated Beat culture for himself. Kesey and Babbs took frequent trips to the area for inspiration. Babbs later recalled, "One of the places we went to in North Beach was a coffee house called 'The Place.' Every Tuesday they had a Free Speech Night. I loved it. The same guys would always be in there, drinking coffee and beer and wine and listening to the new speeches."⁴³ In November 1959, Kesey's *Zoo* received a Saxton Grant from Harper Brothers Publishers for \$2,000 although the money did not promise publication. The money motivated Kesey to complete his manuscript and send it off to New York City. He soon experienced déjà vu of his Hollywood experience as a Harper representative suggested Kesey add her letter to his other rejection letters. Kesey then scrapped his draft and looked for a way to earn money elsewhere.⁴⁴

Kesey could not create an alternative culture out of nowhere. He first had to sell his soul, and mind, to the government in 1959. One night on Perry Lane, Kesey met his neighbor, Vik Lovell, a fellow graduate student in the clinical psychology program at Stanford. Lovell, who interned at Menlo Park Veterans Administration Hospital, told Kesey about a drug study under the supervision of Dr. Leo Hollister. Lovell told Kesey

⁴² *Zoo* was never published.

⁴³ Perry, *On the Bus*, 10-11.

⁴⁴ Peter O. Whitmer and Bruce VanWyngarden, *Aquarius Revisited: Seven Who Created the Sixties Counterculture That Changed America* (New York: McMillan, 1987), 200-01.

he could earn \$20 per session if he sat in a hospital room one day a week for eight hours while researchers monitored his behavior after he ingested the drugs. He needed the extra money to add to the family income, so the pitch sounded attractive.⁴⁵ The study was part of the Central Intelligence Agency's experiment, MK-ULTRA. Researchers gave participants a variety of drugs such as psilocybin,⁴⁶ mescaline, and a new, secret psychedelic, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD).⁴⁷ The CIA became interested in LSD as a way to combine psychology and behavioral sciences with the national security interests coming out of World War II. The world of pharmaceutical technology was thriving, but more research about psychedelic drugs was necessary.⁴⁸ Lovell backed out of the study and asked Kesey if he wanted to fill his spot.⁴⁹

During the study, Kesey took a personal liking to LSD. Dr. Hollister oversaw Kesey's first doses of psilocybin and mescaline, but the drugs' effects did not impress Kesey. Each of the drugs affected his psyche differently, but the outcome was always the

⁴⁵ Fradkin, *Wallace Stegner*, 133; Torgoff, *Can't Find My Way Home*, 90.

⁴⁶ Psilocybin is a psychoactive drug derived from "magic" mushrooms. Similar to peyote, psilocybin has Mexican and Native American origins. For more on psilocybin and its effects see Clayton J. Mosher and Scott Akins' description in, *Drugs and Drug Policy: The Control of Consciousness Alteration* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, 2007), 106-107.

⁴⁷ Torgoff, *Can't Find My Way Home*, 90.

⁴⁸ David Farber, "The Intoxicated State/Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture," in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 21.

⁴⁹ Ken Kesey, interviewed by Terry Gross, August 12, 2011, Fresh Air: "Ken Kesey on Misconceptions of Counterculture," National Public Radio. Kesey's original interview with Gross was conducted in 1989.

same. LSD, however, gave Kesey new visions and altered his current state of thought in ways he had not previously experienced. The chemical-based drug allowed him to see “kaleidoscopic pictures and the geometrics of humanity.” The government, he thought, was on the verge of a scientific, psychedelic, breakthrough. This drug and the worlds it allowed Kesey to reach, in his opinion, “had to be talked about.”⁵⁰

As Kesey took part in the CIA’s research, another investigator explored the attributes of psychedelic drugs on the East coast. Dr. Timothy Leary, a research psychologist at Harvard University took an interest in LSD after chemists submitted the drug to the university for academic testing. Prior to LSD research, Leary’s Harvard Psychedelic Research Project endorsed the testing of conscious-altering substances for behavioral and psychological purposes. The professor and his colleagues supplied graduate students with copious amounts of psilocybin, and mescaline. However, like Kesey, LSD intrigued Leary more than any of the other psychedelics.⁵¹

According to historian David Farber, Leary determined that LSD allowed people to “rethink what they had become and reinvent themselves according to a deeper, truer, drug-produced set of understandings.” He also acknowledged the profound spiritual effect on the human psyche. Leary argued that if people desired to lead productive and happy lives, LSD was necessary. Where Leary explored psychedelics in an institutional setting, Kesey was the first to bring LSD out of a clinically controlled environment and

⁵⁰ Lish, “What the Hell You Looking in Here for,” 21.

⁵¹ Don Lattin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club: How Timothy Leary, Ram Dass, Huston Smith, and Andrew Weil Killed the Fifties and Ushered in a New Age for America* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 61-2.

into the public's consciousness. Leary encouraged users to "rethink social norms and life patterns" through LSD. Kesey, on the other hand, was mesmerized by the drug's ability to facilitate personal enlightenment and enhance creativity.⁵²

Kesey's participation in the government testing led to an opportunity for work in the summer of 1960. It was not an appealing offer, but it was a job. Kesey took a position as an aide on the psychiatric ward at Menlo Park Veterans Administration Hospital. He worked from midnight until eight in the morning tending to patients, cleaning, and mopping the floors. More importantly, the late hours gave Kesey an opportunity to be creative and write. After he completed his nightly chores, Kesey sat at his typewriter at the nurses' desk.⁵³ The psychiatric ward intrigued Kesey, as did the peyote and LSD that he often smuggled out of the lab. Kesey discovered that his master key opened the doors where doctors kept the psychedelic drugs. One day, Kesey ingested peyote, a Native American drug that supposedly provoked hallucinations from the drug's origins in the southwest. The peyote gave Kesey the vision for his first character, Chief Bromden in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.⁵⁴

Kesey claimed that LSD gave him the ability to see beyond the common stereotype of the psychiatric ward: "[The drugs] gave me a different perspective of the people in the mental hospital, a sense that maybe they were not so crazy or as bad as the

⁵² Farber, "The Intoxicated State/Illegal Nation," 22-4.

⁵³ Gross, Ken Kesey on Misconceptions; Perry, *On the Bus*, 12.

⁵⁴ Perry, *On the Bus*, 12; Ken Kesey Paul Foster, and Shirley Abicar, "Who Flew Over What," in *Kesey's Garage Sale*, ed. Ken Kesey (New York: Viking, 1973), 14.

sterile environment they were living in.”⁵⁵ LSD also allowed Kesey to see inside the doctors’ minds. “After I took LSD, I suddenly saw it. I saw it all. I listened to them and watched them, and I saw that what they were saying and doing was not so crazy after all.”⁵⁶ Over the next ten months at the hospital, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* came to life and was published in 1962.⁵⁷

Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* was the literary thread that tied together the cultural progression from the fifties to the sixties.⁵⁸ In addition to its superb craftsmanship, the book’s political and societal undertones resonated among those who searched for a way to break free from the bleak conformity that was bestowed upon them in Cold War America. Kesey’s first published novel shared considerable similarities with works by Beat poets and writers including Kerouac. English professor and literary critic Manuel Luis Martinez argued that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* was a “neobeat, proto-countercultural novel” that shared the Beat mentality of self liberation and “fear of absorption, paranoia of feminization, and fear of the minority, as well as the

⁵⁵ Faggen, “The Art of Fiction.”

⁵⁶ Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Press, 1992), 119.

⁵⁷ Perry, *On the Bus*, 12.

⁵⁸ In November 1963, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* made its Broadway debut with actor Kirk Douglass portraying Randal Patrick McMurphy. In 1975, the book was adapted for the screen with Jack Nicholson as McMurphy. The film went on to win five Academy Awards including Best Picture and Best Actor in a Leading Role. Kesey never saw the film adaptation of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* due to a drawn-out legal battle with producers over the movie’s screenplay.

appropriation of ethnicity.”⁵⁹ However, Kesey’s ability to capture the individual’s triumph over the institution set his work apart from the Beats. In *The Beat Generation and the Popular Novel in the United States, 1945-1970*, Thomas Newhouse argued, “Kesey’s nonconformist superman promised not simply liberation from evil and injustice but, as the psychedelic era unfolded, a pathway to group consciousness and unrestricted power.”⁶⁰ The book’s overnight success and message of individual freedom soon attracted a sizable following that included a Beat legend that doubled as Kerouac’s muse while on the road.

Even though Kesey considered himself “too young to be a beatnik, and too old to be a hippie,” the two worlds collided after *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* provoked Neal Cassady to introduce himself to Kesey.⁶¹ Cassady, the real life Dean Moriarty from Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957), appeared on Kesey’s Perry Lane doorstep in 1962. Fresh out of San Quentin State Prison, Cassady showed up on Perry Lane with a lengthy criminal record. The fast-talking, speed-using, and often shirtless Cassady knew about Kesey by reading *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, but the two had not yet met in person. The Beat-legend’s outlandish and unhealthy lifestyle did not stop Kesey from

⁵⁹ Manuel Luis Martinez, *Countering the Counterculture: Rereading Postwar American Dissent from Jack Kerouac to Tomás Rivera* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 113.

⁶⁰ Thomas Newhouse, *The Beat Generation and the Popular Novel in the United States, 1945-1970* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2000), 67.

⁶¹ Robert K. Elder, “Ken Kesey: Still on the Bus (1999), in *Conversations with Ken Kesey*, ed. Scott F. Parker (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 173.

respecting Cassady's creativity.⁶² The two established more than a friendship that day on Perry Lane. Together, Cassady and Kesey built the bridge from Beat culture to "hippie" counterculture.

It is important to acknowledge that while Kesey ushered in the psychedelic popularity of the counterculture, he was not alone in its creation. Both Beats and hippies shared a common interest in drug use. Psychedelics such as peyote and dimethyltryptamine (DMT) offered Beats something more than the "cool" appeal of smoking marijuana, wearing all black, and listening to jazz music. The established literary circle and its followers turned to psychedelics as means to achieve "higher wisdom of the body and soul." The use of chemical drugs for spiritual and creative exploration ultimately attracted Kesey and a subsequent generation of hippies.⁶³

Each time Kesey took LSD out of the hospital and back to his friends on Perry Lane, he foreshadowed the countercultural turn that California, and the rest of America, witnessed later in the sixties. Kesey's home turned into a twenty-four hour, psychedelic party as friends and neighbors got high and danced to loud, electric rock music. One band that made regular appearances at Kesey's parties was the Warlocks and their eccentric lead singer, Jerry Garcia who did not live far from Perry Lane.⁶⁴ Robert Stone thought Perry Lane became a real "tribal scene" after Kesey brought the drugs home. "It was

⁶² David Sandison and Graham Vickers, *Neal Cassady: The Fast Life of a Beat Hero* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2006), 278.

⁶³ Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 61; Watson, *The Birth of the Beat Generation*, 4.

⁶⁴ Todd Brendan Fahey, "Come Spake the Cuckoo, Ken Kesey: The *Far Gone* Interview," September 13, 1992, <http://www.fargonebooks.com/kesey.html>.

tribal in part because we were amusing ourselves with these experimental drugs. . . . We were young and thought that we were just incredibly sophisticated and bohemian to be doing all this far-out stuff.”⁶⁵ First, Kesey turned on his friends, now he wanted to turn on the rest of the world.

The scene on Perry Lane seemed too good to be true, and it was. In the summer of 1963, the owner of the Perry Lane neighborhood sold the existing properties to a development firm. The intent was to replace the worn-down cottages with more modern homes. In typical Kesey fashion, he did not leave without an appropriate sendoff. The last Saturday on Perry Lane, residents and friends gathered at the Kesey home for a celebration. He served venison chili spiked with LSD, and residents took sledgehammers to walls and windows of each other’s homes. The following week, the Kesey family moved to a log cabin in La Honda, fifteen miles from Perry Lane.⁶⁶ The parties and drug use were rampant on Perry Lane, but the gatherings did not compare to the outrageous scene that followed Kesey to La Honda.

⁶⁵ Perry, *On the Bus*, 25.

⁶⁶ Unger and Unger, *America in the 1960s*, 269; Stevens, *Storming Heaven*, 229, Stone, “Prince of Possibility”, 70.

CHAPTER III: BRIDGE TO THE COUNTERCULTURE, 1963-1967

The La Honda Years

Ken Kesey's performer persona merged with his countercultural conceptualizations when he moved to La Honda in 1963. The six-acre property had a log cabin tucked away in the woods without any neighbors in sight.¹ The secluded, communal property made the perfect backdrop for weekend parties that turned into full-fledged performances. La Honda captured the communal way of life, and the Kesey home had an open-door policy. Cassady even made himself at home on the property where he lived out of his car in the Kesey's front yard.² La Honda mirrored *Ramparts* editor Warren Hinckle's description of hippie enclaves: "Hippies have a clear vision of the ideal community—a psychedelic community, to be sure—where everyone is turned on and beautiful and loving and happy and floating free."³ The Kesey land in La Honda

¹ Martin Torgoff, *Can't Find My Way Home: America in the Great Stoned Age, 1945-2000* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 96

² David Sandison and Graham Vickers, *Neal Cassady: The Fast Life of a Beat Hero* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2006), 296.

³ Warren Hinckle, "The Hippies," *Ramparts* 5, no. 9 (March 1967): 9, Alexander Street Press: *The Sixties: Primary Source Documents and Personal Narratives, 1960-1974*.

was never formally declared a commune, but the free-flowing, communal environment there preceded hippie communes that sprung up across the United States later in the sixties.⁴

The La Honda happenings quickly outstripped the old Perry Lane parties. Kesey recalled, “We moved to La Honda and we started to have these things that would happen every Saturday night. We’d go out there, take acid... and each weekend, there were more people and more people”⁵ Kesey’s friend and fellow author Hunter S. Thompson observed, “The best minds of our generation somehow converged on La Honda, and Kesey had room for them all. His hillside ranch in the canyon became the world capital of madness. There were no rules, fear was unknown, and sleep was out of the question.”⁶ Although the early La Honda parties drew a large crowd, the early weekend events paled in comparison to the gatherings that followed.

In November 1963, following one of the most paralyzing events of the decade, Kesey struggled to sustain his creativity among America’s melancholic mood. Kesey, his family, and a handful of close friends had been in New York City for the premiere of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* on Broadway. On the drive back to California, reports of President John F. Kennedy’s assassination flooded every news and radio outlet in the

⁴ Timothy Miller, “The Sixties-Era Communes,” in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 331.

⁵ Mike Fiona, “Ken Kesey’s Last Interview (1999)” in *Conversations with Ken Kesey*, ed. Scott F. Parker (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 178

⁶ Hunter S. Thompson, “Walking with the King,” in *Spit in the Ocean #7: All About Ken Kesey*, ed. Ed McClanahan (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 79.

country. Kesey kept driving, but the overwhelming sadness was unmistakable.

“Everywhere we went, we knew that everybody was thinking about the same thing in the same way,” Kesey remembered. “Ohio. Indiana. Illinois and Iowa. The whole country felt wounded, yet united.”⁷ It was a “real heavy year for America” as Kesey observed.⁸ He soon devised a plan to perform a traveling act that would restore hope and create a new work of art in the process.

Kesey put the final touches on his second best-selling novel *Sometimes a Great Notion* in early 1964, but he had grown dissatisfied with his writing ability in the process and wanted to pursue other artistic adventures. Writing did not appease Kesey’s artistic edge as it once had, and he publically announced he would never write again. “I found that I couldn’t sit down to write without forming this perfect little birthday cake to sell to people,” Kesey remembered.⁹ As he turned away from writing, he gravitated back toward film. This time, Kesey abandoned the idea of landing a starring role. Instead, he planned

⁷ George Walker, “Definitely the Bus,” in *Spit in the Ocean #7: All About Ken Kesey*, ed. Ed McClanahan (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 45.

⁸ David Kirkpatrick, “Ken Kesey, Checking In on His Famous Nest,” *New York Times*, May 10, 2001.

⁹ Paul Perry, *On the Bus: The Complete Guide to the Legendary Trip of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters and the Birth of the Counterculture*, eds. Michael Schwartz and Neil Ortenberg (New York: Thunder Mouth’s Press, 1990), 58.

to make his own movie. Film was the creative escape Kesey craved. He wanted to be “the archivist for an incandescent period of American history,” and making a movie was one way to fulfill this aspiration.¹⁰

Kesey Boards the Bus

With the publication of *Sometimes a Great Notion* just around the corner, Kesey needed to be in New York City for its release. The 1964 World’s Fair occurred simultaneously, and Kesey hoped to attend while he was in town. He also was not going to New York alone, and he was not going quietly. He wanted to take his friends with him and make a movie along the way. The original group consisted of a few friends, and they planned to take an old panel truck with a mattress in the back. As word spread, more people liked the idea of traveling to New York City, and Kesey knew he needed a larger mode of transportation. Faye came across an advertisement for a 1939 International Harvester school bus that had been transformed into a livable motorhome. The bus was twenty-five years old, but it was well maintained by its owners. It had a full kitchen and was large enough to sleep eight people comfortably. It was love at first sight for Kesey as he made out a check for \$1,500.¹¹

Kesey did not have to look far to find the cast for his movie. Altogether, fourteen friends, including Kesey, who called themselves the Merry Pranksters, made up the psychedelic posse and took the trip to New York City. Each member took a new

¹⁰ Mike Tharp, “That Old Sky-Pie: Ken Kesey, Survivor of the ‘60s, is Back—And He Still Believes in LSD, Love, and Peace on Earth; Facing the Death of a Son,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 18, 1986, ProQuest.

¹¹ Walker, “Definitely the Bus,” 47.

personality for the trip. Kesey became Swashbuckler, and Ken Babbs took on the name Intrepid Traveler. Others included Mike “Mal Function” Hagan, Carolyn “Mountain Girl” Adams, Steve “Zonker” Lambrecht, Kathy “Stark Naked” Casano, and Paula “Gretchen Fetchin” Sundsten.¹² Before the Merry Pranksters headed to New York City, Kesey convinced Hagan to trade his 8-millimeter camera for a newer one. Hagan, along with George “Hardly Visible” Walker, acquired a 16-millimeter camera and twenty roles of color film. Kesey’s classmate from Stanford and author Ed McClanahan remembered, “I think the bus trip was an attempt to make living art.”¹³

The bus was a piece of art and a performance for Kesey and the Merry Pranksters. Walker claimed, “it was more than just getting [to New York City]. It had to do with the trip, which had to do with the movie, and the effect that he was trying to create. . . on people’s minds.”¹⁴ Kesey got his hands on some Day-Glo paint and along with the Pranksters, created, in his opinion, as “good an art work as anything [artist Andy] Warhol did.”¹⁵ Kesey described painting the bus as a process that happened over the course of a

¹² Irwin Unger and Debi Unger, *America in the 1960s* (New York: Brandywine Press, 1988), 269.

¹³ Perry, *On the Bus*, 47, 55.

¹⁴ George Walker quoted in, Ken Kesey, *The Further Inquiry* (New York: Viking, 1990), 166.

¹⁵ Andy Warhol was an iconic artist, and his concept of “pop art,” featuring mass-produced items, brought him to fame in the early sixties. His most famous pop art installment featured Campbell’s soup cans; Bob Sipchen, “Kesey & Co.: The Gregarious Author is Back in the Spotlight,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 11, 1990, http://articles.latimes.com/1990-02-11/news/vw-1114_1_ken-kesey.

few days, and under the influence of LSD. He recalled, “Someone took an old broom up on the top and spilled some paint and wiped around with the boom, making patterns. People walked around in bare feet on the bus, leaving footprints of paint.” Finally, according to Kesey, the group “poured some paint on it and drove it so it would streak back and give it a kind of flame-hooded appearance.”¹⁶

In addition to its appearance, the bus had an elaborate sound system. Sandy “Dis-mount” Lehmann-Haupt wired the bus with microphones inside and out, and brought along drums, guitars, a bass, and speakers.¹⁷ The only thing missing at this point was a name. In his written accounts appropriately titled “The Intrepid Traveler,” Babbs claimed the bus needed a name with one word, “A word that, with whatever power words have, contributes that power toward the bus making it to New York City.”¹⁸ Artist Roy Seburn painted the word “Furthur” on the front. A sign in the back read “Caution: Weird Load.”¹⁹ The bus was complete, and Kesey was ready to take his act on the road in June 1964, but not before Cassady, or “Sir Speed Limit,” jumped in the driver’s seat.²⁰

The bus returned from New York City in August 1964, and the Merry Pranksters wanted to maintain the free-spirited and artistic lifestyle they adopted on the road. The

¹⁶ Perry, *On the Bus*, 62.

¹⁷ Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), 68.

¹⁸ Perry, *On the Bus*, 60.

¹⁹ Walker, “Definitely the Bus,” 48.

²⁰ Perry, *On the Bus*,

Pranksters spent a majority of their days simply talking and hanging out at the Kesey home, but nights and weekends at La Honda turned into a production. The loud, chaotic weekend gatherings initially began as a way for the Pranksters to edit the forty-five hours of footage from the bus trip. “Not only were we tripping on acid,” Babbs recalled, “but we were tripping on film too.” However, more partying and less editing became a recurring theme at La Honda.²¹

The Psychedelic Experience at La Honda

As news about Kesey’s Saturday night get-togethers spread by word of mouth, more people and more drugs found their way into Kesey’s home. He welcomed the newcomers and rarely turned people away. Instead, the gatherings became more elaborate, and preparing for a Prankster party evolved into a weeklong process of making sure every light was in the right place. Prankster Lee Quarnstrom remembered a makeshift amphitheater set up behind the Kesey home where the parties took place. According to Quarnstrom, “Kesey had the whole place wired with loudspeakers and earphones and lights and things. Artsy people called them “Happenings,”²² but they were

²¹ Perry, *On the Bus*, 124; The Merry Pranksters returned from New York City with over forty hours of film footage, but the movie never saw completion. The Pranksters failed to use a clapperboard to synchronize the footage with the sound, and the original material remained unedited. In 2011, directors Alex Gibney and Alison Elwood obtained the footage from Faye and produced a full-length documentary, “The Magic Trip.”

²² Happenings referred to a new aspect of performance art that arose in the 1950s. Composers John Cage and Merce Cunningham organized an unconventional method that allowed for collaboration between audience and performer. Happenings acquired its name from the originality of each performance to take place in the moment, and no two happenings were exactly the same. For more on the history of happenings see, Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means: An Introduction to Happenings, Kinetic Environments, and Other Mixed-Means Performances* (New York: Dial Press, 1968) and

just a way of extending to other people what we had done in the privacy of our own bus.”²³ Kesey and the Merry Pranksters turned these weekend parties into mind, and life, altering experiences for everyone who attended.

The La Honda gatherings also caught the attention of local authorities. San Mateo County sheriffs watched Kesey’s home closely for signs of illegal activity. Quarnstrom recalled in his memoir, “We were still simple-minded potheads who couldn’t quite believe that cops would really break into the home of a famous writer and his pals just because we acted weird, [and] looked funny.”²⁴ On April 23, 1965, the sheriff’s department obtained a search warrant and raided Kesey’s home. At the time, narcotics agent Willie Wong found Kesey painting in his bathroom and simultaneously attempting to flush marijuana down the toilet. According to Quarnstrom, Kesey had been “dabbing yet another touch of Day-Glo paint to the constantly expanding mural-montage that covered the porcelain, and every other surface of the bathroom.”²⁵

That same night, fourteen Merry Pranksters stood handcuffed in Kesey’s living room while authorities finished searching the property. The Pranksters had quickly discarded all other drugs from the home except marijuana cigarette butts and LSD stored

Michael Kirby, ed., *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1966).

²³ Perry, *On the Bus*, 122.

²⁴ Lee Quarnstrom, *When I was a Dynamiter!: Or How a Nice Catholic Boy Became a Merry Prankster, a Pornographer, and a Bridegroom Seven Times* (Hollywood: Punk Hostage Press, 2014), 125.

²⁵ Quarnstrom, *When I was a Dynamiter!*, 120.

in the fridge. Due to inaccuracies in the search warrant, however, no charges were formally filed and everyone was released except Kesey and Page Browning. In 1965, LSD was not yet illegal, and Kesey and Browning were instead charged with possession of marijuana.²⁶ The La Honda raid was Kesey's first brush with the law, however, that did not stop him from hosting gatherings at his home after he had paid the fines.

Kesey's late-night parties grew in popularity, and he gained the respect of other well-known personalities in San Francisco, particularly those in the eclectic Haight-Ashbury district. One group in particular formed a fondness for Kesey and his rising reputation. The San Francisco Hell's Angels became regular visitors to La Honda after journalist Hunter S. Thompson introduced the Angels to the Pranksters in August 1965. Thompson had established a relationship with the bikers from working on a piece for *The Nation* about the outlaws. Kesey invited Thompson and the Angels to La Honda after the two writers appeared on a local San Francisco television station discussing the emerging free speech movement.²⁷ Thompson initially resisted the idea of a meeting between Kesey and the Angels, but, at Kesey's urging, gave in. Thompson realized the Pranksters

²⁶ Sandison and Vickers, *Neal Cassady*, 296; Quarnstrom, *When I was a Dynamiter!*, 121-22.

²⁷ The free speech movement was a series of protest campaigns that took place on college campuses during the sixties. The movement began at the University of California at Berkeley during the 1964 fall semester where students demanded more political involvement and the ability to openly share political opinions including opposition against the Vietnam War. The initial protest sparked a chain reaction and more college-aged students called for their right to freedom of speech. For more on the free speech movement see, Terry Anderson's work, *The Movement and the Sixties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

were “a gang of innocents playing with fire” at this point. The Angels also believed Thompson and Kesey would counteract their image as violent gang of bikers.²⁸

Kesey’s party with the Hell’s Angels was the largest, and most elaborate, La Honda gathering thus far. The bash caught Allen Ginsberg and Dr. Richard Alpert’s attention, both of whom shared an interest in psychedelic drugs.²⁹ The party also drew in San Mateo County authorities with a fifteen-foot long, patriotic themed banner reading, “The Merry Pranksters Welcome The Hell’s Angels.” Police cars guarded the highway leading to Kesey’s home but could not enter without a search warrant. Neither the Angels, nor Thompson, had experienced an acid trip prior to the party. That night, Kesey handed out legal LSD to everyone in attendance. Thompson described the event as, “people running wild, bellowing and dancing half naked to rock ‘n’ roll sounds piped out through the trees from massive amplifiers, reeling and stumbling in a maze of psychedelic lights... and with no law to stop them.”³⁰

Kesey’s relationship with the Hell’s Angels did not gain the community’s support, but the merging of the Pranksters and the Angels marked an important moment in the

²⁸ Andrew Grant Jackson, *1965: The Most Revolutionary Year in Music* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015), 241; Hunter S. Thompson, *Hell’s Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), 227; Perry, *On the Bus*, 129, 131.

²⁹ Dr. Richard Alpert was a psychologist at Harvard University who worked alongside Dr. Timothy Leary. In 1967, Alpert made a trip to India where he acquired the name Ram Dass. Upon his return, Dass became a spiritual guru versed in Eastern religion and philosophy. The psychedelic party at La Honda inspired Ginsberg to publish a poem in 1965 titled, “First Party at Ken Kesey’s with Hell’s Angels.”

³⁰ Thompson, *Hell’s Angels*, 228-29.

developing counterculture. The motorcycle group had an already established ideology, one that ran counter to the views of mainstream society and included excessive drug use. In his article, “The Fugitive Faces His Acid Test,” Tom Wolfe explained that word of Kesey’s party circulated rapidly around Haight-Ashbury. Kesey soon realized, according to Wolfe, he threw “not merely a party but a show. And this insight was to develop into the ‘Acid Tests,’ the origin of most of the visual and musical styles” that became popular one year later in Haigh-Ashbury.³¹ Kesey had inadvertently foreshadowed the psychedelic rock experience that later followed in San Francisco.

Throughout much of 1965, LSD was treated as an illegal substance, even though it was perfectly legal. Authorities and LSD users also did not discuss the topic of psychedelic drugs publicly.³² Although LSD had remained the drug of choice among the Pranksters since 1959, Kesey decided he needed to take the acid trip to a new level. The most important feature of Kesey’s gatherings, aside from the quantity of LSD, was the combination of psychedelic drugs and rock music. He joined strobe lights, Day-Glo paint, costumes, and multimedia slideshows to enhance the drug’s effects. But, as music critic

³¹ Tom Wolfe, “The Fugitive Faces His Acid Test,” *World Journal Tribune*, February 1967, located in Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI File Number 1252814-000: Ken Elton Kesey.

³² Charles Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury: A History* (New York: Random House, 1984), 7.

Jim DeRogatis has argued, “it was the collision between rock and LSD that ushered in the genre of psychedelic rock and brought psychedelic thought into mainstream consciousness.”³³

Out of the House and onto the Stage

The meeting with the Hell’s Angels and the combination of music and drugs gave Kesey the idea to take his performances out of the privacy of his own home and into the public. Instead of settling on one locale, the Pranksters moved among various venues throughout the San Francisco Bay area in late 1965. The first Acid Test occurred on November 27, 1965 at Babbs’ home, also known as the Spread, near Santa Cruz, California. A psychedelic poster that hung in the Hip Pocket Bookstore posed the question, “Can You Pass the Acid Test?”³⁴ Even though the Pranksters publicized the event, few guests beyond the usual La Honda crowd showed up. Kesey knew the show must go on, and the night went on as planned. Footage from the bus trip appeared on the ceiling via an overhead projector, and Garcia’s band played under a new name, the Grateful Dead.³⁵ If Kesey wanted to turn on the public to LSD, he needed another plan.

³³ Jim DeRogatis, *Turn on Your Mind: Four Decades of Great Psychedelic Rock* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2003), 2, 8.

³⁴ Acid tests originally referred to experiments used to determine gold from other metals. The experimentation consisted of using nitric acid in order to break up metals other than gold. If the metal was indeed gold, it had passed the “acid test.”

³⁵ Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury*, 34-5; Perry, *On the Bus*, 114; Dennis McNally, *A Long Strange Trip: The Inside History of the Grateful Dead* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), 111.

The second Acid Test in the early morning hours of December 4, 1965 was a success. Kesey, and Grateful Dead members Phil Lesh and Bob Weir met at La Honda after the Santa Cruz Acid Test to discuss an effective advertising strategy. The end result was Kesey, the Pranksters, and the Grateful Dead passing out fliers to concert-goers exiting a Rolling Stones concert at the Oakland Civic Auditorium that same night. An estimated 400 people showed up at a friend's home near San Jose State University. The Pranksters charged one-dollar admission and danced all night until police ended the party due to noise complaints.³⁶

The Acid Tests grew beyond anything Kesey thought possible. He was well on his way to achieving his goal of turning the public onto LSD through creative performances. More importantly, Kesey's new artistic outlet embodied a form of theater with participation from the audience. During the Acid Tests, the stage was not confined to one area, and there were no defined boundaries between the musicians and the audience.³⁷ "Given a chance, everybody has art in them and they're able to bring it out and give it an opening with a little bit of encouragement," Kesey said in an interview.³⁸ The Pranksters hosted two more Acid Tests in December 1965 before outgrowing friends' homes and small venues.

³⁶ McNally, *A Long Strange Trip*, 112; Perry, *On the Bus*, 115.

³⁷ Gene Sculatti and Davin Seay, *San Francisco Nights: The Psychedelic Music Trip, 1965-1968* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 57-58

³⁸ Perry, *The Haight-Ashbury*, 35; Fiona, "Ken Kesey's Last Interview," 177.

By early 1966, Kesey's Acid Tests turned him into a well-known name around San Francisco, but, as a magician, Kesey still had a few more tricks up his sleeve. Kesey became aware that the time had come to move away from "self-conscious happenings" and on to a "more jubilant occasion where the audience participates."³⁹ As a result, the Pranksters, in collaboration with innovator Stewart Brand, staged the first three-day musical experience of its kind. The Trips Festival ran Friday, January 21 through Sunday January 23 at the Longshoreman's Hall in San Francisco. The event featured a weekend production of multimedia presentations and non-stop music. Brand put Kesey in charge of the second night, and the Pranksters ran with the idea.⁴⁰

Two days before the Trips Festival, on January 19, 1966, Kesey was arrested for the second time for possession of marijuana. Police busted Kesey and Carolyn "Mountain Girl" Adams after neighbors spotted the two on the roof of Brand's North Beach apartment smoking marijuana. As authorities stormed the apartment, they found Kesey and Adams with a bag of marijuana lying on the bed. The incident escalated as an officer and Kesey grappled over the bag when Kesey refused to surrender his stash. Kesey resisted and threw the small plastic bag over the edge of the roof, and the fight was over.⁴¹ Kesey racked up a host of charges that night in addition to possession of

³⁹ This was Kesey's interpretation he advertised for the Trips Festival in January 1966. Quoted in, Mark Christensen, *Acid Christ: Ken Kesey and the Politics of Ecstasy* (Tucson, Schaffner Press, 2010), 152.

⁴⁰ Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 66.

⁴¹ Joel Selvin, *Summer of Love: The Inside Story of LSD, Rock and Roll, Free Love, and High Times in the Wild West* (New York: Dutton, 1994): 46-47.

marijuana. His file from the Federal Bureau of Investigation lists Kesey's charges as: "battery against a police officer," "resisting an officer," and "loitering on private property at night."⁴²

Kesey's arrest fueled publicity for the Trips Festival. After he staged a fake suicide after his arrest, Kesey attended the festival in costume like many patrons. Kesey had encouraged attendees to come dressed in costumes and bring any musical instrument to plug in and play along with the band. Similar to the Acid Tests, Garcia and his band mates guided everyone through an acid trip as closed-circuit televisions set up throughout the auditorium displayed audience members dancing. Kesey controlled the slideshow and wrote messages to the audience on overhead projectors. Heads, or those who took a sudden interest in psychedelic drugs throughout Haight-Ashbury, embraced Kesey's new production.⁴³ The Trips Festival, however, was not a traditional concert. Rather, as journalist and historian Martin Torgoff contends, "what would emerge from this protracted pandemonium was a kind of altered reality, a new-fashioned medium that encouraged the expression of life as art through the senses."⁴⁴

The Trips Festival gave rise to psychedelic dance concerts across San Francisco. This new happening, like Kesey's productions, featured strobe lights, music, and plenty of LSD. Instead of the Grateful Dead, an up-and-coming new band, the Jefferson

⁴² Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI File Number 1252814-000: Ken Elton Kesey.

⁴³ Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Press, 1992), 143; Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyber Culture*, 67.

⁴⁴ Torgoff, *Can't Find My Way Home*, 119.

Airplane, took the stage. On the weekend after the Trips Festival, Bill Graham, an emerging concert promoter, held an event similar to Kesey's at a popular venue called the Fillmore. He wanted to include those who had missed out on the Trips Festival the previous week. He even advertised the event as a way for people to experience the "sights and sounds of the Trips Festival." Graham's successful dance concerts not only expanded upon Kesey's concept, but also opened the door for future psychedelic concerts of this nature.⁴⁵

Hype Over the Haight: The Counterculture Continues Without Kesey

An apparent cultural shift occurred in Haight-Ashbury in the months following the Trips Festival, but Kesey was not there to witness it. Information about psychedelic drugs no longer circulated via word of mouth, and the substances were much easier to find. Drug experimentation expanded to experimentation with one's own body by practicing loose sexual standards. Haight-Ashbury residents publicly used LSD and marijuana, walked everywhere barefooted, embraced thrift store clothing, and both men and women regularly wore flowers in their hair.⁴⁶ The Haight-Ashbury quickly became more than a neighborhood; it became a lifestyle. Hippies adopted a philosophy that Jay Stevens described, in which "everything was pooled—money, food, drugs, living arrangements. The underlying ethic was that hippies were all members of an extended

⁴⁵ Selvin, *Summer of Love*, 54-5.

⁴⁶ David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 182.

family.”⁴⁷ This relaxed and communal way of life brought an estimated fifteen thousand people to Haight-Ashbury by June 1966. One year later, the number reached nearly to 75,000.⁴⁸

October 6, 1966 marked a pivotal turning-point for the residents of Haight-Ashbury. The state of California enacted legislation declaring LSD an illegal substance, and possession of the drug led to a charge of a misdemeanor. Rather than holding a traditional protest, dissenters gathered in the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park to demonstrate their opposition peacefully. The Haight’s own psychedelic newspaper, *the San Francisco Oracle*, organized a free, family-friendly celebration known as the Love Pageant Rally for anyone who shared a common disdain for the new law. The newspaper advertised the rally as an opportunity for individuals to “affirm [their] identity, community, and innocence from influence of the fear addiction of the general public as symbolized in [the] law.”⁴⁹ Three thousand participants gathered in the park with incense, instruments, and feathers. Big Brother and the Holding Co., featuring a new addition to the band, Janis Joplin, was among the musical performers. In contrast to the biblical implications the October date suggested, the Love Pageant Rally was a peaceful occasion.

⁴⁷ Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), 305.

⁴⁸ Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams*, 186; Stevens, *Storming Heaven*, 301.

⁴⁹ Allen Cohen, ed., *The San Francisco Oracle Facsimile Edition: The Psychedelic Newspaper of the Haight Ashbury, 1966-1968* (Berkeley: Regent Press, 1991), 28.

The rally, more importantly, inspired future public gatherings such as the Human Be-In, which, Cohen described as a “larger more inclusive event that would rock the world.”⁵⁰

With his life and reputation on the line, Kesey performed a disappearing act from the psychedelic scene in Haight-Ashbury. He faked his own suicide and fled to Mexico after the Trips Festival, where he remained disguised for nearly six months. Kesey reentered the United States in October 1966 and wanted to remain a “fugitive and as salt in [FBI director] J. Edgar Hoover’s wounds.”⁵¹ On October 20, 1966, two off-duty agents with the San Francisco Bureau of Investigation noticed a man with a mole on his left cheek driving a red pickup truck. The driver matched Kesey’s description. The agents attempted to pull Kesey over, but he sped through heavy traffic at sixty miles per hour. After the chase, Kesey left his truck and ran down a twenty-five-foot embankment to a tree line near the highway. He led the agents on a chase that lasted almost three blocks through a residential area. Finally, Kesey surrendered with cuts and bruises on both hands and legs. On October 25, 1966, Hoover sent a letter to the agents congratulating them on Kesey’s arrest.⁵²

⁵⁰ Allen Cohen, “The San Francisco Oracle: A Brief History,” in *The San Francisco Oracle Facsimile Edition: The Psychedelic Newspaper of the Haight Ashbury, 1966-1968* (Berkeley: Regent Press, 1991), xxvi.

⁵¹ “FBI Nabs Its Taunter, Ken Kesey” *Detroit News*, October 21, 1966, located in Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI File Number 1252814-000: Ken Elton Kesey.

⁵² Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI File Number 1252814-000: Ken Elton Kesey.

Kesey's October arrest resulted in one final performance as he encouraged his "psychedelic fans to try abstinence."⁵³ On October 31, 1966, the Pranksters planned a proposed commencement celebration in which Kesey urged attendees to graduate from using acid because "LSD has reintroduced the full human potentiality into our conscious awareness but LSD has now been absorbed by the cops."⁵⁴ The Acid Test Graduation, as the event was appropriately named, featured the Pranksters handing out diplomas at an abandoned warehouse after the event was moved from the Winterland Auditorium on account of Graham's suspicion.⁵⁵ Kesey's time in the San Francisco spotlight ended as he himself, along with his followers, graduated from the psychedelic scene. After the Acid Test Graduation, Kesey told journalist Gary Goldhill that he used the I Ching to determine the course of his life after the graduation.⁵⁶ He landed on the "Turning Point" hexagram, which meant a season of movement and transformation was in his future. Kesey explained to Goldhill that he planned to settle down and find a house on a farm.⁵⁷

⁵³ "Kesey's Second Break," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 26, 1966, located in Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI File Number 1252814-000: Ken Elton Kesey.

⁵⁴ Cohen, *The San Francisco Oracle*, 48.

⁵⁵ Cohen, *The San Francisco Oracle*, 49.

⁵⁶ The I Ching is an ancient Chinese book of wisdom and guide to decision-making. The manual consists of sixty-four patterns of trigrams and hexagrams and the related interpretations that coincide with each arrangement. The answers are determined by throwing coins then finding the corresponding description in the book. For more on the I Ching see, Yi Cheng, *I Ching: The Book of Change*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 2003).

⁵⁷ Cohen, *The San Francisco Oracle*, 48.

The Love Pageant Rally in October 1966 was the catalyst for another critical event of the counterculture, the Human Be-In, which Kesey did not attend. The Human Be-In attracted thousands to Golden Gate Park in January of 1967. The warm January afternoon constituted a rather harmonious meeting between Haight-Ashbury hippies and student politicians from across the Bay. As tensions had mounted over Vietnam, so did the division between activists and those who chose to turn on instead of confronting the situation head on. As Cohen explained later, “the anti-war and free speech movement in Berkeley thought the hippies were too disengaged and spaced out. The hippies thought the anti-war movement was doomed to endless confrontations with the establishment, which would recoil with violence.” Some activists believed it was time to unite both youth movements for a common cause. In a press brief, organizers described the proposed Human Be-In as a meeting between “Berkeley political activists and San Francisco’s spiritual generation... to powwow, celebrate, and prophesy the epoch of liberation, love, peace, compassion, and unity of mankind.”⁵⁸

The Human Be-In exceeded all expectations. Thirty-thousand youth from two separate worlds sat together in the grass, and listened to music and poetry readings, all without a set agenda. Helen Perry, a psychologist from the University of California Medical Center, described the gathering as “people from so many walks of life... being together, unprogramed, uncommitted, except to life itself and its celebration.”⁵⁹ LSD was

⁵⁸ Cohen, “The San Francisco Oracle: A Brief History,” xxxii; Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams* 160.

⁵⁹ Helen Swick Perry, “The Human Be-In” in *Takin’ it to the Streets: A Sixties Reader*, eds. Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 272-73.

illegal, but easy to find among participants. On the surface, the Human Be-In came across as a peaceful, psychedelic occasion. It issued a powerful statement to the rest of the United States who watched the Haight-Ashbury happenings play out in the media. However, more serious events loomed in the months following the Gathering of the Tribes.

As a result of extensive media coverage, teenagers from across the country ran away to San Francisco to experience the scene personally. Many came to explore the new utopian ideals brought about by drug use. The altered states of consciousness and the alternative lifestyle attracted dropouts from every walk of life. Underneath the easy-going picture the media initially painted, a harsher reality existed for the city. In the July 1967 cover story, *Time* magazine was the first to publicize the conditions associated with the “cult of Hippiedom.” The magazine reported that on a weekly basis, an average of twenty drug busts took place and sixteen to twenty-two years old became the median age among hippies in the Haight.⁶⁰

The largest transformation took place among the proponents of psychedelic drugs. Drug use in Haight-Ashbury turned from personal consciousness-expanding LSD to harder drugs such as amphetamines and barbiturates.⁶¹ In addition, the influx of youth and the shortage of housing resulted in widespread homelessness throughout the city and

⁶⁰ “Hippies,” *Time*, July 7, 1967, Academic Search Premier.

⁶¹ Donald R. Wesson, “Psychedelic Drugs, Hippie Counterculture, Speed and Phenobarbital Treatment of Sedative-Hypnotic Dependence: A Journey to the Haight Ashbury in the Sixties,” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 43, no. 2 (June 2011): 155, Academic Search Premier.

a significant lack of medical care. Dr. Ellis Sox, San Francisco public health director, told *Time* magazine the 10,000 hippies living in San Francisco contracted hepatitis and venereal disease, and suffered from malnutrition.⁶² What once was a free-spirited utopia faded into a tourist attraction and a media phenomenon.

The Performer Disappears

At first, Kesey, more than anyone else, welcomed this new culture with open arms. He formed relationships with other leading figures in the counterculture movement; he hosted electric, nightlong parties; and, more importantly, he embraced the use of LSD for personal and creative purposes. He brought the psychedelic dance performances out of his home and turned on thousands of minds in San Francisco. While Kesey should not receive full credit for the counterculture's creation, he did alter the course of the movement as a whole.

After leaving California, Kesey settled down on an Oregon farm with his wife Faye and his three children, Shannon, Jed, and Zane.⁶³ He followed the I Ching's directions and bought a barn that he and Faye converted into a house for their family. Kesey soon took on the role of a cattle farmer, a position that introduced him to magic as a young boy as he worked alongside his father in the family dairy business. Kesey embraced this new, quiet lifestyle with his family. He joined the Parent-Teacher

⁶² "Hippies."

⁶³ Jed Kesey passed away in January 1984 at the age of twenty. Jed, a wrestler at the University of Oregon, was involved in a fatal accident as the team traveled to a match in Washington. The team's van encountered severe winter conditions and descended down an embankment. In addition to Jed, the accident killed one other member of the wrestling team.

Association at the school his children attended, he coached wrestling, and he continued to write journalistic pieces and children's books. The countercultural figure had faded, but his legacy lived on in literary, musical, and creative forms.⁶⁴

In the end, however, Kesey left California and the counterculture to pursue his most important role as a father. Whether he understood that he had abandoned something bigger, Kesey realized he had made an important decision. "Sometimes you just have to make a choice. It's very difficult to write and maintain a marriage and a family," Kesey told an interviewer in 1993.⁶⁵ When he returned to Oregon in late 1967, it was as though he had never left. He adjusted quickly and became a "solid citizen," and he realized "a lot of the long-haired hippie people never understood. We're as solid citizens as can be. Family types—college educated."⁶⁶ But Kesey was not the one who suffered the most. It was the counterculture that fell victim to Kesey's final prank.

Kesey was not present for the Human Be-In or the Summer of Love, but his departure came at the right time. He managed to avoid the new negativity associated with San Francisco by 1967. Kesey left as if he anticipated the shift to hard drugs and crowded streets. More than anything, Kesey wanted to concentrate on being a father to his three

⁶⁴ In 2009, remaining members of the Grateful Dead, Bob Weir and Phil Lesh, went on to form another band, Furthur, appropriately named after Kesey's bus; Henry Allen, "A '60s Superhero, After the Acid Test: Ken Kesey: Keeping Up on the Farm in Oregon," *Washington Post*, June 9, 1974, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶⁵ Dan McCue, "Ken Kesey: Writing is an Act of Performance (1993)" in *Conversations with Ken Kesey*, ed. Scott F. Parker (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2014), 142.

⁶⁶ "Kesey Considers Self a Solid Citizen," *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, April 26, 1982, Google News.

children instead of being the father of a new cultural epoch. Kesey never considered himself the Father of the Counterculture, but he did have a sense that he was part of an important period in history. Looking back, Kesey described his pranks as “historically important, in a way that still hasn’t been understood or recognized.”⁶⁷ With his creativity and talent, it is necessary to view Kesey as a transitional figure who helped guide the cultural revolution that led to one of the most vibrant era’s in American cultural history.

⁶⁷ Todd Brendan Fahey, “Come Spake the Cuckoo, Ken Kesey: The *Far Gone* Interview,” September 13, 1992, <http://www.fargonebooks.com/kesey.html>.

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