Foucault and the Strategies of Resistance in the New Journalism of Capote, Wolfe, and Kovic

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FOUCAULT AND THE STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE IN
THE NEW JOURNALISM OF CAPOTE, WOLFE, AND KOVIC

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I would like to thank Ned Stuckey-French for his guidance, support, and inspiration throughout the course of this study. I am forever indebted to him for introducing me to the awe-inspiring literary experience that is Ron Kovic’s *Born on the Fourth of July*. I would also like to thank the members of my committee, Leigh Edwards and Barry Faulk, for their willingness to participate in this project. Thank you to my Tallahassee friends, Meg, Doug, and Brianna, for their friendship and support. Finally, this thesis is dedicated to Brendan McDonald, for energizing me with his beautiful smile and encouraging me across the finish line.
This thesis is a study of the ways in which Michel Foucault’s theoretical assumptions about power relations are manifested in the New Journalism of Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, and Ron Kovic’s *Born on the Fourth of July*. Chapter one begins by delineating the many power relations operating within *In Cold Blood*. Capote’s groundbreaking nonfiction novel illustrates the complexity of the power struggle between Capote and his reader; Capote, Perry Smith, and Dick Hickock; and American culture and Perry, Dick, and the Clutters. This chapter includes a close reading of Foucault’s “The Subject and Power.” Chapter one finds instances where panopticism affects power relations.

Chapter two contends that power and the creation of discourses of power are vital to the health of any group or society. A reading of Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* reveals that power is ubiquitous — even in anti-authoritarian, anti-establishment groups like Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters. Wolfe’s text contends that the discourse of power can be healthy for a group or a society, so far as the source of truth is not someone like Ken Kesey. Throughout the text, Wolfe criticizes Kesey, the Pranksters, and the psychedelic drug movement. Chapter two finds that Wolfe’s book is essentially an exercise in meta-discourse: Wolfe promotes his own idea of truth while critiquing another.

The final chapter in this study explores resistance in Ron Kovic’s memoir, *Born on the Fourth of July*. Where Kovic may lack the journalist credentials of Capote and Wolfe, he makes up for in passion and raw talent. His memoir delivers a personal, historical, and sociological account of one of the darkest aspects of American life during the 1960s and early 70s. Writing about his struggle to adjust to his new life as a paralyzed war veteran, Kovic chronicles his resistance against not only the Vietnam War, but also against established conventions of “normality.” Kovic is paradoxically trapped and then freed by his paralysis. He represents Foucault’s notion of a subject’s ethical possibility.
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INTRODUCTION

*I doubt if many of the aces I will be extolling in this story went into journalism with the faintest notion of creating a “new” journalism, a “higher” journalism, or even a mildly improved variety. I know they never dreamed that anything they were going to write for newspapers or magazines would wreak such evil havoc in the literary world...causing a panic, dethroning the novel as the number one literary genre, starting the first new direction in American literature in a half a century...Nevertheless, this is what happened.*

– Tom Wolfe in *The New Journalism*

In his introduction to *The New Journalism* Tom Wolfe begins by throwing a pie in the face of the Novel and those critics who doubted that any other literary form could ever come close to matching its supremacy. Beginning in the late 1950s, writers like Wolfe contributed to a new literary form that dared to challenge the hierarchy of literary genres and make room for a new, unusual, uncategorized mode of expression. Emerging at the same time as New Journalism, and also challenging established norms, the countercultural movement provided the perfect subject matter for New Journalism. This study examines how counterculture is represented in New Journalism; more specifically, the ways in which discourses of power are manufactured by both subject and/or author of New Journalist texts. Using the poststructural theories of philosopher/historian Michel Foucault, I reveal the methods by which the New Journalism of Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, and Ron Kovic simultaneously criticize and produce discourses of power.

In the most basic sense, New Journalism is a genre which melds techniques traditionally reserved for fiction-writing like plot, character development, dialogue, and suspense with reportage on true events, interviews, and research. It takes form in articles, essays, memoirs, and nonfiction novels. Although New Journalism erupted as a literary powerhouse in the 1960s, its influences include the work of Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell, Charles Dickens, Honore de Balzac, Henry Fielding, and Jonathan Swift.
In the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the Novel was the literary Goliath of American culture, even connecting itself to the omnipresent American Dream. What the Novel reflected both in its text and in its process was the possibility of the self-made man (or woman). As Wolfe explains: “In the 1930s all the novelists had seemed to be people who came blazing up into stardom from out of total obscurity (\textit{The New Journalism} 8). That remained to be so until major publications like \textit{Esquire} and \textit{Herald Tribune} started publishing stories by journalists who were doing some blazing of their own.

Before the popularity of New Journalism spread, journalism had been typified by its serious, stuffy, dry, and objective style of writing. As Wolfe explains, this type of writing makes it difficult for a reader to get through an article without being bored to death:

When they came upon that pale beige tone, it began to signal to them, unconsciously, that a well-known bore was here again, “the journalist,” a pedestrian mind, a phlegmatic spirit, a faded personality, and there was no way to get rid of the pallid little troll, short of ceasing to read. (\textit{The New Journalism} 17) New Journalism arrived just in time to add life and color to the tired, black and white pages of journalism.

With widespread roots, New Journalism began sprouting from the feature stories of journals, newspapers, and magazines. Traditionally, the page-turning stories were the “scoop” stories. Journalists notoriously competed with one another to provide the inside information on breaking news. But unlike scoop stories, Wolfe explains, “…feature stories gave a man a certain amount of room in which to write” (\textit{The New Journalism} 6). Feature stories, which were by nature longer and more politically and socially charged, were the perfect outlet for journalistic experimentation. Jimmy Breslin stunned readers in the fall of 1962 when his article “Joe Louis: the King as a Middle-aged Man” appeared in \textit{Esquire}. Filled with dialogue and expository passages, the article read like a short story, yet offered serious reportage on the life of Joe Louis and his relationship with his wife. The article was exciting, but most of all, it was much different than the other articles running in newspapers and magazines at the time. Like \textit{Esquire}, The \textit{Herald Tribune} recognized that journalism was in need of some serious revamping. Jimmy Breslin was
hired by the *Herald Tribune* to offset the serious, dry writing of the editorial page by who Wolfe dubs the “snoremongers like Walter Lippmann and Joseph Alsop” (12).

Although it is difficult to pinpoint the definitive first New Journalist text, the publication of Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* in book form in 1966 established the genre as a literary mainstay. Wolfe emphasizes the impact of Capote’s novel: “It was a sensation—and a terrible jolt to all those who expected the accursed New Journalism or Parajournalism to spin itself out like a fad” (26). But of course, there are those critics who still refused to concede the novel’s preeminence. In “*An American Tragedy* and *In Cold Blood*,” critic John J. McAleer takes aim at trivializing Capote’s nonfiction novel by comparing it to Theodore Dreiser’s 1925 novel, *An American Tragedy*. By positing the two side by side, McAleer claims that Capote’s nonfiction novel is far inferior to Dreiser’s:

> Capote’s facts adorn him like leg irons. He is, in turn, jailer to imprisoned archetypes, myths, and symbols, inherent in his material, but denied liberty. They stare out at us like bugs in amber. Though Dreiser’s method they could gorgeously soar. (5)

This argument is typical of most critical claims against New Journalism: the author’s story and style is shackled by facts. But New Journalism’s critics are not just limited to Novel-elitists like McAleer. Even heavy-hitting journalists like Dwight MacDonald, esteemed intellectual and staff writer for *The New Yorker* takes issue with the new form of reportage. In “*Parajournalism, or Tom Wolfe and His Magic Writing Machine,*” an article that ran in two issues of the *New York Review of Books*, MacDonald blasts Tom Wolfe’s writing style as, “a bastard form, having it both ways, exploiting the factual authority of journalism and the atmospheric license of fiction. Entertainment rather than information in the aim of its producers, and the hope of its consumers” (qtd. in Weingarten 5). Here, MacDonald grumbles over New Journalism’s identity crisis. Refusing to conform within the confines of either fiction or nonfiction, New Journalism situates itself somewhere in between, picking and choosing what goes on its lunch tray from a cafeteria of both fiction and nonfiction writing techniques. For example, in fiction, the author is allowed to use whatever point of view he deems appropriate. He even has the ability to weave in and out his characters’ minds, exerting the power of omniscience
wherever he deems it appropriate. On the other hand, traditional nonfiction is generally limited to an author recounting historical events from his/her own point of view. In his book, *Tom Wolfe: A Critical Companion*, critic Brian Ragen comments on the nonfiction author’s limitability: “He cannot report on what he does not know and that limits his choices as to point of view. The narrator cannot tell what is going on in someone’s mind if that person has not reported what he or she was thinking” (Ragen 77). Passages in Wolfe’s *The Electric-Kool Aid Acid Test* containing inner dialogue for tripped-out Merry Pranksters like Sandy Lehmann-Haupt or in Capote’s *In Cold Blood* containing the thoughts of two cold-blooded killers drove literary conventionalists mad.

It is no wonder, then, that American counterculture attached itself to this rogue form of writing. For youth, radicalism was a la mode in the 1960s. The 1960s pushed in the opposite direction of where America was moving (or was not moving) in the 1950s. While the 1950s was a decade of strict conformism, the 1960s was the decade that celebrated rebellion and change. The December, 1969 issue of *Life* magazine described the shift from the fifties to the sixties as moving from the “brisk feeling of hope, a generally optimistic and energetic shift from the calm of the late 1950s followed by a growing swell of demands for extreme and immediate change” of the late 1960s (qtd. in Anderson v.). But what was it about the 1950s that made counterculture so significant in the 1960s?

The conformity of the 1950s is owes itself to World War II. While other nations like Great Britain and the Soviet Union had suffered devastating economic losses from the bombing of industrial bases during World War II, America escaped unscathed. National pride spread like a virus; the overwhelming victory in the war and the successful creation and deployment of the atomic bomb perpetuated the notion that America was the greatest, most powerful nation in the world. In *Counterculture Through the Ages: From Abraham to Acid House*, Ken Goffman and Dan Joy comment on the psychological impact that the atomic bomb had on postwar Americans:

And the atomic news also had subtext—a message that was perhaps experienced more at the level of the body and the nervous system than the intellect: *speed*. And speed produces exhilaration. Exhilarated Americans were celebrating the instant end of the world war. And the nuke that made the war go away nearly
overnight wasn’t just about fantastic advances in physics, it was about flight. Not only did we possess a weapon of unfathomable terror; it was deliverable anywhere and in a matter of hours! (Goffman and Joy p. 226-227) America now held the ultimate bargaining chip: the power to threaten other nations with mass death and destruction.

While the 1950s was a decade of unprecedented wealth and success, it was also a decade festering with fear and paranoia caused by the cold war and the threat of communism. Following WWII, Joseph Stalin refused to allow democratic elections in the areas the Soviet Union had had liberated from Nazi Germany, spreading Communism throughout Europe. Prime Minister Winston Churchill coined the infamous term “iron curtain” to describe what he thought was a Soviet barrier across the continent. When the Soviets seized the Czechoslovakian government and closed the German capital, the United States responded by creating the Berlin Airlift, rebuilding Western Europe with the Marshall Plan, and creating the North Atlantic Trade Organization (Anderson 2). Communism and the fear of its spread wore heavily on the minds of most Americans.

Politicians like Joseph McCarthy were able to prey upon this fear by labeling any type of subversion as Communist. McCarthy, a Republican senator from Wisconsin, announced in 1950 that he had a list of 205 members of the Communist party who worked in the State Department. Later, he changed the number 83, then 57, “card-carrying members of the Communist Party” (Anderson 4). McCarthyism had a profound impact on the way in which Americans viewed their neighbors. A residue of suspicion, doubt, and conspiracy coated the McCarthy era. By 1957, over six million people had been investigated under suspicion of being Communists (Young 14). The message of McCarthyism was clear: adhere to the strict rules, regulations, norms, and values of American society or be ostracized.

During the McCarthy Era, the fear of Communism was joined by a new fear: a fear of total, unexpected annihilation. When the Soviets exploded their first atomic bomb in August of 1949, many Americans were stunned and equally afraid of a communist infiltration at home. No one believed that the Soviets were anywhere close to nuclear capability; most Americans were immediately paranoid that domestic spies were dollying out secrets to the Soviets. By 1953, both the United States and the Soviets had produced a
hydrogen bomb. The cold war between the two nations caused mass existential anxiety which was heightened when Sputnik was launched into space by the Soviets in October, 1957. Suddenly, and without warning, Soviet technology was advancing much faster than that of the United States. Americans responded by creating nuclear shelters and conducting atomic bomb drills on a regular basis. A McCall’s 1957 article asked, “Will Tomorrow Come?” echoing the apocalyptic sentiments prompted by the cold war and the new space race (Anderson 10). Anderson reiterates the social impact that the cold war and McCarthyism had on Americans: “Generally speaking, Americans are very individualistic and independent. But the continual threats from beyond, and supposedly within, created a society in the 1950s unusually concerned about security, a people bent on security and consensus” (Anderson 7). And that sense of security and consensus was counterculture challenged.

Counterculture constitutes any action or belief that conflicts with established norms, social mores, traditional values, or public policies. Counterculture was largely viewed as delinquency and linked with youth. As the first half of the 1960s saw the beginning of peaceful demonstrations against racism and nuclear arms, delinquency was still considered a huge threat to national security. By 1964, youthful activism was commonplace and increased as the first baby boomers arrived on college campuses for the fall semester. Drugs, sex, music, and literature were imbied with counterculture. Goffman and Joy recount the counterculture of the 1960s:

In the 1960s, all of our countercultural tropes came screaming out into the open at once. It seemed as if some kind of psychic prison had suddenly come unlocked and all the young people were trying to make their escape. Expanded liberties for individuals in thought, speech, and behavior rubbed against—and tried to merge with—a growing sense of collective responsibility to end war, poverty, and injustice. (247)

Journalism could only capture the superficial reality of counterculture. New Journalism lived it. Capote, Wolfe, Didion, and Kovic were able to portray their subjects better incorporating elements of fiction-writing than they ever could have using customary journalism.
In Foucauldian terms, counterculture means challenging different discourses of power. Foucault spent his entire career deconstructing the ways in which power operates, but more importantly, exploring the effects of power on its subject. It is Foucault’s basic belief that truth, which manifests itself through language, science, and social norms is a construct of power. In “Truth and Power” Foucault explains:

‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of all statements. ‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A ‘regime’ of truth.

(133)

Foucault does not understand power as something that prohibits the actions of its subjects, but rather, affects and informs their actions. The way in which power is able to do this is through discourses of power or, regimes of truth. For example, in Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Foucault cites the creation of the social sciences as institutions which produce discourses of power. With the goal to understand, regulate, and normalize all subjects in a society, the social sciences create docile bodies, able to do the bidding of whatever power requires.

Counterculture and other forms of resistance require one to challenge different ‘truths.’ Foucault highlights the essential task for the agent of counterculture:

It’s not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from all forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time (“Truth and Power” 133).

Counterculture is about recognizing the connection between truth and power. For example, those involved in the anti-war movement were most outraged by the government’s political motivations for engaging in war. It was more a war to protect and build America’s power than a war about protecting an underdog.

Foucault is a great fit for a discussion about counterculture because critics have just as hard a time categorizing Foucault as they do categorizing New Journalism. Is he a philosopher? Historian? Sociologist? Critical theorist? Depending on which of his texts or interviews one reads, Foucault wears any and all of these hats. Many critics suspect
that Foucault’s theories for leaving no room for resistance and rebellion because, as he suggest, power is everywhere. This study uses Foucault’s theories to extract a better understanding of both counterculture and the mediating role of the New Journalists who write it.

Chapter one begins by delineating the power relations within Truman Capote’s nonfiction novel, *In Cold Blood*. His groundbreaking nonfiction novel illustrates the complexity of the power struggle between Capote/his reader; Capote/Perry and Dick; American culture/Perry, Dick, and the Clutters; and Government/Perry and Dick. This chapter includes a reading of Foucault’s “The Subject and Power” in order to identify the power and the subject of power in each of these relationships. Also, chapter one detects instances where panopticism, a surveillance mechanism of power, is hard at work affecting power relations.

Chapter two contends that power and the creation of discourses of power are vital to the health of any group or society. A close reading of Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, reveals that power is ubiquitous — even in anti-authoritarian, anti-establishment groups like Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters. Power relations and the trappings of the discourse of power find their way on the day-glo painted bus. But Wolfe’s text seems to argue that the discourse of power can be healthy, so far as the source of truth is not Kesey. Throughout the text, Wolfe criticizes Kesey, the Pranksters, and the psychedelic drug movement. He does not approve of the lifestyle and rules Kesey is promoting/has created. Wolfe’s book is essentially an exercise in meta-discourse: Wolfe promotes his own idea of truth by critiquing the one that Kesey has developed.

The final chapter in this study explores resistance in Ron Kovic’s memoir, *Born on the Fourth of July*. Where Kovic may lack the journalist credentials of Capote and Wolfe, he makes up for in passion and raw talent. He is simply a man who lived through hell and came out alive with a pen and a piece of paper. His memoir delivers a personal, historical, and sociological account of one of the darkest corners of American life during the 1960s and early 70s. Writing about his struggle to adjust to his new life as a paralyzed war veteran, Kovic chronicles resistance against not only the Vietnam War, but also against established conventions of “normality.” This chapter contends that Kovic’s
experiences are a representation of precisely what Foucault envisioned the role of the subject’s ethical possibility.

These New Journalist texts were selected for this study because of their broad range of authorial involvement. Capote, Wolfe, Kovic, and the other New Journalists were better able to portray their subjects incorporating elements of fiction-writing than they ever could have using traditional journalism. They made it okay for journalists to abandon objectivity (Wolfe and Kovic more openly) and view their subject matter subjectively. This study is arranged in such a way as to view the scale of authorial subjectivity. In *In Cold Blood*, Capote’s presence is marginalized because of his reader. But although he does not allow himself to insert his editorial opinion, there is still evidence of a Capote presence throughout the text. He leaves a subtle breadcrumb trail, leading back to his feelings towards Perry and his view of the death penalty. In *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Wolfe is not afraid to acknowledge his presence. For example, early in the book he responds to a woman who has just called him stolid by addressing the reader: “Back in New York City, Black Maria, I tell you, I am even known as something of a dude” (3). Like Capote, Wolfe buries his opinions about his subjects behind irony and sarcasm. The reader must dig a little deep to uncover Wolfe. Lastly, in *Born on the Fourth of July*, Kovic comes out swinging with his subjectivity. He spies a terrible injustice and he is blunt about his feelings throughout his memoir.
CHAPTER ONE
SUBJECTS, POWER, AND PANOPTICISM IN CAPOTE’S IN COLD BLOOD

To The Editor:

For the sake of word economy as well as commerce, may I coin a term for librarians, semanticists, bibliographers, and sign painters everywhere: Why not call this conglomeration described as “Novel. nonfiction”—“faction”?

- Leo Kaltman, Hickville, NY

On the morning of November 16, 1959, a godsend landed on Truman Capote’s doorstep. It had been over a year since the release of Breakfast at Tiffany’s and Capote was agonizing over a subject for a new project. Breakfast at Tiffany’s had elevated Capote’s celebrity status and he was desperate for another project that could fuel that fame. Although writing fiction had brought him great success, he had been entertaining the notion of giving reportage another try. From 1946 until 1950, he wrote nine travel vignettes, which appeared in various periodicals. He had been happy with the powerfully perceptive detail in his vignettes, but none focused deeply on their subjects. Capote had also written The Muses are Heard, an account of his trip to Leningrad with the American cast of Porgy and Bess. Published in 1956, Muses was mostly comprised of personality sketches of the different cast members and read like a novella. He wanted to replicate what he had accomplished in his vignettes and Muses on a much grander scale by writing a nonfiction novel—a book that would read like a novel, except that every word of it would be absolutely true. But so far the search to find a subject capable of sustaining the length of a novel had been fruitless. That all changed when Capote read the Monday, November 16, 1969 edition of The New York Times.

On page thirty-nine, Capote paused over a small headline sandwiched in the middle of the page: “Wealthy Farmer, 3 of Family Slain.” The article continued, “A wealthy wheat farmer, his wife and their two children were found shot to death today in their home…They had been killed by shotgun blasts at close range after being bound and gagged” (Clarke 273). Capote immediately phoned William Shawn, editor of The New
Yorker. He explained to Shawn that he wanted to go to Kansas and write about the murders. Shawn obliged, fully expecting Capote to forget about Kansas and stay in New York.

Before *In Cold Blood* appeared in bookstores on January 17, 1966, it was already a classic. The 135,000-word story had earned Capote an astonishing $2 million in magazine, book, and film payments before he had even sold one copy (Gilroy 23). Although the story had appeared in four installments in the *New Yorker* throughout 1965, the public was anxious for the Random House’s publication in book form. George Garrett, author of “Then and Now: *In Cold Blood* Revisited,” recounts the excitement leading up to the nonfiction novel’s release saying:

I remember that…after the first chunk of it appeared, waiting eagerly for the next issue of the *New Yorker*. People talked about it with excitement in the way that people only talk about good new movies nowadays. I couldn’t wait to get my hands on the book. (467)

But critics and other readers were less than enthusiastic about the book and Capote’s claim that he had invented a new literary form. Many believed it was nothing more than a “true-crime” novel like Frank Norris’ *McTeague* or Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy*. Others felt that it should be categorized as an extended newspaper article.

Despite his detractors, Capote’s nonfiction novel was a great success. In his book, *Truman Capote*, author Kenneth Reed explains why Capote’s nonfiction novel created such a sensation by suggesting that Americans were drawn by the nonfiction novel’s subject matter: “The Clutters were more than respectable upper-middle-class individuals with whom a huge public could easily identify. In addition, there seemed to be a market for close scrutiny of the homicidal criminal mentality, a scrutiny in which Capote was to excel” (Reed 1). According to Capote, more than five thousand people attended the auction of the Clutter family home (269). The fact that most of the crowd was just trying to satisfy a morbid curiosity with the murders accounts for this large number.

Prior to book’s release, the popularity of crime novels had been steadily increasing. Jim Thompson’s *The Killer Inside Me*, Patricia Highsmith’s *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, Charles Willeford’s *Pick-Up*, David Goodis’ *Down There*, and Chester Himes’ *The Real Cool Killers* were all fictionalized crime novels published and widely read at
the end of the 1950s. In addition to these crime novels, one of the most popular television shows at the time was "The Untouchables," a show based on the cases of FBI investigator Elliot Ness and his pursuit of 1920s gangsters. The major assassinations and rising crime rate also made literature, television, and newspaper stories about crime popular. John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, and then black rights’ activist Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965. Also, in the U.S. during the period of 1960-1971, there was a pervasive feeling that the crime problem was getting worse (Peterson 1). *In Cold Blood* both satisfies the curiosity with and exacerbates the fear of crime and violence.

Capote’s nonfiction novel traces the murders of Herb, Bonnie, Nancy, and Kenyon Clutter and the subsequent executions of Perry Smith and Richard Hickock. According to Capote, none of these individuals was deserving of his or her death, including Perry Smith and Richard Hickock. On November 15, 1959, Perry Smith and Richard Hickock broke into the Clutter home in Holcomb, Kansas with the intent to steal money from Herb Clutter’s safe and murder all witnesses. Herb Clutter was a wealthy farmer who maintained one of the nicest homes in Holcomb: “Situated at the end of a long, lanelike driveway shaded by rows of Chinese elms, the handsome white house, standing on an ample lawn of groomed Bermuda grass, impressed Holcomb; it was a place people pointed out” (Capote 11). Like those Americans who emigrated from the cities into the suburbs beginning in the 1950s, Herb Clutter thought he and his family were impervious to the social ills of the world. But when Smith and Hickock broke into the Clutter home on November 15, 1959 and neglected to find a safe filled with money, they proceeded to murder four members of the Clutter family. Throughout the novel, Capote tells the story of Perry and Dick’s lives from before they committed the Clutter murders to their resulting capture, trial, and hanging. But that’s not the only story that Capote’s nonfiction novel has to tell.

Rife with sets of power relations, *In Cold Blood* is more a book about the way in which power operates than a journalistic account of four murderers and two executions. This chapter explores the significant power relations of Capote/his reader; Capote/Perry; American culture/Perry, Dick, and the Clutters; and Government/Perry and Dick. This chapter defines these relationships by locating person(s) in the position of power and the person(s) being subjugated by that power. Devoting his career to the study of power’s
effect on subjects, Michel Foucault defines a relationship of power in “The Subject and
Power” as follows:

A power relationship…can only be articulated on the basis of two elements that
are indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that “the other” (the one
over whom power is exercised) is recognized and maintained to the very end as a
subject who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of
responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up. (Rabinow and
Rose 137-138)

The subject of power is defined by action. Unconventionally, Foucault does not see
power as something which stunts the actions of its subjects, but rather, affects and
informs their actions. In Cold Blood includes so many examples of power relations
because, according to Foucault, “Power relations are rooted in the whole network of the
social” (Rabinow and Rose 141). Unlike reading fiction, nonfiction allows the reader to
view character and character action in terms outside of authorial intent. Spending time
studying the power relations between Capote and his reader, for example, reveals more
than just truths about Capote, but also truths about the ways in which power operates
outside of In Cold Blood.

The most significant power relation is the one that exists between Capote and the
reader. Every author can be expected to have control over his reader, moving the reader
through a text at his pace and by means of his control over the reader’s view of the story.
But in In Cold Blood, this power relation also works in reverse, with Capote as subject
and the reader as the one in power. In an interview with George Plimpton, Capote
unknowingly admits to this power relation: “If I put something in which I don’t agree
about, I can always set it in a context of qualification without having to step into the story
of myself to set the reader straight” (italics added; 204). This statement is paradoxical
because Capote reveals both the power he has over his reader and the power his reader
has over him. In the first half of the statement, he admits that he has the power to alter the
meaning of an event by its placement. But the second half of the statement reveals that
the reader has power over Capote by keeping him out of the story. Capote’s resistance
against making his presence known in the novel is a response to a mechanism of power
that the reader exercises over Capote: panopticism.
In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* and *Power/Knowledge*, Michel Foucault introduces the concept of panopticism to the discourse of the study of power. He views it as a powerful technique through which power operates. At the end of the eighteenth century, Jeremy Bentham devised the prison layout that he believed would cure all social deviance. The idea was to arrange a prison in such a way as to make every prisoner subject to surveillance. Inmates would be placed in isolated prison cells which circled a central observation tower. Guards could monitor the jail cells from the tower without being seen by the prisoners. The effect was a system of visibility, which in turn, made the prisoners feel utterly vulnerable and paranoid. Michel Foucault explains how the operation of visibility worked in this prison saying, “In short, the principle of the dungeon is reversed; daylight and the overseer’s gaze capture the inmate more effectively than darkness, which afforded after all a sort of protection” (*Power/Knowledge* 147). The idea was that the prisoner, not knowing when he was being watched or who he was being watched by, would discipline himself. By Foucault’s very definition of a subject of power, the prisoner alters his own actions in accordance with the prison laws. The prisoner’s complete visibility discourages any type of delinquency. Foucault uses Bentham’s Panopticon as an example of the type of prison system that emerged out of the nineteenth century, but also as a model of the operation of power in contemporary society. In *Power/Knowledge*, he describes how the panoptic gaze functions as a mechanism of power:

> There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. (155)

As a result, a very small number of guards were actually needed to maintain control over the inmates. In fact, for all the prisoners knew, there were no guards in the tower. Anyone can operate the panopticon so long as he or she is in a position to control the panoptic gaze, including Capote’s reader.

Capote’s reader is in the position to maintain surveillance over Capote and his narrator. His reader is able to watch him to see if he violates the truth, makes a mis-step, or breaks his contract as an arbiter of fact-reporting. Capote is careful not to overstep his
journalistic obligation by openly offering his opinion. Instead, Capote buries his opinions in clever manipulations and rhetoric. One of the most interesting examples of this power relation is when Capote includes the testimony of Dr. W. Mitchell Jones at Perry and Dick’s trial. During the trial scene, Capote offers the testimony of the psychiatrists, even after the court refuses to allow the psychiatrist to qualify his answers. Dr. Jones was called to testify for the defense about the psychological nature of Dick and Perry. Dr. Jones had come prepared to deliver a long statement about each of the defendants, but under the M’Naghten Rule, Dr. Jones could only respond with “Yes” or “No” when asked if he could determine whether or not Perry Smith knew right from wrong when he killed the Clutters. He answered “Yes” when asked about both men, but Capote was not satisfied with ending his narration there.

Interrupting the linear flow of his description of the trial, Capote says, “However, had Dr. Jones been allowed to speak further, here is what he would have testified” and then goes on to include Dr. Jones’ statement about Perry’s mental instability and possible paranoid schizophrenia (294). Under the reader’s surveillance, Capote is forced to devise clever ways of manipulating his reader without expressing forthright his editorial opinion. His is trapped by the reader’s expectations of proper reportage. If Capote tried to express his sympathetic sentiments for a murderer or his opposition to the death penalty, his book might not have been as well received by the public.8

The power relation of Capote and his reader works both ways. Because Capote must hide his presence from the reader, this allows him to better underhandedly solicit the reader’s sympathy for Perry. If a reader in 1966 was not aware of Capote’s feeling for Perry, he may not have been aware that he was being manipulated by Capote. In a sense, by being chased out of the book by the reader, Capote occupies a position of power over the reader. In an interview with journalist George Plimpton, Capote discusses the effect of the novel saying, “I’ve often thought of the book as being like something reduced to a seed. Instead of presenting the reader with the full plant, with all the foliage, a seed is planted in the soil of his mind” (Plimpton 203). If he had come right out and presented the full plant, his opinion, the reader could have decided right then and there if he agreed with Capote. Capote’s more subtle approach allows for this seed to be planted. It is Capote’s intent that by the end of the book, the reader has grown just as attached to Perry
as he had been. By Foucault’s very definition of power, Capote has influenced at least one of our actions by causing us to be sympathetic to Perry. Capote plays the role of puppet master as he strings along his reader.

But why does Capote focus more on Perry than on Dick? During an interview with Lawrence Grobel years after writing *In Cold Blood*, Capote explained his preference for Perry after asked by Grobel if he had been in love with Perry:

> I didn’t love either of them but I had a great understanding for both of them, and for Perry I had a tremendous amount of sympathy. Dick, I thought, was just a small-time crook who got into water way over his head and was really responsible for this whole murder, which Perry actually committed. (*Conversations* p. 118)

In order to portray Perry as a sympathetic character, he needs Dick to be Perry’s foil. Capote heightens the reader’s connection to his protagonist, Perry, by exaggerating the reader’s disassociation to his antagonist, Dick. Although Capote presents factual information throughout the novel, he utilizes his authority to pick and choose which events and details he will include so he may better manipulate the reader into conforming to his own opinion of Perry. His admission to Grobel offers some insight for the way in which events in the novel are described, as he allows Perry to be portrayed as mostly a victim of social circumstances, and Dick as a pathological bully. When describing Perry, Capote often refers to him as having very feminine or childlike qualities: “His tiny feet, encased in short black boots with steel buckles, would have neatly fitted into a delicate lady’s dancing slippers; when he stood up, he was no taller than a twelve-year-old child…” (15). Dick, on the other hand is described by Capote like a cartoon villain:

> It was as though his head had been halved like an apple, then put together a fraction off center…and his eyes not only situated at uneven levels but of uneven size, the left eye being truly serpentine, with a venomous, sickly-blue squint that although it was involuntarily acquired, seemed nevertheless to warn of bitter sentiment at the bottom of his nature. (31)

Perry is also depicted by Capote as a romantic soul who takes interest in art and dreams of becoming a famous musician. Capote apparently faults Perry’s childhood for stifling his artistic potential.
When his parents divorced, Perry was ripped from his father and taken away to live with his mother at a very young age. His mother was an alcoholic who tried to convince Perry and his siblings to hate their father. Perry and his brothers and sisters were eventually kicked out of his mother’s home and sent to live in an orphanage where a young, defenseless Perry was regularly beaten by the nuns. Eventually, his father found Perry and his siblings. By this time, Perry wanted to enroll in school, but his father refused to let him. From there, Perry experienced a gradual decline into the world of crime and delinquency. It is evident that Capote views Perry as suffering from a lifetime of abuse and neglect. Capote celebrates the opinions of characters in the novel that support this view of Perry. After Alvin Dewey listens to Perry give his confession about the night of the murders, hears how Perry tied and duct taped the Clutters and then shot them at close range, Capote describes Dewey’s view of Perry: “…he found it possible to look at the man beside him without anger—with, rather, a measure of sympathy—for Perry Smith’s life had been no bed of roses but pitiful, an ugly and lonely progress toward one mirage and then another” (246). This description is a powerful rhetorical device whereby even Dewey, the staunch protector of life and law takes pity on Perry. Clearly, Capote is shifting responsibility for Perry’s actions away from Perry and placing it elsewhere.

There is one important, potentially damning character in the book who does not view Perry as sympathetic: his sister Barbara. When two detectives show up on her doorstep looking for Perry, she tells them that Perry does not know where she currently lives because she is afraid of him. The fact that his own sister is afraid of him could have hurt Capote’s chances for extracting sympathy for Perry. After all, if his own sister is frightened, maybe she knows something that Capote does not. She even warns, “He can make you feel so sorry for him” (182). Has the reader fallen into a trap? But Capote quickly spins Barbara’s fear as misplaced. Capote redirects Barbara’s fear of Perry as really a fear of, “the terrible destinies that seemed promised the four children of Florence Buckskin and Tex John Smith” (183). Her sister Fern turned into an alcoholic, her brother Jimmy had committed suicide, and her brother Perry had been in and out of the prison system since he was eight years old. Barbara managed to lead a normal life and in order to keep it that way, she maintains a protective wall between herself and Perry.
Capote also mitigates any damage that Barbara’s fear of Perry may cause by including a letter that Barbara wrote to Perry in 1958 while he was serving his second year in a Kansas jail for larceny, jailbreak, and car theft. This letter is placed well before the scene where she is interviewed by the detectives. She begins the letter by updating Perry on her perfect, domestic life. She mentions that her children are playing in the yard while she is writing the letter. Then suddenly, and without warning, she attacks Perry saying:

I truthfully feel none of us have anyone to blame for whatever we have done with our personal lives. It has been proven that at the age of 7 most of us have reached the age of reason—which means we do, at this age, understand & know the difference between right and wrong. (139)

Barbara is writing this letter from a very privileged position as the mother of three healthy children. Who knows how different Barbara’s life would have been had she been exposed to the same abuse and neglect as Perry? She then goes on to say, “Of course—environment plays an awfully important part in our lives such as the Convent in mine & in my case I am grateful for that influence” (139). She flouts the fact that her experience at the Convent was positive. Perry’s negative experience and abuse at the Convent had a profound impact on his childhood. Barbara then continues the letter, telling Perry that he should stop being so angry at his father. But the reader realizes that she is speaking to Perry from a privileged position. Unlike Perry, Barbara was allowed to go to school and lead a relatively normal childhood. She even dares to take a jab at his masculinity by saying, “…my husband respects our Dad. Because he is a MAN” (141). She tells Perry that he is less of a man for harboring resentment towards their father. Barbara places all responsibility on Perry, not on their father, their alcoholic mother, or the nuns who beat him regularly as a young child.

Capote posits this letter directly after he retells the sad story of Perry’s childhood, making Barbara’s letter sound insensitive, selfish, and harsh. After the reader has witnessed Perry incur so much abuse and heartache, Barbara’s letter just adds to Perry’s black cloud. Clearly, Capote views Perry as suffering from deep flaws that have developed as a result of his childhood. Capote expresses his opinion through a letter from Willie-Jay, one of Perry’s fellow inmates in the Kansas jail. The letter warned, “You are
strong, but there is a flaw in your strength, and unless you learn to control it the flaw will prove stronger than your strength and defeat you” (43).

Capote does not offer an excuse for Dick’s actions. There is nothing that Capote chooses use from Dick’s past to explain his actions in the future. And if there was, Capote probably would not have included it anyway. Unlike Perry, Dick is the product of stable nuclear family. Mr. and Mrs. Hickock are like figures out of a Norman Rockwell painting. When a detective comes to interview the Hickocks, he finds Mrs. Hickock in a stove-warmed kitchen darning stockings while her husband Walter sits across the room in a rocking chair. The Hickocks express their love for Dick and desire for him to come home. Dick fell into a life of delinquency after he married his high school sweetheart Carol. Dick and Carol rented a nice home and started buying things they couldn’t afford. Dick took to forging checks to maintain their lifestyle. The first time he was incarcerated, it was for stealing a neighbor’s hunting rifle. But his own parents refused to believe that Dick had stolen the rifle. Instead, Mr. Hickock insists that Dick “had no idea to steal it, I don’t give a damn what nobody says” (166-67). The Hickocks are trying to protect Dick, something that no one, other than Capote, would do for Perry.

Capote presents Dick as a man filled with deep violence. He is someone who makes a sport out of running over dogs with his car. Dick runs over a dog and boasts to Perry: “Boy!” he said—and it was what he always said after running down a dog, which was something he did whenever the opportunity arose. “Boy! We sure splattered him!” (112-113). Ironically, this scene is portrayed by Capote as more malicious and violent than the Clutter murder scene. Even though Perry slits Mr. Clutter’s throat, he doesn’t do so with the same sick, evil spirit as Dick running over the dog. In fact, when Perry slits Mr. Clutter’s throat, he doesn’t even realize he is doing it, “But I didn’t realize what I’d done till I heard the sound. Like somebody drowning. Screaming under water” (244). Although this is grotesque, it lacks the personal attachment that Dick had when he ran over the dog. Perry doesn’t take any pleasure or pain in killing Herb Clutter. Upon hearing Perry’s confession, detective Dewey decides that “The crime was a psychological accident, virtually an impersonal act; the victims might as well have been killed by lightning” (245). Conversely, the act of Dick running over the dog could not be described as a psychological accident or an impersonal act.
Even though Capote depicts Perry as the more sympathetic of the two characters, he does not want his reader to believe that either of the two deserved to be hanged. This is evident when Capote describes the moments leading up to Perry and Dick’s execution. Although Capote’s narrator cuts out before Perry and Dick fall from the gallows with rope around their necks, he does include one very small, very thought-provoking detail. He tells us that the hangman has been paid “six hundred dollars” for his services (337). It is a detail that Capote has chosen to include which echoes Dewey’s sentiments about the murderers only killing for a small profit: Dewey could not accept the theory that the family had been slaughtered for paltry profit—“a few dollars and a radio.” To accept it would obliterate his image of the killer—or, rather, killers (103). But even in the middle of the 1960s, doesn’t six hundred dollars for an execution seem like a paltry profit for the hangman? Perry himself struggles to comprehend American society’s willingness to valorize murder one minute, then condemn it the next writing:

[Soldiers] murder, and get medals for doing it. The good people of Kansas want to murder me—and some hangman will be glad to get the work. It’s easy to kill—a lot easier than passing a bad check. Just remember: I only knew the Clutters maybe an hour. If I’d really known them, I guess I’d feel different. I don’t think I could live with myself. But the way it was, it was like picking off targets in a shooting gallery. (291)

Capote’s decision to include the detail about the executioner’s ransom is one of the strongest examples that, as the title of the book suggests, he wants his reader to believe that Perry and Dick were also murdered in cold blood.

Another power relation operating in the nonfiction novel by way of panopticism is Capote and Perry and Dick. With Perry and Dick trapped behind bars, Capote has access to countless interviews and their private journals and letters. Equipped with an endless number of sources, he is able to describe events, conversations, and details he did not witness firsthand. He narrator sees everything — even the private conversations between Perry and Dick have been reconstructed as if Capote had been there. In Sentenced to Death: The American Novel and Capital Punishment, David Guest argues that Capote exercises a panoptic gaze in In Cold Blood, imprisoning Smith and Hickcock within its pages:
*In Cold Blood* recreates this privileged gaze by adopting a particular form of the third-person, omniscient point of view. Smith and Hickcock are placed in a sort of panopticon, while the all-seeing narrator sits, himself unseen, in the observation tower. (106)

The only time Perry and Dick knew that Capote was watching them was when Capote would meet with them for interviews. Even then, they couldn’t have known which parts of their interviews Capote would use or what sort of other background information he had dug up from other sources.

Although both Perry and Dick are made subjects through Capote’s gaze, Perry has been able to exert some power over Capote as well. According to Foucault, one of the main ingredients to a power relation is, ironically, freedom:

> Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are “free.” By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available. (Rabinow and Rose 139)

Capote had the freedom to select how he would present Dick and Perry. On the morning that he first read through the article about the Clutter murders, he obviously had no idea that he would be more sympathetic to one murderer over the other. Nevertheless, for the duration of his novel, he makes excuses for and tries to draw sympathy toward Perry. This proves that Perry has exercised some power over Capote, as Capote performs an action that he might not have otherwise performed. Because of his affection for Perry, Capote admitted years after the publication of *In Cold Blood* that “the subject matter and the loneliness led to a definite darkness and terrific apprehension. I’ve never been so nervous and so agitated. I never slept more than three hours a night for the seven months there” (*Conversations* 111). Where he otherwise may have remained objective, Perry’s power over Capote made Capote more invested in the story. There are plenty of other ways that Capote could have described Perry and even the murder sequence. Perry comes off sounding like a victim because that is exactly what Perry wanted Capote to do.

The novel also depicts a power relation among American culture and Perry, Dick, and the Clutters. In this relation, the power is asymmetrical — located totally within culture. In *The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel*, Mas’ud
Zavarzadeh argues that the same culture that made the Clutters also produced Perry and Dick.

The same cultural values which endow the Clutters with wealth and public security prevent the human development of the abilities of Perry and Richard, and deny them any personal fulfillment…The very values which have shaped the Clutter family life of public fulfillment and interior emptiness have also shaped the life-style of their killers. They are in a real sense the incarnation of the darker side of the Middle American psyche, the side inhabited and exiled from the consciousness which perceives and reacts to everyday reality. They represent the unacknowledged inner anxieties, which, like canker, eat up the private life of the Clutters. (120)

The Clutters are just as much subjects of American culture as Perry and Dick. Postwar American culture celebrates success, wealth, and happiness. The American Dream itself is a mechanism of power, driving people to work, start a family, and most importantly: buy things. The American Dream also incorporates a degree of panopticism. The American Dream is all about making success visible to the public. Knowing that the public is watching and measuring success by what kind of job you have, what kind of car you drive, whether you are married or not, subjects of the American Dream will modify their behavior according to their visibility. Throughout the novel, Capote shows how the Clutters, Perry, and Dick are affected by the American Dream. Herb Clutter has one of the nicest and most sizeable plots of land in Holcomb. He has a wife and five healthy children. From the outside, the Clutters are living the American Dream. As we learn, the private life of the Clutters is not as serene as it seems from the outside. Mr. Clutter is a proud, silent man, who keeps up the pretenses of being a good husband and father. But in reality, his children regard him as absent and aloof, while he and his wife do not sleep in the same bed. His affections toward his family are all for show and offered to maintain the shiny veneer of a perfect, happy lifestyle. He places his work above his family, and it is his family who suffers most. This environment has caused Mrs. Clutter to become terribly depressed, shutting herself in her room. She “despaired of surviving” both the Thanksgiving get-together hosted by her husband and her daughter Beverly’s wedding (28). Capote has uncovered a giant flaw in the Clutter family home.
The very reason that Perry and Dick show up to the Clutter’s farm is because they want a piece of the Clutter’s American Dream. Zavarzadeh also views the Clutter murders as a metaphor for clashing between the haves and the have-nots arguing, “The town itself gradually loses its geographical solidity and becomes emblem of quintessential America, where what happens is less a random murder and a collision between the forces and the ideas which have shaped the American Dream” (Zavarzadeh 116). Capote includes a key passage from Perry, in which Perry laments not being able to attain the American Dream and how this failure set him on the path of crime. He says to his sister Barbara who lives a normal life with a normal family:

You think I like myself? Oh, the man I could have been! But that bastard never gave me the chance. He wouldn’t let me go to school. I happen to have a brilliant mind. In case you don’t know. A brilliant mind and talent plus. But no education, because he didn’t want me to learn anything, only how to tote and carry for him. Dumb. Ignorant. That’s the way he wanted me to be. So that I could never escape him. But you, Bobo. You went to school. (185)

Events in Dick’s life have also been shaped by the American Dream. The act of marrying Susan at a young age and renting a home and purchasing goods he can’t afford is due to his careless chase to achieve the American Dream. He falls into a life of delinquency in order to maintain his lifestyle.

Perry and Dick’s incarceration and hanging only strengthens American culture’s celebration of the American Dream. They are the cautionary tale for anyone who is thinking of stepping out of line.

Perhaps the strongest power relation in the novel is Government/Dick and Perry. In The History of Sexuality, Volume I, Foucault includes an essay entitled, “Right of Death and Power Over Life” where he discusses the way in which a sovereign power reinforces its power through the maintenance of life. Foucault cites the example of how in ancient Rome, the definition of sovereign power was one that had the ability to decide life and death: “…the father of the Roman family the right to ‘dispose’ of the life of his children and his slaves; just as he had given them life, so he could take it away” (135). But as the modern state emerged, this power to decide death translated to the power to maintain life. Foucault explains:
Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. (137)

Through the death penalty, the government is exercising an ancient sovereign right to decide when a subject should die. Perry and Dick are not killed out of necessity. The government could simply keep them in jail if it was really concerned about keeping the population safe from Perry and Dick. Because the executions violate the Government’s responsibility to preserve life, Capote views their murders as unnecessary and therefore, performed in cold blood.

From the time of the Clutter murders in 1959 to the release of the Random House publication of *In Cold Blood* in 1966, America was experiencing some of its most profound growing pains. The American cultural revolution was in its early stages, burgeoning into an orgy of change a year later during “The Summer of Love” in 1967. When reading *In Cold Blood*, it is crucial to take into account the social atmosphere in which the murders and Capote’s research and writing took place. Capote’s nonfiction novel captures that spirit of resistance and change as Capote challenges the reader to identify with a cold blooded murderer and question the death penalty. By examining the novel in terms of Michel Foucault’s concept of power and power relations, we find a number of power relations at work. Of all the power relations, the most surprising is the one between Capote and his reader. With the power to manipulate the reader by his presentation of the material, it may seem that Capote holds all of the power over his reader. But as we have found, the reader has power over Capote — forcing him out of the story. Capote is forced to hide his personal opinions as he adheres to the rules of objective reporting. Knowing that his reader is policing his presence, Capote must rely on the clever arrangement of truth to ensure that the reader believes what he wants him to believe by the end of the novel.

Capote’s New Journalist successors would gradually work up the nerve to be forthright about their opinions concerning their subject matter. Even those critics who don’t accept Capote’s claim that he invented a new literary genre with *In Cold Blood* can certainly agree that he paves the way for New Journalism with the success of the
nonfiction novel. In *New Journalism*, Tom Wolfe highlights the importance of Capote’s novel saying:

Here, after all, was not some obscure journalist, some free-lance writer, but a novelist of long standing…whose career had been in the doldrums…and who suddenly, with this one stroke, with this turn to the damnable new form of journalism, not only resuscitated his reputation but elevated it higher than ever before…and became a celebrity of the most amazing magnitude in the bargain.

People of all sorts read *In Cold Blood*, people at every level of taste. Everybody was absorbed in it. Capote himself didn’t call it journalism; far from it; he said he had invented a new literary genre, “the nonfiction novel.” Nevertheless, his success gave New Journalism, as it would soon be called, an overwhelming momentum. (26)

Capote’s novel elevated New Journalism from the start. Wolfe and Capote’s other successors did not have to fight as hard to make New Journalism valid. Earning a KO in its first round, New Journalism was off to a great start.
CHAPTER TWO
CRITICIZING COUNTERCULTURE: DISCOURSES OF POWER IN TOM WOLFE’S
THE ELECTRIC KOOL-AID ACID TEST

In the summer of 1964, the psychedelic movement began rolling across America—in a day-glo painted bus equipped with movie cameras, tape recorders, a sound system, musical instruments, costumes, over a dozen passengers, and enough LSD to fuel a countercultural drug revolution. At the helm was Neal Cassady, icon of the Beat movement. Cassady had been the muse for Beat writers like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, immortalized as Dean Moriarty in Kerouac’s Beat classic, *On the Road*. Although Cassady was behind the wheel of the bus, it was another literary legend that was really the driving force: Ken Kesey. The rest of the passengers, dubbed Kesey’s “Merry Pranksters,” consisted of Ken Babbs, Page Browning, George Walker, Sandy Lehmann-Haupt, Hugh Romney, Paul Krassner, Stewart Brand, Del Close, Paul Foster, George Walker, Jane Burton, Mike Hagen, Carolyn Adams a.k.a. Mountain Girl, and other part-time passengers. The original idea for the trip had been to travel in a station wagon from California to New York for the New York World’s fair in 1964 and film *Intrepid Traveler and his Merry Band of Pranksters Look for a Kool Place* along the way. Eventually, the goal of the trip transformed into freeing the minds of American youth with copious amounts of psychedelic drugs, mainly LSD. In *Counterculture Through the Ages: From Abraham to Acid House*, Ken Goffman and Dan Joy explain the attitude of the drug movement saying, “Nonconformism and the personal search for identity became a mass movement, in many ways summoning forth new forms of conformity, new group identities. Drugs and rebellion became the thing that all young people do” (Goffman and Joy 247). Kesey and the Pranksters were completely invested in nonconformity and individuality. They wanted each person “be as big as he feels it’s in him to be” (Perry 43) and they viewed psychedelic drugs as the key to individuality and self-expression. Tom Wolfe clearly mocks this notion in his nonfiction novel about the group.

Tom Wolfe recorded the bizarre goings on of Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. Wolfe did not join Kesey and the Merry
Pranksters until the end of their long journey on the bus. Wolfe became interested in Kesey after novelist Larry McMurty showed Wolfe some letters he had received from Kesey while Kesey was in jail. The book begins and ends in the present of 1966, when Wolfe was in San Francisco covering the story. The body of the narrative is a long flashback, chronicling the whole of Kesey’s life up to that point (Ragen 77). Wolfe was able to write about events that had transpired prior to his arrival by piecing together information from personal interviews; and films, notes, and tapes of the Pranksters gathered by Hunter S. Thompson and Robert Stone. When he started the project, Wolfe had only planned on writing a single article, but it turned into a three-part feature in World Journal Tribune, and was then published in book form as The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test.

Wolfe is, by all accounts, out of his element. But he does not seem to mind the obvious barriers between himself and the Pranksters; in fact he encourages these boundaries even through his attire. Wolfe was a conservative, Virginia gentleman, notorious for donning an impeccable white suit and tie. He wasn’t about to turn in his white suit and tie for a pair of day-glo overalls when he met up with Kesey and his crew. The Pranksters immediately took note of Wolfe’s genteel garb. Wolfe tells the reader that the Pranksters, “…told me I ought to put some more…well, color…into my appearance.” Wolfe responds to this incident by telling the reader, “So I kept my necktie on to show that I had pride. But nobody gave a damn about that” (16). More than pride, Wolfe dresses like a misplaced Colonel Sanders to send a message to the Pranksters and anyone else that might see him interacting with the group, that he did not belong. The simple act of refusing to dress like his subjects reveals a lot about Wolfe’s mediating role throughout the nonfiction novel. In Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test, Wolfe scolds Kesey, his leadership, the psychedelic drug movement, and the life of a Merry Prankster. Wolfe reveals that life on the bus and on LSD is not, as Kesey and the Pranksters believe, one of great freedom and autonomy. In order to survive as a group, the Pranksters need Kesey’s authority.

As leader of the Merry Pranksters, Kesey dominates and organizes the actions of the group. More than that, in this asymmetrical power relation, he is the one with the
power. Kesey is the one who produces the discourses of power on the bus. Michel Foucault defines discourses of power in *Power/Knowledge*:

> Each society has its regimes of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; *the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true*. (131)

For Foucault, there is no absolute truth. All truth, including language, is created with bias in order to organize subjects of power and allow the creator of truth to maintain his power. As Wolfe’s narrative shows, Foucault’s notion about the creation of truth marries well with the Freudian concept of group morphology. As Kesey assumes the role of the group’s leader, his behavior and the behavior of his group modify just as Freud hypothesized in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. This chapter pinpoints a fascinating connection between Freud and the poststructuralism of Michel Foucault. Wolfe’s text exposes Kesey as having the status to decide what counts as true, and using it. For someone as anti-establishment as Kesey, this spells bad news for him and his Merry Pranksters. Kesey operates his bus much the same way a government or establishment operates power over its subject.

In late 1959, Kesey was introduced to LSD at a veteran’s hospital in Menlo Park where volunteers were paid $75 a day to be guinea pigs for different experiments involving psychoactive drugs. This was being sponsored by the MK-ULTRA program. It was here at Menlo Park, high on psychedelics, that Kesey found inspiration for his book, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. In the book, Kesey names mechanisms of control “the Combine” and treats the Combine as an antagonist both in the book and in real life. Taking LSD, Kesey believed he had released himself from the powers of the Combine and entered a world of no boundaries or consequences. In the introduction to *On the Bus: The Complete Guide to the Legendary Trip of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters and the Birth of Counterculture*, social historian Lauren Kessler explains the freeing effects of taking LSD:
LSD has a lot to do with removing systems of control—of seeing what’s going to happen without knowing, of accepting the notion of throwing yourself into the void and allowing the world to happen to you without the protective screening mechanisms we usually have. (Lauren Kessler quoted in Perry xxi-xxii)

The drug literally numbs the ego, leaving room for the unconscious to extend its reaches as far as it desires. Kesey wanted to share what he thought was this freedom with others. He and the Merry Pranksters decided to conduct “acid tests,” where large crowds of people could be introduced to acid under Kesey’s direction. He believed that he is setting others free from the Combine, when in fact; he is simply removing them from one Combine and trapping them within another.

Ironically, the origins of LSD in America have nothing to do with the embracing personal freedom. In fact, the drug was developed by the government to use as an interrogation device to coerce information out of an unwilling subject. In the spring of 1942, General William Donovan, chief of the Office of Strategic Services assembled a half-dozen American scientists and asked them to partake in a top research program. The mission was to develop a speech-inducing drug for use in intelligence interrogations. They began experimenting with a highly potent extract of cannabis known as “TD” or “Truth Drug” (Lee 3-4). At first, researchers found that there was a severe lack of consistency in the TD’s side effects and the project was shelved until after World War II. After the war, the CIA and military picked up where Office of Strategic Services left off. First, the Navy began working on Project CHATTER in 1947. When that failed, the CIA began Project BLUEBIRD, later changing the name to Operation ARTICHOKE and then to the MK-ULTRA program (Lee 10). Eventually, LSD-25 emerged from the mix of elusive code names, but it failed to become the truth drug the government had been chasing after for so many years. The book *Acid Dreams: The CIA, LSD, and the Sixties Rebellion* by Martin Lee and Bruce Shlain, offers an explanation for why LSD-25 failed to become a truth drug saying:

The whole concept of a truth drug was a bit farfetched to begin with. It presupposed that there was a way to chemically bypass the mind’s censor and turn the psyche inside out, unleashing a profusion of buried secrets, and that surely some approximation of “truth” would emerge amidst all the personal debris. (10)
Under the influence of LSD, some subjects would have no idea of who they really were and others came down from the drug without remembering what had happened. Although the government failed to create a usable truth drug or madness gas, ironically, it gave birth to the psychedelic drug culture of the 1960s. Ken Kesey was introduced to LSD and psychedelics in a program sponsored by Uncle Sam.

*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* is as much a study of the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of group dynamics as it is a documentary of the most influential proponents of acid culture. Throughout the book, it is clear that Merry Pranksters need to be controlled in order to survive life “on the bus.” To trip on LSD trip is, psychologically speaking, to experience symptoms of madness. Madness, and all variations of mental disorder, is a completely solitary condition. While LSD courses through one’s veins, it affords the taker to experience a dream world while they are awake. Sigmund Freud founded psychoanalysis on the ability to “read” the unconscious in dreams. In *On Creativity and the Unconscious*, Freud explains how humans are able to achieve full expression of the unconscious desires through dreaming by saying:

> It is because of the circumstance that at night wishes of which we are ashamed also become active in us, wishes which we have to hide from ourselves, which were consequently repressed and pushed back into the unconscious. Such repressed wishes and their derivatives can therefore achieve expression only when almost completely disguised. (50)

In the same fashion, Wolfe’s record of Kesey and the Pranksters’ actions while they are tripping affords the reader the opportunity to study the unconscious processes of these individuals. Wolfe quotes Kesey explaining the liberation that comes from this live dream-world saying, “The experience of the barrier between the subjective and the objective, the personal and the impersonal, the I and the not- I disappearing…that feeling!” (45). The ego and the non-ego merge into a vessel existing in a dream-world. As Kesey and the Pranksters ingest microgram after microgram of acid, the wall between their true-selves and the part of themselves that has been repressed is allowed to surface. LSD allows Kesey and the Merry Pranksters to construct their own sense of reality without considering social mores, conventions, and even their own sense of identity. Psychedelic drugs provide a tap into the unconscious. The ego is drowned by LSD and
replaced by the ego’s narcissistic step-child, the ego-ideal, or the image of one’s perfect self. Potentially, the bus could have been filled at any moment with a dozen or so competing demigods. But because the Merry Pranksters are a group, something very peculiar occurs to prohibit this from happening. Their ego-ideals are wrangled together and projected into Kesey.

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud discusses group morphology. Freud argues that in a group, an individual will give up his ego ideal and substitute it with the ego ideal of the group leader (102). Throughout Wolfe’s narrative, Kesey is clearly the group leader and the Pranksters adopt Kesey’s ego-ideal as their own. Wolfe focuses much of the attention of the novel on one Prankster in particular: Sandy Lehmann-Haupt. Through Sandy’s experience on the bus, Kesey’s position of power is revealed. Sandy claims that he is, “Always seeing two Keseys. Kesey the Prankster and Kesey the organizer” (Wolfe 92). This quote implies that there is an understanding that Kesey is the leader. Later on, Sandy begins feeling paranoid about his relationship with Kesey. He thinks that other members of the group are closer to Kesey than he is. According to Freud’s concept of group identification, there is a mutual identification between the members of the group:

> Do not let us forget, however, that the demand for equality in a group applies only to its members and not to the leader. All the members must be equal to one another, but they all want to be ruled by one person…let us venture, then, to correct [the] pronouncement that man is a herd animal and assert that he is rather a horde animal, an individual creature in a horde led by a chief. (89)

Sandy is worried about receiving an equal share of Kesey’s love and attention. Wolfe describes him as thinking, “He approves! Kesey approves of me!” when Kesey puts his arms around Sandy (93). Then, a few days later, Sandy has a frightening experience when he believes he is having dream wars with Kesey: “Back in Esalen, in his cabin, Sandy falls half asleep into…DREAM WARS! It is his Power vs. Kesey’s, like Dr. Strange vs. Aggamon, and one of them will kill the other in the Dream War” (120).

Sandy’s dream (per Wolfe) reveals that Kesey is placed in the role of leader, even a psychiatrist, determining what is normal and what is abnormal, who is “on the bus” and who is “off the bus.” Having this ability and using it is how Foucault defines power.
Wolfe portrays Sandy as terrified of being kicked out of the group by Kesey. Because Kesey and the Pranksters have thrown all the rules of society away, they need to create new ones in their stead.

According to Wolfe, Kesey and the Merry Pranksters view the world as, “…made up of millions of people involved, trapped, in games they aren’t even aware of” (19). Life, for Kesey and the Pranksters, is a series of games. For example, any altercation with the police is explained as merely part of the cops-and-robbers game: “The cops were just playing their eternal cop game. That’s all it seemed like to the Pranksters” (151). If someone on or off the bus acted in a way that did not necessarily agree with the way that the Pranksters were playing their games, the Pranksters decided that that person was merely playing his own game instead.

One of their games is to make up new identities for themselves. Cassady becomes Speed Limit, Kesey - Swashbuckler, Ken Babbs - Intrepid Traveler, Hagen - Mal Function, George Walker - Hardly Visible, and Paula Sundsten - Gretchen Fetchin the Slime Queen (Wolfe 78). Kesey and his Merry Pranksters replace their own identities with these superhero- and comic book-esque identities. In Creativity and the Unconscious, Freud explains their games as a regression back into childhood:

> The child’s best loved and most absorbing occupation is play. Perhaps we may say that every child at play behaves like an imaginative writer, in that he creates a world of his own or, more truly, he rearranges the things of his world and orders it in a new way that pleases him better. It would be incorrect to think that he does not take this world seriously; on the contrary, he takes his play very seriously and expends a great deal of emotion on it. The opposite of play is not serious occupation but—reality. (45)

And like children attempting to play a game, someone needed to create and enforce the rules. Kesey assumes this role of authority by convincing the others that that he has superpowers; specifically, the power of intersubjectivity. Kesey informs the group that he has the power to control the entire group through “Just one line, one current, running through the entire bus. Group Mind, and Cosmic Control, on the bus…” (111). In order to sustain control over the line running throughout the bus, Kesey divides the world into two
teams, claiming, “Now, you’re either on the bus or off the bus” (83). Pranksters now have to fear being determined “off the bus” by Kesey.

Throughout the novel, it is obvious that Wolfe views the relationship between Kesey and the group as that of a messiah and his disciples. Wolfe even quotes the work of religious scholar Joachim Wach explaining how religions are founded: “These followers become an informally but closely knit association, bound together by the new experience, whose nature the founder has revealed and interpreted” (Wach quoted in Wolfe 128). Clearly, for Wolfe, Kesey is the founder and interpreter.

But Kesey and his Merry Pranksters do not take LSD for a religious experience. In fact, when Kesey and the Pranksters makes a special trip to visit Timothy Leary at his home in Millbrook, New York, they are turned off by Leary and his League for Spiritual Discovery. When Dr. Richard Alpert comes out to greet the bus, Wolfe describes the clashing of these two groups saying:

Alpert looks the bus up and down and shakes his head and says, “Ke-n-n-n Ke-e-e-esey…” as if to say I might have known that you would be the author of this collegiate prank. They are friendly, but it is a mite…cool here, friends…there is a general…vibration…of: We have something rather deep and meditative going on here, and you California crazies are a sour note. (105)

While Leary’s League viewed LSD as a Holy Sacrament, Kesey doesn’t see it that way. He has decided that LSD is just a way to free his and the Pranksters’ minds and to creatively express themselves. Kesey has selected one discourse of power for his group and Leary has selected a different one for his different group.

Although the motivation of Kesey and the Pranksters for taking LSD is that of aesthetic appreciation and expression, Kesey and the Merry Pranksters do share similar a group morphology than that of a religious movement. In a religion, there is a leader who loves all of the individuals in the group with equal love. Freud also explains that, “A religion, even if it calls itself the religion of love, must be hard and unloving to those who do not belong to it” (Freud 51). Kesey constantly makes the Pranksters aware that they are “on the bus” and that those who don’t belong to their group are “off the bus.”
It is apparent that everyone on the bus recognizes Kesey as the leader. A strong example of a moment in which the group understands Kesey’s role as leader is when Wolfe describes the following scene during an acid test:

—and, of course, everyone in this tent looks at Kesey and wonders. What is his movie? Well, you might call it Randle McMurphy, for a start. McMurphy, goading, coaxing, leading everybody on to give themselves a little bigger movie, a little action, moving the plot from out of deadass snug harbor. There’s a hell of a scene going for you, bub, out here in Edge City. (147)

While everyone has his own “movie,” running through his head, they are much more interested in Kesey’s movie and want him to delegate roles in his movie. Wolfe’s choice to make Kesey assume the role of Randle McMurphy is very telling, and very appropriate. Randle McMurphy is the hero from Kesey’s One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest. McMurphy is a lazy inmate at a work prison who is transferred to a psychiatric hospital after refusing to work. At the hospital, he becomes the leader of the inmates. McMurphy rebels against the hospital’s discourse of power by challenging the hospital’s concept of normal and abnormal mental pathology. In the book, narrator Chief Bromdon constantly refers to his distrust and distaste for “the Combine.” He views the mental hospital as a function of the Combine. The primary goal of the Combine is to enforce conformity to social norms. The Combine maintains its power by policing the public according to these norms. McMurphy distrusts authority, convention, and the establishment; something Kesey claims to do as well.

As leader, Kesey becomes the very thing he denounces in One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest. Kesey dictates what is normal and what is abnormal on the bus. For example, when Sandy takes “unauthorized acid,” or acid that has not been permitted to be taken by Kesey and starts experiencing paranoia, he is punished by Kesey. Kesey walks away saying, “…if you think I’m going to be your guide for this trip, you’re sadly mistaken.” (Wolfe 97). This is devastating to Sandy who has grown dependent upon Kesey as his guide. Kesey knows that Sandy needs him to guide him in order to keep from freaking out.

Even though Kesey would have been devastated to learn that he operates his bus like any other institution of power, his role as the producer of truth is needed in order to
assure the survival of the group. In fact, the Merry Pranksters disband when Kesey finally decides to stop producing a reality for the Pranksters.

Michel Foucault admits in *Power/Knowledge* that not all productions of power are necessarily bad saying, “What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse” (119). Kesey is the architect and guide of the world on the bus not because he forces his world and ego ideal upon the Merry Pranksters, but because they really do need him to be the guide. In *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*, R.E.L. Masters and Jean Houston discuss, at length, the importance of the role of the psychedelic guide. The guide leads or assists the subject through the psychedelic experience. But the role of the guide does not end there: “Subsequent to the session, the guide continues for some time to keep in touch with the subject, answering any questions the subject may have, observing him to see that all is going well, and also gathering additional research data” (Masters and Houston 129).

Kesey has played the dominant role as guide. Without his guide, Sandy is a sad Humpty-Dumpty, unsure of how to put himself back together again without Kesey. Sandy is nearly driven mad by the threat of being in Kesey’s bad graces. But eventually, Kesey organizes a veritable love-fest for Sandy. The Pranksters crowd around him and tell him how much they love him and how important he is to the group. It is clear that Kesey is in the position to determine the happiness and unhappiness of group members like Sandy.

With the exception of both Gretchen Fetchen and Sandy needing to be hospitalized, Kesey is able to keep the Merry Pranksters and their “trip” under control. But when he tries to bring LSD to the masses, he fails. Kesey and the Pranksters, after feeling that they had mastered life on LSD, decided that they wanted to share their experience with others “off the bus” through a series of acid tests. These acid tests were advertised and conducted in cities and large towns, drawing overwhelming amounts of participants. The Pranksters wanted to perform what they viewed as harmless pranks and invited people to try LSD at a large gathering. These tests were geared to determine who would enjoy the experience and who would freak out. Those people who could maintain their cool while they were tripping were “on the bus,” while those who did not were “off the bus.” The Pranksters kept control over the masses during these acid-tests through the
music and the visual images they provided in order stimulate the creative minds once they were set free. They treated these acid tests like carnivals, promoting a fun, childlike atmosphere. Jerry Garcia and his band, the Warlocks, played onstage while vibrant and beautiful images would flash on screens. During these acid tests Kesey and the Pranksters had complete control over the participants, but were unsure of exactly what to do with it at the end of the test:

*Control—it is perfectly obvious—they have brought this whole mass of human beings to the point where they are one, out of their skulls, one psyche, and they have utter control over them—but they don’t know what in the hell to do with it, they haven’t the first idea, and they will lose it. (206)*

And as they drive off, unable to invite hundreds of people to pile into the bus, Kesey and the Pranksters were unable to control what happened after they left town. All of those who were behind and they did not know how to get back on the bus again. They were setting countless minds free, then leaving them without a guide.

The paradox of LSD and the acids tests is this: they are freeing so long as there is some guiding force to exert power and control. Dr. Richard Alpert, later known as “Ram Dass,” describes the scene of a typical acid test:

They turned people inside out into the moment, in a way that they felt extremely alive. The events were crowded, wild, and confusing; the almost demanded surrender. For some, the surrender was great; but others didn’t like that feeling of having no safe ground. (Perry 149).

In fact, Alpert remembers an interaction with one young man in particular who didn’t like the feeling. He noticed the young man was having a bad trip, and says, “I interceded; I talked to him and held him” (Perry 149). Without Alpert interceding, this man would have had to face a bad trip alone.

When Sandy has a bad trip, he is institutionalized because he is believed to have gone mad. Madness is created by the individual’s loss of control over his own reality. Essentially, the experience of tripping on LSD, good or bad, is a chemically induced state of madness. The Merry Pranksters are really volunteering to make themselves crazy when they begin their ‘trip.’ Wolfe explains their choice to become crazy:
“Craziness” was not an absolute. They had all voluntarily embarked on a trip and a state of consciousness that was “crazy” by ordinary standards. The trip, in fact the whole deal, was a risk-all balls-out plunge into the unknown, and it was assumed merely that more and more of what was already inside a person would come out and expand, gloriously or otherwise. (Wolfe 87)

As the “otherwise” came out of its shell, once the Merry Pranksters lost control, it polluted dream-worlds and fantasies and created nightmares. Repression is necessary to keep what is “otherwise” buried deep inside. The mind needs certain barriers to protect it from itself. On LSD, the Pranksters need Kesey to form that barrier.

While the discourse of power can sometimes be absolutely necessary, as in the case with Kesey and the Pranksters, issues created by the discourse of power have always presented themselves. In 1973, a groundbreaking study revealed a unique problem with an institution’s ability to create discourses of power. This institution was just a little bit bigger than Kesey’s bus: the institution of psychiatry. Psychologist David L. Rosenhan orchestrated a monumental controlled experiment to test the modern psychiatric system’s ability to correctly diagnose mental illness. Rosenhan hired eight “psuedopatients” to gain admission into psychiatric hospitals by complaining that they have been hearing voices. Once given an evaluation by mental health professionals and admitted for further observation, evaluation, and treatment, the pseudopatients were instructed to act “normal” and wait until they were “cured” to be dismissed from the hospital. During some of the psuedopatients’ stays, some of their behavior was dismissed as abnormal. For example, the pseudopatients were all told to stop and ask physicians and staff members the following question: “Pardon me, Dr. X. Could you tell me when I am eligible for grounds privileges?” It was found that 71% of the psychiatrists and 88% of the nurses and attendants moved on without so much as averting their heads. For those patients who gained the attention of a staff member, the response was often a comment like, “‘Good morning, Dave. How are you today?’” (Moves off without waiting for a response)” (Rosenhan 255). The pseudopatient was treated as if all of his behavior was a reflection of his apparent “schizophrenia.” A normal question was dismissed as “crazy talk.” The pseudopatients were asked to carry around a notebook and log their findings. Even this
behavior was viewed by the staff as a symptom of mental disorder. Rosenhan explains this treatment by mental health professionals as follows:

Given that the patient is in the hospital, he must be psychologically disturbed. And given that he is disturbed, continuous writing must be a behavioral manifestation of that disturbance, perhaps a subset of the compulsive behaviors that are sometimes correlated with schizophrenia. (Rosenhan 253)

Rosenhan explains his results by the assumption that society seems to make about the insane: that they are crazy all the time, without a moment of lucidity. But the problem, Rosenhan claims is that the sane are not sane all of the time. We lose our tempers for no good reason. We are occasionally depressed or anxious, again for no good reason. And we may find it difficult to get along with one or another person—again for no reason that we can specify. Similarly, the insane are not always insane. (254)

Some of the eight pseudopatients are released from their respective hospitals in less than a week, while others wait nearly two months until they are deemed suitable to rejoin normal society. Upon their release, each of the eight individuals is stamped with the diagnosis of schizophrenia “in remission.” Not schizophrenia “cured” but, “in remission”—a foreboding diagnosis. This is a diagnostic label that each of these eight patients may have had to bear the rest of their lives had they not all been impostors. The story of the eight “pseudopatients” ends with the publication of Rosenhan’s 1973 study entitled, “On Being Sane in Insane Places.” As one can imagine, the response to Rosenhan’s findings was that there must be a failure in the discourse of psychiatry. Even before Rosenhan published his study, one research and teaching hospital heard rumor of Rosenhan's findings and responded by denying that their psychiatrists and staff members could fall prey to assigning the similar misdiagnoses. Accepting this claim as a challenge, Rosenhan set up the following experiment:

The staff was informed that at some time during the following three months, one or more pseudopatients would attempt to be admitted into the psychiatric hospital. Each staff member was asked to rate each patient who presented himself at admissions or on the ward according to the likelihood that the patient was a pseudopatient. . . Judgments were obtained on 193 patients who were admitted for psychiatric treatment. . . Forty-one patients were alleged, with high confidence, to
be pseudopatients by at least one member of the staff. Twenty-three were considered suspect by at least one psychiatrist. Nineteen were suspected by one psychiatrist and one other staff member. (252)

The fact that almost twenty-percent of the patients that were evaluated “were alleged, with high confidence, to be pseudopatients by at least one member of the staff,” is shocking enough once Rosenhan reveals that the actual number of pseudopatients from his group was zero.

One could argue that although these so-called “staff members” work with mental health patients each day, this does not qualify them to assess normal v. abnormal behavior. But when we consider the fact that twenty-three patients were suspected by psychiatrists, individuals who have been educated and professionally trained to both diagnose and treat mental disorders, we realize the frightening implications of Rosenhan’s study: the line that separates sanity from insanity is not only subjective, but liable to lead professionals to organize and label incorrectly. Thus, the fundamental problem Rosenhan poses to his reader is this: “If sanity and insanity exist, how shall we know them?” (p. 250). Obviously, at any given moment these types of problems will exist if, as Foucault suggests, all truth is subjective. With no absolutes guiding the distinction between sanity from insanity, mental health professionals basically have the same authority to judge between the two as Kesey, the swashbuckling superhero acidhead.

Throughout the narrative, Wolfe is critical of Kesey and the Pranksters’ lifestyle. That is not to say that Wolfe isn’t entertained by the group, he just would never join in on their games, as evidenced by the fact that he maintains his distance with his white suit and tie. In “Traveling ‘Further’ With Tom Wolfe’s Heroes,” Gary Konas agrees that Tom Wolfe offers a conservative perspective of Kesey and the Pranksters in his text saying, “The author’s New Journalism subjectivity shows him leaning towards the Right” (186). He criticizes the life of the Pranksters and views Kesey as an ineffectual buffoon. In The New Journalism, Wolfe talks specifically about his subjective writing style:

I liked the idea of starting off a story by letting the reader, via the narrator, talk to the characters, hector them, insult them, prod them with irony or condescension,
or whatever. Why should the reader be expected to just lie flat and let these people come tromping through as if his mind were a subway turnstile? (17).

_Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test_ does not suffer from lack of irony and condescension. Wolfe makes fun of the fact that the Pranksters live in filth and live like animals, urinating in public and going for weeks without a shower. He pokes fun at their claim that they are so much more enlightened than everyone else for doing drugs. During the acid test graduation, when Kesey mentions smoking Acapulco Gold marijuana, Wolfe says, “Cheers go up in the dark, Acapulco Gold! Oh shit, we’re esoteric heads and we know the creamiest of all the marijuana” (397).

Wolfe reserves special cynicism for Kesey. Kesey is a Stanford graduate and a bestselling author, yet he presents himself like an ignorant country bumpkin. At one point, after Kesey makes a declaration that he has “outniggered” someone, Wolfe responds by suggesting that Kesey is affecting some his mannerisms saying, “Outniggered him! Kesey has kept these countryisms, like ‘the awfulest feeling,’ all through college, graduate school, days of literary celebration…” (26). Perhaps Wolfe’s biting contention towards Kesey stems from the fact that Kesey gained literary notoriety from a book he wrote while high on peyote. Wolfe must suffer through hours of interviews with people high on peyote to earn his keep.

The Acid Test Graduation scene is where Kesey and the Pranksters incur the most criticism from Wolfe. Kesey causes a media frenzy by hosting an Acid Test Graduation. Kesey promotes the event by telling people, “You find what you came to find when you’re on acid and we’ve got to start doing it without acid; there’s no use opening the door and going through it and then always going back out again. We’ve got to move on to the next step…” (363). Kesey is entirely cryptic about what will actually take place at the event, which naturally causes a stir. Hundreds of people show up for the Acid Test Graduation, waiting with anticipation to see what kind of prank Kesey will pull. Kesey appears to the crowd wearing white ballet tights. He was supposed to come out dressed as Captain America and Wolfe says sarcastically, “He’s taken the cape and the sash off, however. Too freaking much, I guess” (394). After standing in the spotlight and humming for a while, Kesey forms a circle with some of the Pranksters and then he loses the enthusiasm of the crowd. Wolfe describes: “Half the people looking on are
nonplused, they’re *embarrassed*. What is this a Halloween party or a séance and the Holy Rollers?” (398). Realizing that the Acid Test Graduation is a bust, the crowd leaves.

The same thing happened when Kesey and the Merry Pranksters invaded a Vietnam Day Committee rally in Berkeley, California and Kesey gained control of the crowd. Once he had control and everyone’s attention, he didn’t know what to do with it. Kesey told the crowd to turn their backs on the war instead of protesting out loud. Then he and the Pranksters left the rally and the rally began marching to Oakland but at the first sign of resistance, they turned their backs and gave up. The protesters wondered who had taken the spirit out of their rally: “O where is our Zea-lot, who Day-glowed and fucked up our heads—and there was nothing to do but grouse at the National Guard and turn back, which they did. What the hell has happened to us? Who did this? Why, it was the Masked Man” (226). If he really cared about setting the youth free, or fighting against the establishment, he would have known what to do with the protestors. Konas contends that Wolfe had been warning against following Kesey all along: “Wolfe’s refrain throughout the book is ‘Never trust a prankster’— not only because the prank may be on you, but because following this hero’s path may lead you nowhere” (184). Wolfe makes Kesey appear like just another deadbeat, selfish acid head who doesn’t want any more responsibility than the ones on the bus.

During the Acid Test Graduation, Kesey is in a circle with the Pranksters, Mountain Girl, his wife Faye, and his kids. One of his children starts to scream but he and the others in the circle are more interested in their meditation. Someone from the crowd finally yells, “The—child—is—cry-ing—Do—some-thing—for—the—child—first” (401). His own followers start noticing that Kesey is flawed and begin to question his leadership. As Gary Konas argues, “… the drug subculture begins to be plagued with the same sorts of problems found in the society they are trying to escape — most notably, skepticism over leadership” (187). Kesey’s ability to produce discourse has obviously faded by the Acid Test Graduation, as very few members of the crowd stick around to see what happens. Most realize that Kesey is washed up by the time the Acid Graduation Test is over.

Wolfe also faults Kesey and the Pranksters as being wreckless and not recognizing the damage that they are doing by promoting drug use. As the Pranksters
packed up the bus and moved on to the next big city or town, they took their guide, their architect, and the rules to their games with them. The young people they left behind began to abuse drugs by treating them as an escape mechanism rather than as a way of experiencing what Kesey and the Pranksters had promoted as enlightenment. What the Merry Prankster had done was unlock minds without teaching them the games they needed to play in order to survive.

Another New Journalist writer who criticizes the drug culture, and other facets of counterculture is Joan Didion. In her essay, “Slouching Toward Bethlehem,” Joan Didion shares her experience visiting San Francisco during the height of the psychedelic drug movement. San Francisco had been the center of the beat movement. But since the beats moved on: “Adolescents drifted from city to torn city, sloughing off both the past and the future as snakes shed their skins, children who were never taught and would never now learn the games that held society together” (84). Didion reveals that these adolescents are clueless. They congregate in San Francisco and drop acid just because it seemed like the cool thing to do. She explains, “They are sixteen, fifteen, fourteen years old, younger all the time, an army of children waiting to be given the words” (123). Like the crowd at Kesey’s Acid Test Graduation, these children have been lured somewhere and promised the merry life of a prankster, but found that Kesey and the Pranksters had packed up and moved on.

Didion shares her experience meeting some of the adolescents who have ran away to San Francisco, chasing the romantic notions of freedom and self expression promoted by the Beat and drug movements. In the Spring of 1967, Didion meets a fifteen-year-old named Debbie and a sixteen-year-old named Jeff who are both runaways. When Didion asks them why they ran away, Jeff responds by telling Didion about how he just needed to escape all of the rules and responsibilities his parents had imposed on him: “For example I had chores. If I didn’t finish ironing my shirts for a week I couldn’t go out for the weekend” (91). These kids aren’t living the bohemian lifestyle because they want to fight for free speech, equality, or peace. They just don’t like taking out the trash. Didion faults the Beat generation for glamorizing this San Francisco lifestyle without informing successors of how to keep it going: “At some point between 1945 and 1967 we had somehow neglected to tell these children the rules of the game we happened to be
playing” (123). The Beats didn’t teach these kids that drugs were just a cursory part of the movement. Art, education, politics, and resistance were also crucial—but these kids were just there for the drugs. What is most distressing about the essay is when Didion describes a five-year-old by the name of Susan. While most other five-year-olds are consumed by finger painting and playing with dollies, Susan spends her days tripping in LSD. This may not have been the world Kesey and the Pranksters envisioned, but it is the world they helped create.

Didion also criticizes other forms of counterculture like the Black Panther Party and the Women’s Movement. In “The Women’s Movement,” she pokes fun at how trivial the Women’s Movement had become: “Even the brightest movement women found themselves engaged in sullen public colloquies about the inequities of dishwashing and the intolerable humiliations of being observed by construction workers on Sixth Avenue” (113). She seems to be suggesting that somewhere along the way, the Movement lost its focus and just became a bunch of women complaining.

In “Where the Kissing Never Stops” Didion goes after the sweetheart of folk, Joan Baez. Didion adopts a very patronizing tone, referring the Baez as “Miss Baez” throughout the essay. Didion’s essay suggests that Baez is a whimsical child with affected countercultural tendencies. Didion describes how Baez broke into folk music saying, “She arrived in Newport in a Cadillac hearse with “JOAN BAEZ” painted on the side, sang a few songs to 13,000 people, and there it was, the new life” (46). Unlike real folk singers who toil for years just trying to get their break, Baez just sort of ends up at the right place at the right time. Of Baez’s politics, Didion says, “To encourage Joan Baez to be ‘political’ is really only to encourage Joan Baez to continue ‘feeling’ things, for her politics are still, as she herself said, ‘all vague.’” (56). Baez’s politics seem about as deep-rooted and flighty as those runaways in San Francisco.

When Wolfe published The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test, he was surprised that hoards of novelists didn’t follow in his footsteps. In The New Journalism, he explains the reaction he had expected from the literary world:

I wrote The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test and then waited for the novels that I was sure would come pouring out of the psychedelic experience…but they never came forth, either. I later learned that publishers had been waiting, too. They had been
practically crying for novels by the new writers who must be out there somewhere, the new writers who would do the big novels of the hippie life or campus life or radical movements or the war in Vietnam or dope or sex or black militancy or encounter groups or the whole whirlpool all at once... The—New Journalists—Parajournalists—had the whole crazed obscene uproarious Mamon-faced drug-soaked mau-mau lust-oozing Sixties in America all to themselves.

(30-31)

The novels didn’t follow Wolfe’s text because the psychedelic drug movement was made to be written by the New Journalists. What could fiction possibly add to the day-glo painted reality of Kesey and the Pranksters? Wolfe’s text offers a fleeting glance of the lives and through the minds of the biggest instigators of the countercultural drug movement. Wolfe’s nonfiction novel suggests that Kesey’s form of counterculture is lazy and uninspired. Wolfe posits himself someone able to determine whether or not someone is an instrument of counterculture. Clearly, he cares little for Kesey’s culture or counterculture. Wolfe’s novel touts Kesey and the Pranksters as silly relics of the beat generation. Wolfe contends that Kesey is a man who just likes acid and the sound of his own voice, not someone with a ‘cultured’ counterculture like Ginsberg or Kerouac. In his own novel, Wolfe is an irritating child on the playground, trying to designate which games are appropriate for the other children to play.
He had been born on the Fourth of July, he had been their Yankee Doodle Dandy, their all-American boy. He had given them almost his whole being in the war and now, after all that, they weren’t satisfied with three-quarters being gone, they wanted to take the rest of him.

- Ron Kovic in Born on the Fourth of July

Vietnam is the historical event which still drums up an unyielding amount of controversy, anger, and malaise. If America hadn’t lost its innocence during the drug years, the Vietnam War surely destroyed any ounce of it still remaining. This war, more than any other political or social event of postmodern America, embodies the break from the era of conservatism and conformism promulgated in the 1940s and 50s to one of reaction, challenge, and resistance in the 60s. What really fueled this break was the fact that America’s status as a superpower was starting to dissolve, especially when the public realized that the efforts in Vietnam were fruitless. America lost a war and the people who suffered most were not the politicians, but the soldiers, the errand boys sent there to do their political bidding under the guise of patriotic duty.

Of the 2,796,000 soldiers the United States sent to Vietnam, 57,147 were killed, and 303,000 returned home wounded. (Time, 1). Both healthy and wounded Vietnam veterans returned to the same kind of reception. Unlike the veterans of the previous World Wars who were welcomed back as heroes; greeted with parades, ceremonies, and crowds of cheers, those soldiers who returned home from Vietnam were spat on, and charged as “baby killers”. In an April 23, 1979 Time magazine article entitled, “Heroes Without Honor Face the Battle at Home,” war veteran Alan Fitzgerald described his return home to America after fighting in the war saying, “You know about the class of ’46, the guys who came back after World War II, greeted with parades and jobs…When I came back and landed at San Francisco airport with 200 others, we were spit on and kicked at” (Time 1).
In his memoir, *Born on the Fourth of July*, Ron Kovic shares similar accounts of his experience as a veteran returning home after the war. Kovic left for Vietnam a healthy, bright-eyed, patriotic soldier and returned home a paraplegic. Expecting to be treated as a hero upon his return, Kovic quickly realizes that this will not be the case. The primary issue that Kovic grapples with throughout his memoir is how and why a twenty-one year-old wounded Vietnam veteran like himself who sacrificed his spine for his country could be treated with such disdain and ill-regard by his fellow countrymen and government. The book chronicles Kovic’s difficult experience changing from a man who would give up the feeling in three-quarters of his body for his country to a man who would give up the last quarter to put an end to the war.

This final chapter explores the role of resistance in Ron Kovic’s memoir, *Born on the Fourth of July* through Foucault’s writing. Kovic’s memoir is a wonderfully masterful countercultural text, steeped in resistance to political and social conventions. Writing about his struggle to adjust to his new life as a paralyzed war veteran, the book chronicles Kovic’s resistance against not only the Vietnam War, but also against established conventions of “normality.” Foucault’s writing not only defines resistance like Kovic’s, but encourages it, deeming it the subject’s ethical responsibility. In his memoir, Kovic challenges both those responsible for placing him in the war, as well as society’s perception of him when he returns from the war a broken, useless “living dead” man. This chapter contends that Kovic’s memoir is a representation of what Foucault envisioned the role of the subject’s ethical possibility.

Foucault began exploring the discourse of power in *Madness and Civilization*. By tracing civilization’s assignment of significance to the term “madness,” Foucault asks the reader to see that a discipline such as psychiatry is a mechanism of power. Throughout Foucault’s critical canon, he asserts that the primary function of the social sciences like psychiatry, sociology, anthropology, etc. is not only to understand or cure man, but to organize and control him. These institutions act as mechanisms of power, producing binaries like normal/abnormal, healthy/unhealthy. The goal of hospitals, prisons, schools, and psychiatric wards is the same: normalization. More specifically, in his first major publication, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Foucault analyzes the roots of modern day psychiatry only to discover that the
significance of a term like “madness” less contingent upon science, than upon social norms.

During seventeenth century Europe, there was a movement to place those who were unable to work into poorhouses as a response to the problems of the economic crisis is what Foucault refers to as the “The Great Confinement.” During The Great Confinement, it was decided that those within these “madhouses” would have to work. Those who did not contribute to the economy became the unsightly wart on the face of society, something that society took great measures to conceal. That is why the sick and the idle were rounded up and placed in confinement. As if being uprooted and placed into a close living space with hundreds of his close friends and neighbors was not bad enough for the average poor man, he was also labeled as “mad.” Foucault argues that this happens because society begins to define madness in terms of morality: “It is not immaterial that madmen were included in the proscription of idleness. From its origin, they would have their place beside the poor, deserving or not, and the idle, voluntary or not” (57-58). The Great Confinement introduced the possibility of madness gaining its significance not just by medicine, but by societal norms. By doing so, immorality was able to be controlled, confined and even punished.

Placed into confinement in the first place because they were either unable or unwilling to work, work was used as a form of punishment. Punishment through physical labor set the groundwork for mental disorders to become treated through the body. As Foucault explains,

Physical therapeutics tends to become, in the first half of the nineteenth century, a cure devised by an innocent determinism, and moral treatment a cure wrought by a culpable freedom. Psychology, as a means of curing, is henceforth organized around punishment. (MC 182)

Psychology, like all social sciences, according the Foucault, is organized around how to normalize abnormal behavior and how to cure someone so that he or she may return to society a useful, docile body.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault further elaborates the concept of docile bodies. In this study, he conceives the opening of the Mettray prison on January 22, 1840 as the birth of the modern day carceral system. While the rehabilitation
of mental disorders and criminals seems like it should be completely separate, in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison*, Foucault argues that all systems that attempt to alleviate pain, to cure, and to comfort, are linked to the prison because they all exercise the power of normalization (316). According to Foucault, this process of normalization began when the “carceral,” what he dubs the system of incarceration or institutions that discipline, shifted its focus toward the end of the nineteenth century from punishing those within the carceral to an institution whose aim is rehabilitation or normalization. As a result, Foucault explains that this has encouraged the progression and development of many of the social sciences that aim to both understand and define human behavior so that it may be normalized:

I am not saying that the human sciences emerged from the prison. But, if they have been able to be formed and to produce so many profound changes in the episteme, it is because they have been conveyed by a specific and new modality of power: a certain policy of the body, a certain way of rendering the group of men docile and useful. (313)

In this study, he explains how prison is the institutional representation of the modern society. Foucault sees this as the state of modern life. He argues that the social sciences serve to discipline the individual in society. Contrary to their individualist ideals, the social sciences and their "disciplinary apparatuses" -- prisons, hospitals, factories, barracks, schools -- correct and constrain individuals, forcing them to abide to the rule of societal norms. This coercive combo seeks to maximize the utility of its objectified subjects. Foucault feels that "the disciplines function increasingly as techniques for making useful individuals." Deviance, like madness, earns its significance from what those in power need from docile bodies in order to stay in power. For example, during The Great Confinement, those in power needed a strong economy to maintain power and therefore, the concept of madness was used as a deterrent to keep the workers working.

Ron Kovic spent the first twenty-one years of his life as an ideal docile body. Kovic is the product of the Cold War mentality that infected his childhood. For example, he discusses his reaction as a young boy to watching the *Vanguard*, America’s first attempt to launch a satellite into space, “I cried watching *Vanguard* that night on the evening news with Mom and all the rest. It was a sad day for our country, I thought, it
was a sad day for America…We were losing, I thought, we were losing the space race, and America wasn’t first anymore” (47). This emphasis on winning had become a part of American mentality, starting during the Cold War and expanded with the economic boom and the growth of capitalism following World War II.

Kovic’s memoir allows us to see how representations in popular culture directly affected his perception of masculinity. Kovic describes growing up watching the war movies like *To Hell and Back* and *The Sands of Iwo Jima*. He and his friends would spend their summers in the woods playing war games and dreaming of the day when they would be old enough to fight for their country, just like their hero John Wayne. Kovic explains, “We’d walk out of the woods like the heroes we knew we would become when we were men” (44). Kovic thought war would grant him his masculinity. In “War, Batterin, and Other Sports,” J. McBride explains Kovic’s boyhood mentality as a condition of American society, especially following the First World War: “Even though the actual number of men who go to war as well as the number of such wars is small, our patriarchal society includes all boys with the consciousness of the warrior caste” (qtd. in Shor 2-3). Here we see how the concept of docile bodies is something so powerful that it reaches the unconscious. The Cub Scouts, toys, and other facets of popular culture are used to solicit docile bodies. Little did Kovic know that he would one day claim that the Vietnam War had taken his masculinity away.

Kovic enlists in the Marines, for the same reasons he had cried over the failed launch of *Vanguard*. During his senior year of high school, a group of Marines came to visit and Kovic describes the experience saying, “The tall Marine spoke in a very beautiful way about the exciting history of the Marines and how they had never lost and America had never been defeated” (60-61). Like all good American boys should do, Kovic signs up for the Marines. What is most interesting is Kovic’s placement of his childhood and enrollment in the Marines within the memoir. They come after Kovic describes the first few days of his newly paraplegic life. The stories of his boyhood and his decision to enlist in the Marines are placed after we learn that he has been paralyzed, adding a crucial sense of irony to these scenes. Most poignantly, right after he enlists, he describes a sensation he felt during the playing of the “Star-Spangled Banner,” saying, “I remember standing up ad feeling very patriotic, chills running up and down my spine”
Our interpretation of this scene is altered by the fact that we know that this is one of the last sensations he will remember feeling in his spine. Kovic can literally feel his patriotism. On his first day of training camp as a Marine, he and the other men in his training camp are thrown into the shower by the drill sergeant and told, “Wash all that scum off!” screamed the sergeant. “I want you maggots to wash all that civilian scum off your bodies forever!” Moments later, Kovic says he, “felt the soothing hot water steaming down his back and onto his legs” (67-68). Again, Kovic provides us with sensory detail connected to the part of his body that will soon be paralyzed. Tragically, Kovic soon realizes that this passionate patriotism and love he feels for his country is unreciprocated.

Kovic first begins to recognize this in the scene where he receives the Purple Heart. Kovic describes a general who came to the hospital one day and walked from bed to bed handing out Purple Hearts. The General seems to perform this act with the same enthusiasm as the nurses at the hospital who issue him an enema every three days. Like an automaton, the general repeats the same exact phrase to every soldier, never pausing, stopping, or changing the inflection in his voice. At the time, the bed next to Kovic was occupied by a nineteen year-old with a severe head wound who screamed incoherent ramblings and wet himself constantly. When the general moves to this particular young man, Kovic paints a bleak scene saying, “The kid is screaming now almost tearing the bandages off his head, exposing the parts of his brain that are still left. ‘I present you with the Purple Heart’” (13). Like Kovic, this young man put his whole entire being into serving his country and the most his country can do to thank him is give him a medal. The Purple Heart is one of the highest honors soldier can earn; for Kovic, the moment he receives the honor is anticlimactic, totally devoid of any of the passion and excitement he dedicated to his serving his country.

Kovic soon realizes that war is nothing like the John Wayne movies. In the hospital, he describes looking at all the other patients thinking, “All these broken men are very depressing, all these bodies so emaciated and twisted in these bedsheets. This is a nightmare. This isn’t the poster down by the post office where the guy stood with the shiny shoes; this is a concentration camp” (24). Kovic juxtaposes the hyper-masculine image of a soldier with the dehumanization of a concentration camp.
During the first few days as a newly paralyzed man, Kovic learns that he must adjust to people viewing him as subhuman. The treatment he receives from the staff at the VA hospital is terrible. Kovic immediately notices that he and the other wounded men have no sense of privacy anymore saying, “The sun has come up in the Bronx and people are walking through the hallways. They can look into all the rooms and see the men through the curtains that never close. It is as if we are a bunch of cattle, as if we do not really count anymore” (24-25). Kovic begins to feel depressed, mostly due to the conditions and his treatment at the hospital, especially when he takes note of the filthy conditions he and the other patients are subjected to. When he or another patient throws up on himself, they are made to wait in their own vomit. Kovic is hurt by this saying, “It never makes any sense to us how the government can keep asking for money for weapons and leave us lying in our own filth” (28). Government, it seems, would much rather spend money to send healthy bodies to Vietnam rather than spend money to take care of the sick and wounded who return.

It is not until Kovic takes part in a Memorial Day hometown parade that he starts to realize that the poor conditions in the hospital are indicative of a more widespread, social issue. As Kovic is being helped into the back seat of the Cadillac convertible by an American Legion commander, the commander says to Kovic’s parents, “We’re gonna make certain that his sacrifice and any of the others weren’t in vain. We’re still in that war to win” (85). Essentially, Kovic’s injury has not been legitimized yet. It will only be made so when America has won. This may shed light on the reception he gets from the crowd. Kovic and Eddie Dugan, another wounded veteran ride in the back of the Cadillac in the parade. Kovic expects to be greeted with crowds of waving, adoring citizens celebrating his return home. He thinks back to when he marched in Memorial Day parades as a cub scout, “He remembered hundreds of people lining the sidewalks, everyone standing with the other mothers on the block shouting for him to keep in step” (89). This flashback makes an interesting juxtaposition during the description of the current Memorial Day parade. Those days in the Cub Scouts when he learned how to march, learning how to be obedient, was preparing him for the moment where he would return home from war a hero. But as the Cadillac passes onlookers, no one is waving or
shouting. The crowd is silent as his car goes by. Kovic starts to feel nervous and lonely wondering, “Why hadn’t they waved, he thought. Eddie had lost both of his legs and he had come home with almost no body left, and no one seemed to care” (91). It didn’t make sense. When he was a boy, the crowd had applauded him for being a good boy by learning how to be a soldier, but this crowd wasn’t applauding for doing the very thing they had once encouraged him to do.

At the end of the parade, Kovic and Eddie Dugan are brought up to a speakers’ platform in front of the town. There, Kovic and Dugan sat in silence while men spoke about, “sacrifice and patriotism and God” and shouted “I believe in America!” (92). Then, the tall commander who had helped Kovic into the Cadillac said, “We have to win…because of them!” as he pointed to Kovic and Dugan. The ceremony ends without Kovic or Dugan ever getting a chance to speak. Kovic, obviously upset by this says, “why [had he] let them take him all over that town in that Cadillac when they hadn’t even asked him to speak” (93). Kovic describes these scenes like he is having an out of body experience. He doesn’t feel the lower half of his body just as he no longer feels anything when he hears these patriotic, hyper-masculine speeches. His broken body had been used to convince people to support the healthy bodies in Vietnam.

Life for Ron Kovic only becomes more difficult after the Memorial Day parade. Kovic soon realizes that at the age of twenty-one, his sex life is over before it ever truly began. After he sees a couple walking together and sharing a romantic embrace on the beach he realizes:

It is over with. Gone. And it is gone for America. I have given it for democracy. It is okay now. It is all right. Yes it is all right. I have given my dead swinging dick for America…Oh God oh God I want it back!…Yes, I gave my dead dick for John Wayne and Howdy Doody, for Castiglia and Sparky the barber. (98)

Once he realizes the implications of no longer being capable of having sex, Kovic sinks into a deep depression. He decides to take a trip to the Village of the Sun, a facility for the paralyzed in Mexico. Kovic’s motivation for going was the possibility of finding a prostitute to be intimate with explaining, “He’d even met one guy who’d been there and talked about a whorehouse he’d gone to where the whores were very understanding, where even paralyzed men could get fucked” (105). When he finds a prostitute, he tries to
explain that he cannot have sex with her. He shows her the yellow catheter tube and suggests alternatively, “We can still love” (108). The prostitute begins to cry and runs out of the room. It is not sex the thought of never having sex again which upsets him the most, but the thought of never being able to be loved by a woman.

A couple of nights later, Kovic and Charlie, another veteran from the village, are thrown out of a bar after Charlie gets in a fight with a prostitute who makes fun of him for being paralyzed. As Charlie leaves the bar he shouts, “Fuck you! Fuck all you goddamn motherfuckers! They made me kill babies! They made me kill babies!” Kovic responds to Charlie’s outburst saying, “What Charlie was saying was what he [Kovic] had been feeling for a long time” (111). Kovic is frustrated by the lack of sympathy and understanding that people show him. Life in Vietnam was hell for him and Charlie and that hell has only gotten worse upon their return home. The next day, Kovic leaves the Village and heads back to New York.

When Kovic returns, he moves out of his parents’ home and gets a place in Hempstead near the university. Although he is scared to be living alone, the is the first time in his narrative where his outlook seems positive. He begins attending classes and is determined to build up enough strength in his body to learn to walk with braces. But his dreams are crushed when he breaks his right leg while doing exercises and is forced into a veterans’ hospital for six months. His experiences during these six months are what caused him to start actively resisting the war effort.

The conditions at the hospital were appalling. In addition to the facilities being filthy, Kovic and the other veterans are treated terribly by the staff. Kovic explains his frustration saying, “I asked for a bath. I asked for the vomit to be wiped up from the floor. I asked to be treated like a human being” (114). But he isn’t treated like a human being, and he certainly isn’t treated like a hero. And on one morning, after he has been lying in his own excrement for over an hour, he screams to an aide, “I fought in Vietnam and I’ve got a right to be treated decently.” The aide responds, “Vietnam don’t mean nothin’ to me or any of these other people. You can take Vietnam and shove it up your ass” (116). Kovic had known this was true all along; it was just the first time someone had actually said it out loud. The aide simply vocalized exactly what the rest of his experience at the hospital indicated. Kovic had been lured into war under the false
pretenses of honor, duty, masculinity, and patriotism. Even as a young boy, he was being groomed to serve, or, at the very least, want to serve his country. But Vietnam is nothing like the John Wayne movies he had grown up idolizing. He won’t get to play the part of the hero.

To make matters worse, Kovic almost loses his leg because a pump he was hooked up to fight infection stopped working. When he discovers that the old pump is the only one in the hospital and that the hospital doesn’t even have money to purchase another one, he is astonished. Luckily, the pump turns on again and in a few more months, his leg heals. But what he has realized about the hospital is that, “This place is more like a factory to break people than to mend them and put them back together again” (116). According to Foucault, he is spot on. Why should the government waste its time and money on these useless bodies when there are plenty of docile bodies available to go to work? In “Transcending the Myths of Patriotic Militarized Masculinity,” Fran Shor explains the factory metaphor, providing an interesting (unintentional) connection the docile body:

The factory metaphor captures the sense of alienation felt by Kovic who as, like workers producing surplus value, become dead labor to those who utilized his labor for the killing machine in Vietnam. Moreover, the fact that the military spending diminished the necessary expenditures on the very machines that were instrumental to the survival and well-being of Kovic and other veterans brings the war home in the most physically intimate way. (6)

Kovic’s earlier assertion, “It is as if we are a bunch of cattle, as if we do not really count anymore” is true (25). He is so betrayed and hurt when he realizes that he is just as good dead to the government than half-alive. Kovic leaves the hospital with a fire in his belly. He has taken about enough abuse and is ready to start doing something about it. He finally sees eye to eye with the anti-war protesters he had despised while he was overseas.

While Kovic was fighting in Vietnam, he recalls hearing about war protesters and promising that he would make the hippies and the draft card burners pay when he returned home. But after his experience at the hospital, his outlook has changed. He explains the cumulative effect of his stay at the hospital saying, “It was the end of
whatever belief I’d still had in what I’d done in Vietnam. But it was still very hard for me
to think of speaking out against the war, to think of joining those I’d once called traitors”
(119-120). When Kovic reads an article about a group of veterans who traveled to
Washington D.C. to throw away their medals, Kovic wishes that he could have been there
with them. Kovic slowly starts to pursue a more active role in the antiwar movement. He
joins Vietnam Veterans Against the War and starts speaking out against the war at public
events. Most daringly, Kovic takes part in disrupting Richard Nixon’s presidential
acceptance speech during the Republican National Convention. He and three other
wounded veterans shouted at Nixon to stop the bombing. Although the crowd’s response
is to spit on him and call him a traitor, he recalls this moment as his proudest:
All three of us sat holding on to each other shaking. We had done it. It had been
the biggest moment of our lives, we had shouted down the president of the United
States and disrupted his acceptance speech. What more was there left to do but go
home? I sat in my chair still shaking and began to cry. (169)
Where he had once associated pride with serving his country, he now finds that he can
take pride in fighting against those powerful leaders of the country.
The scene at the convention is the last one he includes before he flashes back to
the day he was paralyzed. Kovic reserves the last pages of his narrative for describing the
moment his spine was shattered. Employing the same storytelling technique as Capote in
*In Cold Blood*, Kovic withholds that bit of information in order to build suspense, but
also, to develop irony. First Kovic is shot in the heel, but decides to keep fighting rather
than retreat. He is drunk with the idea of returning home a hero saying:
I had been shot. The war had finally caught up with my body. I felt good inside.
Finally the war was with me and I had been shot by the enemy. I was getting out
of the war and I was going to be a hero...For a moment I felt like running back to
the rear with my million-dollar wound but I decided to keep fighting out in the
open. (204-205)
Kovic has provided a terrible sense of dramatic irony for the reader. The reader knows
that Kovic is just moments away from getting hit with a second bullet that will confine
him to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. If he just retreats now, he won’t have to tote a
urine bag around with him, won’t have to dig around in his own bowels to relieve
himself, and won’t be treated like a second-rate citizen at third-rate hospitals. The reader wants to warn the ambulatory Kovic to turn around and run. The reader wants to warn young Kovic just as much as the Kovic writing the memoir wants to. Moments later, by way of his shoulder and his lung, Kovic’s spinal chord is shattered by a thirty-caliber slug, rendering him paralyzed at the age of twenty-one. And we know what journey Kovic is about to embark on.

For as much sadness as Kovic’s narrative evokes, he doesn’t want the reader to feel sorry for him. His memoir documents a severe injustice and he wants his reader to be just as angry as he is and both empathize and support his antiwar efforts. What other choice does Kovic have but to resist? And according to Foucault, Kovic is a more complete, more ethical human being for having done so.

Many of Foucault’s critics contend that his theoretical presumptions concerning power and power relations leave no hope for escape from power’s ubiquitous hold. One such critic, Richard Rorty, goes so far as to charge Foucault as being a, “stoic, dispassionate, observer of the present social order, rather than its concerned critic” (qtd. in Johnson 563). Like Rorty, Foucault’s harshest critics argue that he made a career out of explaining the rules to a convoluted game, leaving his reader with no other alternative but to play. He merely navigates his reader through the maze of “power/knowledge” and “games of truth” without providing a secret passageway out. And as we have explored in Chapter II, there is no such passageway. Power is not only omnipresent and inescapable, but necessary, even for staunch anti-authoritarians like Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters. It is important to recognize that while his work does locate power everywhere, it does not eradicate the possibility for resistance. In an interview just months before his death, Foucault was still defending his work saying, “The idea that power is a system of domination that controls everything and leaves no room for freedom cannot be attributed to me” (Rabinow and Rose 35).

In a series of interviews with Paul Rabinow, Charles Taylor, Martin Jay, Richard Rorty, and Leo Lowenthal entitled “Politics and Ethics: An Overview,” Foucault commented on the situation in Poland where the Solidarity movement was being crushed and Poland was under a state of martial law and political unrest. His comments give insight into how he viewed the role of resistance:
If we raise the question of Poland in strictly political terms, it’s clear that we quickly reach the point of saying that there’s nothing we can do. We can’t dispatch a team of paratroopers, and we can’t send armored cars to liberate Warsaw. I think that, politically, we have to recognize this, but I think we also agree that, for ethical reasons, we have to raise the problem of Poland in the form of a nonacceptance of what is happening there, and a nonacceptance of the passivity of our own governments. I think this attitude is an ethical one, but it is also political; it does not consist in saying merely, “I protest,” but in making of that attitude a political phenomenon that is as substantial as possible, and one which those who govern, here or there, will sooner or later be obliged to take into account. (Rabinow 377)

In this passage, Foucault contends that even in situations where resistance seems absolutely futile, ethically, it is imperative to fight. But if power and power relations are always going to exist, does that mean the individual only resists because it is his ethical responsibility?

Although there is no way of eradicating power and subjects of power, Foucault believed, as he expressed in *Power/Knowledge*, that the individual was capable of fighting for a new form of right:

If one wants to look for a non-disciplinary form of power, or rather, to struggle against disciplines and disciplinary power, it is not towards the ancient right of sovereignty that one should turn, but towards the possibility of a new form of right, one which must indeed be anti-disciplinarian, but at the same time liberated from the principle of sovereignty. (108)

According to scholar James Johnson in his article, “Communication, Criticism, and the Postmodern Consensus: An Unfashionable Interpretation of Michel Foucault,” Foucault wholeheartedly supported movements like the Feminist movement because:

Feminism, according to Foucault, resists extant definitions of female subjectivity in terms of sex. On this interpretation, feminism advances a “new politics of truth,” one which resists accepted truths about women, and which, consequently, suggests “new schemas of politicization.” (565-566)
To change social conventions, one needs to change the source of power. And in order to do that, one must stop being used as a docile body.

According to Foucault, power requires docile bodies in order to operate fluidly. In the most basic terms, Foucault’s notion of the docile body is that the physical body is affected by power. Foucault explains what it means to be a docile body saying,

But the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labor power is possible only if it is caught up in the system of subjection…; the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body.

(Rabinow 173)

To elaborate on this concept, consider Ron Kovic an example of Foucault’s notion of a docile body. He joins the Cub Scouts, is star athlete in high school, and then enlists in the Marines. Of course, for Foucault the docile body does not necessarily entail rigorous physical tasks. An example of docility can also be someone who goes to work or school every day. When Kovic becomes a Marine, he is both a productive and subjected body. The first day of Kovic’s training, he and the other Marines line up to have their heads shaved. He describes this event as being a moment of subjugation saying, “…the guys who were cutting, the guys who were shaving all their hair off, weren’t even looking at the heads, but just cutting like guys shearing sheep” (67). To be a good soldier, one must adhere to strict discipline, all the while learning how to best use his body and mind to serve. Kovic endures rigorous training. And throughout his training, he illustrates just how much propaganda he was subjected to. In his narrative, he summarizes his training into four pages of text by creating a collage of words and phrases that were shouted at him during his training such as, “YOU BETTER BE DEAD IF YOU DROP OUT” and “WE ARE THE BEST” “WE HAVE NEVER LOST!” (78-79). He is trained to do the bidding of whatever he is told by those in power. For Foucault, this is the same way that power affects all docile bodies.
The irony, then, is that while Kovic may be paralyzed, he is not longer a docile body because he is not a productive body. Physically, Kovic’s body cannot bend to the will of power because it cannot bend at all. To the government, he is just a waste of money and space that could be distributed to a truly docile body. In a more theoretical sense, Kovic is no longer a docile body because he starts speaking out against the war and the treatment of the veterans. Shor offers an explanation for why Kovic and the anti-war movement is such a threat to power saying, “The historical moment that allowed both Kovic and the anti-war movement to challenge patriotic militarized masculinity was defined by the horrors of the war in Vietnam and the realization that American power and mythology had reached a dead-end” (Shor 6). As an antiwar paraplegic, Kovic is the living, breathing dispeller if the patriotic militarized masculinity myth. If young boys discover this myth, they may stop playing army games in the backyard or stop watching John Wayne movies.

Most obviously, Kovic is viewed as a threat because of his antiwar politics. An opinion poll taken in 1969 reveals that eighty percent of Americans felt that the activists raised important issues that should be discussed, but over 60 percent agreed with Nixon that demonstrations harmed the prospects for peace. (Anderson 170-171). What that poll reflects is that while most people agreed with what protesters like Kovic were saying, they did not agree with the fact that these protesters so openly questioned the government. This was the culture that Kovic so bravely muddled through. Kovic continued to address his cause, despite what the polls, getting spat on, and beaten revealed.

Less obviously, Kovic is a threat because no amount of medicine can “normalize” him. He is welcomed into a long tradition of society stigmatizing those suffering from disease and illness the same way we stigmatize deviance. As Foucault contends in both Madness and Civilization and Discipline and Punish, hospitals and prisons are built with the same founding goal in mind: to normalize. In both of these texts, he theorizes that the social sciences that are born out of these institutions operate by promoting the normalizing discourse of power.

Once Kovic’s superficial wounds heal and he is still left paralyzed, he realizes that he will never completely heal. Medicine has done all it can do to normalize him.
again, but he is still a paraplegic, an “other”. Kovic describes the sad moment when he accepts that there is no more healing that he can physically. He describes himself in terms that are clearly informed by the way he has viewed the handicapped:

There is no real healing left anymore, everything that is going to heal has healed already and now I am left with the corpse, the living dead man, the man with the numb legs, the man in the wheelchair, the Easter Seal boy, the cripple, the sexlessman, the sexlessman, the man with the numb dick, the man who can’t make children, the man who can’t stand, the man who can’t walk, the angry lonely man, the bitter man with the nightmares, the murder man, the man who cries in the shower. (27)

Neither medicine nor any of the social sciences can normalize Kovic any further. According to the discourse of power, he will remain an abnormality.

What Kovic and other soldiers who returned home from war had to struggle with was the transition from adhering to one discourse of power to the next. In Vietnam, he was subject to a discourse of power where it was perfectly acceptable to murder and maim the enemy. In boot camp, he is trained to, “KILL! KILL! KILL! KILL!” (77). Kovic shares the effect that this discourse has on him after he accidentally shoots a corporal from Georgia during a frenzied shootout in Vietnam. He says, “He was going mad. One minute he wanted to pull the trigger and the next he was feeling the strange power of a man who had just killed someone” (176). This sadism was necessary in order for these soldiers to keep performing their duties. But Kovic is so upset when he kills the corporal from Georgia because, “The good guys weren’t supposed to kill the good guys” (181). But the truth about “good” and “bad” is being manufactured by a government thousands of miles away. If America had never sent troops overseas, these poles wouldn’t exist. When Charlie shouts “They made me kill babies!” in the bar in Mexico, he is criticizing the discourse that he was subjected to. Kovic attends a meeting for Vietnam Veterans Against the War and talks about being comforted by being able to express that discourse once again. He says, “We talked of death and atrocity to each other with unaccustomed gentleness” (134). But Kovic and the other veterans must learn to “un-normalize” this sadism immediately upon their return home. Kovic and the others protest
the war in part, because they feel they never should have learned to make killing pleasurable in the first place.

While the government dictated who was the enemy while they were fighting in Vietnam, Kovic and his cohorts decide to redefine the enemy. When they head to the Republican National Convention, they confront the enemy head on. Kovic explains,

We are going to the Republican National Convention to reclaim America and a bit of ourselves. It is war and we are soldiers again, as tight as we have ever been, a whole lost generation of dope-smoking kids in the worn jungle boots coming from all over the country to tell Nixon a thing or two. We all know we are fighting the real enemies this time—the ones who have made profit off our very lives. (158)

Kovic begins to realize that he does not have a docile body any longer, both in a physical and Foucauldian sense. Kovic says of his body:

I could see that this thing—this body I had trained so hard to be strong and quick, this body I now dragged around with me like an empty corpse—was to mean much more to me than I had ever realized…I think I honestly believed that if only I could speak out to enough people I could stop the war myself. (136)

Kovic is able to make more of an impact with his paralyzed body than he ever could have even in his best physical condition. In fact, while Kovic was picketing Nixon’s campaign headquarters, he was physically assaulted by policemen. When they stopped, Kovic describes that the police officers looked in horror at what they had just done, “They stand there looking at me. They see my scars and the rubber catheter tube going into my penis and they begin to think they have made a mistake. I can see the fear in their faces. They have just beaten up a half-dead man, and they know it” (141). And for the people who watched the brutality take place, they know it too. His beating had more of an effect on both the people who were assaulting him and the people who watched the assault take place.

Kovic learns to use his lifeless body as a powerful device to fight for new definitions of right. Like other representatives of the counterculture, Kovic is met with a great deal of resentment. Not everyone is comfortable with altering the current definitions of right, especially not those in power. Kovic demonstrates this when he attends a peace rally in Washington D.C. and sees huge busses blocking the White House. He responds
by saying, “I remember wondering back then why they had to put all those busses in front of the president. Was the government so afraid of its own people that it needed such a gigantic barricade?” (123). The truth is, yes. Those people have the power to change injustices by demanding that a new form of right replace the old form of right. Although Kovic fails time and time again, he continues to fight against the war and the treatment he and other veterans have received. He poignantly explains the opposition he faced:

He had been born on the Fourth of July, he had been their Yankee Doodle Dandy, their all-American boy. He had given them almost his whole being in the war and now, after all that, they weren’t satisfied with three-quarters being gone, they wanted to take the rest of him. (151)

The memoir does not draw to a close in a neat bow with the promise of a better tomorrow for Kovic. Although the last American troops left Vietnam on April 30, 1975, Kovic is left with irreversible physical and emotional scars. He is left to awake every morning to a body that serves as a constant reminder of the consequences of acting as the government’s docile body—its lemming. But through his terrible experiences, Kovic has created a new, immortal body: his text. As long as his memoir continues to serve as an integral part of New Journalism, creative nonfiction, Vietnam, and masculinity studies, his textual body will continue his resistance long after corporal body turns to dust.
CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, I have argued that the New Journalist texts of Capote, Wolfe, and Kovic illustrate intricate sets of power relations working, mostly, at odds with one another. Of all of the countercultural figures in this study, Kovic is the most dangerous threat to power. Despite the difficulty he faces, he makes a conscious, ethical choice to resist, unlike Dick and Perry who resist power by default or Kesey who ends up running his bus like the establishments he condemns, then giving it all up on a whim.

All three of the texts used in this study involve subjects and/or authors who struggle against the subjugating forces of power. Through the theoretical application of Foucault, each of these texts seems to illustrate the effect of power upon an individual subject. Through a Foucauldian lens, these texts reveal discourses of power acting upon and defining subjects. In “Foucault and Critique: Deploying Agency Against Autonomy,” Mark Bevir insists that, “Foucault’s view of the subject, therefore, precludes an idea often seen as the core of liberalism, the Enlightenment Project, or modernity; it precludes the idea of the individual coming before, or standing outside of, society” (67). To render a complete portrait of an individual, one must look at the power structures by which he is defined.

I have also contemplated the new, mediating role of the New Journalist. In the case of Capote’s In Cold Blood, I have argued that a strong power structure exists between Capote and his reader that works in tandem. As Capote is driven out of the nonfiction novel by his reader, Capote is able to manipulate his reader. But Tom Wolfe’s Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test and Ron Kovic’s Born on the Fourth of July are not limited by the author’s subjective presence. In fact, I would argue that the reader is more persuaded by Wolfe’s honest irony and Kovic’s blunt reality. But as the frontrunner of New Journalism, Capote had to test the waters before the others could jump in. The popularity of his nonfiction novel and its critical success meant that his successors could start experimenting and testing the boundaries of New Journalism.

With each New Journalist text, the snowball keeps rolling in new, strange places. Hunter S. Thompson took it all the way to Las Vegas in Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, his definitive Gonzo Journalist text. On New Journalism’s scale, Capote and Thompson
are opposite. Capote worked tirelessly to keep himself out of his texts, while Thompson burned through every functioning brain cell to keep himself in.

New Journalism on rolling today under the general umbrella of creative nonfiction. In “The Place of Creative Nonfiction,” Douglas Hesse traces the growth of creative writing in the academic setting:

Through most of its short academic history, creative writing exclusively worked fiction and poetry. But in the 1980s it began to settle creative nonfiction. Associated Writing Programs minutes record that by 1986 “the fastest growing creative writing programs are in nonfiction,” and, judging from sources as varied as Poets and Writers and the AWP Guide to Writing Programs, this growth has accelerated as part of the general swell of creative writing. (238-239)

The interest in and success of creative nonfiction academically is due to the timelessness of texts like *In Cold Blood, The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,* and *Born on the Fourth of July.* In his anthology, *The New Journalism,* Wolfe exercises his bragging rights:

Not even the journalists who pioneered in this direction doubted for a moment that the novelist was the reigning literary artist, now and forever. All they were asking for was the privilege of dressing up like him…until the day when they themselves would work up their nerve and go into the shack and try it for real…They were dreamers, all right, but one thing they never dreamed of. They never dreamed of approaching irony. They never guessed for a minute that the work they would do over the next ten years, as journalists, would wipe out the novel as literature’s main event. (9)

Not only did the New Journalists dress like the novelist, they looked better in his clothes. Capote, Wolfe, and Kovic now strut through the elite halls that were once only reserved for the novelist, and even the poet.
NOTES


2 Written by Leo Kaltman from Hicksville, N.Y. in the Feb. 6, 1966 “Letters to the Editor” section of *The New York Times*. Other letters in this issue shared similar sentiments.

3 These vignettes were compiled in published in book form in 1950 in *Local Color*.

4 This is a direct quote of Capote’s from Lawrence Grobel’s *Conversations With Capote* in a section which he talks about why he wanted to write a nonfiction novel and the process of selecting his subjects for this form. Grobel, Lawrence. *Conversations With Capote*. New York: New America Library, 1985.

5 In *Conversations With Capote*, Lawrence Grobel contends that Capote never claimed to invent the nonfiction novel saying, “He did consider it to be a serious new literary form and he did feel he had made a major contribution toward its establishment. And he also staked the claim to have undertaken the most comprehensive and far-reaching experiment in the medium of reportage” (109).

6 This is not to say that these are the only power relations in the novel. As a means to expand this study, I will include others such as: Perry/Dick, Town of Holcomb/Perry and Dick, Capote/Alvin Dewey, etc.

7 Italics intentionally added to emphasize that Capote’s statement unknowingly reveals the power that his reader has over him.


9 Italics added by the author, not included in original text.

10 This interview entitled, “The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom” was conducted by H. Becker, R. Fornet-Betancourt, and A. Gomez-Miller on January 20, 1984.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Laura Kiely was born and raised in Elverson, Pennsylvania. She earned her B.A. in English from Gettysburg College in May, 2005 before entering the master’s program in English Literature at Florida State University.