

DON'T CUT THE MOTHER LOOSE TOO SOON:
REEVALUATING THE ART OF KEN KESEY'S *JAIL*
JOURNAL

by

KYLE SWARTZLENDER

A THESIS

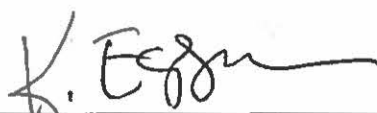
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Don't Cut the Mother Loose too Soon: Reevaluating the Art of Ken Kesey's *Jail Journal*

Approved:  _____

Keith Eggener

This thesis addresses the topic of Ken Kesey's *Jail Journal*, a fully illustrated narrative poster series that was constructed during the author's 1967 incarceration in the San Mateo County Correctional System. Not published until nearly forty years after its completion, Kesey's *Jail Journal* remains a relatively unknown work to this day. Part of the reason for this work's obscurity can be attributed to its inaccurate categorization as a piece of literature. Through close examination of the *Jail Journal*'s many different parts and genres, this paper demonstrates how the work would be better suited classified as an example of an artist's book; a composition which consists of multiple stylistic and compositional elements, and which is not bound by a single restrictive categorization.

Following a model of overlapping classification for the artist's book genre first outlined by Johanna Drucker in her book *The Century of Artists' Books*, Kesey's *Jail Journal* is broken down and evaluated in this thesis based on its five most prominent functions as an artist's book. Discussions of the journal's roles as document, written and illustrated narrative, agent of social change, and as a unique and auratic object formulate the different sections of this paper, and provide support for the work's classification as an artist's book.

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Introduction

*You the finger on the trigger
You, the hand that weaves the noose
You, you hold the knife of freedom
Cut all the motherfuckers loose.*
-Ken Kesey, 1967

In 2003, Viking Press published a 160 page book entitled *Kesey's Jail Journal*. The work consisted mainly of typeset pages translated from the original handwriting of writer Ken Kesey, who in 1967 created an autobiographical, personally illustrated piece of work entitled *Cut the Motherfuckers Loose*, from which the text of *Kesey's Jail Journal* is mainly derived [Figs. 1 and 2]. Out of the dozens of illustrated folios that comprised Kesey's original work, only 26 were reproduced in the 2003 published edition, and at the cost of being shrunk to a fraction of their original size. Released two years after the death of Kesey, the posthumously published *Kesey's Jail Journal* never achieved the widespread commercial success or renown of Kesey's earlier novels, but instead became a sort of novelty piece to be collected by Kesey admirers and occasionally by what the *Sacramento News & Review* has called "the armchair hippie in all of us."¹ Though he had re-entertained the notion of having this work published toward the end of his life, there was a reason why Kesey did not publish his journal at the time he originally completed it in the mid-sixties. Back then, printing technologies were neither sufficiently advanced nor cost efficient enough to faithfully copy and mass

¹ James Seckington, "Not Finished Yet: *Kesey's Jail Journal*," *Sacramento News & Review*, January 15, 2004, accessed January 3, 2014, <http://www.newsreview.com/sacramento/not-finished-yet/content?oid=26989>.

produce the 18" x 23" pages of this handcrafted journal, causing the project to ultimately be set aside. While printing technologies have drastically improved since the 1960's, a similar problem can be seen in the 2003 publication of *Kesey's Jail Journal*. While the reproductions of the included pages are crisp and clear in quality, their shrunken size becomes problematic when trying to decipher their specific content. Measuring approximately 7" x 9 1/4" after reproduction, the legibility and general impact of this work is significantly compromised in relation to the original, and almost ensures that anyone reading through the book must rely mainly on the typeset translation in order to follow the story's narrative. The question then arises: is it fair to judge Kesey's original poster-sized illustrated work based on the reception of the 2003 publication of *Kesey's Jail Journal*?

While such a question concerning public reception may be unanswerable through mere speculation, it *is* possible to solely analyze and evaluate the merits of just Kesey's original *Jail Journal*, which up to this point has always been assessed in conjunction with the book published in 2003. The goal of this paper is to reevaluate and examine Kesey's *Jail Journal*,² not as something that lent itself to the creation of a published book, but as a work of art and narrative all its own. This reassessment of Kesey's *Jail Journal* is centered around one primary argument: that the preexisting stigma attached to this work, which characterizes the *Jail Journal* as merely a unique object or novelty accompanying a greater work of literature, is a grievous example of misclassification.

² Referring here and hence forth to the original illustrated poster series dating back to 1967, not to the book published in 2003 of the same name.

One of the largest factors that has contributed to this work being banished into relative obscurity has been the issue of proper categorization. Having been first publicly released in book format, especially since it is by a famous American author, the *Jail Journal* was almost immediately condemned to only being seriously evaluated for its literary merit. However, for a work like this which spans multiple mediums, the literary element is only a fraction of the overall content, and in effect should only be treated as such. In addition to the literary, there are also traceable artistic, cultural, and experimental traditions that can be identified within Kesey's *Jail Journal*, and which deserve the same consideration as is given the work's textual element. To do otherwise could be likened to only evaluating a modern movie solely for the quality of its dialogue and other acoustic elements. While such an evaluation would be fair for a classic radio performance, it would be foolish to apply this method of critique to a movie, which relies as much on its visual element to tell a story as it does its purely aural component. Assessing Kesey's *Jail Journal* purely on the basis of its written parts is folly of the selfsame nature. As such, the proper labeling of this work is of utmost importance. Just as one would not assume to only critique something classified as a movie for its audio, labeling something as a book immediately presupposes that the work's literary element is of principal significance. Since such an association has already caused enough damage to this work's reputation, I propose a more accurate and beneficial classification of Kesey's *Jail Journal* would be with another genre; that of the artist's book.

Slippery by definition, the artist's book form is an excellent way to define Kesey's *Jail Journal*, since both take issue with being neatly classified. The reason for the difficulty in clearly defining the artist's book is due largely to its habitual use as an umbrella term for anything that combines the vast genre of art with the form or qualities of the book. Clive Phillpot, the former director of the Museum of Modern Art's Library, perhaps best explained the genre, saying that artists' books are of a "mongrel nature ... distinguished by the fact that they sit provocatively at the juncture where art, documentation, and literature all come together."³ It is at this convergence point between forms that Kesey's *Jail Journal* also resides; a mongrel where many would demand a purebred.

Due to the wide variety of forms that the artist's book may take, a number of different scholars have tried to categorize the different subcategories of this genre. Johanna Drucker, a leading scholar in the field of artists' books, devised an especially well articulated system of classification for the artist's book, which she delineates in her book *The Century of Artists' Books*.⁴ What makes Drucker's classification system for artists' books particularly astute is her acknowledgement of the fact that artists' books will very rarely fit within any single classification, no matter how well devised the system of classification may be. Therefore, instead of creating a set of subcategories into which one might classify each individual artist's book, Drucker outlines and defines some of the most essential attributes of artist's books, formulating a common

³ Clive Phillpot, "Books by Artists and Books as Art," in *Artist / Author: Contemporary Artists' Books*, eds. Cornelia Lauf & Clive Phillpot (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 1998), 33, quoted in Anne L. Burkhardt, "'Mongrel Nature: A Consideration of Artists' Books and Their Implications for Art Education,'" *Studies in Art Education* 47, no. 3 (2006): 249.

⁴In addition to Drucker's system of classification that is mentioned here, Clive Phillpot's thirteen category system and Anne Burkhardt's eleven category system (which is mainly a composite of Drucker and Phillpots' systems) are also widely respected and referred to in this field.

vocabulary with which one might describe and compare these works. In her own words, Drucker believes that “if all the elements or activities which contribute to artists’ books as a field are described what emerges is a space made by their intersection, one which is a zone of activity, rather than a category into which to place works by evaluating whether they meet or fail to meet certain rigid criteria.”⁵ Under Drucker’s classification system, each individual artist’s book may possess a variety of the fundamental qualities that she outlines, allowing every single work to be evaluated for *all* of its facets and attributes, not just one in particular. It is through Drucker’s system of classification that this paper will identify and evaluate the various elements and influences that make up and define Kesey’s *Jail Journal*, including and exceeding its purely literary aspect.

In her book, Johanna Drucker breaks down the core qualities and concerns of the modern artist’s book into roughly nine different primary categories, with five of those nine being directly applicable to Kesey’s *Jail Journal*.⁶ These five attributes, which include the capacity to function as a documentary work, explore verbal / written traditions, play with visual forms, serve as an agent of social commentary or change, and assume the status of a rare or auratic object, are central to the content and effect of this work. In the following sections, each of these major aspects of the artist’s book as delineated by Drucker will be examined in regard to Kesey’s *Jail Journal*, demonstrating not only this work’s identity as an artist’s book, but the various sub-categorizations that it fits under as well.

⁵ Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists’ Books* (New York: Granary Books, 1995), 2.

⁶ The remaining four categories either deal with specific aspects of artists’ books that are absent in Kesey’s *Jail Journal* (such as the performative quality of some artists’ books), or manifest in the journal in such a way that they may be effectively lumped together with some of Drucker’s other categories.

The Documentary Function of the Jail Journal

It is not enough to photograph the obviously picturesque.

-Dorothea Lange⁷

If only one of Drucker's subcategories of the artist's book could be used to define Kesey's *Jail Journal*, her notion of the artist book's role as document would easily be the most suitable choice. Drucker describes works of this category as having the ability to literally serve as documents, "either reproducing a record of experience and information or serving as the document themselves."⁸ Artists' books of this variety often assume a diaristic quality, frequently being narrated or guided by a first person perspective and usually chronicling a personal experience or sequence of thought. Sol Lewitt's photo journal entitled *Autobiography* is often cited as an example *beau ideal* of the documentary artist's book, consisting of dozens of pages of photographs recording every item that was in Lewitt's possession at the time he undertook his project [Fig. 3]. By creating this detailed catalog of his life's possessions, Lewitt offers to his audience a unique glimpse into the everyday reality of his existence without ever actually picturing himself or even writing a single word, forcing his reader to guess at the details of his 'autobiography' based purely off of any significance they might glean from the photos of his belongings.

Though Lewitt chose to create his work without the aid of words, by no means are all examples of the documentary artist's book lacking the presence of language.

⁷ Dorothea Lange, in *Daring to Look: Dorothea Lange's Photographs and Reports from the Field* by Anne Whiston Spirn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 20.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 335.

Take, for example, W.G. Sebald's novel *The Emigrants*. Written in four parts, this narrative work follows Sebald as he researches and retraces certain aspects of the lives of four unrelated German émigrés, including throughout his text various photographs of places he visited and people he interviewed during his research [fig. 4]. However, while Sebald's research appears to be exhaustive and even supported by photographic evidence, the book is in fact a work of fiction; the four German émigrés he studied never having actually existed and the photographs he includes as 'proof' are ambiguous enough that they do not in fact validate anything.⁹ Though often considered a novel, Sebald's *The Emigrants* is similar to Kesey's *Jail Journal* in that it also features deliberate elements that go beyond the basic concerns of the purely literary, in this case creating a false biography that is identical in effect and method to other artists' books that utilize random or contrived records for inauthentic purposes.¹⁰

Similar to *The Emigrants*, Kesey's *Jail Journal* is another artist's book that relies heavily upon a mostly linear narrative to achieve its documentary function. The difference, however, is Kesey's autobiographical journal is largely nonfiction, excluding a few instances where Kesey takes some artistic license.¹¹ Told from Kesey's own perspective, the *Jail Journal* chronicles Kesey's six month stay in the San Mateo

⁹ Though the names of Sebald's subjects are fictional, their characters are based largely upon the lives of actual German expatriates that Sebald did in fact study. As such, the nature of *The Emigrants*'s artifice is only partial and extremely deliberate, with Sebald even including throughout the work various subtle hints as to the work's own falsehood. Jane Zwart elaborates upon the function of artifice in Sebald's novel in her article (Jane Zwart, "The Faithful Trace of Misgiving in W.G. Sebald's *The Emigrants*," *Critique* 47, no. 3 (2006), <http://search.ebscohost.com>).

¹⁰ The following being good examples of such artist's books: Eleanor Antin, *Being Antinova* (New York: Astro Artz, 1983). Tom Trusky, *Guest Book* (Boise: Boise State University, 1992).

¹¹ One of the greatest deviations from reality that Kesey makes in the *Jail Journal* has to do with some of his subjects' names. To avoid getting himself into trouble, Kesey made an effort to avoid using the actual names of the other men, especially the guards and officers at the jail. While not all the names are altered in the original *Jail Journal* (as the text is taken largely from his private journals), it was his intention that they be changed before the work be published.

County jail system, from the moment he was first incarcerated all the way to the final, impatient moments before his release, and does not spare any unsightly details merely for the sake of creating a marketable narrative. In this sense, Kesey seems to share the opinion of photographer Dorothea Lange as expressed in this section's epigraph: that it is not enough to only portray the appropriate, or 'picturesque' aspects of a story, for the ugly parts are necessary as well. Organizationally, the textual element of the *Jail Journal* is what drives this work's narrative, a fact that was made evident in the 2003 publication of *Kesey's Jail Journal*, which includes a coherent printed translation of the journal as well as images of the original poster panels [fig. 2]. However, reading through the journal without the context provided by Kesey's illustrations, collages, and original handwriting results in a very different experience of the work than if one had absorbed the work in its original form and context.

On a basic level, one reason for this disparity in significance between Kesey's original *Jail Journal* and the printed version released in 2003 is the simple difference between the handwritten and typeset word. Twentieth century artist and critic Roger Fry explains this divergence between the human generated art form and printed fonts in a chapter on book illustration from his book *Transformations: Critical and Speculative Essays on Art*:

The rhythm of ordinary free draughtsmanship is nearly akin to that of the written word, but it is not at all naturally akin to the printed. The letters of our print, though originally based on written forms, have become far more rigid and exact, and have, if we imagine them drawn, a slow and excessively precise movement.¹²

¹² Roger Fry, *Transformations: Critical and Speculative Essays on Art* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), 216.

The “rigid and exact,” “slow and excessively precise” form of the printed word as described by Fry stands in deep contrast to the wild, swirling, uninhibited and unconfined nature of the pages of the *Jail Journal*. Take for example the page of the journal numbered by Kesey as 6A [fig. 5]. On this folio, word and image wander and intermingle freely about the space, not restricted by the strict order that is archetypal of the printed page. The right half of this poster page is especially free from linear constraints, with snippets of text scattered amongst hastily executed sketches, and the boldly capitalized sentence “AND A GROUP SNIVVLE THEN LEAVES YOU FEELING SAD AND CONFUSED AND RAGING IMPOTENT AND ALONE” even scrawled in red ink *atop* a barely legible illustration.¹³ Below this sentence in the bottom right corner of the page, Kesey has made an illustration of a visibly angry man shaking his fist, with the words “ONE OF DESE DAY WE FORCE PEACE ON DESE MOTHER FUCKERS!” drawn in the same field and color scheme as his illustration, clearly implying that these two elements are intended to go together.¹⁴ After observing this page in its originality, it is obvious that it could not be faithfully reconstructed onto a typeset page without losing the majority of its potency, as well as a great deal of its meaning. There is a sketch-like quality to Kesey’s *Jail Journal*, not only in its illustrations, but in its text as well, and once that hurried sketchiness is translated into the deliberate, rigid form of the printed word, the sense of vitality and urgency that underlies this work is severely diminished, if not entirely lost.

In addition to losing the inherent energy of Kesey’s handwritten text, reproducing the journal in a purely print format also causes it to lose a significant

¹³ Ken Kesey, *Jail Journal* (1967), 6A.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

amount of its meaning, as the contexts provided by the non-textual elements of the work are often critical to understanding the content of the written narrative. The implied connection between some of the text and the illustration of the man shaking his fist on page 6A of the journal mentioned in the previous paragraph is a small-scale example of this, but in some cases, the nature of a page's illustration can thoroughly affect that page's entire meaning. Such is the case with the *Jail Journal's* thirty third folio, which features a major discrepancy between how it addresses its subject in its written narrative and what it chooses to feature in its illustrations [fig. 6]. The topic that Kesey addresses on this page of the journal has to do with lust while in prison, which naturally leads to a short discussion about hank books and other kinds of pornography. In his written text, Kesey comes across as being quite nonchalant about the subject, even referring to the magazines as "Just hank books. No big thang."¹⁵ Yet the images and delineation of space on this page would argue otherwise. By hand printing his text for this page at a small scale around the border of this folio, Kesey leaves the majority of the space free for an enormous and fairly explicit collage of magazine collected and hand-drawn pornography. Even the words 'HANK BOOK' are created from letters cut out from pictures of women exposing themselves. While most of the magazine clippings are somewhat tame, mainly featuring high-gloss photos of topless women taken from publications like *Playboy*, Kesey's personal illustrations are even more explicit, depicting a conglomeration of lusty men and women participating in a variety of sexual activities. The result is a visual assault that is outrageous even by today's standards, and could not seriously be considered "no big thang" by even the most broad-minded of

¹⁵ Ibid., 33.

individuals. The importance of these magazines to the sexually frustrated prisoner is made obvious by the fact that Kesey has devoted an entire 18” x 23” poster page to displaying his own hank book collection, yet the facetiousness of his written claims are lost without the contradictory content of his hyper-sexualized collage. This folio is one of the pages not reproduced in the 2003 publication, and the poignancy of this particular section of the *Jail Journal* falls quite short of its intended mark in that version because of its lack of necessary context. The written narrative may be the guiding force that drives the development of Kesey’s autobiographic plot, but it in turn relies upon the visual elements of the journal to provide much needed support and to make sense of the meandering, often tangled lines of prose that weave throughout this work.

I mentioned at the beginning of this section that Drucker defined documentary artists’ books as either “reproducing a record of experience and information or serving as the document themselves.” Kesey’s *Jail Journal* meets both of these criteria. As a first person account of his time in prison, Kesey’s *Jail Journal* is a document in and of itself, but it is also made up of a myriad of other records and mementos taken from his time in jail. In fact, nearly everything but the pieces of poster board that the pages of the *Jail Journal* are mounted upon are original documents from Kesey’s stay in jail, with even the majority of the text of the journal having been cut and pasted from diaries Kesey maintained while inside. Since Kesey was usually provided with a plethora of art and drawing materials thanks to gifts made by his family and friends,¹⁶ the fact that he made the majority of his *Jail Journal* while still incarcerated does not immediately appear to be extraordinary, at least not until some of the realities of his imprisonment

¹⁶ Ed McClanahan, introduction to *Kesey’s Jail Journal*, by Ken Kesey (New York: Viking, 2003), xii.

begin to physically manifest in his project. For example, the poster page numbered 28 features an assemblage of some of Kesey's diary pages that he made during a weekend stay at a different prison, and where the deputy who checked him in "sees my pens, [and] busts me for all of the colors except green + my rapidiograph."¹⁷ As a result, the entire page is written and illustrated in nothing but green pen and black India ink, giving the page a grotesque and labored quality. It is thanks to folios like this in the *Jail Journal* that the reader is reminded that these handwritten documents are in fact taken from Kesey's original prison diaries, and that they are authentic records in their own right.

Alongside the sections of his personal diaries that he includes in the *Jail Journal*, Kesey also pastes in a conglomeration of other items from his jail sentence into this work, with pictures and words clipped from magazines being the most common additions to this collage work. However, on a few occasions, Kesey also includes pieces of letters and correspondences that he held during his imprisonment, which are some of the most concrete and original documents that he includes in his *Jail Journal*. Unlike the vague photographs that Sebald includes in *The Emigrants*, Kesey's letters, some of which are even accompanied by postmarked envelopes addressed either to or from the San Mateo County jail [fig. 7], are actual proof of his incarceration. In the same vein as the letters that Kesey includes in his journal, there is one other correspondence that he features in the *Jail Journal*, but instead of it being one which he held with the outside world, this correspondence was with another prisoner. During Kesey's time in the San Mateo County jail, before he was transferred to the Sheriff's Honor Camp to serve the

¹⁷ Kesey, *Jail Journal*, 28.

remainder of his sentence, he made the acquaintance of another prisoner, Joseph Anthony Meeks. At the time, Meeks was serving time in relative isolation for sexual crimes, and was in the process of being charged with the death penalty. Respected by the other prisoners as well as the guards, Meeks would write poetry and then have it delivered to Kesey for evaluation and critique. Some of Meeks's poems would stay in Kesey's possession, and he includes original excerpts of Meeks's writing on the third page of his *Jail Journal* [fig. 8]. While Kesey often writes about the other men that he served time with, this is the only instance in which he includes a contribution by any of them in the *Jail Journal*. Just like the letters Kesey includes from his family and friends, the inclusion of Meeks's poetry into the journal makes the work feel all the more legitimate, allowing the viewer the opportunity to read the self same documents that Kesey had during his stay in jail.

Including original records of his time in prison as well as serving as a document in its own right, the documentary function of Kesey's *Jail Journal* is undeniable, serving as an irrefutable record of Kesey's six month stay in the San Mateo County jail system.

The Exploration and Deviation from Lingual Precedents

In the old art the writer judges himself as being not responsible for the real book. He writes the text. The rest is done by the servants, the artisans, the workers, the others.

In the new art writing a text is only the first link in the chain going from the writer to the reader. In the new art the writer assumes the responsibility for the whole process.

-Ulises Carrión¹⁸

There are some book artists who would claim that classic prose writing is not a suitable form for the artist's book, believing that something less cohesive and more experimental is more akin to the artist book's nature. Ulises Carrión is one such artist of this mindset, expressing his opinions on the matter in his essay "The New Art of Making Books." In the essay, Carrión even states: "Among languages, literary language (prose and poetry) is not the best fitted to the nature of books."¹⁹ This heavy-handed and censorial perspective is understandable, especially since many book artists feel as though it is necessary to distinguish themselves from the tradition of purely text-based books. However, while such sentiments may be understandable, they are not particularly reasonable, and represent an extremist perspective. After all, most of the works that are frequently cited as being the inspirations for the artist's book, such as the illuminated works of William Blake and William Morris, are quintessential examples of poetry and prose. More diplomatic and inclusive than Carrión, Drucker proposes a tactful disambiguation between the different uses of language in artists' books, saying that "There are artists' books which --- to make a fine point of distinction --- use

¹⁸ Ulises Carrión, "The New Art of Making Books," in *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*, edited by Joan Lyons (Layton, UT: Peregrine Smith Books, 1985), 32.

¹⁹ Ibid.

language and artists' books which are **actually written.**"²⁰ Like the works of Blake and Morris before it, Kesey's *Jail Journal* would unquestionably fall under Drucker's second category. Though he may not have agreed with Kesey's frequent usage of prose in the *Jail Journal*, Carrión would have surely paused and possibly reconsidered the journal's merits as an artist's book due to Kesey's frequent non-adherence to the traditional lefthand justified, block of text presentation of his prose, as well as the way Kesey crafted the *Jail Journal* himself (a practice that Carrión considers to be emblematic of the book artist and is the subject of this section's epigraph).

First though: what of Kesey's writing in the *Jail Journal*? In the epigraph, Carrión mentions that the written element is only the first step in the creation of an artist's book, yet for Kesey's *Jail Journal*, that first step is very significant, bearing the load of actually telling the narrative of Kesey's time in jail. The written narrative of the story is so important in fact, that it may be argued that Kesey's title *Cut the Motherfuckers Loose* was only intended to refer to this written story, and that the title of *Jail Journal* was used more broadly to refer to the work as a whole. So what is the content of Kesey's story?

An autobiographical work, *Cut the Motherfuckers Loose* is narrated in the first person from Kesey's own perspective, featuring himself as the protagonist of his own adventure. Ironically, many of the themes that Kesey explores in this work, namely those of imprisonment, authority, and heroism, are major themes in his other novels as well. The difference between this work and his previous novels, however, is quite simple: this one is entirely based upon Kesey's own lived experience. In both *One Flew*

²⁰ Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books*, 227.

Over the Cuckoo's Nest and *Sometimes a Great Notion*,²¹ Kesey writes from perspectives that are not always his own, and as such are not reliable means of discerning Kesey's own character. Yet with *Cut the Motherfuckers Loose*, Kesey himself is the narrator, and thus this work offers a unique glimpse into Kesey's own self, and in turn provides a point of reference from which one may evaluate how Kesey's characters compare or deviate from Kesey himself.

As a document of his six month stay in a Northern California jail, themes of imprisonment and dealing with authority naturally play a significant role in this work. Regarding imprisonment, Kesey's sentiments on the matter are immediately made clear by the opening line of this work, "CUT THE MOTHERFUCKERS LOOSE."²² From start to finish, Kesey doesn't have much positive to say about his incarceration, adamantly refusing to be 'rehabilitated.' Part of Kesey's attitude toward his imprisonment is due to the aggressive and predatory manner of his initial arrest, which occurred after a police agent confiscated "a pound of grass he and his henchman planted on us by hiding it in a quart fruit jar in the La Honda creekhouse [Kesey's home]."²³ While the means of his arrest would make anyone angry, Kesey had also previously expressed negative views about forced confinement in his novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Set in an Oregon mental asylum, *Cuckoo's Nest* is narrated by a Native American character named Bromden who feigns his own deafness and muteness, and as a result is classified as a "Chronic," or a patient beyond the help of rehabilitation. From

²¹ Both of these novels were published prior to the creation of the *Jail Journal* (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in 1962 and *Sometimes a Great Notion* in 1964), and as such will be the only works by Kesey that I will compare to this work, since all of his other major novels and publications were written after 1967.

²² Kesey, *Jail Journal*, 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, 26.

Bromden's perspective, the hospital where he is essentially imprisoned is a nightmarish place, which he secretly believes is operated by a shadowy mechanical otherworld that controls every aspect of the prisoners' sterile white environment, even the passage of time. In one particularly harrowing scene, Bromden dreams that he has seen a member of the hospital staff gut one of the other patients, and that "Right and left there are other things happening just as bad---crazy, horrible things too goofy and outlandish to cry about and too much true to laugh about."²⁴ Kesey is hardly sympathetic in his portrayals of the mental asylum, always describing it in either nightmarish or clinically cold terms. What's more, the fact that the hospital ultimately destroys the novel's protagonist, the swaggering, boastful Randal McMurphy, is only further evidence of Kesey's distaste for the prison-like mental asylum, especially since there was nothing actually mentally wrong with McMurphy when he was first checked into the hospital. Kesey's aversion to and disapproval of captivity is emphasized again at the end of *Cuckoo's Nest*, when Bromden finally gathers the courage to escape from the asylum. After breaking out, Bromden describes the sensation of running: "I remember I was taking huge strides as I ran, seeming to step and float a long ways before my next foot struck the earth. I felt like I was flying. Free."²⁵ Besides the inherent beauty of these lines, this passage takes on additional meaning in context to the rest of the novel, in which Bromden, who physically stands far taller than any of the other characters, frequently describes himself in small terms, having shrunk under the strain of imprisonment. Once free, however, Bromden seems to physically grow, remembering his own size and stature, and flies free across the fields outside the mental institution. Even as early as *Cuckoo's Nest*,

²⁴ Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (New York: Penguin Books, 1962), 82.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.

which was published a good five years before his own imprisonment, Kesey was already thinking about the importance of freedom and the consequences of incarceration. His opinion on the subject had clearly not changed by the time he wrote *Cut the Motherfuckers Loose* either, in which he intensifies his denunciation of any institution that stands between a man and his freedom.

Going hand in hand with his criticism of imprisonment is Kesey's penchant for challenging authority. This is a common and recurring theme throughout the *Jail Journal*, usually manifesting as a struggle between Kesey and his jailers. Kesey is too wise to ever physically challenge his captors, so instead his rebellions tend to take the form of verbal slights and instances of mental sparring. This is exemplified in the page of the journal numbered as 6.²⁶ After being asked by one of the jail's deputies why he had come back to the United States from Mexico,²⁷ Kesey cannot help but ruffle the deputy's feathers. First, Kesey contemplates telling the officer something that he would like to hear, but, in his own words, "I can't pull it off quite. [Deputy] Grainger reminds me too much of my Dad. His stance too belligerent. So I give him my grimmest and dead levelst look and tell him: "Because I wasn't finished.""²⁸ Kesey goes on to have a few of these less-than-civil exchanges with his captors, though always mindful not to rock the boat too much and land himself in too hot of water. Again, this is a theme that has clear precedent in Kesey's earlier works. The character of McMurphy in *Cuckoo's*

²⁶ This should be distinguished from the page numbered as 6A, which was addressed earlier.

²⁷ This refers to an incident that occurred after the drug charges were initially leveled against Kesey. To avoid the charges, Kesey had elaborately staged his own suicide, and then had some of his friends smuggle him down to Mexico. He lived there for approximately 8 months, then decided to return to the U.S. despite the risk. After sneaking back across the border unrecognized, he would go on to make a series of guest appearances at various happenings around the San Francisco Bay area, until he was finally recognized and arrested while stuck in heavy traffic.

²⁸ Kesey, *Jail Journal*, 6.

Nest, for example, is the epitome of the anti-authority figure, being introduced to the novel as a con-man who got himself out of a prison sentence by pleading insanity, thus ending up in the mental hospital. While there, McMurphy goes about disrupting the order and routine of the asylum as much as he possibly can, undermining the authority of the head nurse and even inspiring some of the other patients to rebel as well.

Kesey's other novel which predates the *Jail Journal*, *Sometimes a Great Notion*, also addresses this theme, in a couple of different ways. Firstly, the main family in the story, the Stampers, may be seen as challenging the authority of the local worker's union. Set in the fictional Oregon logging town of Wakonda, the main action of *Sometimes a Great Notion* takes place during a logger's strike that is being held by the town's main logging union. While the rest of the town is out of work, the Stamper family, who owns their own logging outfit, make a deal with the lumber company who the other townsfolk are holding a strike against, essentially foiling the rest of the town's strike. Despite pressure to stop from their neighbor's and the local logger's union, the Stampers maintain their contract with the town's main lumber company, an act of rebellion against their friends and neighbors. This struggle of the Stamper family against the rest of the town is echoed on a smaller scale within the Stamper family itself. In the Stamper family, there are two main characters: Hank, who has assumed control of the family lumber business since his father was forced to retire due to injury and old age, and Leland, who is Hank's younger half-brother, related through their father. To Leland, Hank has always been his antagonist, a relationship that M. Gilbert Porter evaluates on a psychological level in his publication *The Art of Grit*:

More important than the twelve years in age separating the two brothers are the two different kinds of conditioning each received. Hank grew up aggressive and physical under the supermasculine example of Old Henry [his father]. Lee [Leland] grew up passive and intellectual under the hyperfeminine influence of Myra [his mother]. The pressure of extremes on both sides pushed the boys even farther apart than simple chronology entails. Possessed by his mother, Lee felt he possessed her in turn; thus Hank's physical possession of Myra outraged Lee as a form of emotional/psychological theft.²⁹

Meek and frail where Hank was self-confident and strong, Lee grew up hating his brother, a fact that was only made worse by Hank's secret affair with his mother. As such, when the need arises for Lee to return home after studying at college on the east coast, he takes it as an opportunity to finally get back at Hank, to challenge the authority of the brother who always had what Lee wanted but couldn't have. In this sense, Hank is the symbol of authority that Lee is rebelling against. In both *Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion* then, there are clear precedents for Kesey's theme of challenging authority that he explores in *Cut the Motherfuckers Loose*. Of course, the irony of this being that in these two earlier novels by Kesey, authority and the idea of something to rebel against was merely symbolic, yet within only a few years, Kesey himself would be faced with the ultimate authority figure: the law.

In both *Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*, Kesey tends to cast strong, self-sufficient men as his protagonists and heroes, which in itself is not such a revolutionary concept. Yet what *does* set Kesey's heroes apart from the norm is what they fight for: freedom, in the most general sense, but more specifically a freedom outside of the established rules or laws put into place by the governing forces of power. Randal McMurphy and Hank Stamper fit this description particularly well, a point that

²⁹ M. Gilbert Porter, *The Art of Grit: Ken Kesey's Fiction* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982), 59.

has been made by a number of scholars and critics over the years.³⁰ With this clear precedent already set by the time Kesey was incarcerated in 1967, the question presents itself: would Kesey himself be able to live up to the standard and flavor of rugged heroism he had established with the characters McMurphy and Hank? Though perhaps not as extreme as his previous characters, Kesey nonetheless continues the theme of the outlaw hero in *Cut the Motherfuckers Loose*, this time casting himself as his own protagonist. Bruce Wallis describes this phenomenon of Kesey's as "a peculiarly Wildean instance of nature imitating art, for the author seems to have presented in his novel a fictional program of action, which he thereafter attempted to translate into reality."³¹ This is evident in Kesey's unwillingness to compromise himself to his authority figures while in prison, as well as by the mere fact that he created and intended to publish the *Jail Journal*. Full of references to his continued drug usage during his incarceration as well as numerous jabs and digs at the various law enforcement officers he came into contact with during his imprisonment, the *Jail Journal* itself is a brazen act of rebellion and defiance. Though not as verbally brash as the character of McMurphy nor as physically indomitable as Hank Stamper, Kesey still rivals their company for gumption in the face of an oppressive bureaucracy, using his

³⁰ Good examples of such scholarship being the chapter "The Ringing of Hank's Bell: Standing Tall in Wakonda," from M. Gilbert Porter's *The Art of Grit* (Ibid.), and: Elaine B. Safer, "'It's the Truth Even If It Didn't Happen': Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," in *A Casebook on Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, edited by George J. Searles (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), 151 - 161.

³¹ Bruce E. Wallis, "Christ in the Cuckoo's Nest: or, the Gospel According to Ken Kesey," in *A Casebook on Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, edited by George J. Searles (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), 103.

In his article, Wallis is only specifically referring to the character of McMurphy from *Cuckoo's Nest* when he mentions Kesey's fictional program of action, though the character of Hank also works in this respect as well. Additionally, Wallis is not referring specifically to Kesey's time spent in jail, but to the general persona that Kesey created for himself in the mid- to late-sixties, specifically as portrayed by Tom Wolfe in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. However, as Kesey's stay in jail fits into that time frame portrayed by Wolfe, I believe that this quote applies to the subject addressed here as well.

literary and artistic communicative abilities instead of pure swagger or brawn to challenge authority. It is difficult to say what came first: Kesey's rebellious characters or his own rebellious persona, but regardless of which predates the other, Kesey as the protagonist of his *Jail Journal* and the heroes of his first two novels are all cut from the same cloth.

It is not surprising, considering Kesey's previous work as a writer, that the written portion of the *Jail Journal* assumes a principal role in the driving of the work's narrative. By no means is the written element this important for all artists' books, with Lewitt's *Autobiography*, mentioned in the previous section, having no text other than the author's name and the work's title. While Lewitt's artist's book is extreme in this respect, Kesey's *Jail Journal* may also be seen as extreme for an artist's book in its dedication to its prose. In this way, Kesey's version of the artist's book is very much akin to the works of William Blake and William Morris, whose illuminated works are often attributed the distinction of being some of the first artists' books, preceding the preeminent days of the 1960s artist's book movement by well over a century. An article released by the Associated Press shortly after the publication of *Kesey's Jail Journal* in 2003 provides a surprising amount of insight in this respect, describing Kesey's original *Jail Journal* as a melding of "words and drawings [into] a psychedelic 1960s version of an illuminated manuscript."³² The term 'illuminated manuscript,' especially in the more experimental Blakean sense, is an excellent way to describe the relationship between word and image in Kesey's *Jail Journal*. While the illustrated works of William Morris are also frequently cited as being a precursor to the modern artist's book, the similarities

³² Associated Press, "Ken Kesey's 1967 journal from jail published along with drawings," *lawrence.com*, January 18, 2004, accessed May 2011, http://www.lawrence.com/news/2004/jan/18/ken_keseys/.

between Morris's illuminated manuscripts and Kesey's *Jail Journal* are not as apparent. Morris's books tending to be more classically decorative than Kesey's, their having been more closely modeled largely after the medieval tradition of the illuminated manuscript [figs. 9 and 10]. The illuminated manuscripts of William Blake, however, are uncannily similar to the pages of Kesey's *Jail Journal*. The illuminated works of Blake and Kesey are comparable to one another both in the manner in which they each award a significant amount of attention to the poetic or narrative aspects of their folios, as well as the intimate manner in which their respective texts and images co-inhabit and intertwine on the page. In particular, Blake's *The Song of Los* finds a formal parallel in Kesey's *Jail Journal*. Compare, for instance, the third and fourth plates of *The Song of Los* to the page numbered as 9 in Kesey's *Jail Journal* [figs. 11 and 12]. In both works, the differentiation between word and illustration becomes blurred.

In *The Song of Los*, Blake's flowing script is barely distinguishable from his organic illustrations of flowering vines, which reach into the field of the text and sensually guides the placement of his words. Occasionally, word and image even blend into one another, as in the case of the word "Adam" in the second stanza, which grows out of a leafy vine protruding from the lefthand border. The title word of these two plates, "AFRICA," is the uncontested pinnacle of Blake's interweaving of word and image in this work. Surrounded and penetrated by leafy vines as well as a monstrous snake with open maw, the word "AFRICA" is as much image as it is word, functioning both as language and as decoration.

The page numbered as 9 in Kesey's *Jail Journal* matches these plates from *The Song of Los* in their interrelation of text and image. However, instead of the vegetative vines of Blake's work, this page of the *Jail Journal* uses illustrations of light beams to cross the threshold between text and image. Color is especially critical in Kesey's work, as it allows him to place his darker shaded texts literally atop some of his illustrations, a method demonstrated particularly vividly in this folio's upper righthand and bottom lefthand corners. Also akin to Blake, Kesey too interweaves his text and image together to form illustrations that are both lingual and pictorial. On this page, the words "Do Unto the Other Mother Before the Other Mother Do Unto You" demonstrate this technique, which flow in and around an illustration of prison bars.³³ This phrase may fairly be compared to the word "AFRICA" in Blake's *The Song of Los* in how the written and illustrated elements dance and intertwine with one another, the only real point of difference between them being that Blake's illustrations tend to wrap around his words, where Kesey's words prefer to flow around his illustrations.

In both the case of Kesey's own earlier writings and the prose / poetry heavy illuminated manuscripts of William Blake, one finds obvious precedents for the textual content and form of Kesey's *Jail Journal*. However, while the similarities between the *Jail Journal* and these antecedent works are undeniable, there are also glaring differences between them as well. Regarding *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*, Kesey breaks stride from these previous works by casting himself as the protagonist of the *Jail Journal*, making the jump from fiction to autobiography.

³³ Kesey, *Jail Journal*, 9.

The organization of text to image in the *Jail Journal* is nearly analogous to that of Blake's illuminated manuscripts, but returning back to the Associated Press article quoted earlier about the *Jail Journal*, it is very much a "psychedelic, 1960s version" of Blake's style. The *Jail Journal* is an object that epitomizes the era from which it originates, a quality that will be explored further in the following sections.

The Visual Forms of the *Jail Journal*

The writing of painters suggests indeed a kind of borderland which is a meeting between the arts. The painter may be using language as an extremely abbreviated kind of sketch, but there is also a tendency for the sketch to turn into the writing: for him to be experimenting in a medium which he is tempted to think might be better for his purpose than painting.

-Stephen Spender³⁴

To define something based on its visual qualities is a tall order, as ‘visual’ is a very broad category, including literally anything and everything that is perceptible through the optical sense. Drucker acknowledges the vastness of such a categorization, admitting that “All books are visual. Even books which rely exclusively on type, or on unusual materials, or those which contain only blank sheet have a visual presence and character [...]. The mark, the image, the photograph, the page, the sequence, the whole: a book’s potential in visual terms is complex and multivalent.”³⁵ Given the immensity of such a classification, Drucker opts in her book to contain this category by only identifying the visual elements and forms that are most prominent in each work that she evaluates; a time-saving technique that will be employed in this paper as well. As such, Kesey’s *Jail Journal* may be thought of as being composed of two primary visual elements: its drawn component and its collaged component. While these two different approaches to filling space would normally be evaluated separately, with their individual contributions to the work being assessed independently of one another, such a methodology does not make sense for Kesey’s *Jail Journal*. The reason for this has to

³⁴ Stephen Spender, “Painters as Writers,” in *Poets on Painters: Essays on the Art of Painting by Twentieth Century Poets*, edited by J.D. McClatchy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 141.

³⁵ Drucker, *The Century of Artists’ Books*, 197.

do with how intimately the drawn and collaged elements of the journal work together in order to form the work's illustrations, which are often composed of a mixture of these two artistic techniques. Instead, these two visual components of the *Jail Journal* will be evaluated together, and will be assessed on how they emulate some of the artistic trends that were popular at the time Kesey was creating the work. In particular, comic, poster, and pop art were clear influences for Kesey's illustrations in the *Jail Journal*, shaping and inspiring the visual form of each folio.

Before delving into an analysis of Kesey's artistic inspirations in his *Jail Journal*, something should first be said of the general relationship between the acts of writing and illustration, particularly in regard to Kesey. Quoted in this section's epigraph, twentieth century writer and critic Stephen Spender discusses a sort of "borderland" between the arts that occurs when an artist uses writing to articulate his ideas for an illustrated project. During such exercises, Spender implies that there is a temporary period in which the medium that the project will ultimately be executed in is put into consideration, where the artist questions whether it is better to switch back over to a pictorial medium or remain using a written mode of expression. This point Spencer brings up about an artist struggling to decide what medium of expression to use is also applicable to Kesey, despite the fact that he is not commonly identified as a painter. Quite the opposite, Kesey is a writer with an eye for the artistic. Outside of his literary career, the artistic inclination of Kesey is obvious, with his wildly painted bus further standing as testament of his adoration of the artistic endeavor. Yet even within his writing, the visual image plays a significant role in both his ability to express himself and his private writing process. In a doctoral dissertation about Kesey, Ronald Gregg

Billingsley discusses how Kesey's work "is readily distinguishable by its prolific use of images and by a characteristic efficiency with which he employs his masses of images."³⁶ Billingsley is not the only scholar to have brought attention to Kesey's prolific use of imagery in his writing, but echoes the opinions of many Kesey scholars. Though best known for working inside a written medium, the vivid visual imagery that he evokes in his writing gives Kesey's work an almost cinematic quality, evoking in his reader a visual response to a written stimulus.

A less abstract example of Kesey's use of imagery to create and tell a story can be gleaned by examining the handwritten rough drafts and character studies he would make for his novels [fig. 13]. During his drafting process, Kesey would frequently employ the use of brief sketches to solidify and manifest his ideas, an exercise especially apparent in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, with the 50th anniversary edition of the novel even including 25 reproductions of Kesey's original sketches scattered about the text.³⁷ Kesey's usage of sketches during his drafting process for his books is the literal inverse of Spender's scenario, where a painter uses language as a means of mapping out his ideas for a painting. Yet that moment of questioning that Spender alludes to, where the artist wonders whether or not he should give up his secondary medium, would surely be the same for both parties. Following this line of reasoning, Kesey's creation of his *Jail Journal* using an intermedia approach makes perfect sense, as illustration was already a technique that Kesey was familiar with, and even frequently used in conjunction with his writing. In this respect, Kesey's choice to model the *Jail Journal* after something of the artist's book variety is not so much a

³⁶ Ronald Gregg Billingsley, "The Artistry of Ken Kesey" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1971), 29.

³⁷ Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 2012 ed. (New York, Penguin Group, 1962 and 2012).

foray into a foreign medium for Kesey, but an exercise in maintaining and developing the original sketch quality that all of his manuscripts have during their formative stages, resulting in something that transcends any single medium. In an interview held shortly after the 2003 publication of *Kesey's Jail Journal*, Kesey's widow, Faye Kesey, alluded to Kesey's grand intentions for the multi-medium journal, saying that "He was trying to make the whole page move, so it would convey something beyond what the words themselves could say."³⁸ This quote by Faye Kesey is telling of Kesey's ultimate intent for the *Jail Journal*, proving beyond doubt that Kesey was committed to creating a work that would explore artistic mediums beyond the purely literary, and allowing the aesthetic elements of this work to take on a primary role alongside that of the written narrative.

In his creation of the aesthetic elements of the *Jail Journal*, Kesey would rely largely upon contemporary artistic styles and methods as the model for his own visual forms. The art of comics and comic books is a particularly prominent influence on Kesey's *Jail Journal*, and a medium that has precedent in Kesey's other works as well. In an article titled "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and the Comic Strip," Terry Sherwood discusses Kesey's use of "comic strip principles" in his novel, which he believes operates as more than a mere reference to the comic medium, but represents Kesey's own "artistic stance" in the book as well.³⁹ Paul Nastu takes Sherwood's idea about the comic strip quality of *Cuckoo's Nest* and elaborates on it even further, finding

³⁸ Faye Kesey, quoted in Associated Press, "Ken Kesey's 1967 journal from jail published along with drawings," *lawrence.com*, January 18, 2004, accessed May 2011, http://www.lawrence.com/news/2004/jan/18/ken_keseys/.

³⁹ Terry Sherwood, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and the Comic Strip," *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: Text and Criticism*, edited by John C. Pratt (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 382.

Kesey's novel to have an "obvious connection with the absurd world of Loony Toons and the animated comic," especially due to the schizophrenic narrator Bromden's skewed descriptions of the characters and actions occurring around him.⁴⁰ The comic book plays an important role in Kesey's *Sometimes a Great Notion* as well, especially in the characterization of the young Leland Stamper. As a meek and somewhat feeble child, Leland would lock himself in his room reading comic books, with Captain Marvel being his favorite due to the fact that Captain Marvel was the magically altered and nigh invincible alter ego of the "scrawny and ineffectual punk" Billy Batson, who could transform by merely speaking a magical word.⁴¹ In the character of Billy Batson, Leland sees much of himself, wishing that he too had a "magic phrase that would turn me instantly enormous and invincible."⁴² Comic book notions of altered reality play a key role in Kesey's first two novels, a tradition that continues in the illustrative qualities of his *Jail Journal*.

Born in 1935, Ken Kesey grew up during what is considered to be the 'Golden Age of the Comic Book,' a period of "unparalleled creativity, productivity, and popularity" for the genre.⁴³ As such, it is no wonder that comics play a significant role in Kesey's conceptualization of art and storytelling. However, by the time that Kesey was making the folios of his *Jail Journal* in 1967, the Golden Age of Comic Books had long since given way to what comic book scholars consider to be the genre's 'Silver

⁴⁰ Paul Nastu, "Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*," *Explicator* 56, no. 1 (1997): 48, accessed March 10, 2014, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/ehost/detail?sid=92e9d93d-f783-4e81-9da5-c1ef2126ac7%40sessionmgr115&vid=1&hid=124&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#db=aph&AN=209032>.

⁴¹ Ken Kesey, *Sometimes a Great Notion*, 2006 ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 160.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 161.

⁴³ Mike Benton, *Superhero Comics of the Golden Age: The Illustrated History* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1992), 3.

Age.’ Being a “period of reinvention of superheroes” and the comic book genre, the Silver Age of the comic book is more concerned with the “human element” than the preceding Golden Age, paying more attention to the emotional concerns of its characters.⁴⁴ In addition to reinventing the emotive aspect of the comic book, the Silver Age of Comic Books also sees a change in the traditional comic book form, with many comic book artists experimenting with page layouts that vary from the typical panel-to-panel form. It is from these Silver Age examples of the comic book form that Kesey’s *Jail Journal* takes some of its visual cues, being a work by no means bound to a structure as uniform as the panel-to-panel form of most Golden Age comics.

One of the most identifiable traits of the comic book that Kesey also employs in his *Jail Journal* is the prevalence of illustrated sound effects and cartoon symbolia, the symbols typically used to denote an action or occurrence in a comic (such as a log being sawn equating snoring). Widespread throughout the work, the folio numbered as 34 in *Kesey’s Jail Journal* features some exceptionally good examples of comic book sound effects [fig. 14]. Essentially a cartoon book version of onomatopoeia, the comic sound effect takes a written shorthand for a noise and then illustrates it, making the word *appear* like the noise as well as sound like it. On folio 34 of the *Jail Journal*, Kesey uses this technique extensively, evident in the sharply drawn “TICK TICK TICK TICK” noise, and the explosive, wavering lettering of the word “SNAP!”⁴⁵ These manner of sound effects are archetypical of comic books from their very advent, as can be seen from this panel from *Mystery Men Comics #7*, dating back to 1940 [fig. 15].

⁴⁴ Peter J. Jordan, “Emotions in Comics: Why the Silver Age of Comics Made a Difference,” in *Our Superheroes, Ourselves*, edited by Robin S. Rosenberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 53.

⁴⁵ Kesey, *Jail Journal*, 34.

Other strips, such as the popular *Batman* franchise, also frequently used this manner of illustrated sound effect. Yet Kesey takes this comic method of illustrating words a step further in his *Jail Journal*, using this illustrative technique on some non-onomatopoeic words as well. In these instances, the word “THUNDERSTORM” surrounding the question mark in the bottom right section of folio 34 being a good example, Kesey uses the illustration of words as a method of either placing emphasis or hinting at the words’ natures. In the case of “THUNDERSTORM,” the top of the first letter ‘T’ is shaped like a lightning bolt, and the entire word features a shaking black line running through its middle, literally evoking an image of what the word means. In his illustration of words *not* onomatopoeic, we see the influence of another manner of comic: the underground comic.

Popular during the 1960’s, especially in countercultural centers like San Francisco, the underground comics movement would have been very familiar to a tuned in individual like Kesey, especially with the works of underground cartoonists like R. Crumb and Art Spiegelman saturating the shelves of local head shops and private bookstores. Widely diverse in style and technique, perhaps the best way to define underground comics is through their content, which Mark James Estren, in his anthology on the genre, flippantly describes as dealing with “‘taboo’ subjects: drugs, sex, shit, religion, snot, politics, etc.”⁴⁶ The content of Kesey’s *Jail Journal*, which also addresses a number of these subjects, might also be likened to the tradition of underground comics, but it is the innovative visual qualities that some of these comics possess that are clearly paralleled in the folios of the *Jail Journal*. Returning to the

⁴⁶ Mark James Estren, *A History of Underground Comics* (New York: Planned Production, 1974), 17.

concept of words that have been illustrated despite their not possessing any onomatopoeic qualities, the works of some underground comic artists offer a precedent for Kesey's usage of this technique. In particular, underground comic artist and poster designer Rick Griffin was a tour-de-force in the creation of illustrative texts and titles. His poster for the first Human Be-In, held in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park in January of 1967, is an excellent example of his usage of illustrative and expressive fonts [fig. 16]. The very first word of the poster, "POW-WOW," immediately demonstrates his affinity for illustrating his words based off of their individual meanings. Executed in bands of red, blue, and white, Griffin's illustration of "POW-WOW" is reminiscent of a design one might expect to find on a Native American blanket, echoing the Native American connotation of the word. The poster goes on to feature at least 14 other fonts, each competing for the viewer's attention.

The work of Griffin and other poster artists of the sixties may also be seen as having provided a model for the page layout of Kesey's *Jail Journal*. For example, compare Griffin's poster for the Human Be-In with folio 13 of the *Jail Journal* [fig. 17]. Compositionally, these two works are extremely similar, each featuring a central, rectangular panel appearing to be placed on top of a larger field of illustration and text. Even the division of the illustration outside of the main panel is similar, With Kesey's being separated into three parts (an upper, a bottom left, and a bottom right) by leaving gaps between the different parts of his collage, and Griffin's being separated into the same three parts based off of style: the upper part featuring the main title of his poster, and then the lists of names along both the left and right sides of the middle panel constituting their own sections.

While the work of Griffin provides a strong precedent for the overall layout of the *Jail Journal*'s pages, the work of other underground comic artists, as well as that of some of the more mainstream comic book designers of the Silver Age, would help influence some of the journal's other visual content. Regarding the often complex and extremely busy nature of Kesey's illustrations in the *Jail Journal*, the work of one underground comic artist in particular, S. Clay Wilson, clearly made a large impact on Kesey's own work in this respect. Compare, for example, the confusing mashup of words and images in the upper left part of the *Jail Journal*'s eighteenth folio to a page from S. Clay Wilson's 1967 "cowboy edition" portfolio [figs. 18 and 19]. In both cases, the lack of empty space and the manner in which the different parts collide and meld into one another result in a mass of swirling colors that is best appreciated as a whole rather than for any of its individual parts. What's more, both works lack any single horizon line, causing images to float and juxtapose with one another in a way that could never happen naturally. Both Kesey's and Wilson's illustrations result in a dizzying, disorienting effect, forcing the viewer to give up their ordinary perspective and enter into a world that could only be described as intoxicating. Drugs, particularly LSD, which both Kesey and Wilson took frequently and in liberal amounts,⁴⁷ might be said to play a role in creating works of this nature, as the hallucinatory effect of that drug finds parallel in illustrations such as these.

Returning now from the underground comics scene back into the mainstream, there is one more comic book artist that deserves to be mentioned in relationship to

⁴⁷ For more on Kesey and Wilson's consumption of LSD, consult: Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1968). Patrick Rosenkranz, ed., *Rebel Visions: The Underground Comix Revolution 1963 - 1975* (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2002), 46.

Kesey's *Jail Journal*. Jack Kirby, a highly prolific comics artist perhaps best known for his work with the highly popular series *The Fantastic Four*, first began experimenting with the art of collage and photomontage in 1964, and would continue using the technique throughout his career. By pasting cutout pieces of his hand drawn comics onto collages he would make from magazine clippings and other photos, Kirby created remarkably surreal works of comic art. In *Fantastic Four* #67, Kirby creates a particularly compelling collage of a universe known as the 'Negative Zone' [fig. 20]. To create this collage, which features one of Kirby's characters actually inside the black and white Negative Zone, Kirby created his initial space themed collage, then added in the cut out form of his hand drawn character. He then photographed the entire construction in black and white, finally adding in his color characters and border to give the impression that the color characters exist in another world, looking *into* the Negative Zone.⁴⁸ As an innovative usage of collage in comic art, the work of Jack Kirby is a likely model for Kesey's own use of collage in the *Jail Journal*, especially considering how Kesey also tends to combine hand drawn elements with clippings taken from newspapers and magazines to create his collages. The link between Kirby and Kesey is further established by an observation made by James Romberger in his article "Undiscovered Particles," in which Romberger notices that "a Kirby drawing of Thor is prominent in a [Merry] Prankster poster for an 1965 Acid Test"⁴⁹ [fig. 21]. While not absolutely conclusive evidence that Kesey had the work of Kirby in mind while he was

⁴⁸ More detailed information about Kirby's collage technique is available from: Robert L. Bryant, Jr., "Cut & Paste: The Making of Kirby Collages," *Jack Kirby Collector* 48 (March 1, 2007).

⁴⁹ James Romberger, "Undiscovered Particles," *Jack Kirby Quarterly* 15 (2008), <http://www.thearteriesgroup.com/JackKirbyRomberger.html>.

creating the visual components of his *Jail Journal*, this does at least confirm that Kesey would have been familiar with Kirby's work.

In addition to possibly having been an inspiration for Kesey, the work of Jack Kirby also serves as a convenient bridge into another one of Kesey's potential visual models: the genre of Pop art. Ironically, even before Kirby began experimenting with the art of collage in his own career, one of his illustrations, a splash page from his series *Young Romance*, was featured in Richard Hamilton's seminal Pop art collage *What is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* [fig. 22]. Regarding this work, John Russell once wrote that "Hamilton in 1956 was engaged in a revolutionary act: nothing less than the overthrow of that hierarchy of preoccupations which had been accepted in art for as long as anyone could remember."⁵⁰ By creating a work of 'art' literally out of a conglomeration of popular culture references, Hamilton effectively disrupted the traditional artistic model, which had become unnecessarily complicated in its requirement of art having to fit or at least refer back to those works and movements that preceded it. With *What is it*, Hamilton began a new artistic tradition, one that could be fed exclusively by 'non-art' precedents. Of course, as with anything new or innovative, swarms of other would-be artists began to follow Hamilton's initial example, ultimately turning Hamilton's "revolutionary" approach to art merely into another artistic tradition to be emulated and referred back to.⁵¹ Whether consciously or not, Kesey too was one such would-be artist working within Hamilton's new artistic

⁵⁰ John Russell, "Introduction," in *Richard Hamilton*, exh. cat. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1973), 10 - 11, quoted in David E. Brauer and others, *Pop Art: U.S. / U.K. Connections, 1956-1966* (Houston: The Menil Collection, 2001), 112.

⁵¹ Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein are two such American artists who also began to work in this style, pioneering an American version of Pop art that would quickly differentiate itself from its British counterpart, resulting in American and British Pop art styles from this period each having their own distinct identity within the broader genre.

tradition. Kesey's very usage of the collage medium, especially in his appropriation of images from popular magazines and publications (*Playboy* should immediately come to mind), demonstrates his flirtation with and activity in the Pop art movement.

Though it could be argued that the entirety of the *Jail Journal* possesses traces of Pop art, folio 26 of the journal is a clear allusion to the movement [fig. 23]. Featuring an image of a kneeling Uncle Sam with a hat before him surrounded by a plethora of hyper-stereotypical symbols of classic Americana (the 'Drink Coca-Cola' sticker and the Ford Motor Company's logo being the most apparent), Kesey is clearly referencing America's consumer culture and in turn Pop art's celebration and/or study of it. To drive his point home, these images are accompanied by the text:

DRIVE BACK through AMERICA
You've been a couple months
truly separated from the El Camino of USA
And you see it sudden again--- Wheeeee!⁵²

Given the context of his words, Kesey may be seen as assuming the role of kneeling Uncle Sam, begging for the opportunity to again ride in the "El Camino of USA," able to enjoy all of the consumer comforts that accompany such a ride. Having lived through the rise and heyday of the Pop art movement, it is inconceivable that Kesey would have been oblivious to its ceaseless commentary on the materiality of contemporary society, yet Kesey still expresses his yearning for it, far preferring it to imprisonment. Though perhaps coincidental, this part of Kesey's *Jail Journal* could almost be read as a response to the works of James Rosenquist, who frequently juxtaposed images of cars, women, and food together in his paintings. In particular, his 1964 work *Lanai* works

⁵² Kesey, *Jail Journal*, 23.

very well in comparison to Kesey [fig. 24]. In Rosenquist's painting, an image of a spoon and peaches is literally 'spoon feeding' the consumer the additional images of a Buick Skylark and a nude, kneeling woman. In contrast, Kesey's Uncle Sam is supplicating himself for essentially the same commodities. While Rosenquist sees such things as being readily available, Kesey finds himself in a situation where he is suddenly deprived of them, and as a result begins to long for such comforts.

As was mentioned at the beginning of this section, the visual form of Kesey's *Jail Journal* is made up of two primary parts: a drawn component and a collaged component. Together, these two components of the work's visual form create the work's illustrative elements, which are influenced by a variety of different influences. Notably, Kesey's *Jail Journal* borrows heavily from the visual examples set by contemporary underground and mainstream comics, rock and other event posters dating from the sixties, as well as the popular culture obsessed art of the Pop art movement. In its consciousness and various allusions to contemporary art movements and styles, Kesey's *Jail Journal* serves as a sort of time capsule for the mid-sixties; a work visually emblematic of its time.

Kesey's Jail Journal: An Agent of Social Change?

But, for just a second, when we hear the cement grind at our feet, we think, by golly, he might do it.

Then his breath exploded out of him, and he falls back limp against the wall. There's blood on the levers where he tore his hands. He pants for a minute against the wall with his eyes shut. There's no sound but his scraping breath; nobody's saying a thing.

He opens his eyes and looks around at us. One by one he looks at the guys---even at me---then he fishes in his pockets for all the IOUs he won the last few days at poker. He bends over the table and tries to sort them, but his hands are froze into red claws, and he can't work the fingers.

Finally he throws the whole bundle on the floor---probably forty or fifty dollars' worth from each man---and turns to walk out of the tub room. He stops at the door and looks back at everybody standing around.

"But I tried, though," he says. "Goddammit, I sure as hell did that much, now, didn't I?"

And walks out and leaves those stained pieces of paper on the floor for whoever wants to sort through them.

-Ken Kesey⁵³

Johanna Drucker has the following to say about the artist book's ability to serve as an agent of social change: "These books function by revealing or commenting upon an existing situation in a way which offers a critical reading. These works are often narrative, descriptive, and embedded in personal experiences of individuals --- and their agenda is to point to conditions of injustice, oppression, or discrimination."⁵⁴ Kesey's *Jail Journal* fits Drucker's description of this manner of artist's book in two respects: firstly as a work that addresses the social unease between the budding counterculture and 'straight' society by chronicling his own arrest, and secondly as a testament of

⁵³ Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, 110-111.

⁵⁴ Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books*, 287.

American racial prejudices by describing his interactions with African American inmates while in jail. In its function as an agent of social change, the *Jail Journal* is akin to the actions of Kesey's character McMurphy as described in this section's epigraph. After betting the other patients that he could lift a heavy metal control panel for the purpose of throwing it through a window and escaping should the need arise, McMurphy attempts the Herculean feat of strength, only to ultimately fail in his endeavor. However, while McMurphy himself fails, the fact that he even tried to accomplish the feat would later inspire Chief Bromden to follow in his footsteps and attempt to lift the panel himself, an effort that *does* result in success and Bromden's subsequent freedom. Similar to McMurphy, Kesey's *Jail Journal* does not actually solve the issues that it stirs up, but by bringing the issues to his audience's attention, Kesey takes the first step in addressing and ideally ultimately resolving them.

By the summer of 1967, the grassroots rumble of something new, exciting, and potentially threatening was audibly shaking the foundations of conventional American society. Across the nation, young people everywhere were beginning to stand up and reject the traditional values passed down to them from their parents, coming together to instead invest themselves in other, alternative lifestyles and means of expression; creating in their wake a sort of psychedelic counterculture all their own. San Francisco in particular, perhaps due to its reputation as being a home for the bohemian, beatnik, and artistically inclined, had become a sort of countercultural Mecca, with the city's Haight-Ashbury district serving as the epicenter of the growing peace and love movement. The year of 1967 in particular was especially important for the budding counterculture, having birthed such iconic moments as the first Human Be-In /

Gathering of the Tribes in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, The Beatles' foray into the psychedelic genre with the release of Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, and even the introduction of the Monterey International Pop Festival, which is often considered to have been the model for later large-scale music festivals such as Woodstock. Of course, such blatant displays of personal expression, illicit drug use, and general disrespect for authority could not help but draw the attention and animosity of those who had chosen not to, in the words of countercultural icon Timothy Leary, "Turn on, tune in, and drop out."⁵⁵ The popular band Buffalo Springfield had taken notice of the increasing friction between the counterculture and general society early on that year with their January release of "For What It's Worth," in which Stephen Stills sang of "battle lines being drawn" and "young people speaking their minds [but] getting so much resistance from behind."⁵⁶ The counterculture, which was born out of a push against mainstream society, was beginning to feel mainstream society push back, sometimes to disastrous end. The police and other law officers in particular began to be seen as villains in the minds of many individuals involved with the counterculture, as they were the enforcers of 'straight' society's rules and regulations. Contentions between the youth generation of the sixties and the police would continue to escalate over time, with the deaths of four student protestors who were shot and killed by members of the Ohio National Guard during a peace rally at Kent State University in 1970 being one particularly horrific incident. However, instances of antagonism between members of the counterculture and the police force were relatively

⁵⁵ Timothy Leary, *Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out*, with Ralph Metzner, Rosemary Woodruff, and Maryvonne Giercarz, 1967 by Mercury Records, Mercury Records 21131, record.

⁵⁶ Stephen Stills, "For What It's Worth," by Buffalo Springfield, 1967 by Atco, 7" single.

commonplace even by 1967, with the incarceration of Ken Kesey that summer being a prime example.

Kesey's status as a celebrity involved in the counterculture made him a prime target for law officials, who were itching to make an example out of somebody involved with this growing movement. In April of 1965, the San Mateo County sheriff's office descended upon Kesey's home in La Honda, California, and arrested Kesey along with 13 of his close friends, who called themselves the Merry Pranksters, on charges of marijuana possession. Within 24 hours they were all released on bail, but with court dates pending. After months of legal proceedings, charges against twelve of the fourteen Pranksters were dropped, but Kesey and one other, Page Browning, were convicted and sentenced to six months of jail time, which they would ultimately serve during the summer of 1967.

As mentioned previously in the section "The Exploration and Deviation from Lingual Precedents," Kesey saw himself as the target of police entrapment, which only fueled his preexisting disdain for authority. Seen from the perspective that Kesey was imprisoned for a crime he was not fully responsible for, all so he could serve as a warning to the other upstart members of the counterculture should they not reform their behavior, Kesey begins to assume the identity of a martyr. In turn, the *Jail Journal* may be seen as the vehicle through which Kesey intended to apprise people of his martyrdom. After all, without the *Jail Journal*, public opinion of Kesey could not have been particularly good, given that the newspapers at the time were having a heyday with Kesey's new criminal status. Backlash against Kesey was common during the time following his conviction, with the local College of San Mateo even banning Kesey from

their campus.⁵⁷ As a result, the *Jail Journal* was absolutely intended as an agent of social change, as it would have not only provided Kesey with the ability to tell his side of the story, but would have made his very imprisonment a symbol of conservative America's attempt to oppress the counterculture's liberties and freedom. As the journal was not widely circulated for nearly 40 years after Kesey's release, this function of Kesey's *Jail Journal* was never realized, but one may guess at what kind of impact it may have made had it been published at a more relevant time.

The other way in which Kesey's *Jail Journal* might be considered as an agent of social change has to do with its exploration of interracial relationships and interactions. Though perhaps not outright racist, Kesey does have some difficulty with living alongside men of color, especially during the first couple months of his incarceration. Kesey addresses the issue of race early on, even devoting the majority of his second panel to the subject [fig. 25]. At this stage in the journal, Kesey's discomfort is obvious, beginning his discussion of race with the lines "DREAMS SO WIERD And FIERCE That I think for a while they ARE PROVOKED BY THE BROTHERS IN OUR CELL..." and "first time you know I've actually lived with spades. And you know? They are different."⁵⁸ The collaged illustrations that Kesey includes on this folio echo his discomfort and underlying racism, especially the spear wielding, tribally dressed African women in the page's bottom lefthand corner. At this early stage of the journal, Kesey is clearly fearful and worried about living with African Americans, yet as time

⁵⁷ "Ban Kesey From CSM Appearance: Dr. Bortolazzo Cites D.A. Advice," *The San Mateo Times*, May 25, 1965, 7.

⁵⁸ Kesey, *Jail Journal*, 2.

and the journal progresses, Kesey becomes more and more comfortable around his black inmates.

By the journal's fifth folio, a clear change in Kesey's attitude toward the black inmates can be observed. Following an incident in which Kesey helped a black prisoner named Morton fix his phonograph, Kesey describes a scene in which one of the other black inmates, who goes by Goldie, stops by Kesey's bunk and Kesey gives him a lollipop he has on hand. After asking Goldie if the flavor is alright, Goldie "grins and says "That'll be fine, Home."" In response to Goldie's words, Kesey speaks directly to the reader of his journal, asking if "You got any idea What it's like to be new in a prison farm barracks and have a young bad colored dude call you "HOME?" Its very close to being called "Brother."⁵⁹ Though Kesey still sees Goldie as something of the 'other' and his language might not exactly be politically correct by today's standards, the tone and context of Kesey's words here make them ring of relief and even excitement, signaling a major change in Kesey's perception of and comfort level around African Americans.

Perhaps the most interesting and decisive folios regarding race in the *Jail Journal* come at the end of the work, when Kesey describes a race riot that occurs toward the close of his stay at the Sheriff's Honor Camp. Having originated over a misunderstanding about an innocent water fight, the riot broke out when one of the black prisoners, Sylvester, who was blind in one eye, got an ax when he thought some of the white prisoners were attacking another black inmate. While Kesey does not defend Sylvester, neither does he blame him for the misunderstanding, instead

⁵⁹ Kesey, *Jail Journal*, 5.

maintaining an objective eye throughout the event. This level of objectivity on Kesey's behalf on the matter of race stands in stark contrast to the comments he made at the beginning of the journal, where he was even inclined to blame the black prisoners for causing his nightmares.

By the end of his *Jail Journal*, Kesey is by no means entirely relieved of racial prejudice, still maintaining a questionable vernacular when referring to the black prisoners, and probably still feeling like he would be more comfortable not living in extremely close proximity to people of color. However, what the *Jail Journal* does demonstrate is significant improvement in Kesey's understanding and acceptance of his black neighbors. Considering that Kesey made this work during a time when racial tensions were still extremely high (Kesey's *Jail Journal* predates the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King by almost a year), the fact that the *Jail Journal* advertises the possibility of *any* kind of improved relationship between the races is itself revolutionary. Like the journal's other capacity as an agent of social change regarding the tension between the counterculture and conservative mainstream America, Kesey's *Jail Journal* by no means solves the problem of racial prejudice, but by demonstrating that some positive change is possible, Kesey's work at least supports the notion of social change.

The *Jail Journal* as a Rare and Auratic Object

Mary Elizabeth saw what she saw.

“Oh!” she gasped, and laughed eagerly. Yet even as she laughed her eyes were stricken to sorrow, and laughter died away.

“Ah!” sighed Mary Elizabeth, but even as she sighed, the sigh passed and her lips warmed to another smile.

“Why!” exclaimed the girl, and there were wonder and selfless pride in her voice, but even as she cried out her lashes were dampened by tears.

And love and laughter, and gain and loss, and anger and calmness, and pride and pity, and joy and sorrow, swept over the face of the gazing girl at that which the crystal revealed to her. And at the last was a serene and invincible contentment, in which were the wistfulness of memory and the goodly gift of knowledge.

-Ben Hur Lampman⁶⁰

While the concept of a ‘rare’ object is not particularly difficult to grasp, an object’s rarity being a quality easily measured by assessing how many duplicates it has, the concept of an ‘auratic’ object is significantly more difficult to precisely define. Drucker, in defining auratic artists’ books, uses the vague description that “Books which have an aura about them generate a mystique, a sense of charged presence.”⁶¹ Yet what is a “charged presence?” How would one respond to something that exudes this manner of force? To answer such a question, this section’s epigraph may be of some service.

The flood of emotions that Lampman describes as taking hold of the little girl, Mary Elizabeth, when she looks into the crystal is as effective a way of describing this sensation as the written word will allow. Though perhaps excessive in their rattling off

⁶⁰ Ben Hur Lampman, *Here Comes Somebody* (Portland: Metropolitan Press, 1935), 67.

⁶¹ Drucker, *The Century of Artists’ Books*, 93.

of dualities, Lampman's prose capture some of the sense of wonder and awe that accompany objects of this variety. It is the purpose of this section to explain how Kesey's *Jail Journal* is one such artist's book that possesses this auratic quality, which is not inherent in an object merely because it is rare. Before discussing how Kesey's *Jail Journal* exudes an auratic quality, however, a quick clarification should be made regarding this work being a rare object as well as what Drucker calls a "democratic multiple," or an object that is both plentiful and available to the masses.⁶² In the form that we know it in today, as a singular unparalleled example of Kesey's exploration of both word and image, the *Jail Journal* is the epitome of the artist's book as rare object, it having no peer besides the severely diminished and only partial reproductions included in the 2003 publication of *Kesey's Jail Journal*. Yet at the time of its creation, Kesey's original intent was to distribute the *Jail Journal* by means of mass producing it and selling the copies, and as such the argument could be made that the journal is both rare object and democratic multiple; rare in outcome, yet a democratic multiple in intention.

Had Kesey succeeded in making the *Jail Journal* a democratic multiple, it would be questionable whether or not the work would retain the auratic quality that it has today. Proximity to objects and figures of power or prestige evokes in the viewer an intoxicating sense of excitement, a feeling that Martha Moore explores in her article "Coveted tickets mean more than good view" by interviewing a conglomeration of attendees of Obama's 2008 presidential inauguration.⁶³ The indefinable sense of awe that Moore discusses in her article can apply to special objects as well, especially when

⁶² Ibid., 69.

⁶³ Martha T. Moore, "Coveted tickets mean more than good view," *USA Today* (January 21, 2009), 6a.

such objects are one of a kind or irreplaceable. This is certainly the case with Kesey's *Jail Journal*, which holds the distinction of not only being one of a kind, but having been originally intended for mass production as well, giving this now unique poster series the feel of something that has been lost and then rediscovered.

Also contributing to the *Jail Journal's* auratic quality is the fact that the work is handmade by Kesey himself, featuring his own writing, illustration, and collage work. Standing before the journal, a viewer sees the physical result of Kesey's labors, the record of his time spent in the San Mateo County jail. Though all of the panels of this work consist almost entirely of original documents, the third folio of Kesey's *Jail Journal*, the page on Joe Meeks, is particularly auratic [fig. 8]. There is something exceptionally haunting about how Kesey has pasted the actual scraps of paper that Meeks wrote his poetry on onto this folio, as they could be some of last words Meeks ever committed to paper, considering how he was being charged with the death penalty at the time Kesey made his acquaintance.⁶⁴ The layout of the page only adds to this haunting quality, with the featureless silhouette of Meeks serving as a constant reminder that this page in Kesey's *Jail Journal* may be the only physical remnant of Meeks left, the rest of him having been lost at the time of his execution. In addition, the inclusion of Meeks's writing on this page also serves as a reminder to the reader that the rest of the text was also scrawled by a once living hand, the hand of a well known American author.

⁶⁴ Though tried, Joseph Anthony Meeks would never actually be sentenced to death, instead undergoing a three month period of mental observation at Atascadero State Hospital before ultimately being sentenced to four concurrent terms in a California state prison. "Meeks Must Serve Four Prison Terms," *The San Mateo Times*, January 5, 1968, 43.

Because of the work's sheer size, it is easy to take for granted that the entire book was handmade by Kesey himself. It is only when one considers the demand and value that anything featuring Kesey's signature enjoys nowadays that the sheer magnitude and magnificence of this work begins to truly sink in.

Conclusion

When evaluated as an example of a twentieth century artist's book instead of as a mere literary novelty, the full range and complexity of Ken Kesey's *Jail Journal* finally becomes illuminated. In the vernacular of the artist's book as defined by Johanna Drucker in her book *The Century of Artists' Books*, Kesey's *Jail Journal* consists of five principal parts, each pertaining to one of its critical functions. These are as follows: its function as documentary and document, its capacity to explore and deviate from written traditions, its ability to draw upon and utilize preceding and contemporary visual forms, its role as an agent of social change, and its status as a rare and auratic object. By evaluating the *Jail Journal* based on these five prominent categorizations of the artist's book, a complete and near seamless understanding of Kesey's intentions and inspirations for his *Jail Journal* results, allowing for a superior reading of the work as a whole.

Today, when the work of Ken Kesey is referred to, it is almost always an allusion to the novels *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion*. Very rarely are Kesey's other books discussed, and even rarer still are his non-literary works examined. The reason for this, at least in part, must have to do with a general public unfamiliarity with these other works, for as this paper has attempted to prove through the example of the *Jail Journal*, by no means are Kesey's first two novels his only works worthy of attention. In the case of the *Jail Journal*, while its subject matter may not always be the easiest to come to terms with, this is a work that is undeniably important, not only in the context of Kesey's own oeuvre, but for its position in history and the trajectory of art and the artist's book as well. Nearly four decades overdue at the

time *Kesey's Jail Journal* was published in 2003, the *Jail Journal* itself is a gem that has resurfaced from the dust of the past, and now it deserves to be seen and understood for the important historic and interdisciplinary artifact that it is.

This last section does not feature an epigraph. Instead, I will address the one from this paper's very beginning. Taken from the final stanza of a poem that Kesey wrote at the same time he constructed his *Jail Journal*, the four lines of this epigraph concisely capture Kesey's frustrations and desire to regain his freedom, with the poem's final line eventually being recycled to provide the title for the *Jail Journal's* written narrative. Though not included in the actual *Jail Journal*, this poem was published in the early seventies as a part of *The Last Whole Earth Catalog*,⁶⁵ alongside some other excerpts from Kesey's jail diaries. However, lacking the visual elements that are iconic of the *Jail Journal*, Kesey's poem and other excerpts failed to stir up much attention, falling short of their intended mark. Though it would be unthinkable to justify Kesey's imprisonment purely on the logic that it brought about the *Jail Journal*, it is true that this work would not exist had Kesey not been incarcerated and subjected to the hardships that accompany such a long sentence. If, in accordance with Kesey's wishes, those "who held the knife of freedom" had indeed cut Kesey free early on, the *Jail Journal* would surely have never reached fruition, as Kesey would have been spared the jailhouse experiences and accompanying emotions that form the content of this work.

Kesey's 1967 imprisonment and isolation from his family and friends was a tragedy, the sentencing being unnecessarily harsh and possessing an undercurrent of foul play on the side of the police. Yet out of this unfortunate experience, Kesey formed

⁶⁵ Stewart Brand, *The Last Whole Earth Catalog* (Menlo Park: Portola Institute, 1971).

the *Jail Journal*, unwilling to let his imprisonment halt his productivity and oppress his creativity. It is due to that initiative that the line “Cut the motherfuckers loose,” instead of remaining the end of a pretty yet mediocre poem, is instead the beginning of a masterful if under-recognized synthesis of art and literature.

Images

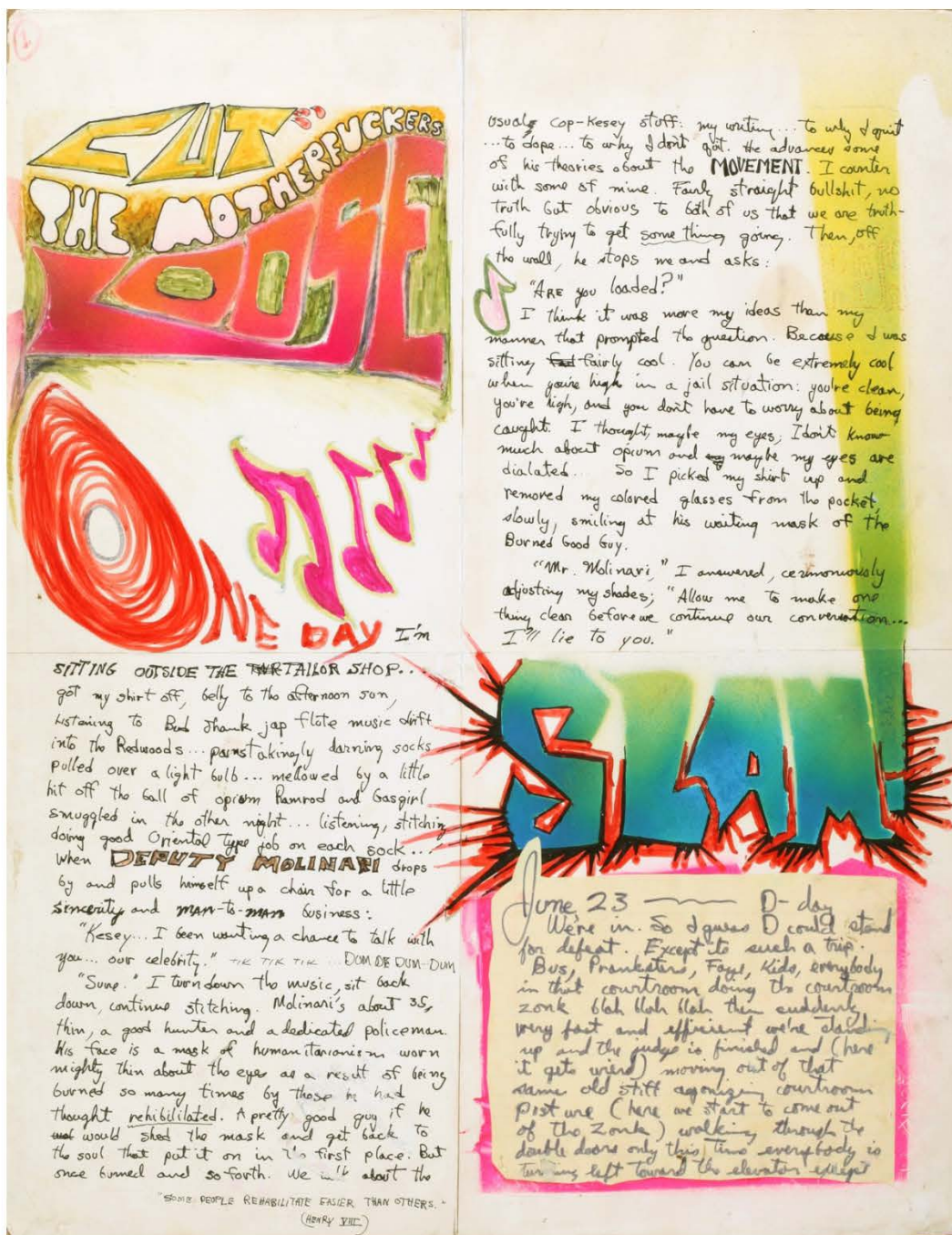


Figure 1 - Kesey, Ken. *Jail Journal*, folio 1. 1967.

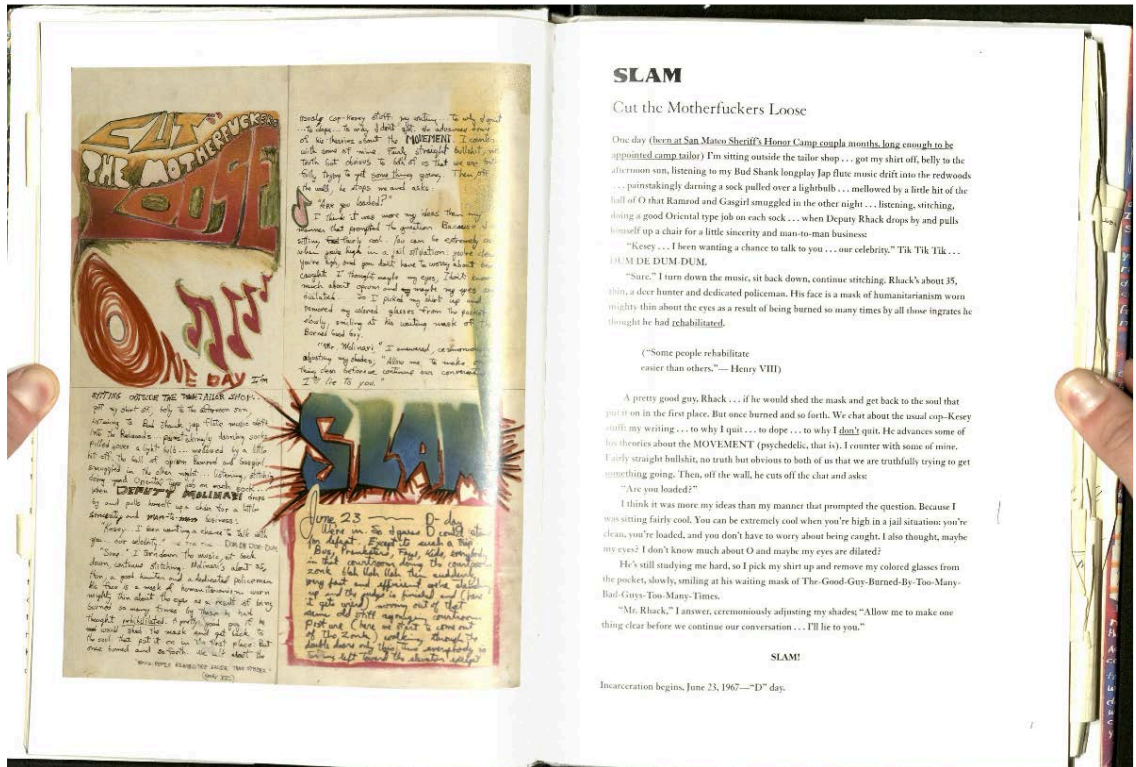


Figure 2 - Kesey, Ken. *Kesey's Jail Journal*, pages 1 & 2. 2003.

SLAM

Cut the Motherfuckers Loose

One day (here at San Mateo Sheriff's Honor Camp, complete months long enough to be appointed camp tailor) I'm sitting outside the tailor shop... get my shirt off, belly to the afternoon sun, listening to my Bud Shank longplay Jap flute music drift into the redwoods... painstakingly darn a sock pulled over a lightbulb... mellowed by a little bit of the hell of O that Ramrod and Gasgirl smuggled in the other night... listening, stitching, doing a good Oriental type job on each sock... when Deputy Rhack drops by and pulls himself up a chair for a little sincerity and man-to-man business:

"Kesey... I been wanting a chance to talk to you... our celebrity," Tri Tik Tik... DUM DE DUM DUM.

"Sure." I turn down the music, sit back down, continue stitching. Rhack's about 35, thin, a deer hunter and dedicated policeman. His face is a mask of humanitarianism worn mightier than about the eyes as a result of being burned so many times by all those ingrates he thought he had rehabilitated.

"(Some people rehabilitate easier than others."—Henry VIII)

A pretty good guy, Rhack... if he would shed the mask and get back to the soul that put it on in the first place. But once burned and so forth. We chat about the usual cop-Kesey stuff: my writing... to why I quit... to dope... to why I don't quit. He advances some of his theories about the MOVEMENT (psychedelic, that is). I counter with some of mine. Fairly straight bullshit, no truth but obvious to both of us that we are truthfully trying to get something going. Then, off the wall, he cuts off the chat and asks:

"Are you loaded?"

I think it was more my ideas than my manner that prompted the question. Because I was sitting fairly cool. You can be extremely cool when you're high in a jail situation; you're clean, you're loaded, and you don't have to worry about being caught. I also thought, maybe my eyes? I don't know much about O and maybe my eyes are dilated?

He's still studying me hard, so I pick my shirt up and remove my colored glasses from the pocket, slowly, smiling at his waiting mask of The Good-Guy-Burned-By-Too-Many-Bad-Guys-Too-Many-Times.

"Mr. Rhack," I answer, ceremoniously adjusting my shades: "Allow me to make one thing clear before we continue our conversation... I'll be to you."

SLAM!

Incarceration begins, June 23, 1967—"D" day.



Figure 3 - Lewitt, Sol. *Autobiography*. 1980.

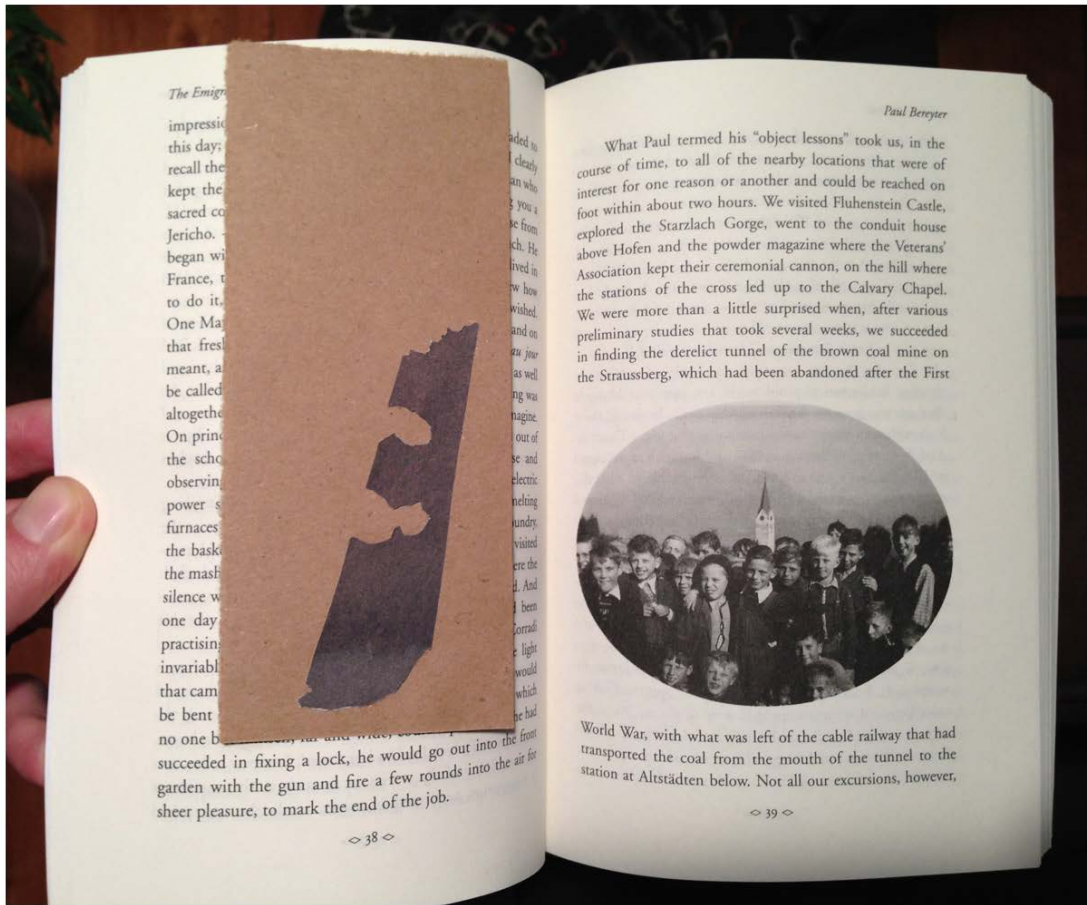


Figure 4 - Sebald, W.G. *The Emigrants*, pages 38 & 39. 1992.

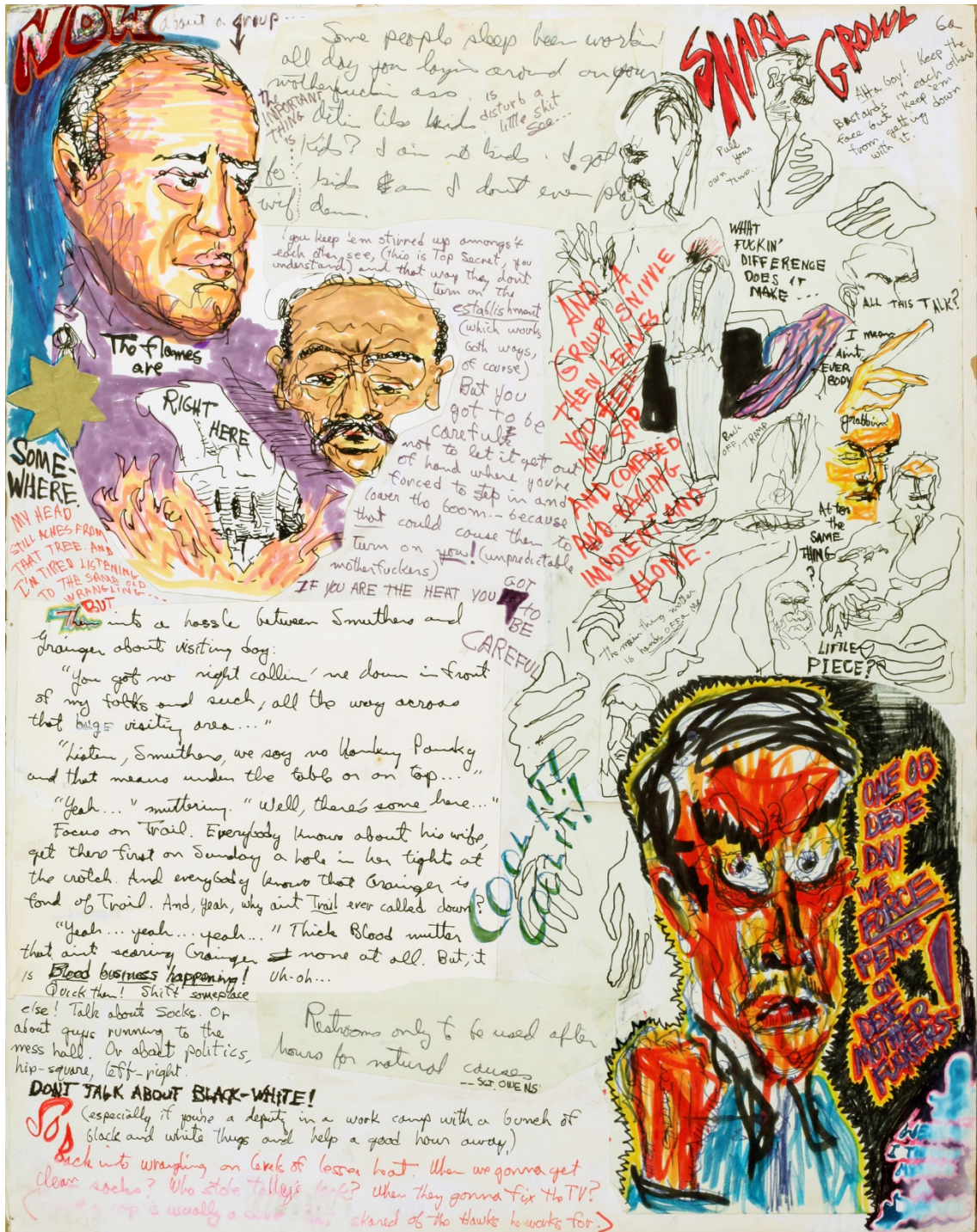


Figure 5 - Kesey, Ken. Jail Journal, folio 6A. 1967.



Figure 6 - Kesey, Ken. Jail Journal, folio 33, 1967.



Figure 7 - Kesey, Ken. Jail Journal, folio 41. 1967.



Figure 8 - Kesey, Ken. Jail Journal, folio 3. 1967.



Figure 9 - Morris, William. *The Tale of Beowulf*. 1895.

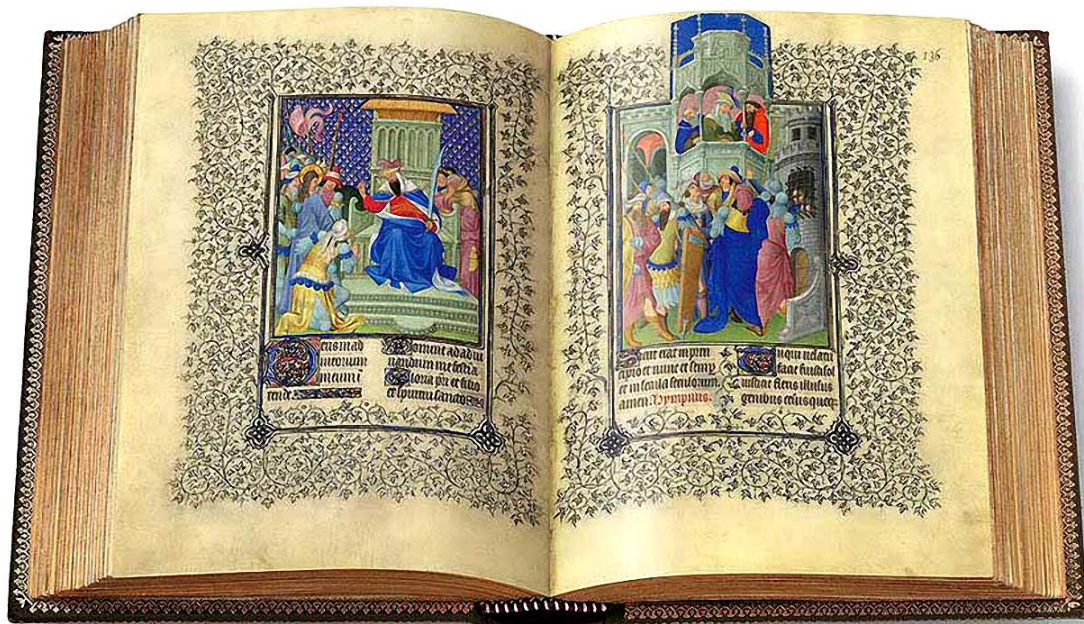


Figure 10 - Limbourg Brothers. *Les Tres belles Heures du Duc de Berry*. 15th century.



Figure 11 - Blake, William. The Song of Los, Plates 3 & 4. 1795.

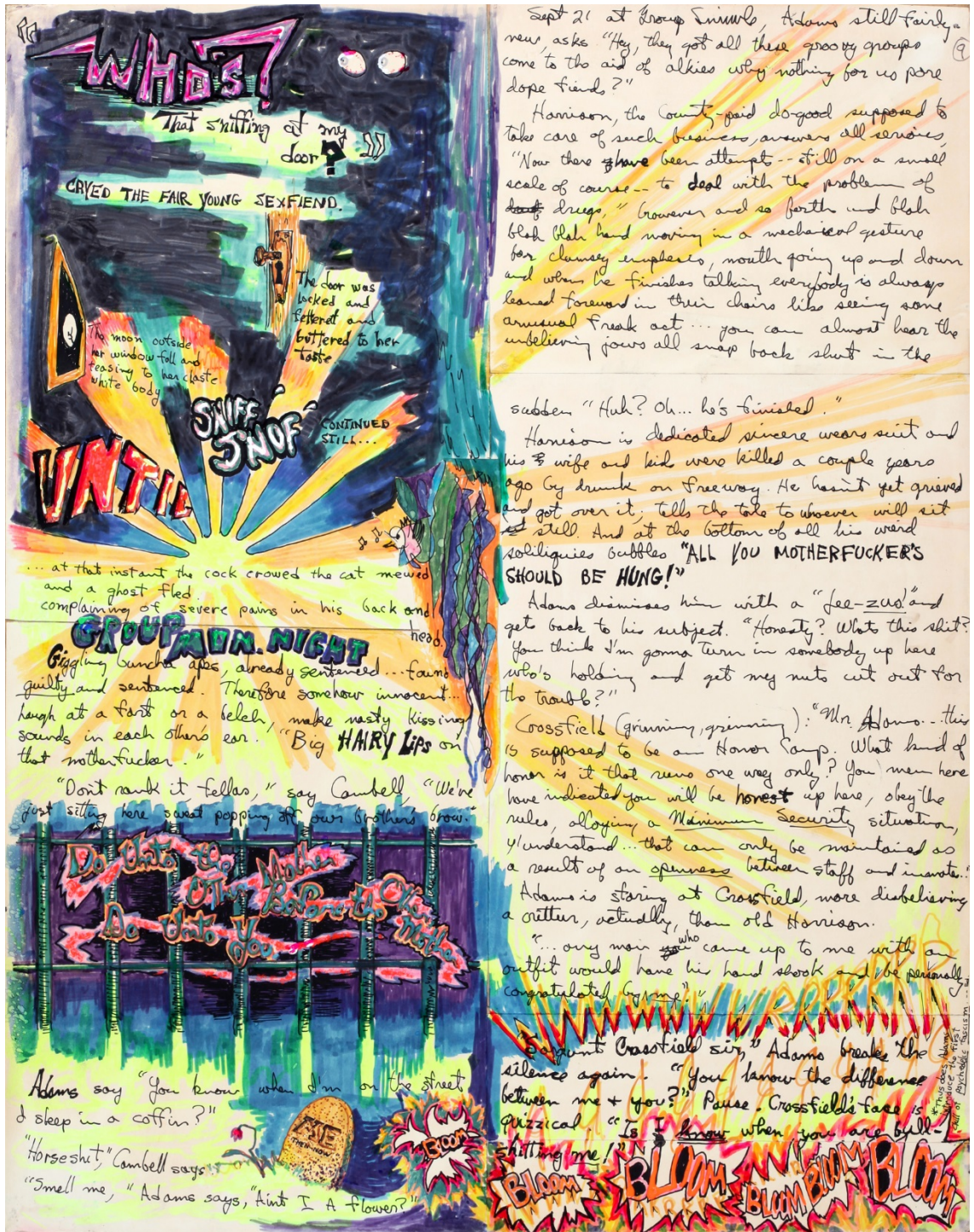


Figure 12 - Kesey, Ken. Jail Journal, folio 9. 1967.

the first laugh I've heard in years.

He stands looking at us, rocking back in his boots, and he laughs and laughs. He laces his fingers over his belly without taking his thumbs out of his pockets. I see how big and beat up his hands are. Everybody on the ward, patients, staff, and all, is stunned dumb by him and his laughing. There's no move to stop him, no move to say anything. He laughs till he's finished for a time, and he walks on into the day room. Even when he isn't laughing, that laughing sound hovers around him, the way the sound hovers around a big bell just quit ringing—it's in his eyes, in the way he smiles and swaggers, in the way he talks.

"My name is McMurphy, buddies, R. P. McMurphy, and I'm a gambling fool." He winks and sings a little piece of a song: "... and whenever I meet with a deck a cards I lays ... my money ... down," and laughs again.

He walks to one of the card games, tips an Acute's cards up with a thick, heavy finger, and squints at the hand and shakes his head.

"Yessir, that's what I came to this establishment for, to bring you birds fun an' entertainment around the gamin' table. Nobody left in that Pendleton Work Farm to make my days in-

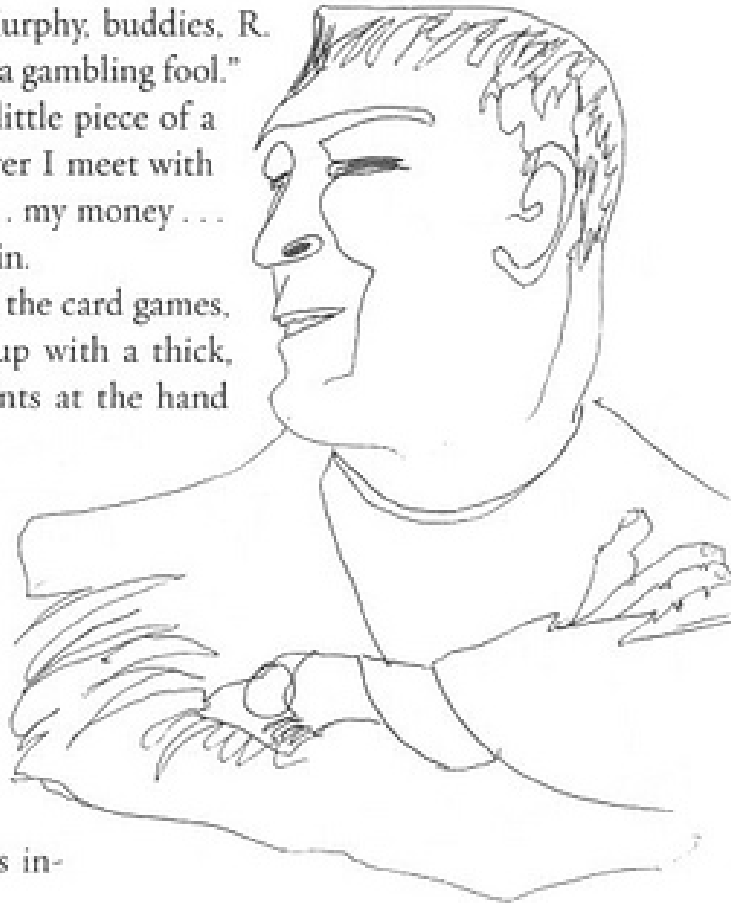


Figure 13 - Kesey, Ken. From *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (2012 edition). 2012.



Figure 14 - Kesey, Ken. *Jail Journal*, folio 34. 1967.

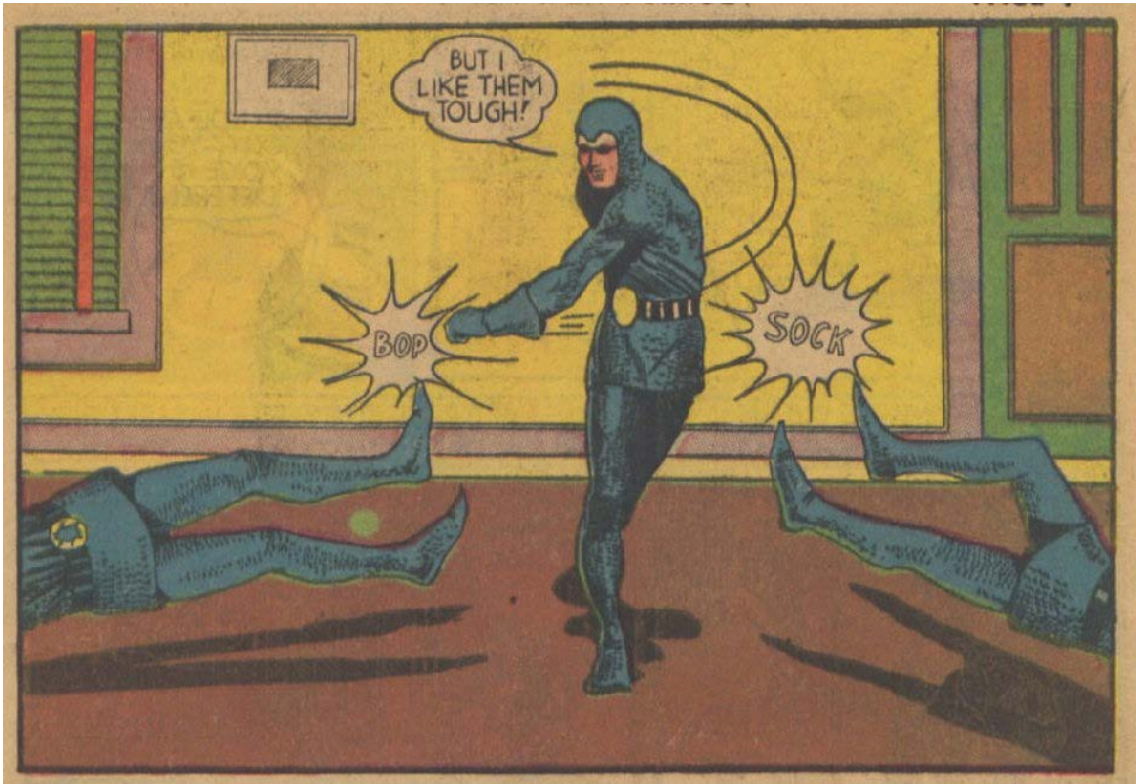


Figure 15 - Nicholas, Charles and Walter Frame. *Mystery Men Comics* Vol. 1, # 7.
1940.

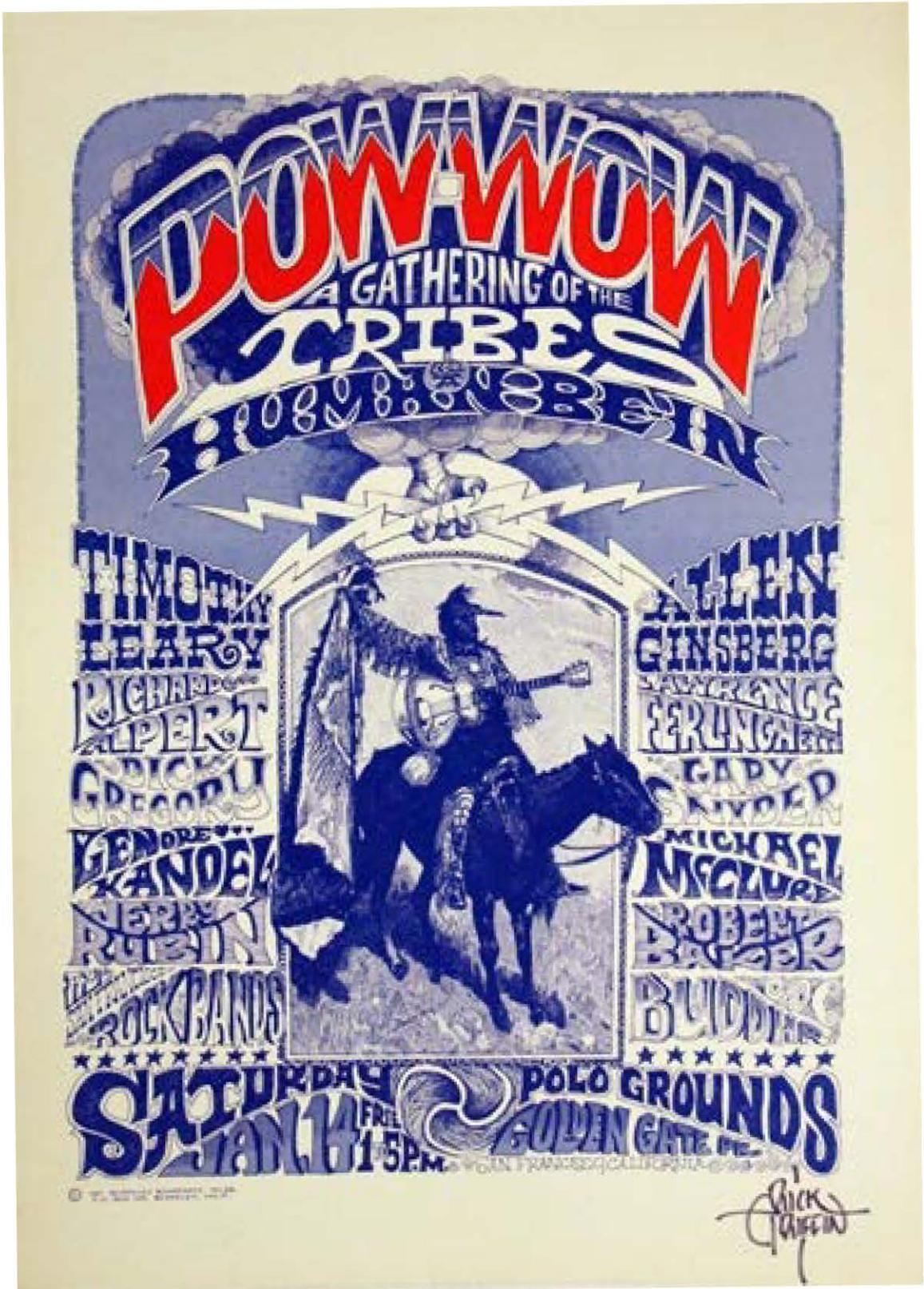


Figure 16 - Griffin, Rick. Pow-Wow: Gathering of the Tribes & Human Be-In. 1967.



Figure 17 - Kesity, Ken. *Jail Journal*, folio 13. 1967.

would have taken a week or better. A little piece of information on behalf of a useful but much-maligned & dope)



RIGHT NOW. But I want to wait for Trail, see if he'd like a crack at some new dope. ~~we have~~ ~~close at hand~~. Page don't like the idea. "I don't think he can hold his mud behind acid."

"I think he can. About a half a cap. There's more to him than he's got out front."

We sit around the day room listening to James Brown, watching hiso and Grooms pantomime the words. Playing with the pens Ed brought me (very popular item), our day room table is filled with Bloods sketching and doodling...looks like a CORE art class) and waiting for the Friday night flick to be announced.

Bland is tipped back in a chair, stocking feet on the table watching hiso and Grooms bob around. Bland is a straight-haired Blood, tall, good looking and probably ~~from~~ Louisiana in his background. Talks very

low and very slow and watches hiso and Grooms with the super-cool benevolence of the older Negro patiently waiting for the young bucks to wise up. Finally says "hiso..."-like a note blown across a big black jug.. "What is it ex-act-ly...you are in here for?"



hiso says "I in the county jail, sir, for goin' too fast... for steppin' too quick... and for not bein' too cool." Then goes at Grooms

with a karate stance "Haw!" Grooms returns gesture "Haw!" hiso makes a swipe "Eee YAW!"

"Bitch! You kicked me with those big Grogans! Almost break my blue glasses..."

Bland sniffs at the whole performance: "Buncha wet-nosed cock lickers." obviously pleased with the way the younger generation is shaping up.

Chandler bouncing a tennis ball, flat-palmed like a kid in a comic strip, face as round as the ball he's bouncing.

Speedy hopez swoopers through stirring instant coffee in a cup. Hits on his heels thump so loud reminds me how a chicken jumping from rooster to floor hits with a thump ten times his size. And Speedy's hips and backbone working odd from a bad wreck in his youth. And his arms terrifically gnarled and knotted with muscles. A two-hundred pound Puerto Rican boiled down to his hundred pound essence. "Speedy," Chandler calls, "how about a cup of coffee for me?"

"You kees my bleenking light!"

"You can bounce my bleenking ball...?"

James Brown sings "Sweet... sweet forame"

Grooms, always headless of words being played, sings his own: "Ooo little girl..." head back

and his mouth pink and obscene "...oo little girl... Can you dig me... out here in this moonlight..."

voice lifted to all the insensitiv' lovelies on that far off street:



Figure 18 - Kesey, Ken. Jail Journal, folio 18. 1967.



Figure 19 - Wilson, S. Clay. From "Cowboy Edition" Portfolio. 1967.

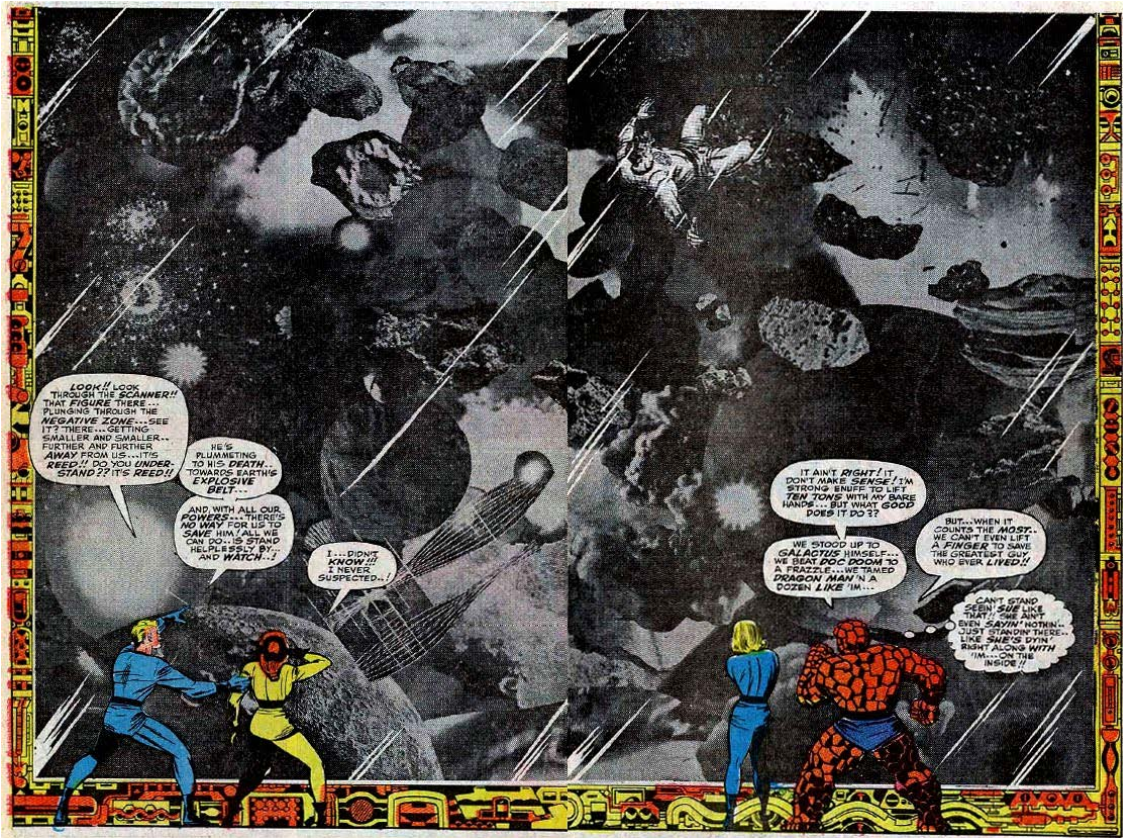


Figure 20 - Kirby, Jack. *Fantastic Four* #67. 1967.

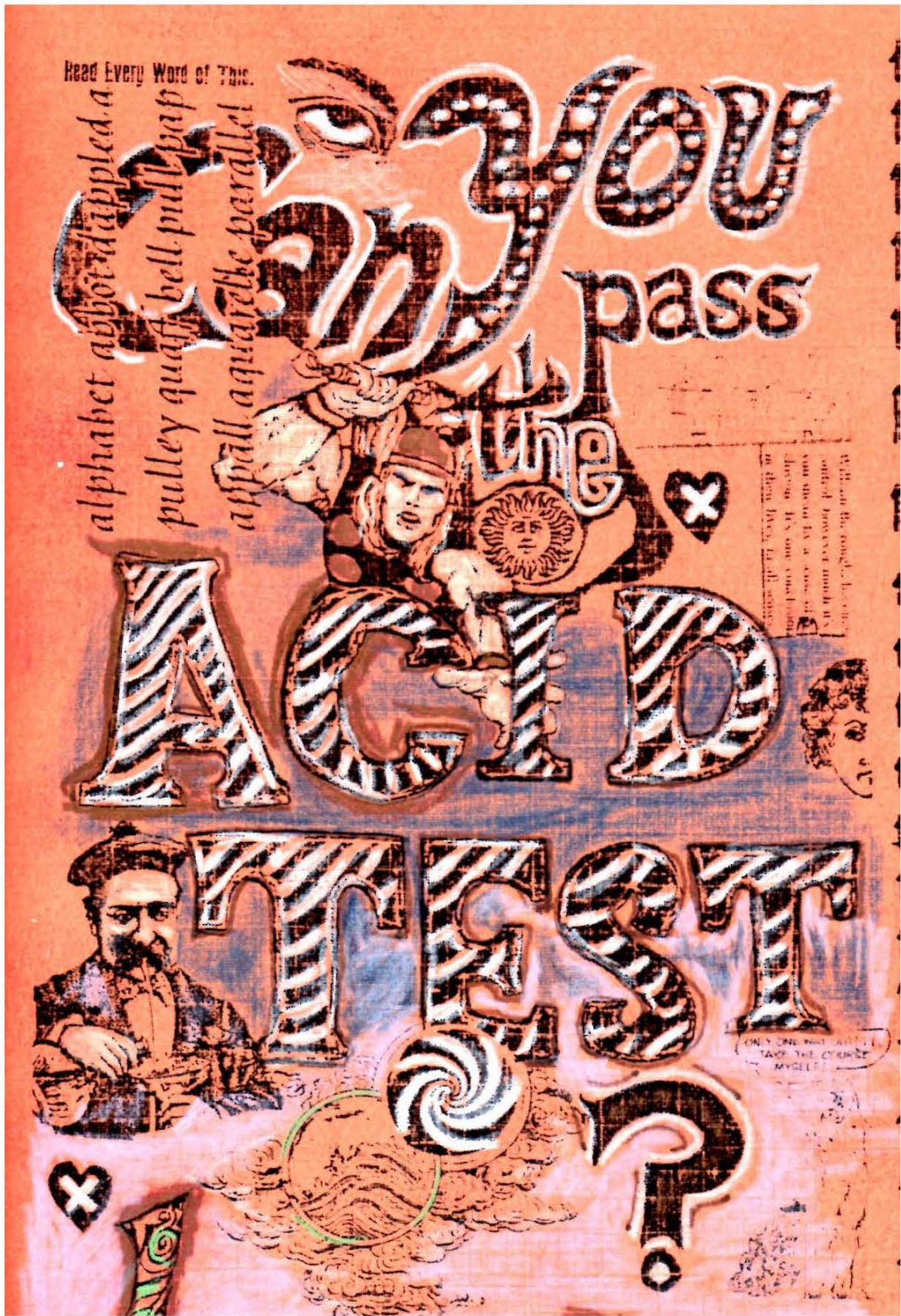


Figure 21 - The Merry Pranksters. *Can You Pass the Acid Test?* 1965.



3/25

R. Hamilton

Figure 22 - Hamilton, Richard. *What is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* 1956.

(26)

Just a little around in the dayroom after breakfast before call to bus-- And "Mister Kesey to the office."

"Kesey gonna sweep the competition this week for ~~most~~ Most Popular man in jail, Campbell tells me when I leave."

It was Crossfield again. Asking me first off about my head. "Feels fair I'm going out on the job."

"You sure you shouldn't see the doctor. ~~Leave~~ -- now what? I'm confused as shit. Is he really concerned? Is it a trap? Zap! I'm lost. "No... I don't think so..."

I see Pucke across the office, giving me a weird look. I come on to Crossfield a minute about "you've either got to let me make these kind of decisions-- like letting me know when to go get my aspirin-- or make my decisions for me! Just let me know which way you want it."

"Now, Ken, you aren't being exactly fair..."

"My headaches stopped. I'm waiting for the bus."

"Maybe you'd better get some X-rays. We want you hit right where that train hit you."

And Grainger been sitting there scowling at us; "We don't want you accusing us of some old sear. If Sergeant Crossfield thinks it's a good idea to go get X-rays then I'd fucking go!"

Ah-hah! Grainger so obvious. "You guys are ~~scared~~ scared I'll see you!" I'm delighted. I've pruned them. Crossfield is shook. Bushie a little ashamed. And Grainger would like an excuse to ring my ringing necks. "You guys talk about Honor and Honesty and trust. Does that just mean for the other side? Don't you know that I'd'll never get more from us than you give?"

Don't you know we won't respect the law until it respects us?

And that asshole Grainger breaks into that big Come-on-and-try-me-punk gear and says. "Kesey... you know what your trouble is? You ain't realistic."

So here I sit, contemplating, Trull and Wadbury Sylvester clean the shitter. Both of us waiting for Glick to take us down to the jail in redwood to see the nutty old doctor. Sylvester about his bad eye, me, my head.

Oh Thick and Fast
Thick and Fast
They clock each other running past
And wave the winners with a flag of truce
Cut the motherfuckers loose.

face on the end of a turkey neck and the turns out to be Jay Glick.

of historical note: Babbs makes in behind Wong smacks him off my back by the collar, Wong sailing back and knocking Page over in the bathtub jumping back up and whap whop whap at Babbs with flashlight until Babbs tells him "stop that!" and Wong stops. Amazed then a-fashed. Then pissed. Then turns to Page sitting baffled and lathered in

comes into my life

CRASH! gun-first through my bathroom window he hunk where page is standing in the bathtub shaving hee Penitentiary standing at the bathroom door rapping and me I am (1) flushing grass down toilet or (2) painting flowers on the toilet or (3) engaging in some even more heinous act as yet un-changed and un-derived.

CRASH! there's this unknown Oriental on my back working at me with his flash light who turns out to be the sinister Arch-Agent Willy Wong, and at the bath room window this exhibited


Paste Here if I ever find it picture of Glick on top of bus took night of he Honda but Glick standing up there holding flashlight and on back of photo J. Glick when he'd autographed it.


the tub and charges him with resisting arrest. The reason Page is doing the time with me and not one of the others at the house. Interesting.)


Glick is the transportation officer at the camp, makes daily run with guys to see the doctor, lawyer, probation officer down in Redwood.

BRIBE BAKERS THOUGH

You been a couple months truly spaced from the El Comino of the US. And you see it seeler again. What?







JAY GLICK






Figure 23 - Kesey, Ken. Jail Journal, folio 26. 1967.



Figure 24 - Rosenquist, James. *Lanai*. 1964.

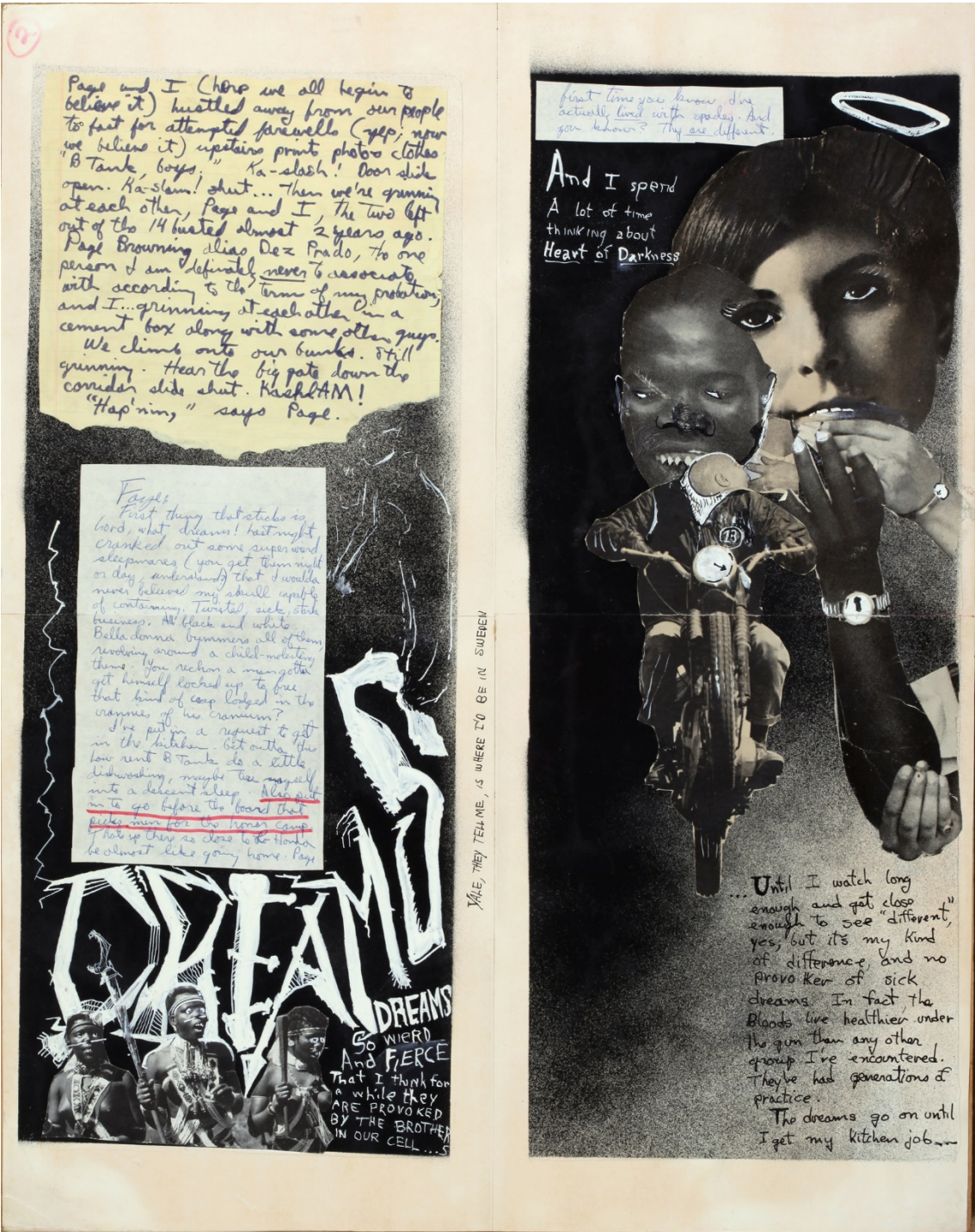


Figure 25 - Kesey, Ken. Jail Journal, folio 2. 1967.

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