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'Further': A Study of the Underground through Tom Wolfe's
The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test

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ABSTRACT

During the 1960s, the confluence of different factors led to a major counter-cultural movement in the United States that proposed a radical change in the way of thinking and living, which in just four years was adopted by a whole generation of young people. Tom Wolfe, in his work *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, makes a detailed description of the people who started this movement, as well as interesting reflections about the different elements that characterize it. This study analyzes descriptively and in depth the ideological components that govern the philosophy of the underground, through the study of Wolfe's work. Through this novel, it is possible to understand the individualistic character, the oriental concepts and the use of psychedelic drugs that characterized this movement.

Key Words: Tom Wolfe, underground, counter-culture, Ken Kesey, individualism, Psychedelia.

Durante los años sesenta, la confluencia de diferentes factores derivó en un movimiento contracultural de gran magnitud en Estados Unidos que proponía un cambio radical en la forma de pensar y vivir y que en apenas cuatro años fue adoptado por toda una generación de jóvenes. Tom Wolfe, en su obra *Ponche de Ácido Lisérgico*, realiza una descripción detallada de las personas que iniciaron este movimiento, así como interesantes reflexiones acerca de los diferentes elementos que lo caracterizan. Este estudio analiza descriptivamente y en profundidad los componentes ideológicos que rigen la filosofía del underground, a través del estudio de la obra de Wolfe. A través de esta, es posible entender el carácter individualista, los conceptos orientales y el uso de las drogas psicodélicas que caracterizaron a este movimiento.

Palabras Clave: Tom Wolfe, underground, contracultura, Ken Kesey, individualismo, psicodelia.

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Introduction

The counter-cultural movement that took hold in the United States in the 1960s was one of the few serious attempts in Western history to carry out a revolution by peaceful means, through individual progress of people rather than a change in the form of state organization. It failed to succeed, and in subsequent years, rock music and film helped to spread a trivialized version of this event that has caused its importance to be underestimated today. Precisely now that the capitalist system, based on consumerism, has entered into crisis, causing the validity of liberal democracies as a political system to be called into question from different sides due to the serious economic and social problems affecting Europe and the United States, it is necessary to claim the American underground. Almost fifty years ago, this movement developed a true alternative to the exaggerated consumerism and system of life that was implanted in the country after World War II. However, they did not renege on liberal democracy, as they accepted that this system was the only one that guaranteed a dignified respect for individual freedoms and a high level of civility in society.

The events of that time were faithfully portrayed in some literary works, which helped the movement to become known throughout the country. In particular, it was the authors who developed the literary genre of the New Journalism, who were interested in the underground and who, through the non-fiction novel, integrating themselves personally in the events, described it masterfully. The most important works are Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* (1968), *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971) by Hunter S. Thompson and Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968). In the first one, Mailer relates the great Chicago protest in which there was a strong repression by the police. Thompson explores in his work the consequences that the failure of the counter-cultural movement had on many young people, trapped in drug addiction. However, it is the third work, which provides a more detailed portrait of the movement, as it tells the story of the main protagonists. Through *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Wolfe examines the different elements that compose the complicated ideology of underground.

There are also numerous studies focusing on underground, from different approaches. Many of them analyze it from a sociological and historical point of view, for

example Blake Slonecker's "The Columbia Coalition: African Americans, New Leftists, and Counterculture at Columbia University Protest of 1968" (2008), or Guenther Roth's "Socio-Historical Model and Developmental Theory: Charismatic Community, Charisma of Reason and Counterculture" (1975). Others study the artistic part of the movement, such as Nadya Zimmerman in "Consuming Nature: The Grateful Dead's Performance of an Anti-Commercial Counterculture" (2006), which studies the counter-cultural component of underground music. There are also papers that analyze the influence that underground has had in later decades, as in the case of "The Legacy of the Sixties: Innovation-Bloodied but Unbowed" (1982), written by Warren Bryan Martin.

This paper studies the underground from a different point of view. It aims to make a descriptive analysis of the ideological and philosophical elements that characterize this counter-cultural movement, its origin and the role that important writers had in it, through Wolfe's work, which provides an important amount of information about these elements. However, on a large number of occasions these are displayed in a somewhat confused and dispersed manner due to the characters' use of various drugs, which affects their consciousness. In addition, the very amalgam of elements, of different origin, that compose the ideology of underground adds difficulty to the purpose of exposing it in a clear way.

Because of this, the present study is based mainly on Luis Racionero's *Filosofías del Underground* (1977), an essay that explains the different currents of thought that influenced the American counter-cultural movement. From the methodological point of view, this paper does not compare this work with Wolfe's, which would entail difficulty, since they belong to different literary genres. On the contrary, it is used as a theoretical base to identify, classify and organize the elements found in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, according to the following structure:

The first chapter focuses on determining the importance of the writer Ken Kesey in the development of the underground, as well as the connections of this movement with the previous counter-cultural and literary current, the Beat Generation, which influenced it. This is intended to serve as a contextual basis for the following chapters, from which the subject is approached from a more theoretical point of view.

The second chapter analyzes the individualist component of underground ideology. This is of particular importance in explaining the behavior of the characters

described by Wolfe, as well as their political attitude. In addition, the conflicts that this movement had with other relevant progressive political trends are analyzed, due to the differences in the methods used to achieve its objectives. With the help of Racionero's work, we also try to explain the origin of these ideas that propose an individual development as a way to improve society.

Finally, the third chapter is devoted to the analysis of two essential components in underground and with broad connections between them: the Oriental cultures and psychedelia. The first part of the chapter focuses on determining the different Oriental concepts, which the counterculture adopted, and how this decisively affected its way of interpreting reality. The part dedicated to Psychedelia explores the effects of LSD and the experimental and intellectual use that the members of the movement made of this psychoactive substance, as well as the relationship with the oriental concepts studied.

The Underground

The underground movement that appeared in the United States during the 1960s was a cultural movement that emerged as a reaction to a series of problems derived from the consumer society and lifestyle that has been consolidated in this country after the end of World War II and the great economic development derived from it. As Racionero explains in *Filosofías del Underground*, the American lifestyle of that time is the result of the enormous weight that rationalism has in the western mentality, so that the underground was nourished by currents of thought different from this one:

Es un irracionalismo basado en las grandes tradiciones filosóficas no socráticas. Su reivindicación se debe al fracaso de la filosofía racionalista para dar un propósito a la sociedad y unos valores que su ordenen los medios tecnológicos a los fines humanos, lo cual ha llevado a la generación actual a la búsqueda de otros métodos de utilización de la mente distintos del racionalismo. Esta búsqueda cristalizó, en las condiciones objetivas favorables de la década de los sesenta, en un movimiento de amplia repercusión cultural que se ha dado en llamar el underground. (10)

This countercultural manifestation involved a clash at the political, social and ideological levels between a majority of the population and a new generation of young people willing to bring about a great change in society.

In addition to this, the movement was constituted by a heterogeneous mixture of cultural elements and ideas with a very different origin. According to Racionero: “El underground considera todas las culturas y estilos de vida que en el mundo han sido como un archivo donde puedan escogerse aquellos elementos culturales y personales que más se adapten a los temperamentos y objetivos vitales de individuos y grupos.” (11) This conglomerate of ideas is an impediment to understanding the ideological bases of this counter-cultural movement. Through the analysis of this work, in which Wolfe narrates the experiences of the writer Ken Kesey (nuclear character in this movement), this chapter seeks to understand the origins of the underground movement, the most important events in its development, as well as the main characters who participated in it, and thus understand the social and political circumstances in which it occurred, and the complicated amalgamation of components that formed it. In this way, it is intended to create a basis for a later more theoretical analysis of underground in the following chapters.

Wolfe tells his own experience in San Francisco in 1966, where he hoped to interview Ken Kesey, author of the novel *Someone Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) with the aim of writing an article for a magazine. From that encounter, he joins Kesey's group and is able to tell his story of Kesey during the preceding years until he reaches the time and place in which he finds himself, in which a whole generation of young people adopted the way of living and thinking of this counter-cultural movement. Wolfe himself recounts the methods he used to write the work:

I have tried not only to tell what the Pranksters did but to re-create the mental atmosphere or subjective reality of it. I don't think their adventure can be understood without that. All the events, details and dialogue I have recorded are either what I saw and heard myself or were told to me by people who were there themselves or were recorded on tapes... (412)

As Luis Racionero explains, underground is not something that emerged in that decade, but has only been the last manifestation of a countercultural current that has existed since the beginning of civilization. Throughout the centuries, different circumstances have made these movements more or less important, although they were always minority and ended up disappearing due to repression by the dominant culture. Racionero says, quoting the poet Gary Snyder who belonged to the underground movement:

En ese punto, reparando atentamente en la historia de Oriente y Occidente, algunos de nosotros pudimos observar las similitudes entre algunos pequeños, pero influyentes, movimientos heréticos y esotéricos. Estas escuelas de pensamiento y práctica fueron generalmente suprimidas, disueltas o convertidas en inofensivas, en cualquier sociedad donde aparecieron (24)

Furthermore, it is important to note that underground was not a radical movement that intended to change all elements of Western society, but rather to enrich it with others, in order to advance its defects. According to Racionero this is a very common mistake. In Spanish, it may partly be due to a bad translation:

El término inglés contracultura significa el intento de equilibrar la cultura occidental compensándola en aquellos aspectos cuya carencia está provocando su declive. En la traducción española la idea ha adquirido connotaciones de movimiento anticultural, de ir contra toda cultura y no sólo los aspectos nocivos de ésta, lo cual confunde la intención del significado inglés. (10)

During the 1960s, this new counter-cultural impulse appears due to the confluence between this old underground tradition and a new element, psychedelic drugs. It is in this union where Ken Kesey plays a fundamental role.

Ken Kesey & LSD

Ken Kesey achieved great recognition for his work *Someone Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* but the role he played in the development of the counterculture of the 1960s is less well known. As Wolfe explains in the work, he had been interested in Kesey due to the news that had appeared referring to the problems with the justice that he had due to two arrests for possession of marijuana, which had caused his escape to Mexico. Wolfe wanted to understand how Kesey had gone from enjoying professional success to that situation.

As Wolfe explains, Kesey's role in underground development begins with his voluntary participation in experiments conducted by the U.S. government with LSD. This substance was discovered by the Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann and will be one of the elements analyzed in the third chapter. The effects of this drug meant a huge change in Kesey's mind, who realized the psychological implications that the use of this substance could have on people, and in his conception of reality. He wrote his famous work at that time, often under the effects of acid: "Lovell told him about some experiments the Veterans Hospital in Menlo Park was running with 'psychomimetic' drugs, drugs that brought on temporary states resembling psychoses. They were paying volunteers \$75 a day. Kesey volunteered." (40)

At the time, the writer studied at the University and belonged to a circle of intellectual students influenced by the Beat movement, the counter-cultural current that existed at that time, led by writers belonging to that generation. Kesey's use of LSD and other drugs caused the group of intellectuals to move away from Kesey because, according to Wolfe, they were afraid of these substances: "Being hip on Perry Lane now had an element nobody had ever dreamed about before, wild-flying, mind-blowing drugs. Some of the old Perry Lane luminaries' *cool* was tested and they were found wanting." (45). Despite this, LSD attracted several young people who joined Kesey in his goal of experimenting with this substance. They all went to live in La Honda, a house that Kesey acquired situated in nature and formed a group called the Merry Pranksters. Led by Kesey, they embark on an adventure that would last barely three years. Being one of the few people who knew the real effect of LSD all over the world, and being aware of the changes it can cause in people's individual development, they intend to expand their way of thinking, developing a way of life that would later be imitated by many young people. Wolfe describes several excerpts in which the Merry Pranksters travel along the country in a school bus for this purpose. On the front of the bus, they placed a sign with the word

Furthur, a variation of the word further. This word sums up the goal of the underground movement. This is why this word has been chosen to head the title of this paper.

Expansion of the Movement

Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, in order to fulfill their objective of extending the change of mental and vital attitude that they had experienced, relied on the organization of different events that Wolf narrates throughout his work. In these events, some students, members of the Beat Generation, the Hell's Angels and other people enjoyed the LSD experience together. Subsequently, after gaining confidence, they could show themselves in the public light and lose their fear of police; the Merry Pranksters began to organize the so-called Acid Tests. The aim was to imitate the original meetings in La Honda but in rooms where a larger number of people could attend. Wolf describes the many contacts the Pranksters had to establish with some of the world's largest LSD producers in order to be able to supply them free at these events. He also points out Acid Tests and the celebration of a Trips Festival were a real explosion in the expansion of the underground movement:

For the acid heads themselves, the Trips Festival was like the first national convention of an underground movement that had existed on a hush-hush cell-by-cell basis. The heads were amazed at how big their own ranks had become- and euphoric over the fact they would come out in the open, high as balloons, and the sky, and the law, wouldn't fall down on them (261)

This new San Francisco – L.A. LSD thing, with wacked-out kids and delirious rock 'n' roll, made it seem like the dread LSD had caught on like an infection among the youth – which, in fact, it had. Very few realized that it had all emanated from one electric source: Kesey and the Merry Pranksters. (282)

This highlights the fundamental role that Kesey and his group played in the development of the new underground current of the 1960s. The following section focuses on analyzing the relationship that the members of this group had with the previous countercultural generation, the Beat Generation.

Beat Generation

It is important to establish the connection that existed between Kesey and the Beat Generation. The influence it had on the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s was determinant. These Beat writers had already adopted many of the elements of the

underground tradition, such as drug use (not LSD), study of the East, an open attitude to sexuality and a libertarian political attitude. As mentioned above, these elements and the use of LSD defined the new underground. Racionero says: “De la tradición underground universalista, antiautoritaria, comunal, libertaria y descentralizante, emergió en la década de los sesenta la contracultura, que se caracterizó formalmente por su énfasis en la música rock, las drogas psicodélicas, las comunas y la filosofía oriental y hermética.” (11). Also David Buchdahl shows the same idea, reflecting on the Beat poet Gary Snyder and Bob Dylan in “The Past, the Counterculture, and the Eternal-Now” (1977):

Taken together their writings also make evident the differences that are related in the shift of time consciousness now occurring: on the one hand a humility in the face of the long great, archaic, and mystical traditions, and on the other, a proud refusal to be unduly intimidated or impressed by the ‘official’ culture of established elites in modern American society. (468)

These countercultural traditions will be studied in chapters two and three of this paper. The aim of this section is to analyze the personal relationships between members of these two movements that Wolfe describes in his work. Firstly, it is necessary to highlight the figure of Neal Cassady, member of the Merry Pranksters. As *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* stands out, Cassady was known to have belonged to the Beat Generation. Although he was neither a writer nor an artist from a conventional point of view, he was admired by the main members of that generation such as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs because he embodied the ideal of the person they defended. In the Merry Pranksters, he occupies the same role, being considered by them as a model and as one of Kesey's advanced students. Wolfe, surprised to see him, presents him in the work in the following way: “I remember Cassady. Cassady, Neal Cassady, was the hero, ‘Dean Moriarty,’ of Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957), the Denver kid, a kid who was always racing back and forth across the U.S. by car, chasing, or outrunning, ‘life,’ and here is the same guy, now 40, in the garage.” (15). He highlights how he shares his knowledge with others continuously:

Cassady never stops talking. But that is a bad way to put it. Cassady is a monologist, only he doesn’t seem to care whether anyone is listening or not. He just goes off on the monologue, by himself if necessary, although anyone is welcome aboard. He will answer all questions. [...] spinning off memories, metaphors, literary, Oriental, hip allusions... (15)

Tom Wolfe relates in his work how after a trip to New York there was an encounter between the two main figures of the two movements, Kesey and Kerouac, as well as

Cassady and Allen Ginsberg. It also reflects on the shift from one countercultural current to another:

Keseey and Kerouac didn't say much to each other. Here was Kerouac and here was Kесеey and here was Cassady in between them, ones the mercury for Kerouac and the whole Beat Generation and now the mercury for Kесеey and the whole – what? - something wilder and weirder out on the road. It was like hail and farewell. Kerouac was the old star. Kесеey was the wild new comet from the West heading Christ knew where. (102)

Allen Ginsberg, author of the famous poem “Howl” (1956), considered one of the best works belonging to the Beat Generation, participated actively in this new movement, having a close relationship with the Merry Pranksters, as Wolfe shows. It is possible to find several examples in which the opinion that Kесеey processed this Beat writer is observed. This quote belongs to an excerpt in which the Hell's Angels attend a party at La Honda: “But you can't help yourself, you got to groove with this cat in spite of yourself. Ginsberg really bowled the Angels over. He was a lot of things the Angels heated, a Jew, an intellectual, a New Yorker, but he was too much, the greatest straightest unstraight guy they ever met.” (173)

Despite the great influence that the Beat generation had in the underground of the 1960s, there was a contrast between this one and the American counterculture of the previous decade. Wolfe describes at the beginning of the work, when he arrived in San Francisco, his surprise at the change produced in the areas of the city that in the past had harbored a countercultural atmosphere in their streets: “Slipping and sliding down to North Beach, the fabled North Beach, the old fatherland bohemia of the West Coast. [...] And now North Beach was dying [...] In the famous Beat Generation HQ [...] The action – meaning the hip cliques that set the original tone- the action was all over in Haight-Ashbury.” (9). He goes on to describe how the people of the counterculture no longer go to North Beach, which has commercialized and trivialized the whole relationship with the Beat movement. In this first chapter, Wolfe reflects on the progressive disappearance of the political and cultural elements that had characterized it, such as his affinity for black culture and jazz music: “But it was not just North Beach that was dying. The whole old-style hip life – jazz, coffee houses, civil rights invite a spade for dinner, Vietnam – it was all suddenly dying, I found out, even among the students of Berkeley [...] which had been the heart of the ‘student rebellion’ and so forth.” (10)

Before finishing this section it is necessary to emphasize the participation of another writer in the beginnings of underground, Hunter S. Thompson, who, like Wolfe, is one of the precursors in the development of New Journalism. As explained in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Thompson, on the one hand, was the one who put Kesey in contact with the Angels of Hell, an important fact in the underground, which will be dealt with in greater depth in the next chapter. On the other hand, he lent the audio recordings he made of those encounters to Tom Wolfe, who would use them to describe a chapter in his work. Thompson himself stresses in an epilogue added to the Spanish edition of Tom's work, the importance of the union of several writers and intellectuals around Kesey as the origin of the underground movement:

San Francisco, en 1965, era el mejor sitio del mundo donde se podía estar. Todo era posible. Los locos tomaban las riendas, la locura zumbaba en el aire, y el rey de los locos, el peso pesado entre todos ellos, era un rústico chico de La Honda llamado Ken Kesey. [...] era un mundo absolutamente nuevo [...] Las mejores mentes de nuestra generación se las arreglaron para coincidir todas en La Honda, y Kesey tenía sitio para todos. (445)

After this analysis, it is possible to conclude that the transition from one movement to another did not take place in a radical way, but that the Beat movement was integrated into the new current and bequeathed many of the elements that, as discussed in the following chapters, defined it.

Individualism

This chapter focuses on studying the political ideology of underground, through the analysis of the different currents that influenced it, in order to determine the main characteristics that compose it and thus, be able to identify which of them are present in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.

After a first reading of the work, it is possible to see that the political attitude of the members of the underground, although progressive, differs from the left-wing ideology in that the former emphasizes individual freedom, never calling liberal democracy into question. Donald W. Keim also shows this idea in his article: “‘To Make all Things New’:-The Counterculture Vision of Man and Politics” (1977): “The counterculture gives pride place to the individual. Despite the attention lavished on community, few contemporary movements have been so militantly individualist.” (200). As we will analyze later, this meant a clash with other progressive movements of ideology closer to communism, facts that Wolfe reflects in his work.

Based on the opinion of poets such as Allen Ginsberg, Racionero establishes the origin of the deep individualistic component of the underground of the 1960s: “existe acuerdo, entre los que han estudiado el underground, Ginsberg, Roszack, o Slater, sobre la gran influencia del individualismo antiautoritario de los románticos y anarquistas.” (24). This chapter is based on these elements analyzed in *Filosofías del Underground* to understand and expose in a structured order the different passages that relate these ideological connections in Wolfe's work.

Voluntary Outsiders

One important characteristic of the underground that can be observed in Wolfe's work is the role played by certain sectors of society in this movement: Kesey's opinion of some members of the lower class and some marginal groups is striking. He considers that the incorporation of these is essential for the counter-cultural movement he led. This type of people lived on the margins of society, with a solitary and miserable existence. However,

this constituted an advantage for the new model of conduct proclaimed by Kesey. According to the underground, individuals had to free themselves from the rules and values of society in order to reach a different mental state and thus be able to interpret reality more faithfully and achieve a qualitative leap on an individual level.

The most important example of this characteristic of underground in Wolfe's work is found in the connection of the Merry Pranksters with the Hell's Angels, famous for their relationship with crime. These enjoyed a terrible reputation due to the altercations they provoked wherever they went, which originated a great fear in society. In spite of this, in countercultural environments they were seen from a different perspective. As Wolfe explains in his work: "Intellectuals around San Francisco, particularly at Berkeley, at the University of California, were beginning to romanticize about the Angels in terms of 'alienation' and 'a generation in revolt,' that kind of thing" (169). In the first chapter it has been explained how the Merry Pranksters make friends with some members of the Angels of Hell, inviting them to La Honda. Before this encounter, Wolfe relates the good opinion that Kesey has on these due to his rebelliousness, cataloguing them as authentic "proscribed": "Outlaws, by definition, were people who had moved off of dead center and were out in some kind of Edge City. The beauty of it was, the Angels had done it like the Pranksters, by choice. [...] The Angels' trip was the motorcycle and the Pranksters' was LSD." (170)

The keys to understanding these relationships can be found in *Filosofías del Underground*. Racionero offers in his work a possible explanation for this strange connection that existed between violent and marginal groups like the Hell's Angels with the underground. The cause lies in the ideas developed by English romantic writers. As Racionero points out, there are enormous similarities between the situation experienced by the English romantic authors and the generation that joined the counter-cultural movement in the United States in the 1960s. Both generations lived periods characterized by a great industrial development:

Uno de los problemas que se planteó en la cultura inglesa del siglo XIX fue el rechazo de las consecuencias inhumanas de la Revolución Industrial. Esta situación se ha repetido, doscientos años más tarde, después de la segunda Revolución Industrial. La primera Revolución Industrial fue la del vapor en 1750, la segunda ha sido la atómica, cibernética y consumista, hacia 1950. (40)

Because of this, some English romantic authors like Blake denounced the harsh conditions that the new economic system, capitalism with its great industrial

development, caused to the most disadvantaged population. In the same way, the generation of the underground more than a century later revealed itself against the American way of life based on an excessive consumerism and on the absence of individual freedom, voluntarily becoming "marginalized from society": As Racionero points out; the most influential romantic writer in this sense was Byron. The main reason is the preference that this author had to use marginalized characters in his works, as well as the search for a situation of marginality in his own life, voluntarily (41). Kesey imitated these characteristics, feeling attraction for the marginalized volunteers, those who turn away from society in order to change it through individual development. This is the reason why Ken Kesey gave so much relevance to the fact of living on the margin of society, and integrating the Angels of Hell in his project. In this sense, underground will mean a break with left-wing groups of ideology closer to communism, as will be analyzed in the next section of this chapter. From this perspective posed in *Filosofías del Underground*, it is easy to understand why, after the encounter between the Hell's Angels and the Merry Pranksters, these gained fame among the intellectual groups of San Francisco, since they, as Wolfe points out, achieved something that no intellectual had, but that they admired:

They had broken through the worst hangup that intellectuals know – the real-life hangup. Intellectuals were always hung up with feeling that they weren't coming to grips with real life. Real life belonged to all those funky spades and prize fighters and bullfighters and dockworkers and grape pickers and wetbacks. *Nostalgie de la boue*. Well, the Hell's Angels were real life. It didn't get any realer than that, and Kesey had pulled it off. (178)

With this, Wolfe explains why some of the more intellectual underground members, who supported Kesey at first, became disconcerted and disconnected with the movement. Due to their intellectual height of exclusively rationalist type, they refused to abandon the security and comfort of society, much less to relate to violent and marginal people whom they were afraid of. Kesey did both and was able to overcome the fear of the American middle class of the lower classes. Following Racionero's idea, we can see the attitude that the underground has towards people outside society is a direct inheritance from English romanticism, whose authors developed these ideas long before them and which, after being studied by the Beat generation, were taken up again in the following decade. This influence is studied in depth in the last section of this chapter.

Herman Hesse

In addition to Byron, Herman Hesse is probably the most influential writer on the underground, because he anticipated in his novels many of the most characteristic elements of the ideology and behavior that an entire generation would develop in the 1960s. In *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* Wolfe shows how Kesey and his group read Hesse and highlights in several chapters of the book his surprise at the great similarity that exists between them and the book *The Journey to the East* (1932):

and so many mysteries of *the synch* from that time on ... There is another book in the shelf in Kesey's living room that everybody seems to look at, a little book called *The Journey to the East*, by Hermann Hesse. Hesse brought it in 1932 and yet...the synch! ...it is a book about ... exactly ... the Prankers! and the great trip of 1964! (143)

Racionero, in his work, coincides with Wolfe in pointing out this connection:

Hesse es otro profeta indiscutido del 'underground', libro de texto para los que abandonan el sistema: Su teatro mágico es una anticipación de las visiones de ácido, su *Viaje a Oriente* una premonición del nuevo Camino de Santiago que es Katmandú, sus personajes, arquetipos con los que se identifican millares de jóvenes en todo Occidente (52)

Wolf explains the resemblance between the plots of Hesse's *The Journey to the East* and the journey Kesey and The Merry Pranksters made with their bus across the country. The objectives, the way of life, the way of relating to each other coincide with the journey to the east made by the characters in Hesse's novel, forming a group they call the 'League': "It began, supposedly, as just a journey, to get from here to there, but gradually it took on a profound though and classifiable meaning." (143). And he quotes Hesse:

"My happiness did indeed arise from [...] the freedom to experience everything imaginable simultaneously, to exchange outward and inward easily, to move Time and Space about like scenes in a theater. And as we League brothers traveled throughout the world [...] and transformed it into Paradise, we creatively brought the past, the future and the fictitious into the present moment." The present moment! Now! The *Kairos*! It was like the man had been on acid himself and was *on the bus*. (143)

Here we can see how Hesse introduces into his novel concepts such as the search for the present moment and the disassociation between oppositions such as time and space, key elements in underground culture as will be analyzed in the third chapter, related to Psychedelia and Eastern philosophies.

Racionero analyses some characteristics of Herman Hesse's works and the characters that appear in them. These characteristics have to do with the search for a new type of ethics, to move away from the restrictions that European morality impose on men:

Herman Hesse se lee en el underground porque actualiza una cuestión de fondo planteada por Dostoievsky y más tarde por Nietzsche: la necesidad de una nueva ética. Una ética personalista que permita al hombre los grados de libertad moral proporcionados a las posibilidades vitales que le abre la tecnología, y a la desmitificación mental causada por la ciencia (52)

Hesse expresses this new ethic through the characters in his novels, which will decisively influence the American counterculture. It proposes the liberation of man through individual development, transcending moral norms, being able to confront oneself. Thus, Hesse creates some characters to which he attributes a personality based on the ethics he defends, making these people difficult to judge under Western values, based on the strong morality inherited from Christianity. Their behavior would be defined by the absence of oppositions, trying to face reality as it is, where everything happens at the same time, where these oppositions do not exist, thus denying not only the conception of reality proposed by Christianity, but also the proposal by scientific rationalism. Racionero shows Hesse's opinion of the Russian man in an article he wrote about the Karamazov brothers (1919):

Este ideal asiático es un alejamiento de la moralidad y ética particularizadas en favor de un entendimiento universal, una validación global, una nueva, peligrosa y terrorífica santidad; el hombre ruso no se puede describir adecuadamente como histérico, borracho o criminal, o como poeta y santo, sino solamente como la combinación simultánea de todas estas características. El hombre ruso, el Karamazov, es a la vez criminal y juez, rufián y sensible, es tanto un completo egoísta como un héroe de abnegación. No podemos abarcarlo desde un punto de vista fijo, moralista, ético, dogmático, -en una palabra, europeo-. (53)

This type of character that Hesse develops in his works coincides with the idea of Byron, who, as analyzed in the previous section, both in his life and in his writings advocated the voluntary marginalization of the individual before society as a method of liberation in the face of the repression and authoritarianism that power exercised over the population. Both believe in the creation of a new type of man, who has to be carried out facing reality by oneself, free of the conditions that traditional norms and customs impose on us; rejecting the comfort of the safe and facing the complexity of human existence and of reality itself. In this way, learning from their own experience, people are able to deal with the powers that try to influence our lives by imposing a single way of thinking and living. Racionero cites Hesse's *The Return of Zarathustra* (1919):

Hesse da en esta novela su estrategia para la lucha vital contra la burguesía: la marginación, la vida solitaria y libre del que ha renunciado a acumular, explotar y escalar. “La soledad es el camino por el que el destino lleva al hombre a sí mismo. La mayoría de los hombres, el rebaño, nunca han probado la soledad. Dejan el padre y la madre, sólo para agarrarse a una esposa y sucumbir tranquilamente a nuevo calor y nuevas ataduras. No están nunca solos, nunca comulgan consigo mismos. Y cuando un hombre solitario cruza su camino, lo temen y odian como la plaga; le apedrean y no se quedan tranquilos hasta que está lejos.” (59)

This element is clearly represented in Wolfe's work. As explained above, both Cassady, Kesey and the Hell's Angels were considered role models by underground followers precisely for practicing this kind of life proposed by Hesse. They all left society with the conviction that by living life for themselves it was possible to better understand the complexity of the world and free themselves from a very simple view of reality, as society imposes.

As has been explained, the ideology of Byron and Hesse influenced the underground decisively. For a whole generation in the 1960s, this was a new way of transforming society through individual change in people. The following section will analyze this idea from a political point of view, analyzing the differences between this progressive individualistic ideology and other left-wing political movements and the conflicts between them, as shown in Wolfe's work.

Individualism vs Communism

In the early 1960s, many leftist groups, some related to university students, were of great importance in California because of the huge demonstrations they held. Racionero explains how when he arrived in Berkeley to study in those years he witnessed the reorganization of these left groups:

y los estudiantes blancos de izquierdas organizaron el movimiento SDS, Estudiantes para una Sociedad Democrática. La SDS, a partir de 1962 y con la declaración de Port Huron tomó el relevo de la New Left, aglutinando a su alrededor un conjunto cada vez mayor de grupos raciales tan distintos entre sí que sólo se parecían en su rechazo del “American way of life [...] En 1964 hay el primer enfrentamiento grave en la universidad; es el Free Speech Movement que encabeza Mario Sabio: paralizan la universidad y obtienen sus demandas. (12)

Wolfe describes in chapter XVI of his work a manifestation of this type to which Kesey is invited as an orator. It is a great event against the Vietnam War with the same scenario and protagonists as in Racionero's quotation:

an organization known as the Vietnam Day Committee invited Kesey to come speak at a huge antiwar rally in Berkeley, on the University of California campus. [...] Berkeley, the New Left, the Free Speech Movement, Mario Savio, the Rebel Generation, the Student Revolution, in which students were going to take over the universities. (214)

This chapter is a good example of the differences that existed between this type of left and the new counter-cultural movement of the underground. At the end, the organizers regret having invited Kesey, who comes to the event with the Merry Pranksters on their bus. They go up to the stage where the orators are in charge of raising the spirits with speeches to later carry out the march, but they achieve the opposite because with such a strange aspect and accompanied by musical instruments, he explains that he does not agree with the opinion of the previous speakers:

You know, you're not gonna stop this war with this rally, by marching... That's what they do... They hold rallies and they march... They've been having wars for ten thousand years and you're not gonna stop it this way. [...] and you know who I saw... and who I heard?... Mussolini... (221)

Somehow here are represented the differences between the individualist mode carried out by the underground movement and the left-wing tendencies based on communism, focused on achieving equality of members of society through a proletarian revolution and not on the individual freedom of the individual. Both have in common that they fight against the excessive consumerism on which the prevailing capitalism in the United States is based. The difference lies in the method and the alternative they propose to this consumerism. For underground, experience in the world had shown that communism had failed in its goal of liberating the population from authoritarian power because, as Racionero explains:

Hoy día, tanto en el consumismo como en el comunismo, hay una tendencia antihumana que amenaza la libertad: es la tendencia a la anulación de la individualidad. [...] ello se debe a que tanto el utilitarismo liberal, que es la ideología del capitalismo, como el marxismo materialista, que es la ideología del comunismo, son filosofías racionalistas, es decir, fuera de la escala humana, antiindividualistas, generalizadoras, desarrollistas, tecnocráticas. [...] La visión científica del mundo es útil si se aplica a la técnica, pero nefasta si se aplica a la sociedad. (67)

After the failure of communism, young underground progressives took a different attitude. As we have seen above, influenced by Hesse and the English Romantics, they tried to transform society through individual change and abandoned protests organized by leftist groups. Wolfe portrays this change when he describes the explosion that the movement has had in just one year: "the political thing, the whole New Left, is all of a sudden like *over* on the hip circuit around San Francisco, even at Berkeley, the very

citadel of the Student Revolution and all.” (354). He tells how a young man who had always participated in the rallies organized by the left had changed his mind and had become an addict to LSD:

he now has a very tolerant and therefore withering attitude toward all those who are still straggling in the old activist political ways for civil rights, against Vietnam, against poverty [...] unwittingly supporting the oppressors by playing their kind of game and using their kind of tactics. (354)

Wolfe thus expresses the same idea expressed by Racionero about the similarity between the methods used by authoritarian powers and those used by communist ideology. The boy expresses the individualistic alternative he had opted for. He also tells how the young people who continue to attend the more traditional left-wing gatherings are now wealthy, people who are not really willing to reject the comfort offered by consumer society: "It was all fraternity men with sports shirts and crew cuts and their own cars and painted signs, you know, like you get from a commercial artist. There was a lot of bread out there." (355).

This individualistic component has been present in American society since the origins of the country. William F. Averyt states in his article “The Philosophy of the Counterculture” (1971): “We do see, indeed, strains of a very American type of anarchism and individualism in today’s counterculture. The young people who retreat to their desert commune in New Mexico-are they so different from Thoreau in his retreat from ‘hustling’ Concord to Walden Pond?” (19)

Imagination and William Blake

To conclude this chapter, it is important to note the influence of another English romantic author, William Blake. Throughout *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* Wolfe describes the behavior of Kesey and The Merry Pranksters. At first glance, this behavior can be defined as quite strange, due to his mental experiments. One of these experiments with the mind has to do with the imagination, which, according to them, has a close connection with reality.

The power that they give to the imagination keeps connection with the English romantic poets, again. According to Racionero, William Blake was a great influence on the underground because of his ideas about imagination. Racionero tells how, when he

was studying at the University of Berkeley, Allen Ginsberg himself explained the reason to him, and this quote is also an example of the strong relationship between the Beat poets and the underground of the 1960s:

Cuando le pregunté por qué la mitad de su recital habían sido poemas de William Blake, Ginsberg me puso sobre la pista de Blake, explicando que Blake era el primer poeta de la genealogía “beat” [...] Ginsberg declara que su poesía nace de Blake, el cual, según él, es el primer poeta moderno porque se dio cuenta de los efectos opresores del racionalismo y el cientificismo indiscriminados. [...] Blake fue el primero en cuya obra la liberación mental y la social están inseparablemente tratadas. (25)

Romantic poets criticized the society resulting from the development of capitalism in England before communist theory did, but unlike this, which focused exclusively on economic causes, the romantics added in their critique a more psychological side, also focusing on the effects that the industrial revolution had on people's minds, hence their insistence on the importance of imagination.

Aunque hoy día algunos opinen lo contrario, el romanticismo, no sólo fue un estilo lírico de expresión individual, sino también un movimiento cargado de intencionalidad de cambio social, un cambio a conseguir tanto por la modificación de las condiciones materiales, como por la alteración de las condiciones mentales. (29)

As mentioned, Wolfe reflects in his work the privileged place that Ken Kesey and his group give to imagination, which they use as a method to achieve their purposes, since by imagining some events, they are able to make it easier for them to occur in reality. A clear example of this can be seen in a chapter of the book in which the Beatles give a concert near Kesey's house. These, after having integrated the Hell's Angels into their movement, try to do the same with the English group:

It's a matter of imagining them into the movie. The Beatles. It is like an experiment in everything the Pranksters have learned up to know. We can't *make* the Beatles come out here to our place. We can't *cause* them to do it in the usual sense. But we can imagine them into the movie and work them into the great flow of a causal connection and then it will happen of its own accord. (197)

Racionero states that, as the Romantics thought, the process of imagining would be key for society to advance and thus find solutions to the problems created by capitalism, since it is essential to conceive in the mind new concepts that later could be applied:

Así como el racionalismo es la capacidad de concatenar y relacionar conceptos, la imaginación es la capacidad de inventar conceptos, de crear imágenes. [...] es una facultad vital para el progreso mental, ya que inventa lo que aún no existe, sacándolo del limbo de las posibilidades y convirtiéndolo en un proyecto de realización que, en algunos casos, llega a materializarse en la práctica. (26)

Throughout this chapter, the strong individualistic component of the underground movement has been analyzed, as well as the sources from which these ideas were taken. In the next chapter, we will analyze other elements of the countercultural movement, the use of psychedelic drugs and the influence of different oriental philosophies from which they extracted new concepts and new ways of using the mind.

Oriental Philosophies and Psychedelia

This third chapter focuses on an in-depth analysis of the numerous references to oriental concepts and the use of psychedelic drugs present in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, which demonstrate the great influence these elements had on the ideological and philosophical content of underground. In addition, the connections that exist between them will be described. As in the previous chapter, the work *Filosofías del Underground* has been used as a theoretical basis to identify and understand Wolfe's references in more detail.

Oriental Philosophies

Oriental philosophies were introduced into the underground through the participation of the Beat Generation in this movement. As mentioned above, these writers studied Eastern culture and they influenced the new countercultural current and are a fundamental part that must be analyzed in order to be able to understand many of the Eastern concepts that appear in Wolfe's work. Racionero in his work supports both ideas: the importance of Eastern philosophy and the Beat writers as pioneers in the interest in these subjects:

Sobre la búsqueda de las fuentes orientales, Gary Snyder, uno de los “Vagabundos del Dharma” descritos por Kerouac, Jafy Roder en la novela, explica así como la generación “beat” comenzó a interesarse por Oriente: “Creció la sospecha de que tal vez la tradición occidental, de la que el marxismo es sólo una parte, estuviera extraviada. Esto indujo a muchos a estudiar otras grandes civilizaciones, India y China, con el objeto de ver lo que podían enseñarles (79)

Gary Snyder y los primeros poetas de la generación beat exploraron las vías alternativas, ampliando desde entonces las perspectivas mentales de las subsiguientes generaciones. Estas búsquedas les llevaron al zen, al taoísmo y al hinduismo. (81)

In his work, Racionero explains the different philosophies that the Beat writers studied. These will serve as a structure to order the many references that Wolfe makes to oriental elements in his work.

Zen

The idea of the search for the "Now" appears throughout Wolfe's work. It continuously describes how members of the underground, especially Kesey and the Pranksters, become obsessed with this concept and try to capture the present moment and put aside the past and the future, the thoughts with which our mind is always busy and which prevent us from understanding the reality that surrounds us in the moment we perceive it. Racionero explains that this is an oriental concept, Zen, which he explains thus: "El zen no es una filosofía sino una actitud vital, el cultivo de un estado mental que se relaciona con lo exterior con total inmediatez, sin tiempo ni espacio de por medio." (82). Next, he reflects on the implications that this idea has on the way of perceiving reality, which explains the search for the present moment that Kesey and the Merry Pranksters carry out all the time, and the method used consisting of freeing the mind from thoughts related to past or future times:

La vida es un constante movimiento de relaciones, y el pensamiento, al tratar de captar ese movimiento en términos del pasado, como memoria, tiene miedo a la vida. De ahí la necesidad de una percepción inmediata, sin pensamiento directa, fluyente, sin miedo y sin ego. El pensamiento sirve para llegar puntualmente a una cita o construir un motor, pero para penetrar el misterio de la experiencia, el pensamiento llega siempre tarde. Es como retener con el pensamiento el placer de un aroma que se va sobre la brisa (82)

To carry out this search, Kesey and his group begin to experiment with this topic. In the beginning, the experiments they perform are simple and aim to make them capable of capturing the present moment. Wolfe relates a concrete experiment: "The idea of the red rubber balls was that every Pranksters should always be ready to catch the ball, even if he wasn't looking when it came at him. They should always be that alert, always that alive to the moment." (100).

However, over time they delved into the psychological aspects of the idea, the impossibility of individuals to grasp the present moment and the social effects that this fact had caused throughout history. In addition, Wolfe shows in his work how Kesey and the Pranksters admired Cassady, a member of the Beat movement, for the reason that they considered him a privileged person to capture the present, his way of being and behaving was taken as a model by all of them. This passage serves as an example of all the above in which Kesey talks about people's lags:

A person has all sorts of lags built into him, Kesey is saying. One, the most basic, is the sensory lag, the lag between the time your senses receive something and you are able to react. One-thirtieth

of a second is the time it takes, if you're the most alert person alive, and most people are a lot slower than that. Now, Cassady is right up against that 1/30th of a second barrier. He is going as fast as a human can go, but even he can't overcome it. (144).

This passage explains this sensory gap, which, according to Kesey, is what causes that, although we individuals believe that we can grasp the present moment, we are actually incapable of doing so, since when we perceive something it already belongs to the past. In order to overcome it Wolfe relates continuous experiments carried out by Cassady and the others.

To finish with this section, it is interesting to add that Zen could also influence the way of speaking characteristic of underground. Wolfe himself relates it in one of his passages in which he describes the way of communicating that Kesey had with his companions, and that later the others imitated. In this passage, Wolfe compares this fact with the figure of Koan:

... Kesey's explicit teachings were all cryptic, metaphorical; parables, aforisms; "you're either on the bus or off the bus." "Feed the hungry bee," "nothing lasts," "see with your ears and hear with your eyes," "Put your good where it will do the most," "What did the mirror say? It's done with people." To that extent it was like Zen Buddhism, with the inscrutable koans, in which the novice says, "What is the secret of Zen?" and Hui-neng the master says, "What did your face look like before your parents begat you? (126).

Racionero explains about Koan: "Esta actitud desinteresada y fluida, impremeditada y alerta, la consigue el zen por medio de los ejercicios del koan y yoga. [...] El koan es un enigma, una paradoja irresoluble racionalmente por las reglas de la lógica" (86). These paradoxes that mark the limits of logic, like other poems or oriental writings, are of short duration and have a poetic language. This is why Wolfe compared Kesey's way of speaking to this type of oriental art in the previous quotation. Racionero explains in *Filosofías del Underground*: "La reticencia es característica en estética oriental: la obra de arte es abierta y pretende sugerir, cuando las palabras cesan continúa el significado, cuando los perfiles se difuminan se abre la atmósfera." (84)

Here ends the section dedicated to the analysis of Zen and its influence through Beat poets in the underground. The following section delves into other Eastern elements.

OPPOSITIONS

The underground studied some oriental philosophical concepts, such as the unification of opposites or reality in continuous change. As discussed in the second chapter, authors like Hesse have already explored these concepts through the characters in their novels. These could not be judged by Western values since the complexity of their behavior, derived from facing reality with all its infinite details, did not fit into the West's very restrictive moral norms. According to Racionero, these concepts are something that has differentiated us totally from the East for centuries: “Las formas de conocimiento alternativas, razón y yoga, quedaron sistematizadas por escrito, por primera vez, en el siglo V a. de J.C. en Platón y Patanjali” (90). These two aspects differ in their conception of reality. Eastern philosophers define reality as a continuous change, while Plato conceived it as something fixed, static; influencing the entire Western way of thinking ever since. As Racionero explains: “Contra el mundo en flujo, Platón estableció un estándar de realidad fijo: las ideas eternas e inmutables” (91). Yoga, therefore, would be a source of knowledge adapted to this idea of reality, trying to capture it not through the thought of Western rationalism itself, but through meditation, fixing attention on an object and freeing the mind from ideas:

Es preciso tener la valentía de soltar el ego y afrontar que sólo existe una realidad cambiando perpetuamente sus formas; sucesos sin fin fluyendo en la eternidad [...] El yoga pretende la acomodación de los sentidos al modo de ser o naturaleza de la mente, mientras que el racionalismo griego pretende acomodar la mente a la naturaleza de los sentidos, limitándola para explicar lo que se percibe por los sentidos. (91)

Wolfe describes in his work perfectly how Kesey and the members of his group share this idea of changing reality, thus rejecting the behavior proposed by American values. Therefore, as in Hesse's novels, it is very difficult to define and understand the behavior of Kesey and others. Wolfe reflects this masterfully by telling the contradictions that characterize them, but that give them a higher vision of reality. Take for example the political attitude they processed, explained in the previous chapter: On the one hand, they want to change society quickly through LSD, but, on the other hand, they do not want any revolution in the strict sense of the word. They reject the excessive consumerism typical of capitalism, but think that liberal democracy is the best system of all, because of the individual freedom it entails. Thus, they get closer to reality, avoiding taking too simple

and radical visions, as Racionero explains: “una de las reglas principales de la lógica racionalista; el dualismo occidental que ve opuestos donde hay polaridades” (93)

All-In-One

Another oriental concept reflected in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* is what Wolfe calls ‘All-in-One’. It is a conception of reality in which all living beings and inanimate beings are connected. As explained in the section on psychedelia, underground tried to develop this idea through the effects of LSD. Wolfe uses this element to compare Merry Pranksters with the East and with ancient religions:

In most cases, according to scriptures and legends, it happened in a flash. [...] What they all saw in ... a flash was the solution to the basic predicament of being human, the personal I, Me, trapped, mortal and helpless, in a vast impersonal it, the world around me. Suddenly! – All-in-one! – flowing together, I into It, and It into Me. (127).

This ‘All-in-One’ comes from the traditional Chinese philosophy of Taoism. As Racionero explains, in this tradition the universe is part of a harmoniously ordered whole:

El taoísmo es una filosofía que excluye el concepto de ley y lo sustituye por el de orden; este orden es como un ritmo armonizando una infinidad de ritmos menores”... “El concepto clave del pensamiento chino es Orden, y sobre todo, Estructura. Las cosas se un cierto modo, no necesariamente debido a acciones anteriores o impulsos de otras cosas, sino debido a que su posición en el universo cíclico, en perpetuo movimiento, les confiere una naturaleza intrínseca que les obliga a ese comportamiento. La naturaleza de una cosa depende de su posición: de ahí la importancia de la estructura. (96)

The underground welcomed this idea because they considered it necessary to fight against the errors of capitalism and the excessively rationalist way of thinking derived from this system. It may seem a contradiction that the underground pursues this unified vision of reality if we compare it with the individualistic attitude they possess, explained in the previous chapter. However, this contradiction is not such, since they wanted an individual change in people, which would influence personal relations and improve society. This idea of ‘All-in-One’ is a good example of this: changing individually the perception of reality, it is possible to achieve a more cohesive society. Racionero explains why the 1960s generation considered this philosophy important:

Este pensamiento organicista es necesario para extirpar las raíces filosóficas de nuestra crisis ecológica; raíces que consisten en las dualidades hombre-naturaleza, espíritu-materia, dios-creación, introducidas erróneamente por la tradición judeocristiana, y en la asimilación de lo vivo a una máquina, realizada por la reductiva ciencia mecanicista del siglo XVII. (101)

Psychedelia

It can be considered that the element that most characterized the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s is the use of LSD. This is the conclusion reached after reading Wolfe's work, since this substance is present continuously and is described from different points of view. In this section, we try to explain the references to this drug which are present in Wolfe's work: the use of this drug by some intellectuals like Kesey, as well as the effects that this substance produces in the mind of those who consume it, pointing out the existing similarities between these effects and the oriental philosophies, since as Racionero affirms about psychedelic experiences: “son experiencias místicas, siendo por tanto estas sustancias medios alternativos para producir el estado psicósomático alcanzado mediante contemplación, yoga y demás métodos tradicionales empleados por los místicos” (135). Finally, the dangers that the use of this type of substances entails will be analyzed.

LSD Experiments

As explained in the first chapter, Wolfe perfectly portrays the enormous impact that LSD had on the underground, as well as the role of Kesey, one of the pioneers in experimenting with this substance and in spreading the possibilities derived from its use. In this example, it can be observed how Wolfe is aware at all times of the importance of Kesey's discovery and the implications that this implied for the development of the mind, because very few people in the world at that time knew its effects, and he also compares it with Aldous Huxley, another writer and intellectual pioneer in this research: “this amazing experiment in consciousness was going on, out on a frontier neither they nor anybody else ever heard of before.” (53).

*All of us have a great deal of our minds locked shut. We're shut off from our own world. And these drugs seem to be the key to open these locked doors. How many? – maybe two dozen people in the world were on to these incredible secret! One was Aldous Huxley, who had taken mescaline and written about it in *The Doors of Perception*. (44).*

Although he does not specifically mention Kesey, Racionero agrees with Wolfe and also puts in value the experimentation carried out by some intellectuals, including Huxley: “La reacción depende de la categoría intelectual de las personas: si son del temple de Huxley [...] procuran, como corresponde a un intelectual, explorar los ámbitos ignotos

que se abren al cerebro al ingerir sustancias que los llevan a otros estados de percepción o poder” (144). It can be observed in the examples of Kesey and Huxley, who, as it happened with the oriental culture, experimented in a different way to the scientists and were interested in this new way of using the mind.

Wolfe describes the reflections of various members of the underground on perception, who, like Huxley, think that most people are locked to perceiving the reality that surrounds them. This example is a conversation that some LSD consumers have when observing a child:

He still experience the moment he lives in. The inevitable bullshit hasn't constipated his cerebral cortex yet. He still sees the world as it really is, while we seat here, left with only a dim historical version of it manufactured for us by words and official bullshit. (52)

With the use of psychedelic drugs (LSD, mescaline and some others), all these people tried to achieve a higher vision of reality, because, as discussed in the next section, the effects of these substances produce in the mind experiences similar to those proposed by Eastern philosophies.

LSD effects

Wolf makes a multitude of descriptions about the effects of LSD, focusing on physical and mental effects. In several occasions, the experience is negative, but in the majority of the times, it provides the one who consumes it a vision of the enormous complexity of reality. This example has been chosen in which compares the sensation provided by LSD with the feeling a baby has when he sees someone drawing for the first time:

can you remember when you were a child watching someone put a pencil to a sheet of paper for the first time to draw a picture... and the line begins to grow – into a nose! And it is not just a pattern of graphite line on a sheet of paper but the very miracle of creation itself. (45)

This description reflects the intensity of the experience and the feeling of understanding the totality of reality that this substance produces. However, Wolf provides much more information, delving into the originated mental consequences, and concludes that these are related to the philosophical concepts characteristic of the East. Here three examples are shown, comparing the fusion of opposites, the ‘All-in-One’ and the immediacy of Zen:

Under LSD, if it really went right, Ego and Non-Ego started to merge. Countless things that seemed separate started to merge, too: a sound became ... a colour! [...] all flowing together in this very moment. (140)

these certain indescribable feeling... indescribable, because words can only jog the memory, and if there is no memory of... The experience of the barrier between the subjective and the objective, the personal and the impersonal, the I and the not-I disappearing... that feeling! (45).

a ping-pong ball in a flood of sensory stimuli, all quite ordinary but, revealing themselves for the first time and happening... Now... as if for the first time [...] with each new discovery it is as if he has entered into all of it himself, is one with it. (41)

We can find these similarities in the work of Luis Racionero, who reaches the same conclusion as Wolfe in his own research, relating the same concepts to LSD as he did:

Hay tres vivencias en el viaje de ácido que corresponden a otros tantos conceptos perfectamente aceptados en la filosofía oriental: las experiencias de unidad, de cambio y de cesación del tiempo. La primera es una noción básica en el hinduismo, la segunda en el taoísmo y la tercera en el zen. (139)

Finally, it is important to remark that Wolf considered that Kesey and the Merry Pranksters used this drug from an intellectual point of view, comparing it with the use that other scholars such as Huxley made of it. They did not trivialize the dangers they faced, they were fully aware of them, but they assume them due to the commitment they had with their objective.

This concludes Wolf's analysis of his references to Eastern and Psychedelic philosophies, which are essential for an in-depth understanding of underground movement.

CONCLUSIONS

After the analysis of *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, it is possible to affirm that the work describes with great fidelity many of the elements that compose the complicated ideology of the underground. Added to the theoretical information provided by *Filosofías del Underground*, the following facts have been determined:

First, the striking relationship that existed between the counterculture of the 1960s and American postmodern literature. In chapter one, the role played by some writers in the origin, development and expansion of the movement has been highlighted: Ginsberg, Thompson, Wolfe himself, all of them around Kesey.

Secondly, it has been shown the importance that the Beat movement of the fifties had in the countercultural current of the following decade, bequeathing the knowledge they had about individualist theories and the study of the Orient, analyzed in chapters two and three.

Thirdly, the marked individualistic character that characterizes the underground has been analyzed, as the political position that supposed a conflict with other more traditional left ideologies close to communism, which valued much more the equality between people than the individual development. It has also shown how the ideas developed first by English Romantic authors such as Byron and Blake, and later by Hesse, had a decisive influence on ideology of the underground: the cult of the imagination and the predilection for marginal individuals, suspicious of the comfort provided by Western society, with an ambiguous morality adapted to the complexity of reality.

Finally, the third chapter highlights the importance of oriental cultures and their philosophies in the counterculture, from which they acquired philosophical concepts that were essential for the development of the mentality of their members. Concepts such as the fusion of opposites, the all-in-one or the perception of the present moment. In addition, the connection between these philosophical concepts and the experiences produced by LSD effects has been demonstrated. This is why, as Wolfe shows in his work, this substance was the trigger for an entire generation, following the pioneering footsteps of intellectual writers like Kesey and Huxley before him, set out to experiment with the limits of human consciousness.

It is also convenient to emphasize the possible usefulness that these ideas developed by the underground could have nowadays, as a basis for developing an alternative to the capitalist consumerism prevailing in the West. Learning from the mistakes they made such as the dangerous continued experimentation with psychoactive substances, many of the elements could lead to greater intellectual development at the individual level and a more harmonious conception of society. Otherwise, at least, it is fair to value positively the attempt that an entire generation of young people made in those years.

To conclude, it is important to point out that this work could serve as a starting point for developing other research. It would be interesting to study Wolfe's work from a literary point of view, analyzing how the main characteristic of New Journalism, a genre that the author helped to develop, helped to narrate in such an effective way the current of thoughts of the protagonists, by eliminating an objective position of the narrator regarding the story. In addition, as mentioned above, it would be of interest to delve into how American literature portrayed this countercultural movement by studying the works of other authors such as Hunter S. Thompson and Norman Mailer.

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