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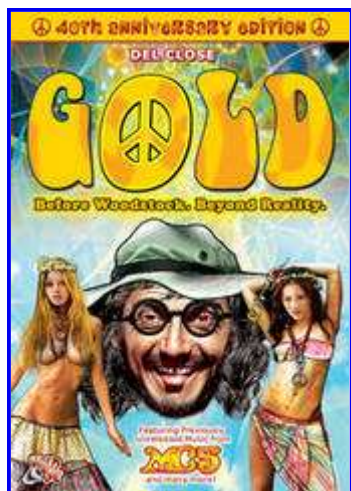
# Art House Beat: A Hippie Relic is Unearthed & Daniel Ellsberg Revisits the Pentagon Papers

By [Bill White](#)

Post Globe Film Critic

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Connoisseurs of the weird, epicureans of the flesh, and archeologists of hippie lore will find

infinite delights in this lost treasure from 1968. **Gold: Before Woodstock, Beyond Reality (Grand Illusion, March 12-18)**

Forget about “Easy Rider,” “Psych-Out,” and “Beyond the Valley of the Dolls.” For an authentic dose of psychedelic sunshine, accept nothing less than the marvelously incoherent “Gold: Before Woodstock. Beyond Reality.” Connoisseurs of the weird, epicureans of the flesh, and archeologists of hippie lore will find infinite delights in this lost treasure from 1968. Others may see nothing but a trainload of naked freaks set loose in a forest where a handful of part-time television actors, dressed as politicians, discuss issues of public morality.

The sex scenes, which run the gamut from innocent skinny-dipping to Calabanish group gropes in the mud, must have been the primary marketing lure of the film when it was finally released in London in 1972, but its more tingling pleasures are the anthropological images of hippies in their natural habitat set to hitherto unreleased music by artists that include the MC5 and David McWilliams. The screenplay which is mostly gibberish, has a few choice lines such as “The kind of politician this town needs is a man who does nothing,” which perfectly expresses the drop-out philosophy of non-action which might also extend to directors Bob Levis and Bill Desloge’s non-involvement with dramatic sense and logic. Unlike the handful of other films that might be akin to “Gold,” such as Norman Mailer’s “Maidstone,” Jim Morrison’s “Highway,” and Robert Downey’s “Greaser’s Palace,” there is no guiding intelligence behind these amateur cameras.

Not that it is all chaotic wonderment. Some sequences do have a hint of narrative ambition. At one point, the mayor is murdered after going nutso and running naked. Later, the ghost of this martyred nudist searches the town for a successor. What happens next, though, is anybody’s guess, as the film spins out into spats of Guerilla Theater and topless dancing. The final reel is as close as American film has come to the freewheeling radicalism of Jean Luc Godard’s “Weekend.” Had it been seen by anybody, perhaps the film might have brought about the “death of cinema” that Godard so desperately craved.

**The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers. (Varsity, March 12-18)**

There was a moment midway through “The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers,” that brought tears to my eyes. Nixon had succeeded in getting a supreme court injunction to prevent the New York Times, and later the Washington Post, from publishing the top secret documents leaked to them by Daniel Ellsberg, when several national newspapers joined in the battle for a free media.

Their solidarity with the Times and Post resulted in the courts allowing the papers to be published. As these newspapers from different American cities piled high on top of each other, I imagined what might have happened to the country in 1971 had those newspapers not existed. What if there had been no media to bring people the truth about Vietnam? Worse yet, what will happen in the near future when journalists are as antiquated as blacksmiths?

If I get sentimental about newspapers, it is because they are the one industry that still have something of the old wild America about them. When they are gone, it will seem like a quieter world, but only because we have stopped listening to the screaming. Ellsberg was a marine, later a military strategist, who had the guts to take responsibility for the war casualties in Vietnam. When a friend mentioned that the best thing for a young American to do was go to prison, it cut his life into two parts like a hatchet through his skull and he threw away the worse half. Following his better nature got him branded a traitor and put him at the top of Richard Nixon's list of enemies.

Ellsberg himself narrates "The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers," giving it an intimate confessional tone. It makes an ideal companion piece to "The Fog of War," which was centered on director Errol Morris' interviews with U.S Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. At least as important as the coming to light of suppressed documents are these meetings with the men who are still alive to clarify the history they have made.

For a hilarious example of how badly Hollywood transforms historical profiles into mundane drama, see "The Most Dangerous Man in America," then rent the 2003 made for television movie of "The Pentagon Papers" with James Spader as Ellsberg.

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Ellsberg

I realize it was a Hollywood dramatization, but I love "The Pentagon Papers". It was lightyears better than most made for TV movies and it did capture the essence of Ellsberg and the time period. Some liberties were taken (as they almost always are to transform reality into condensed form), but it definitely was pro-Ellsberg...a man to be admired. James Spader did a wonderful job portraying this complex individual.

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RE: Ellsberg

you have no argument from me on these points, but see the documentary and then watch the television movie again. you may agree that a dramatization can't come close to the real thing.

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