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GOLD: Before Woodstock, Beyond Reality

Dir. Bob Levis and Bill Deslodge

[Wild Eye, 1968]
by BENJAMIN PEARSON

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STYLES: nude, western, experimental, masturbatory
OTHERS: Woodstock

LINKS: [GOLD: Before Woodstock, Beyond Reality - Wild Eye](#)

In the late 60s, director Bob Levis got his hands on some equipment and led a bunch of counterculture people into the woods for a month of sex, drugs, and to a lesser extent, improvisational filmmaking. The film that emerged from this exercise, *GOLD*, tells the story of a bunch of counterculture people also living in the woods who also happen to enjoy sex and drugs (and not much else), pitting them against a prudish lawman and a crooked politician. With a biography and a plot that run so parallel, it's easy to see why the film, recently released on video for the first time, is being marketed as a hippie artifact as much as a work of cinema. And it's a smart move: as a document of hippie culture released (as the newly-added secondary title reminds us) a year before that one other hippie thing called Woodstock, *GOLD* actually holds some interest. As a film, not so much.

GOLD begins with a slideshow of images capturing the era's human rights causes, from Martin Luther King, Jr. to the Vietnam War, but don't let that fool you. The film is interested in fighting the man, sure, but only enough to ensure that white dudes can keep smoking weed and that (young) women are liberated enough to flash their tits and put out to said white dudes, but not liberated enough to have even a single sentence of dialogue between them.

The local law enforcement, Captain Harold Jinks (Garry Goodrow), doesn't approve of T&A, and makes it his mission to rid the town of it by shooting his junk-bearing friend Verbal Talkingham (Sam Ridge) and then placing all flesh-bearing hippies inside a barbed wire prison that looks almost exactly like a concentration camp. In this lazily-constructed allegory, nudity laws and mass murder are simply different branches on the same tree of oppression.

Fortunately, the film's hero/peeping Tom/hermit Hawk (Del Close), despite preferring modesty himself, gets a hold of a bulldozer and frees everyone's junk. With captives freed, Captain Jinks realizes his cause is lost and jumps into a pond with the rest of the naked people. War is over, if you want it. It's easy.

Improvisation is all about the ability of meandering, captivating details to stand on their own, not about any kind of message, so it makes sense that *GOLD*'s improvised *big, important message* fails. But despite starring the creator of modern improvisational comedy Del Close, the details don't fare much better. Dialogue serves only to further the plot, not to entertain. Camerawork apes mainstream cinema. The acting's bad, but lacking the artless charisma that can make bad acting so appealing. For an improvised film fueled by drugs, *GOLD* has surprisingly few inspired or even truly weird moments. It's as if instead of harnessing the creativity of their drug-addled minds, the filmmakers simply enjoyed their highs and confined shooting to their moments of hungover sobriety.

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TMT Cerberus 16: Mouthful of Marbles

Outside Lands 2010: "Will you go to prom with me, San Fran-muthagrubb'n'cisco?"

Newport Folk Festival 2010: "Folk music is intimate. The NFF was not."

Lollapalooza 2010: "I was carried to Ohio in a swarm of bees."



The Flaming Lips to perform *The Soft Bulletin* in its entirety!!!!

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Dirty Projectors release two-disc version of *Bitte Orca*, tour US to find the Great Tree and defeat the Pure Ones

Lightning Bolt and Dan Deacon announce joint tour of venue floors across North America

Can a song be interesting with only one chord? "Power-ambient" band Chord seem to think so, and they'll sell you an album that proves it

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Jim Jarmusch sets his lens on Iggy Pop's old, writhing body

Brian Eno announces more details about his forthcoming Warp debut, *Small Craft on a Milk Sea*

No, but seriously, folks: Liars announce new EP, *Proud Evolution*

of Montreal fulfills prophecy by releasing new EP, *The Controller Sphere*



"Where in life we do everything we can to avoid anxiety, in art we must pursue it." - Morton Feldman



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