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The Counterculture of the 1960s in the United States: An "Alternative Consciousness"?

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**Nom : KIDARI
Prénom : Mélisa**

UFR ETUDES ANGLOPHONES

Mémoire de master **1 professionnel** - 12 crédits

Spécialité ou Parcours : **parcours PLC**

Sous la direction de **Andrew CORNELL**

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Introduction

A decade after the end of WWII, in the United States, some young Americans came to hate what their country had become. The materialist American society was for them a denial of the American Dream in which they believed. They were the Beat Generation, poets and writers like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. They praised the early American theme of big spaces and of the exploration of American territories. Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) is a hymn to individual freedom and exploration. It was about freeing oneself from the social roles which actually stifled the worth of people. They felt the materialistic vision of life praised by the rising media industries in the United States had created a life far too rigid and based on appearances only, with no regard to human heart, sensitivity and beauty. The Beats of the 1950s wanted to change the culture. They never acted on the political plain. Their favorite battle-field was art. They wrote poems and novels praising their vision of a life based on absolute freedom.¹

The Beats directly influenced the hippies of the next generation and the movement called the "counterculture". One of the Beats' most important references was Henry David Thoreau's *Walden or Life in the Woods*. Thoreau was a transcendentalist praising life in accordance with basic human needs and capacities, and absolute freedom. It became an inspiration for the hippies too. Kerouac and his Beat friends turned to Buddhism to feed their vision of absolute inner freedom. The counterculture followed this path too. The use of drugs, especially marijuana, was strongly praised by the Beats. Hippies also often used marijuana and acid.²

The themes and practices of the Beats and those of the Hippies were so close it can seem weird that historians distinguished between them. Actually, the first difference between the Beats of the 1950s and the hippies of the 1960s is that the latter were far more numerous. Indeed, the counterculture was such a large movement that it deeply changed the American society forever. Therefore, the counterculture owes a lot to the previous "Beat Generation", but while the Beats were a restrictive group of mostly writers, the counterculture spread to thousands of young people, mostly from the middle classes, and shook the United States and the world like no other youth movement before. Moreover, the

¹ Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 35.

² Allen Ginsberg, *Collected poems*, (New York : Harper Perennial, 1988).

counterculture went further than the Beats. For the counterculture youth it was less about outer exploration than inner exploration. Robert Alpert, a former Harvard professor who became a spiritual teacher, asked:

What was the sense of doing external journeying when obviously what Timothy [Leary] had been looking for was inside his own head?³

If there is a word which has to be repeated over and over in an analysis of the cultural storm that was the counterculture, it is the word "ideal". The counterculture people were idealist dreamers who thought that if you believe in something you should just do it. However, the authors of *Present Tense: The United States since 1945* affirm that

Relieved of the burden of financial worry by the growing American economy of the 1960s, the baby-boomers looked to expand the boundaries of peace, justice, and spirituality, as part of their quest for an ever-better good time.

By the mid-1960s, psychologists and sociologists had documented a growing alienation among America's young. Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd*, Kenneth Keniston's *The Uncommitted*, and Philip Slater's *The Pursuit of Loneliness* depicted a generation at loose ends, disconnected from meaningful relations with other people, and lacking a sense of social purpose. Social critics and therapists alike wondered where this vast, free-floating constituency might end up. They wondered whether it would drag society down with its lethargy, lose itself in narcissism, or find something meaningful to do.

If even the children of privilege felt distant from the American dream, others had more reason to feel disaffected...⁴

Schaller, Scharff and Schulzinger interpret the counterculture as a reaction of spoiled children looking to add fun to their boring comfortable lives. This way of looking at the counterculture is widespread. Two points of view can be exposed: was the counterculture a quest for meaning in life beyond material comfort? Or was it really a capricious immature fad? Though a significant part of the counterculture was about hanging out high with no other purpose, it also gave birth to some important achievements. The counterculture is often reduced to the alienation of a lost generation, even by respected historians. My point here is to argue that it was much more than that.

³ Ram Dass, "Journey: The Transformation: Dr Richard Alpert, Ph D. into Baba Ram Dass", in *Be Here Now*, ed. Ram Dass (New-York: The Crown Publishing Group, 1978).

⁴ Michael Schaller, Robert D. Schilzinger and Virginia Scharff, *Present tense. The United States since 1945* (Boston : Toronto [et al...] : Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 297.

The understanding of the counterculture claims as the reaction of spoiled children is, I think, linked to the apprehension of it as an "alternative consciousness". David Ferber, in his essay "The Intoxicated State/Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture", describes drug use in the countercultural San Francisco neighborhood of Haight-Ashbury:

By becoming drug dealers these advocates of alternative consciousness took another step toward breaking free of the rules and constraints demanded by what was then called "straight" society.⁵

Did the hippies praise an "alternative consciousness"? In this memoir I will argue that they did not. The first chapter will examine the post-WWII US context, the compost in which the counterculture grew. I will explore the political, economic and social reasons why people from comfortable social milieu came to rebel in the most extreme ways against their parents' ways of living and values. The second chapter will be an investigation of the counterculture's values and models, of what they were looking for, which tools they used to achieve these goals. I will suggest what made it a movement, instead of different practices vaguely related to one another. A third part will be dedicated to understanding the traditions underpinning the countercultural worldview - especially the previous "openings" brought by Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung and by the transcendentalist Thoreau. This part will also aim at analyzing the counterculture understanding of Eastern philosophies, which, in turn, will lead us to understand that the new comprehension of the world defended by the counterculture was not for them an "alternative consciousness". Indeed, I will argue that the young counterculturists were defending *consciousness* itself, in opposition to *unconsciousness* which, according to them, governed the world during the 1960s and early 1970s.

⁵ David Farber, "The Intoxicated State/ Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture", in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 33.

Part 1

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Post-War American Politics and Culture

"The sixties began with a shot". This is the first sentence of *When you're Strange*, Tom Dicillo's 2010 documentary on The Doors, one of the most famous rock bands of the 1960s.⁶ It evokes President John F. Kennedy's murder. Indeed, despite the prosperous economic situation of the United States, in the decades following WWII the country was being shaken in every way.

The United States in the 1960s was economically prosperous. Youth from the middle class had growing purchasing power and the industries of entertainment were flourishing. The prosperity brought by WWII to the country also allowed it to spend much money in wars aimed at expanding its power over the world and its growing economy by exploiting the resources of other countries. A few examples of that are given in this part: Japan, Cuba and Vietnam. This latter conflict played a significant role in United States history. It raised a colossal antiwar movement, so widespread that everyone had to have an opinion on it: either for or against the Vietnam War.⁷ This battle field fueled the new political protest. It was new because it broke free from anticommunism; the focus was on liberty for all people to choose their government. For the young political activists of the 1960s, the US should not intervene in a country where the leader had been democratically chosen, even if that leader was a communist. Within the opposition movement everyone agreed upon this. But disagreement about the way to fight the imperialist United States government eventually led to a fundamental break within the movement. On one side were political activists of the "New Left", on the other were "hippies" fighting against the whole hegemonic thinking of the country. I will further explain this division in this first part.

During the 1960s the United States was also divided on the racial level. The Civil Rights Movement was at his climax, itself divided between peaceful and violent methods for the same aim: ending racial segregation. The protests against segregation were influential on the campuses. White students witnessed them and were not as racist as their parents. The fight against racism aligned with the counterculture praise of universal "peace and love". Indeed, the protestation at the time was on every level of the United States: foreign policy, racial issues, political activism and cultural patterns. But the latter was definitely the motivation for many young from the middle class to abandon what they saw as a rotten society and find ways to live according to their own ideals: peace, absolute

⁶ *When you're strange*, directed by Tom Dicillo (New-York: Wolf Film/ Strange Pictures, 2010), DVD.

⁷ Maurice Isserman, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 67.

freedom, opening of consciousness. And so, the "American way of life" of the 1960s was what the counterculture was most angry about. This part will aim at describing it too.

With those elements we can then understand the soil in which the protest movement called the counterculture grew and why it happened at this specific period of the American history.

Chapter 1 – Foreign Policy: American Imperialism and the Media

WWII had been the occasion for the US to sell huge numbers of weapons to European countries. This considerably boosted the economy of the country. Moreover, the war had required loans from the US to Europe -- for example, Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister had asked for and obtained a multi-billion dollar emergency loan -- which gave the U.S. influence over these countries' economical and political decisions.⁸ Consequently, after the war successive presidents expressively intended to extend this new dominant position, through aggressive military actions when necessary. Here are a few examples:

- In 1945 the US victory over Japan after the dropping of two atomic bombs enable it to annex Japan islands which gave it a strategic position in the Pacific "to protect American access to raw materials, to deter foreign aggression, and, if that failed, to intercept and counterattack aggressors."⁹
- In 1959 in Cuba, Fidel Castro had organized a successful coup against Fulgencio Batista, the dictator settled by the United States in 1952. In April 17, 1961, soldiers secretly trained by the CIA during President Eisenhower's presidency (1953-1961) attacked Cuba on the Bay of Pigs hoping to overthrow Castro's Government. It failed because the people were supportive of Castro.¹⁰
- From 1964 to 1972 the US intervened in Vietnam in order to prevent the country from self-ruling, to impose its capitalist laws, and to control the material and human resources of the country.¹¹

Non-capitalist countries were a threat to American financial interests. The "domino theory", which developed at the time, implied that if one of the countries liberated from Nazis fell under the communist domination it would open the doors for others and communism could eventually spread in the whole world.¹² That is the reason why the US was spreading its net over the world -- to crush at the basis any possibility for communism

⁸ *Present Tense*, 53.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present*, (New-York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 439.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 469.

¹² *Ibid.*, 471. *The Movement and the Sixties*, 7.

to expand. In the mass media communism was presented as the worst evil in the world and the Red Scare was spreading throughout the country. As the authors of *Present Tense: The United States from 1945* say:

Fueled by legitimate worries about the Soviet Union as well as by political opportunism, the Red Scare distorted national politics from the end of the Second World War well into the 1950s.

Communism had been linguistically constructed in the press as a big threat and when the United States wanted to fight a country for its resources, it played on anti-communism.¹³ This construction was reinforced by an intentionally created analogy between Stalin's authoritarianism and other types of governments, either socialist or communist, chosen by the people and aiming at real equality and well-being for the inhabitants of the country. In the case of Cuba, what actually bothered the United States' government was the fact that Castro worked to give land to poor peasants, which made the United Fruit Company lose a million acres. This, with other losses for the United States due to the socialist program of Castro, led to the attack of 1961.¹⁴

About the Vietnam War, a United States Defense Department study stated that

for a few weeks in September, 1945, Vietnam was - for the first and only time in its modern history - free of foreign domination, and united from north to south under Ho Chi Minh...¹⁵

Despite this, the war was presented in the medias the same way as the Cuban war: the United States came to rescue a people from a terrible communist dictator, when actually the United States government was completely aware that it was the most democratic government the country had ever had. Its intervention in Vietnam was much more linked to political and economical interests as explicitly stated in a congressional report of 1953:

The area of Indochina is immensely wealthy in rice, rubber, coal and iron ore. Its position makes it a strategic key to the rest of Southeast Asia.¹⁶

Eventually many young people in the United States came to realize that they could not trust the mainstream information as it was cautiously screened by the Government in order to hide its real motives from the people, get its support and prevent eventual

¹³ Noam Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, (London : Pluto Press, 1989), 182. *The Movement and the Sixties*, 7-8, 13.

¹⁴ *People's History*, 339-440. *America Divided*, 10.

¹⁵ *People's History*, 470.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 472.

protestation.¹⁷ Moreover, the Red Scare was also interesting for the government because it captured people's attention, preventing them from looking elsewhere, for example at the US imperialist attacks and cruel methods on defenseless people.¹⁸

The examples given here represent only an insignificant part of the US' aggressive actions around the world in the decades following the Second World War. Indeed, after WWII the supremacy of the US in the world, though contested by communist and socialist governments, seemed on the way to be complete, with the use of military and financial pressure. I mention here the examples provided by the Cuban and Vietnam wars in order to illustrate the both oppressive and hypocritical atmosphere that eventually came to stifle the young generation of the 1960s while their elders predominantly continued to trust the Government.¹⁹ This realization of the governmental institution's hypocrisy by the young generation eventually led to much deeper questions about the very basis of the American values. Moreover, the United States was facing injustices at home too.

¹⁷ *Present Tense*, 303.

¹⁸ *Necessary Illusions*, 183.

¹⁹ *The Movement and the Sixties*, 14.

Chapter 2 – Racial Issues: The Civil Rights Movement

Almost two hundred years after the abolition of slavery, aggressions from white people against African-Americans on the only basis of race were a daily theme in the United States. In the South this trend was at its climax. White racist aggressors were protected by the police, who were nearly all white and as racist as themselves. Moreover, as Schaller, Scharf and Schulzinger say in *Present Tense. The United States Since 1945*, "again and again, FBI and Justice Department officials stood by while demonstrators were beaten and illegally jailed".²⁰ The protest against segregation was not new in the 1960s - The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was active since 1909, and the Urban League, another influential civil rights organization, since 1910. But the 1960s were a turning point in the battle for African-American rights, with organizations more recently created: the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960. Students played an important role in the movement. In February 1960 a student initiative brought national attention to the white Woolworth's department store, North Carolina. Four students from the nearby black college in Greensboro came to sit down at the white cafeteria and refused to leave when asking for it. The cafeteria closed for the day. They repeated the same action day after day, joined by other Black students. The event inspired similar actions in fifteen colleges in southern states in the weeks that followed and even more as the months passed. The black students faced much violence but eventually desegregated lunch counters in Greensboro and many other places.²¹

The early 1960s also saw the emergence of the charismatic Martin Luther King, Jr. with his famous speech "I Have a Dream" in 1963 on Washington. He gave to the Civil Rights Movement a strong leader able to convince a great number of people, blacks and whites.²² King was influenced by Gandhi, the political leader for the independence of India, and applied the same non-violent philosophy and methods. Under his leadership, the protest took the shape of peaceful demonstrations, sit-ins and boycotts. The United States' government felt strongly endangered by King as proven by constant attempts by the FBI to

²⁰ *Present Tense*, 298.

²¹ *People's History*, 452-453.

²² *Present Tense*, 298. *People's History*, 452.

"destroy" him.²³ His killing in 1968 in Memphis, by a white segregationist, exasperated many black people and riots led to the murder of thirty-five of them.²⁴

The killings of blacks and the constant aggression against them created overwhelming anger among many African-Americans.²⁵ Another tendency of the movement was critical of King's peaceful methods and encouraged much more radical ones. Malcolm X, with his oratory talent and calls for violence became one of the most influential activists of the time. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was created in the middle of the decade to defend the use of violence to protect African-Americans from white injustices.²⁶ Both Malcolm X and Black Panther leader Fred Hampton were assassinated, in 1965 and 1969 respectively. Malcolm X's murder is still unknown today, though the killing had occurred in public.²⁷ Newton was assassinated by the Chicago Police and later released evidences proved the infiltration of the Black Panthers by the FBI.²⁸

Despite huge white resistance to the desegregation of the country, the Civil Rights Movement did lead to some achievements.²⁹ One of the major demand of the civil rights movement was the implementation of African-Americans' right to vote given to them by the 15th Amendment in 1870. After this, many states, particularly in the South, had barred the access to vote to large proportions of African-Americans mostly with the use of comprehension and literary test.³⁰ In 1965, the Congress passed the Voting Rights Act which forbade those practices and actually gave African-Americans the possibility to exercise their right to vote. In Dallas, for example, before the Voting Rights Act, only 383 African-American of voting age, out of 15, 000, were registered to vote. After the enactment of the Act, this number reached 8000.³¹ But, indeed, as proven by the constant murders of black militants, the resistance to equality between Blacks and Whites in the US stayed very strong despite the concessions made by the government. Howard Zinn

²³ *People's History*, 463.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 462.

²⁵ *The Movement and the Sixties*, 29.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 152.

²⁷ *People's History*, 461.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 463.

²⁹ *The Movement and the Sixties*, 30.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

³¹ Evelyn Elayne, "Voting Rights Act Section 2: Racially Polarized Voting and the Minority Community's Representative of Choice", in *Michigan Law Review* 89 (1991): 1038.

explained the United States' government behavior in his work *A People History of the United States*:

The government in all the years of the civil rights movement, while making concessions through Congress, was acting through the FBI to harass and break up black militant groups. Between 1956 and 1971 the FBI concluded a massive Counterintelligence Program (known as COINTELPRO) that took 295 actions against black groups.³²

In this agitated context the traditional ways of fighting governmental decisions saw a significant change. In the following chapter, I am going to explore the emergence of the New Left and the shift from a political to a cultural focus on the part of the some protestors.

³² *People's History*, 463.

Chapter 3 – National Politics: The New Left

American's imperialist enterprises abroad and inequalities at home made whites, particularly students, also become involved in the civil rights movement. This commitment against inequality would then lead them to fight for causes which concerned them more directly. Student for a Democratic Society (SDS) was the most influential and famous "New Left" organization. It came from the League for Industrial Democracy (LID), an anticommunist organization created in 1905. From LID was born the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID) in the 1930s, which became the SDS in 1960. Conflicts between the LID and the SDS about members suspected to have allegiances with communists led to the rejection of the SDS members by the LID leaders. As a consequence the SDS became independent and freed itself from the ancient anticommunist and liberal left. The shift from LID to SDS illustrates very well the birth of the "New Left", distinguished from the "Old Left" of the previous decades. Indeed, until the end of the 1950s, unionism and anticommunist hysteria had characterized most of the organizations working for democracy - either liberal, socialist or others - in the US. For the young generation of the 1960s, this fear of communism was ancient history. Now that they had freed themselves from this eater of attention they could look at the United States' real problems.

The New Left focused on participatory democracy, social equality and peace. The SDS famous Port Huron Statement, written in a meeting of the organization in 1961 by its president Tom Hayden, declared that "America should concentrate on its genuine social priorities: abolish squalor, terminate neglect, and establish an environment for people to live in with dignity and creativeness".³³ Students were influenced by prominent figures of the New Left such as the radical sociologist C. Wright Mills and the political theorist Herbert Marcuse.³⁴ Mills insisted on the close link between political and economical power as the basis of the social inequalities in the US.³⁵ Though Marcuse was not an activist he joined this same idea too and because of the influence of his writings he is often referred to on the subject of the student movement of the 1960s. Marcuse, like Mills and many other sociologists and theorists of the time, strongly stood against the Vietnam War. They were

³³ *Present Tense*, 304.

³⁴ *The Movement and the Sixties*, 37.

³⁵ C. Wright Mills, "L'élite au pouvoir", foreword to *L'ordre des choses*, by François Denord (Marseille: Agone, 2012).

part of what Howard Zinn called "the greatest antiwar movement the nation had ever experienced".³⁶ College students were the core of this protest which, still in Zinn's words, "played a critical part in bringing the war to an end".³⁷

The commitment of students against the war was partly due to the draft, which obliged young American men to fight and risk getting killed in Vietnam. They protested against military recruitment offices on campuses and demonstrated in front of Reserve Officers Training Program (ROTC).³⁸ Women, like men, protested against the war. One of the techniques used by some women was "Girls say yes to guys who say no", promising to have sex with men who refused to draft.³⁹ The march on the Pentagon, on October 21, 1967, after five days of antiwar actions, involving twenty thousand people, was primarily constituted of students.⁴⁰ However, the antiwar movement was a national one. Howard Zinn stated that it "was part of a general change in the entire population of the country". He provides revealing figures: "In August of 1965, 61 percent of the population thought the American involvement in Vietnam was not wrong. By May 1971 it was exactly reversed; 61 percent thought our involvement *was* wrong".⁴¹

But under the same banners were very different groups which separated more and more as the 1960s went on. The civil rights agitations, added to the antiwar ones, had embedded in the spirit of many young Americans the necessity of the protest for a better life. During the 1960s, young middle-class Americans turned to their own domestic American life and found many problems. To solve them, while the New Left was targeting the government, fighting in the political area, more and more young people turned in another direction. Influenced by philosophies from the East, especially Buddhism, they directly applied their ideals instead of waiting for the government to allow them to do so. Their tools were exclusively cultural. They "dropped out" of the mainstream society and adopted life styles whose only rules were to be free and have fun. Drugs were the tool to deschool their mind, open their perceptions, and live a life of transcendental feelings. The Beatles' song "Revolution" illustrates the fundamental break that occurred within the opposition of the 1960s:

³⁶ *People's History*, 469.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 469.

³⁸ *Present Tense*, 305-6. *People's History*, 491.

³⁹ *Present Tense*, 305.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁴¹ *People's History*, 469.

[...]

We're doing what we can

But when you want money

For people with minds that hate

All I can tell is brother you have to wait

Don't you know it's gonna be all right

All right, all right

[...]

You say you'll change the constitution

Well, you know

We all want to change your head

You tell me it's the institution

Well, you know

You better free you mind instead⁴²

It was political activism versus opening of consciousness. The latter constituted what was called the *counterculture*. But what did they want to end precisely? What did they reject in the "American way of life" of the 1960s? This is what I am going to answer in the next chapter.

⁴² The Beatles, *Revolution*, (EMI, 1968).

Chapter 4 – Cultural Field: The "American Way of Life" of the 1960s

In his work "Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse", published in 1973, Stuart Hall defines hegemony as follows: "(a) that it defines within its terms the mental horizon, the universe of possible meaning, of a whole sector of relations in a society or culture; and (b) that it carries with it the stamp of legitimacy - it appears coterminous with what is "natural", "inevitable", "taken for granted", about the social order". This was exactly the understanding of the counterculture people about the "American way of life", that it was a restrictive vision of life which strictly forbade any investigation out from it. The American hegemonic system insisted that happiness was about possessing goods.

The wealth brought to the country by the Second World War had made the middle-class bigger and richer. They now had access to all kinds of consumer goods. Moreover, although the war had forced women to do jobs traditionally reserved to men, when it was over the country saw a vivid revival of the "cult of domesticity".⁴³ Women came back to the house and became again the faithful and ever supportive good wives. Their roles inside the family and in society were more precisely defined than ever before: there were fashion codes, behavior codes for each situation and they were not allowed to get out from them. In this post-war era a surprisingly large number of white middle-class people left the towns for the suburbs.⁴⁴ This exodus added to the massive production and consumption culture and led to the creation of a rigid stereotype of what life must be for "good people" of the American middle-class. Advertising and television programs participated in the defense of this hegemony by often representing the perfect suburban house with the good housewife within, making cakes and taking care of the children with all her household appliances, while her husband is outside working in a bureaucracy, making money for the family.⁴⁵ This was presented as the perfect happiness. The consequence of this perception of life was that the American middle-class raised young people who missed nothing about material comfort but were obliged to live through pre-determined roles. Among the young, a feeling was growing that this was not enough. Little by little, young Americans came to realize that having every possible physical comfort while possessing no liberty, no choice in the way they wanted to live their life, and

⁴³ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (London: Penguin Books, 1963), 14-15.

⁴⁴ Paul Monaco, *The sixties: 1960-1969*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 42.

⁴⁵ *The Movement and the Sixties*, 16, 20-21.

constantly having to pretend in society did not make them happy and satisfied people. It was actually stifling them. Although more contemporary, the story of Christopher McCandless, alias Supertramp, told in the movie *Into the Wild* offers a good representation of the apparent well-being which could exist in white suburban families when so much anger, frustration and suffering actually inhabits its members.

The Beatnik generation - with its emblematic writer and traveler Jack Kerouac - had already introduced important questions about individual freedom. Now the more and more repressive "American way of life" made things explode. Meanwhile the Vietnam War helped gather people against oppression. Young middle-class people came to sympathize with the oppressed Vietnamese. And in the Cold War context they looked for some warmth in human interactions, which, to their eyes, had become so cold and false in the consumer society.

An interesting question here would be: Why did the successive governments in the US so eagerly defend this cultural model, which was based on the nuclear family? The Gay Liberation Front Manifesto offers an interesting answer to this question. It states that "gay liberation [would] not just mean reforms. It [would] mean a revolutionary change in our whole society" and that "the present system of work and production depends on the existence of the patriarchal family".⁴⁶ Therefore, any modification (due to homosexuality or not) to the cultural basis of society, that is the nuclear family, would endanger the economic structures and would risk raising more and more fundamental questions about the American hegemonic thinking. Indeed, the nuclear family and the culture of materialism as the source of happiness were a manipulation of the people which had two aims: firstly, to keep the industry going by creating workers and buyers; secondly, to prevent people from fully comprehending the capitalist system, which could lead to massive rebellion. This is actually what happened in the 1960s, though not everyone rebelled.

The protest came in large part from the young generation of the middle class, which became totally opposed to capitalist propaganda. They came to realize that the US military strategies abroad and policies at home had only one aim: finance. And they thought that their leaders would not stop killing or injuring people, physically and psychologically, at home and abroad, until they are forced to do so by losing the support of

⁴⁶ Gay Liberation Front: *Manifesto*, (London: Gay Liberation Information Service, 1979).

the masses. Politically and culturally, with the development of forms of mass media, the country spread its principles all over the world as the only one possible. But, as William Blake said, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is- infinite." The counterculture would be based on the belief that changing first the culture, that is to say the habits and ways of thinking of people, would automatically change political behaviors in the same direction. The youth movement of the 1960s would aim to extend the "possible" to the maximum: infinite. This means, on the one hand, that they would not tolerate any banning from anyone; on the other hand, it means that they would intend to expand their mind at the infinite (notably through the use of drugs).

As this analysis of the social and political context shows, the counterculture rebellion was born in the heart of a conservative society. However, as proven by the New Left, even those who did not embrace the counterculture path participated in the break from their elders concerns and points of view. The youth elation that created the counterculture was born from the political and domestic excesses of the society they wanted to change. The post-WWII period, the Cold War atmosphere, the Civil Rights fights and the Vietnam War launched something which could not have happened in another time in the US history. Indeed, though young conservatives were still numerous in the 1960s, it seems that the break in the apprehension of the world in the mass consciousness was inevitable. And so, many, such as the New Left activists, encouraged an alternative consciousness. They wanted to build the world on the values of peace and equality, they fought within the capitalist system, to better the institutions. The counterculture, however wished to leave this system. The fact that the counterculture youth wanted to end the institutions instead of ameliorate them can be seen as parallel to their vision of opening consciousness. Indeed, what they wanted was to annihilate the mental frame that governed life in the US and live in the now, in harmony with their body's needs, desire, and with nature. They did not want to change the frame created by dominant institutions but to remove it. They did not want to create a new government with a new hegemony but to get free from any government and hegemony. (I will return to this anarchist trend of the counterculture in the third part). In that sense, they created a new way of protesting. The protest, in their point of view, was not seen as an "alternative consciousness". They went further than that. I am going to analyze this in detail in the second part, dedicated to the counterculture essence.

Part 2

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The Countercultural Essence: "Sex, Drugs & Rock'n'roll"

This second part, about the counterculture's essential beliefs and achievements will be built around an analysis the famous slogan: "Sex, drugs and rock'n'roll". Though, in a way it describes their focus, it hides more than it can seem at first. About sex, the counterculture called for "sexual liberation", which was a total revolution for the entire country and abroad, though I will demonstrate, the liberation, was not, in the first place, for women. The use of drugs was based on a strong and deep spiritual message, not on the simple aim to "get high" for fun. The counterculture was fueled by many poets, musicians, writers, painters, dancers and so on. As culture was the focal point (not politics) this couldn't have been achieved without the artistic flowering of the 1950s and the following decades. For counter-culturalists, art became the perfect area where they could train themselves to break social codes. The biggest example of this was, of course, rock'n'roll music.

Chapter 5 – Sex and Gender Roles

Sexism was an issue in the counterculture as well as in the broader society. However, it took a different path, following the "sexual liberation" advocated by the counterculture. Here, I will focus on the lot of women. I will argue that there was actually no improvement for women in the counterculture. However, the liberation from Christian prudery (no sex before marriage) emphasized by the counterculture launched the possibility of real sexual liberation both for men and women.

Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* was published in 1960 and immediately met great success. As a work dedicated to the youth problem in the materialist western society, it was largely read by the countercultural youth.⁴⁷ Indeed, Goodman expresses the feelings of the youth of the counterculture of the 1960s, in particular about the real meaning of life and inner self-achievement, in contradiction with the material achievement praised by the capitalist society. However, this book also shows the ways traditional sexist ideas were reproduced in the early stages of the counterculture. In the introduction of his book Goodman encapsulated his vision of human self-fulfillment, with a paragraph between brackets:

(I say the "young men and boys" rather than the "young people" because the problems I want to discuss in this book belong primarily, in our society, to the boys: how to be useful and make something of oneself. A girl does not *have* to, she is not expected to, "make something" of herself. Her career does not have to be self-justifying, for she will have children, which is absolutely self-justifying, like any other natural or creative act. With this background, it is less important, for instance, what job an average young woman works at till she is married. The quest for the glamour job is given at least a little substance by its relation to a "better" marriage. Correspondingly, our "youth troubles" are boy's troubles - female delinquency is sexual: "incorrigibility" and unmarried pregnancy. Yet as every woman knows, these problems are intensely interesting to women, for if the boys do not grow to be men, where shall the women find men? If the husband is running the rat race of the organized system, there is not much father for the children.)⁴⁸

It is only in the beginning of the 20th century that sexologists talked about women as sexual beings, meaning they have desires and actually need sexual fulfillment.⁴⁹ Before that, sex, for women, was exclusively thought of in terms of procreation. Women were

⁴⁷ Ronald Creagh, *Utopies Américaines: Expériences libertaires du XIX^e siècle à nos jours*, (Marseille : Agone, 2009), 218-221. *The Movement and the Sixties*, 36-37.

⁴⁸ Paul Goodman, *Growing up Absurd*, (New York: Vintage Book, 1960), 13.

⁴⁹ Dorothy McBride-Stetson, *Women's Right in the USA*, (New-York: Routledge edition, 2004), 328.

thought of as mothers and wives. Their personal fulfillment was understood only in terms of serving men and educating children. This vision remained dominant in the US in the mid-20th century, as indicated by Paul Goodman's absolute sexist vision.

Indeed, the central issue of true sexual liberation is the achievement of women's sexual liberation. Sexual intercourse had been regulated by precise rules in western society, as in most cultures in the world. As Goodman wrote, to behave out of this regulation is considered "delinquency", especially for women. The highly religious and patriarchal pattern of the American culture has perpetuated centuries of oppression of women. For many feminists in the US, that oppression began with sex. And so, to end the oppression, feminists of the mid-20th century believed they had to begin by freeing women from sexual regulation. For them, sex liberation was one part of the broader liberation of women.⁵⁰

Although the counterculture called for total sexual freedom, it did not emancipate women from male domination. Indeed, it was mostly men talking publicly, getting all the attention and having fun in the fight for cultural liberation while women did the paperwork, the dishes, laundry and all the household tasks.

Counterculture women had often sex with men without being married. As a consequence, many women complained that the sexual liberation was more about male having access to more women than to any real liberation for themselves.⁵¹ In 2009, *Mail Online* published an article quoting writer and feminist pioneer Rosie Boycott:

What was insidious about the underground was that it pretended to be alternative. But it wasn't providing an alternative for women. It was providing an alternative for men in that there were no problems about screwing around.⁵²

As Boycott indicates, sex and gender roles in counterculture circles were still defined in terms of male domination. Moreover, hippy women did not enjoy the material comfort and security offered to them in the mainstream society. They were, in many cases, even more oppressed than in the "straight" world.⁵³ However, the sexual liberation did

⁵⁰ Ibid., 307-310.

⁵¹ Barry Miles, *Hippies*, (London: Octopus, 2003), 13-16.

⁵² Bel Mooney, "My generation created the sexual revolution - and it has been wrecking the lives of women ever since", *Mail Online* (2009), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1232485/My-generation-created-sexual-revolution--wrecking-lives-women-since.html>, (accessed April 24, 2012).

⁵³ *Hippies*, 16.

happen, with the large participation of the counterculture, and sexual intercourses has been redefined since in the mainstream society.

Though the first outburst of sexual freedom did lead to a lot of excesses, particularly harmful for women, the liberation from strict Christian principles eventually led women to find the balance. The new freedom allowed them to decide by themselves about their sexual lives. After a period of excesses, women did exercise this power, for their own sake. As most things in life, collectively we needed to experience the extremes in order to find the middle ground in which freedom and self-respect reunite. The young of the sixties dried up the excesses for the next generations, and the balance was eventually found. It is true that on the individual level absolute sexual liberty can be oppressive because no one is there to teach you what is good for you and what is not. But it can also teach deep respect, because once you have experienced what it is to lack self-respect you've learned at the same time what it means to respect yourself. In this sense the sexual liberation praised by the counterculture eventually achieved their primary aim: absolute liberty in order to find their own answers, deep inside. And at the end, there is a possibility for women and men to unite in equality and mutual respect.

However, the "gender roles" element helps us to understand that counterculture young were not entirely free from the hegemonic thinking. For the majority of them, they provided neither an "alternative consciousness" nor "consciousness" as they understood it. They put light in some important aspects about it but if they had reached the consciousness they praised they would have realized the illegitimacy of the gender roles as defined by the mainstream society. This actually came later. However, as demonstrated below, the sexual liberation did lead in the following decades to more choices for women, and men alike in the sexual realm. This, in turn, led to a redefinition of relationships between men and women, offering many more possibilities of experiences. And so, in western societies at large, we owe much to the counterculture the relationships as we now know them, that is to say dating someone and having sex with him or her before marriage, living with several persons in a life time, not marry at all, etc. Therefore, though most hippies could not free themselves from the sexist part of the hegemonic thinking of the culture they were born into, they did launch the path toward gender equality, beginning with sexual intercourse. This opening also served homosexuality, which won its first battles during the counterculture era too.

Apart from sexual intercourses, the theme of the reunion of opposites was dominant in the counterculture. The opening of consciousness was supposed to bring equality and reunion of apparently opposite forces: men and women, Blacks and Whites, "low and high culture", and so on.⁵⁴ I will develop this in the section on music, as music illustrated the reunion of opposites in the most efficient way. For now, I am going to explore the drug theme of the counterculture, as their favorite tool to "open the minds".

⁵⁴ Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 43.

Chapter 6 – Drugs

We saw the necessity felt at the time to explore more in life than what was allowed by hegemonic ways of thinking. Indeed, the core of the counterculture was the illegitimacy of the American way of life as a universal model. The young rebels praised the "opening of consciousness" as a necessity to widen the possibilities that had been eliminated by the mainstream American thinking. In *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau, the famous transcendentalist writer (see III.2.) said "all their wit and usefulness lay within certain not very wide limits".⁵⁵ He targeted the rest of society, but not himself, as he felt he was already freed from narrow ways of thinking. Counterculture people started from the statement that they had been caught in it, in the sense that they had been drifted away from their deep values because of the expectations of American society. So, the aim of their cultural revolution was to free their minds from the narrow vision and to be open to new possibilities. In this regard, Timothy Leary's experiences on LSD played an important part within the counterculture philosophy and practices.

In the early 1960s, Dr. Timothy Leary, then a professor at Harvard University, began to lead experiments on the effect of LSD on human consciousness.⁵⁶ With a group of scientists he took precise doses of LSD and observed their effect on him. The results of these experiences were very satisfying. He developed a program prescribing precisely controlled amount of the drug which was aimed at opening consciousness in the long term.⁵⁷ But if Leary saw LSD as a solution to this, Aldous Huxley's observations introduced a note of caution into the idea that drug use could lead to liberation.

Aldous Huxley's experiences played a significant part in the counterculture too. Huxley was born in a family of well-known scientists. With forty-seven published novels he was considered one of the best English writers. He became interested by drugs in the 1950s and applied his analytical eye to the subject. In *The Doors of Perception* (1954), a formulation he took from Blake's poem, he recalls his experience of testing mescaline on himself and observing it with the help of scientist friends and methods. The aim of the use

⁵⁵ Henry David Thoreau, eds., *Civil Disobedience*, <http://thoreau.thefreelibrary.com/Civil-Disobedience>, (accessed June 12, 2012).

⁵⁶ David Farber, "The Intoxicated State/ Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture", in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 22.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 23.

of drugs for young people of the counterculture was to "clean the doors of perception". In his book, Huxley first confirms their utility to open consciousness:

what rose and iris and carnation so intensely signified was nothing more, and nothing less, than what they were - a transience that was yet eternal life, a perpetual perishing that was at the same time pure Being, a bundle of minute, unique particulars in which, by some unspeakable and yet self-evident paradox, was to be seen the divine source of all existence.⁵⁸

But then he underlined that to see the infinite of life, the so deep light that makes every single object shine like heaven, cancels every desire to act on anything. Everything seems so perfect and blissful than one can't feel like acting to transform it. Therefore, users won't try to improve society since in this state of bliss it has no importance that humanity was in such a desperate condition.

Indeed, the consumption of acids did make a lot of counterculture young people passive. For them, the fight should be on the terrain of culture, so there was no need to be active in the political arena. Eventually, this thinking, added to the consumption of drugs, did lead many of them to lie passively, acting for nothing, neither politics, nor culture. This trend was real and expanded during the period. As a consequence, many conservative historians use this actual trend of the counterculture to stop there and state that this was just a movement of a lost youth that had lost every meaningful value. This account of the counterculture history usually relied on psychologists' and sociologists' studies to defend the status that indeed those young had nothing to bring to society but, at the contrary, were a danger to it.⁵⁹ What is important to understand about the counterculture's use of drugs is that it was not an end in itself, just to "get wasted", as it could have been for the previous generations, just providing a kind of "alternative entertainment" to movie theater.⁶⁰ On the contrary, like the Beats, the hippies saw drugs as a mean to reach spiritual enlightenment and as a consequence of that, artistic creativity. Indeed, the counterculture was about culture and culturally it achieved a lot, especially in the domain of art. The consumption of LSD and other drugs led to the creation of psychedelic art. This artistic trend found its most striking expression in music, with the emergence of psychedelic rock, also called

⁵⁸ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*, (New-York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1954), 18.

⁵⁹ *Present Tense*, 297. *The Movement and the Sixties*, 243.

⁶⁰ Jim De Rogatis, *Kaleidoscope Eyes: Psychedelic Rock from the '60s to the '90s*, (Secaucus: Carol Publishing Group, 1996), 9.

"acid rock". The counterculture achievements were numerous and it is probably in the music area that it was most visible and everlasting.

Chapter 7 – Rock'n'roll

The counterculture is often referred to as the "peace and love" movement. But indeed those two words can be understood in a lot of different ways. What did they mean for the counterculture people? How did they apply their definition of peace and of love? These are the questions I am going to analyze in this chapter, because answers are to be found in the story of psychedelic music, born in the US in the 1960s within counterculture circles. The study of this new music style will lead me to argue that the counterculture was more than a set of practices vaguely related to one another, that it proposed a totally different and logical alternative to the mainstream American society of the 1960s, mostly shaped by music.

The Woodstock festival is still remembered as the culminating point of the counterculture era. It was originally called "3 days of peace and music". Its success far overwhelmed the producer's expectations. It gathered about 500,000 people taking LSD, hanging out naked, having sex in the middle of the crowd, or wearing multicolor clothes, and sharing the music. The Woodstock festival has been, for generations, until today, a reference point for absolute freedom. It also provides a sense of universal brotherhood and love. It was exceptional for the young involved and it became a symbol of universal peace and love. And those young were not listening to just any kind of music. The music itself provided the same feelings. The most remembered shows are probably Santana's and Jimi Hendrix's electric guitar solo. This latter was impressive with new musical effect. Less remembered is the Incredible String Band set. They played their strange sounds, mixing rock'n'roll and folk music.⁶¹ Indeed, the String Band group, though far less famous than others of the time, was representative of the different influences which came to define psychedelic rock. One of the three Scottish members of the band, Robin Williamson, explained how his music was formed:

I started off doing Scottish and Irish music. But I also liked the visionary writing of Walt Whitman and Jack Kerouac, and those two opposites caused me to go and search for a common root to world music. I went to North Africa in 1963 to learn more about the music there [...]. The notion of fusion music wasn't a word used in 1963 when we started doing it. We just thought it would be a good idea.⁶²

⁶¹ *Kaleidoscope Eyes*, 62.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 60.

He adds:

There was an inspired amateurism in those days, a feeling that anybody could play music, that anybody could play a lot of different instruments.⁶³

Walt Whitman was a 19th century poet (among other talents). *Leaves of Grass* (1855), his most famous poetry collection, is a sensual hymn to freedom and sexuality.

So, in the one hand, psychedelic rock was born from the desire to explore unknown territories both in terms of different cultures and philosophies and of technical research. And on the other hand, the possibility of exploration opened by the counterculture movement allowed many young people to actually widen their explorations. In the counterculture this kind of opening and exploration was very often associated to the taking of drugs. Psychedelic rock, as its name indicates, was no exception.

In 1960, The Gamblers, an ephemera rock band, recorded a single called "LSD 25". It was the beginning of the association of rock'n'roll with LSD. But the music of the Gamblers did not differ in any point from what had been done before.⁶⁴ It is only toward the middle of the decade that psychedelic experiences came to influence young musicians who considerably changed their music and created "psychedelic rock". More than a marginal music trend, "acid rock" became an international frenzy with astonishing influences in the music world, with the advent of groups like The Beatles, with its leading singer John Lennon, The Doors, The Rolling Stones, and artists like Janis Joplin, to name but a few. John Lennon's first LSD trip inspired him to write "Tomorrow never knows", released in 1966 and full of strange sounds depicting the acid experience.⁶⁵ The same year, The Rolling Stones' "Paint It, Black" reached number one of the charts both in the US and the UK. It was the start of a passion which would involve thousands of musicians all over the world.

Psychedelic rock was not just about taking LSD and writing music. It was about translating into sounds the physical and spiritual experience offered by the drug. Albert Hoffman, the first well-known researcher in LSD effects on humans, related in the 1950s that under the influence of LSD "every sound generated a vividly changing image with its own consistent form and color".⁶⁶ Indeed, the "psychedelic music" was aimed at giving to

⁶³ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 10.

audiences the same kind of experience as the one offered by LSD, without them necessarily taking the drug. In the late 1960s and 1970s the psychedelic experience was known by virtually all young people (and even some “not so young” in the country) thanks to the "acid rock" culture, even by those who never took LSD.

In his study of progressive rock - a direct inheritance of psychedelic rock, and so also an important innovation of the countercultural era, Edward Macan states that:

Clearly, in progressive rock the alternation of electronic and acoustic sections creates a set of dialectical opposites. Acoustic passages suggest the meditative, pastoral, traditional, and "feminine", electronic passages the dynamic, technological, futuristic, and "masculine". The masculine/feminine analogy goes deeper than one might think, since masculine and feminine sections complete each other, contributing to the expansion and contraction, the movement toward and away from climaxes, that was such a central facet of progressive rock structure. Furthermore, this masculine/ feminine dialectic allows for a symbolic playing out of many of the conflicts that were of great significance to the hippies. It symbolizes how a whole set of cultural opposites - high and low culture, European and African-American creative approaches, a futuristic technocracy and an idyllic agrarian past, or matriarchal (creative, intuitive) and patriarchal (rational, carefully organized) modes of society - might be integrated into a larger whole. ... the concern with reconciling these seemingly irreconcilable cultural opposites is a major concern of the genre, and strongly informs its lyrics and cover art as well.⁶⁷

Indeed, music was not an entertainment anymore; it was a transcendental experience which conveyed the counterculture ideals, above all, universal peace. For that, duality had to end and humans had to recognize themselves as inherently the same, as brothers. To serve that sense of recovered unity, the counterculture praised the reunion of opposites. So, was the counterculture an "alternative consciousness"?

Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, in *America Divided*, say that:

In the course of the 1960s, many Americans came to regard groups of fellow countrymen as enemies with whom they were engaged in a struggle for the nation's very soul. Whites versus blacks, liberals versus conservatives (as well as liberals versus radicals), young versus old, men -versus women, hawks versus doves, rich versus poor, taxpayers versus welfare recipients, the religious versus the secular, the hip versus the straight, the gay versus the straight - everywhere one looked, new battalions took to the field, in a spirit ranging from that to redemptive sacrifice to vengeful defiance.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *Rocking the Classics*, 43-44.

⁶⁸ *America Divided*, 4.

More than being liberal, or conservative, "hawks" or "doves", man or woman, the rule was to fight; to have one or several precise enemies and define our own fight in the opposition to this enemy. Isserman and Kazin's list mention "hip against straight". This proves how hard it is for most people to understand personal claims, here the one of the counterculture, otherwise than in terms of duality. The "hips" were not against "straight". They did not put bombs in big stores, nor did they burn houses of straight people. What made them different from the new Left was their withdrawal from the fight, from duality. But this withdrawal did not have to mean to give up their inner values. Indeed, they just did it, without asking for the permission of an authority which was not legitimate for them.⁶⁹ And the counterculture "included everyone, excluded no one".⁷⁰

The formulation "alternative consciousness" relies on a duality understanding of the world, while the counterculture praised unity. It did not place itself at the opposite of the western society but wanted to complete it by an essential ingredient it had lost. For example, it was not praising a matriarchal society but a society which would recognize again the role of women, as equal to the men's role. Though it embodied extreme forms of rebellion - in their clothes, sexual behaviors, and communal livings - the final aim was the reunion of the opposites in order to find harmony. As the music served the reunion of cultural, gender and philosophical opposites, the values they embodied in their ways of living, were aimed at including the whole world and understanding in terms of the wholeness of everything.⁷¹ This awareness of the wholeness of the world is a direct consequence for them of the opening of consciousness, as praised by Eastern philosophies, privileged sources of inspiration for the counterculture people. I am going to study those in the last part of this memoire. But first I will focus on the previous openings of consciousness which touched their society: the progress in the field of psychology and in Transcendentalism.

⁶⁹ *Utopies Américaines*, 221.

⁷⁰ *The Movement and the Sixties*, 244.

⁷¹ *Rocking the Classics*, 73.

Part 3

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Previous Intellectual and Philosophical Openings

Like any other current of any other period, the counterculture did not arise from an intellectual vacuum. Its reaction against the American hegemony of the time led people involved to go looking for inspiration in previous ideas and practices. Moreover, the hegemony itself had been subjected to previous openings too. In this second part, I am going to analyze briefly the change in the mainstream thinking brought by Sigmund Freud's individual unconscious and Carl Gustav Jung's collective unconscious. I will argue that these "opened doors" served the counterculture's understanding of human beings, even though they rejected Freud's theories and did not praise Jung's. Other previous philosophies were actually explicitly praised by counterculture people. Indeed, they were directly influenced by Transcendentalism, Thoreau's writings in particular, and by Eastern philosophies which Ram Dass's *Be Here Now* perfectly represented for them. From the analysis of these currents, I will argue that, from the counterculture point of view, their claims were not about promoting an "alternative consciousness", but about coming into consciousness, that is to say a higher understanding of the nature of human beings.

Chapter 8 – S. Freud and C. G. Jung

Since the Enlightenment, beginning in the 18th century, in the US, knowledge was understood in terms of rationalism. As a consequence, the comprehension of human beings was limited to what was immediately perceivable. The acceptance of an unconscious part of the psyche, that is to say a room in human's brain where there are elements acting on humans without us being able to notice it, is due to Sigmund Freud's work. The psychoanalysis he developed at the beginning of the 20th century was based on several principles. The first principle is the existence of unknown forces acting in the behaviors of humans, situated in the unconscious part of the psyche. The second innovation of Freud is that those unconscious forces all have the same origin, which is sexuality. To sum up the idea, for Freud, sexuality is the basis of human life and so inhabits it since the very beginning of life? However, at some point it has to be repressed in order for an adult human being to be civilized. For Freud, sexuality has to be repressed and sublimated (that is to say, that the sexual energy is directed toward a non-sexual object and so helps creativity and force of action) for the good of civilization. Freud's theories of sexual repression did not please counterculture people. On the contrary, they were strongly opposed to it as for them pleasure must by no mean be repressed, but encouraged and celebrated. However, Freud did open the way of a larger understanding of humans by the introduction of the unconscious, and his sexual theory of sublimation brought to sexuality a positive shade which did not exist until there.⁷² However, one of his former students went further.

As Freud's student, Carl Gustav Jung first admired him for his sexual theory because it gave to psychology a collective dimension.⁷³ But he soon came to be critical of it. He saw it as a hypothesis, interesting in many regards but which should not cancel other elements of the human psyche, while Freud wanted to make it a dogma. Eventually the two separated and Jung spent his life developing his own "analytical psychology".⁷⁴ The main element brought by Jung's psychology, and the one which interests us in the subject of the counterculture, is his "collective unconscious". Jung defined universal "archetypes" which, according to him, are present in every human being. These archetypes are part of a

⁷² Sigmund Freud, Preface to *La sexualité infantile*, (Paris : Payot & Rivages, 2011), 7-21.

⁷³ C.G. Jung, introduction to *Essaie d'exploration de l'inconscient*, (Sarthe : Editions Denoël, 2001), 16.

⁷⁴ C.G.Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd edition, 1961), 32.

collective field which links all human beings to one another. In his research, Jung made huge investigations in ancient texts and philosophies from different traditions and came to identify in all these texts common elements which he called universal archetypes. For him, these universal archetypes have direct impact on the psychology of every single individual. And he used this knowledge to heal people's mental sicknesses.

We see how these discoveries are linked to the counterculture claims of universal unity. This idea of collective unconscious was not popular in the first place but eventually won a significant number of followers, as proved by the many Jungian schools created in the US and in the world. So, though Jung's theories met many more critics than Freud's (probably because Jung put into question a lot more of the mainstream thinking than Freud did), he led to an even more important opening than his former teacher about the very nature of human beings. Moreover, Jung always claimed that, despite his important discoveries, there was about the human psyche much more we don't know, that actually it is infinite and we will probably never know everything of how the human brain and soul work (the notion of "soul" is omnipresent in Jung's work). Therefore, in several ways Jung's discoveries were a significant step toward a bigger understanding of human consciousness and so it is not too adventurous to state that the counterculture owes something of their own comprehending of human unity to him.

Therefore, though Leibniz, the famous German philosopher, had introduced the idea of the unconscious some two hundred years before Freud, it is this latter who spread it in the mainstream thinking.⁷⁵ In 1960, very few people doubted the existence of the unconscious. Therefore, the advent of psychoanalysis had changed mainstream consciousness in the way of an enlarging of the elements taken into account in the comprehension of human psychology. Moreover, Freud's doctrine was entirely based on his sexual theory which began to end the vision of sexuality as something inherently wrong. Jung's theories did not rely on sexuality, but his "collective unconscious" brought something new which opened big doors. It is in that sense that, in my opinion, Jung helped the counterculture to grasp the meaning of unity praised by ancient texts and philosophies, mostly from the East.

So, Freud and Jung, though their thinking differed from the mainstream one, did not come with an "alternative consciousness", they came with openings, taking what they

⁷⁵ *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, 2.

thought good in the culture they were born into and expanding it thanks to their intelligence and freedom to use it. Their scientific mind settled this in the field of psychology, while hippies were not interested in developing theories. Instead, they would experiment their ideas in the present moment. Though the contents of the unconscious is very different for Freud, Jung and the hippies, psychoanalysis praised consciousness in the same way than the counterculture, that is to say that what was unconscious emerged from the dark room of the human psyche into the light of the consciousness. What was unconscious for most people, according to hippies, was the very nature of humans, which is love and peace, and the fact that materialism was hiding from them this fundamental truth. It was what the Transcendentalists of the 1830s thought too. I am going to study now the work of Henry David Thoreau, one of their main figures and his links to the counterculture of the 1960s.

Chapter 9 – H.D. Thoreau: Transcendentalism and the Counterculture

It would be hard to talk about the ideals embodied by the counterculture without relating them to the transcendentalist movement of the 19th century, so close are their concerns, and their influence in the American culture. Indeed, the transcendentalist writings directly influenced the counterculture.

Twin Oaks is a commune created in 1967, which co-founder Kathleen Kindale called "A Walden Two Community". *Walden two* was a novel written by the behaviorist F.B. Skinner in 1948 in which he describes the life of a utopian community of a thousand people. Skinner named his novel after *Walden: Life in the Woods* by H.D. Thoreau, published in 1857. Thoreau was one of the transcendentalist thinkers, a movement which developed in New England in the first half of the 19th century, under the leadership of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Thoreau's *Walden* was one of the most famous documents of the movement and made the author an important literary figure. It describes a concrete application of the transcendentalist doctrine by telling of Thoreau's experience of living alone in the wood at Walden Pond from 1845 to 1847.

The decision of Thoreau to leave town for the woods came from a desire to know "the very essential facts of life".⁷⁶ This required total purification of the exterior. For transcendentalists, life was meaningful just because it was and materialist concerns diverted men from the essential. In the 1960s, this same observation led thousands of young people to leave the cities and settle in what came to be called "communes", a neutral land in natural surroundings where they could live according to their deep nature, out of sight of the capitalist society's pressures. Communal experiences have always been part of the American history. There never existed a time when there was no commune in the United States. But the 1960s saw a frenzy for communal life never matched, before or after. So, nature was a point of focus too for the idealists of the 1960s. Thoreau actually provided many of them the rural ideal and simple life.⁷⁷ They believed that to live with oneself alone in the case of Thoreau, with friends for the counterculture people -- in harmony with nature, without any unnecessary goods would lead humans to discover the

⁷⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, ou la vie dans les bois (Walden, or Life in the Woods)*, (Paris: Editions Montaigne, 1967), 194.

⁷⁷ *Utopies Américaines*, 241.

essential meaning of existence and as a consequence, to complete happiness. Indeed, *Walden* was largely read by founders of communes during the sixties era.

This praising of simple life led Thoreau and the transcendentalists to see technical progress as absolutely useless in regard with human evolution, which was in total contradiction with the dominant positivism and scientism of the era. Indeed, positivists, along with scientists (in the sense of scientism) thought that knowledge could only be reached through objective observations and scientific experiences.⁷⁸ For transcendentalists, on the contrary, knowledge was an experience which came from deep inside and need no other evidence than the feeling itself. That is how they perceived the link between humans and nature. For them, humanity is inherently dependent on nature: they are interrelated as one organism and God is in nature as it is in humans. As a consequence, nature will lead to the revelation of God, not as a belief but as an experience. It is the quest of this kind of experience and the belief that only there remains the meaning of life which was called "transcendentalism". And so, in many regards, the counterculture could be called a transcendentalist quest too.

Indeed, the core question of the movement of the 1830s and 1840s, as well as the one of the 1960s, was the same: to leave the materialist world's answers and go looking for one's own, and not outside but inside. And the novel raised other questions analogical to counterculture claims too. For example, in *Walden*, Thoreau talks about a man he often met during his years at Walden Pond: "I occasionally observed that he was thinking by himself and expressing his own opinion, a phenomenon so rare that I would any day walk ten miles to observe it".⁷⁹ Thinking by oneself meant to be freed from the vision of life, men, women, nature, of everything important which was programmed by the mainstream society and did not allow people to find their real nature. This was a very strong topic of the counterculture too. In this sense too, the counterculture was not providing a set of beliefs strictly ordered which would constitute an alternative consciousness. It gave leads for people to find the truth; it said "look inside instead of outside", and "look in natural objects instead of artificial ones". Indeed, the counterculture praised another kind of quest than the materialist-fulfillment one. But it did not provide a rigid pre-defined model, as the middle-class US society did at the time. The huge diversity of the communes illustrates this very well. There did not exist two similar communes at the time (as they did exist

⁷⁸ *Utopies Américaines*. 94.

⁷⁹ *Walden*, 282.

similar houses in suburban areas in the US). There is nowhere in the counterculture writings a pre-defined way of living which everyone should follow. The counterculture was the age of experimentation. What they praised was the freedom from a reduced vision and that everyone would allow him/herself to experiment out from it. In this sense, it was an anarchist quest. For this also they found strong echoes in Thoreau's work.

Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience", another of the indispensable works of the transcendentalist corpus, begins with these words: "I heartily accept the motto, - "That government is best which governs the least;" and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically".⁸⁰ The non-intervention of government asked by Thoreau aimed at individual choices and freedom in every aspect of the human life. He believed that without the government's repressive policies the people would organize itself the best and each would provide to his/her own needs without exploiting neither other men nor nature. He states that "the character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way."

So, as we have seen, while a part of the rebellion in the 1960s turned toward politics to improve the social order, reduce the inequalities (cf. part I), a great number called for absolute freedom, and this, for them, could obviously not be fulfilled through the government. The counterculture resisted the Establishment and was conscious of the interdependence of the State and the industrials, and so they could not hope to achieve in it a fairness whose level would satisfy their thirst of freedom. It is, therefore, no surprise that a great number of them were pleased by Thoreau's anarchism which he expressed in "Civil Disobedience". Movement participants had been introduced to this work, as proven by its direct influence on Gandhi's non-violent fight for the independence of India. Martin Luther King also based his political agenda on "Civil Disobedience".

More importantly, in regard to the counterculture, Thoreau associated anarchism with a higher consciousness of human beings, as explicitly said in "Civil Disobedience" : "[...]I believe "That government is best that governs not at all" and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have".⁸¹ This means two things: first that people have to prepare themselves to be free, in other words, to free their mind;

⁸⁰ Henry David Thoreau, eds., *Civil Disobedience*, <http://thoreau.thefreelibrary.com/Civil-Disobedience>, (accessed june 12, 2012).

⁸¹ Ibid.

second, that when they will have done so, they will automatically organize life collectively without a government. As a consequence, it is useless to act on the government itself. The best fighting against it is no fighting but a complete retreat from it (Thoreau got into troubles because of his refusal to pay his taxes). This anarchist feeling most inhabited the 1960s rebellion and motivated many communes of the time. It was connected to deep work on the mind, encouraged by Eastern philosophies (which were also present in Thoreau's work).

In the 19th century, Emerson strongly insisted that transcendentalism was not an "organized movement".⁸² Categorizing things creates representations which prevent their comprehension, as "hippies" were very rapidly categorized and judged according to the representations of what is a "hippy". The truth was that, in their common quest, they had different beliefs and practices and more importantly they were simply different persons. And so, a "hippy" would not have moved a "straight" person, but another one could have. Unfortunately, the representation created by categorization prevents that.⁸³ Those representations are shaped according to the hegemonic thinking, which was precisely what the counterculture people wanted to escape from. But they did not intend to create another hegemony, with other representations related to it. They wanted to be free from any representation in order to be able to grasp the essence of what or who they confronted in the present moment. It is in that sense that I argue that the term "alternative consciousness" cannot suit their claims. Though one can argue that they finally fall into another trap, that is to say another rigid frame of beliefs, and so did create an alternative consciousness, it was certainly not the aim of this movement. As such, it could obviously not settle on universal truth of how one should behave, who he or she should love, how, under which conditions, etc. For them, "if a vegetable and an animal want to get together and can be heavier together than either one of them alone, it shouldn't be anybody else's business".⁸⁴ Therefore, the counterculture people did not want to impose their way of seeing things on others, they just wanted to live according to their own feelings. They did not want to interfere with other's lives but observed that other's lives were very limited and that most people had no access to their own worth, which exists in every human without exception.

⁸² Perry Miller, "foreword" to *The American Transcendentalists. Their Prose and Poetry*, (New York: Anchor book edition, 1957), ix.

⁸³ *The Movement and the Sixties*, 243.

⁸⁴ Stephen Gaskin quoted in Timothy Miller, "The Sixties Era Communes", in *Imagine Nation: The Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 337.

The opening of consciousness they praised is what should bring everyone to become aware of that.

Chapter 10 – Eastern Philosophies and the Counterculture

In the 1960s, Eastern religions and philosophies became very popular. Buddhism in particular found very numerous followers. The “peace movement” naturally found its ideas of non-violence and universal brotherhood very attractive. More importantly, Buddhism and other eastern philosophies brought the idea of being fully into the Now as a solution to the western spiritual vacuum. Former Harvard Professor Dr Richard Alpert, along with Timothy Leary, was fired from Harvard for advocating in favor of psychedelics. Alpert then became a spiritual teacher and called himself Ram Dass (literally “servant of God”) after a trip in India.⁸⁵ In 1971, he published “Be Here Now”, which quickly became a “countercultural bible”.⁸⁶ This book, which never stopped being printed since its publication, and its author route, has many elements to help us in our problematic which is to know if the counterculture can be defined as an “alternative consciousness”.

“Be Here Now” brought an answer to the fundamental question of the counterculture: the meaning of life, the meaning of human existence. What the American society proposed - marriage, house, children, job, retirement and death - did not work for those young rebels. They needed a meaning to their existence that would talk to their hearts and link them to other humans. “Be Here Now” offered this answer: life has no meaning out of the now. More concretely, for the counterculture youth, “living the now” meant not being pressured by the necessity to earn a living, not being pressured by anything actually. Living the now was to follow the *flow* of life without any doubt or fear, in a state of absolute faith. Hindu beliefs expressed by Ram Dass’s book also implied that there is no accident in life; everything is there to teach something so you don’t need to worry about anything, it is all for your own sake. But the world they grew up into had taught them to think and analyze everything and not the necessity to be in harmony with their inner self. So in order to approach this state of deep peace, hippies felt the need to clear their life from material necessities, but also from compulsion to think at all. Here is the core idea most “analyzers” of the counterculture could not apprehend and which is to find its best expression in Eastern-originated works, like Ram Dass’s. The comprehension of the essential facts in life, as praised by Thoreau before them, needed the purification of every

⁸⁵ Ram Dass, "Journey: The Transformation: Dr Richard Alpert, Ph D. into Baba Ram Dass", in *Be Here Now*, ed. Ram Dass (New-York: The Crown Publishing Group, 1978).

⁸⁶ *The Sixties Era Communes*, 336.

single bulky thing, either intellectual or physical. In the introduction of his famous book, Alpert recalls a dialogue he had with “a 23 year old guy from Laguna Beach, California”, while travelling in India:

“Did I ever tell you about the time that Tim and I...”

And he’d say “Don’t think about the past. Just be here now.”

Silence.

And I’d say “How long do you think we’re going to be on this trip?”

And he’d say “Don’t think about the future. Just be here now”.

I’d say “You know, I really feel crumby, my hips are hurting...”

“Emotions are like waves. Watch them disappear in the distance on the vast calm ocean.”

He had just sort of wiped out my whole game. [...] I was, after all, a great story teller.”

The common message of Eastern philosophies was that the compulsion to think, and as a direct consequence, talk, was what needed to be healed in order to be able to live in a state of peace. Agitations are in the mind only, which loves playing, telling stories, even if the stories are full of suffering, better than nothing to feed it. This does not mean that humans should lose their ability to think, but that they should control it instead of being controlled by it. Buddhism taught that if humans stop the involuntary noise in their mind they will re-discover their inner connection with everything which is alive.⁸⁷ Meditation will help them to do so. Many countercultural people spent some time in the East: Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, to name but a few.⁸⁸

Those philosophies teach to free the mind from the impulsive desire to classify and analyze, which came to its paroxysm in the occidental society at that time. It means undo the structure of the mind, become conscious of the other spheres that shape human beings, be aware that humans are not only their mind. To stop the compulsive thinking that makes us, civilized human beings, think that we are only this. It teaches to stop the voice in our head that talks continuously and doing so, we become aware of our deep self who is constituted of what emanates from our heart, and soul. The fact that our thinking absorbs all our attention prevents us from paying attention to our intuition and our capacity to feel the different energies which constitute life. The absorption of the human attention by the

⁸⁷ Eckart Tolle, *The Power of Now*, (Vancouver: Namaste Publishing, 1999), 52-53.

⁸⁸ Ram Dass, "Journey: The Transformation: Dr Richard Alpert, Ph D. into Baba Ram Dass", in *Be Here Now*, ed. Ram Dass (New-York: The Crown Publishing Group, 1978).

mind stops absolutely every other perception on the conscious level (as unconsciously it is impossible to lose the contact with the deepest spheres of life). When we take back our attention from this it automatically directs itself toward the present moment.

This comprehension is absolutely anti-rationalist. Western societies were seen by the counterculture young like the advent of rationalism, and this rationalism had completely erased the intuitive and creative part of human beings. Even in the domain of human psychology, rationalism was the only rule. Alpert, who had a Ph D. in psychology, expressed it in these words: “The concepts we were working with were intellectual fun and games, but they were not affecting my life”; and “As a therapist I felt caught in the drama of my theories.”

This opposition was translated in Eastern philosophies in terms of masculine/feminine dichotomy. For these ancient philosophies the patriarchal society had led to the elimination of feminine principles (intuition, creativity) to leave room only to the expression of the masculine ones (rationality, exterior fulfillment). As historian Terry H. Anderson says in *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest from Greensboro to Wounded Knee*, for the hegemonic America "women feel while men think" and it was "a man's world".⁸⁹ But, this cancellation of one half of life led to a deep feeling of lack felt not only by women, but by many men too. Alpert, while occupying an honorable situation in prestigious Universities, recalled: “Not enough was happening that mattered – that was real.” The idea of honesty can directly be linked to the extreme American hypocritical cultural and political behavior felt by the hippies and which led thousands and thousands of young to go looking for something else that what their former culture proposed them.

The fact that many occidentals at the time were attracted by Eastern philosophies was sometimes considered a first sign of the reconciliation of the opposites: occidental and oriental world, rationalism and spirituality, as (respectively) masculine and feminine principle. This reunion of apparently opposed patterns of culture can be linked to the advance of psychoanalysis, as seen previously. Indeed, Eastern philosophies did not come at this moment in Europe for nothing. Freud’s psychoanalysis had opened the doors long before and in the sixties the idea that some forces acted on our lives in the dark, while we don’t even notice it, was largely accepted. Moreover, Jung introduced something different and new: the collective unconscious. The perception of humans had already been opened

⁸⁹ *The Movement and the Sixties*, 24.

by the individual and collective unconscious. Though they might not have explicitly recognized it like this, it seems obvious that counterculture thinkers could appreciate and understand parts of Eastern philosophies thanks to these previous openings in the American hegemony. And so, in oriental terminology to bring light in the darkness of our beings means that what was unconscious becomes conscious. In that sense, the counterculture did not praise an alternative consciousness, which would be another logical way to look at things, but simply consciousness, which means to embrace every single thing in the same peaceful inner feeling. This implies that, for counterculturists, human beings are inherently loving beings; it is their real nature but they have been drifted away from it by centuries of controlling of the mind. Stopping this control will automatically bring them back to their heart and so change the world. That was, for the counterculture people, the meaning of changing the culture in order to change the politics.

The questions the counterculture brought and exposed freely to everyone without shame were so deep that to listen to them would have meant a too sudden reversal of conservative beliefs. The counterculture led to the development of the New Age, still existing in the US and in the world. It inherited the countercultural substance that is the spiritual quest, mixing different traditions, but abandoned LSD, orgies and acid rock. Though New Age people represent a small proportion of the population, their number is significant. A current best-selling New Age American writer and spiritual teacher gives an explanation for the resistance which hippies encountered from mainstream Americans. In *The Power of Now* (1999), Eckart Tolle states that the identity of someone is based on his egoic personality and this egoic personality is based on beliefs. If you take these beliefs from a person, that is to say the way he or she learned to define himself/herself and the world, the egoic personality dies. If the death of the egoic personality is accompanied by spiritual enlightenment, the feeling of existence would be replaced by a deep feeling of oneness with the entire world; if it is not, this death is felt like actual death because there is nothing to attach the person's feeling of existence to, and so the possibility of losing this egoic personality unconsciously creates a deep panic, and the person would do anything to keep his/her feeling of existence. That is why the counterculture provoked so much anger and incomprehension, as, for example, showing in Dennis Hopper's movie, *Easy Rider* (1969) in which the three main characters, hippies, are all murdered. This movie rapidly became a classic of the counterculture. Indeed, it contains a few very interesting dialogues,

like the one between Billy, a dropper, and George, an alcoholic lawyer travelling with him, about "mainstream people":

- They think we're gonna cut their throat, man. They're scared.
- They're not scared of you. They're scared of what you represent to them.
- All we represent to them, man , is somebody who needs a haircut.
- Oh no. What you represent to them is freedom.
- What the hell is wrong with freedom, man ? That's what it's all about.
- Oh yeah, that's right. That's what it's all about. But talking about it and being it, that's two different things. I mean, it's really hard to be free when you are bought and sold in the market place. Don't tell anybody they're not free 'cause they're gonna get real busy killing and maiming to prove to you that they are. Oh yeah, they're gonna talk to you, and talk to you and talk to you about individual freedom. But if they see a free individual it's gonna scare them.⁹⁰

This dialogue completes Eckart Tolle's vision. So, the counterculture of the 1960s was not providing other beliefs. They provided freedom from mainstream beliefs. Being free, they looked in the world to see what it provides or provided in terms of the meaning of life. In that sense, calling it an "alternative consciousness" reduces it a lot.

⁹⁰ *Easy Rider*, directed by Dennis Hopper (New-York: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 1969), DVD.

Conclusion

1960 American conservatism, consumerism, materialism, conformism was a box which wanted to contain every single person in the United States. For the 1960s youth, the box was too tiny to allow them to experience life. They looked for a bigger horizon. What is bigger than the Universe? The Buddha taught connection with the universe. It said that, when in touch with this feeling, humans' minds are not limited by anything anymore. Eastern philosophies came to young Americans' hands and offered them the biggest hope of all. Because they were stifled by limitations, many young people from the middle class embraced Eastern philosophies' universal freedom. Indeed, extremes are always at the origin of their opposite.

The Universal freedom praised by Eastern traditions was the freedom of the mind. But for Buddhists a person can reach spiritual enlightenment thanks to a rigorous meditation program, often accompanied by different levels of asceticism. Young hippies, as a consequence of a too strong authority applied on them, rejected any discipline. The 1940s had seen the first scientific discoveries about LSD and it had led to many others.⁹¹ Leary's campaign about the virtue of LSD to free the mind convinced the youth that they could reach the Enlightenment whom the Eastern philosophies praised. And LSD had the advantage of asking for no effort, no discipline, no rule. So what was the point to meditate for hours when you can have the same result in a few seconds with no effort? Therefore, hippies used LSD as a spiritual practice supposed to bring them back to their deep nature by freeing them from their mental conditioning.

In the 1830s Thoreau and his fellow transcendentalists already praised the same return to the essence of human nature. To reach this aim, they did not praise the use of drugs, but nature. By 1960, Thoreau's *Walden* had become a canon of American literature.⁹² He praised simple life and a vision out from his materialistic and racist society. He inspired many countercultural communes. However, many hippies interpreted his claims for the return to the "very essential facts of life" a bit differently. For them, to get back to the deep nature of humans meant to celebrate the human primitive impulses. Moreover, freedom was closely associated to immediate pleasure for young counterculturists. Pleasure was celebrated and of course the sexual repression praised by

⁹¹ *Kaleidoscope Eyes*, 4-16.

⁹² *The American Transcendentalists*, x. *Utopies Américaines*, 92.

the mainstream society was absolutely rejected. Instead, the counterculture embraced the exact opposite; they allowed everything in terms of sexual intercourses.

As a matter of fact Freud's theory of the need for sexual repression in a civilized society could not suit them. They rejected it. However, Freud's vision of sexuality and the fact that it was widespread and largely known had led the mainstream society to admit the sexual nature of human beings as something not entirely devilish. In this sense, it launched the path for the counterculture claims for the celebration of sexuality. Moreover, he argued in favor of the existence of the unconscious and made it accepted by the mainstream society. This created a larger perception of human life. Indeed, the last century before the counterculture era had seen significant progresses in the field of psychology. C. G. Jung's theories were less widespread than Freud's but he was certainly an influential psychologist; his theory of the collective unconscious was an important innovation in the understanding of what link human beings together. His scientific approach gave a rational explanation to the Eastern belief (which Jung knew very well) in universal unity.

The new vision built by the counterculture, following these previous openings, was best expressed in music. With its renew vision of life, the counterculture created a new style of music, made of past traditions, occidental as well as oriental: the psychedelic rock. Music was much more than a simple entertainment. It was a way of life. Psychedelic rock suited the hippy way of life with its LSD trips, sexual freedom and all kinds of new experiences. Indeed, "for [their] generation music [was] the most vital force in most of [their] lives".⁹³ Because, for hippies, in the decadent capitalist world, "music [was] the only thing that [made] sense anymore".⁹⁴

The golden rule of the counterculture was freedom of experimentation. It was an improvised set of beliefs and practices. Davin Seay, the author of *Stairway to Heaven: The Spiritual Roots of Rock'n'roll*, states that

The Onyx, the *I Ching*, tarot cards, and God's eyes. [Hesse's] *Steppenwolf* [and] *Siddharta*, [Tolkien's] Middle Earth, and Merlin. The peace sign, yin/yang, astrology, and yoga... from the welter of American Indian lore, Arthurian daydreams, Oriental smoke rings, science fiction

⁹³ *The Movement and the Sixties*, 246.

⁹⁴ *Accross the Universe*, directed by Julie Taymor, (New-York: Revolution Studios Distribution Company, 2007), DVD.

ciphers, and their own growing compendium of psychedelic syllogisms, the hippies seemed on the verge of achieving a grand synthesis, striking the final harmonizing metachord.⁹⁵

Indeed, the counterculture was not an organized philosophy or doctrine. Seay's demonstration actually aims at arguing that the counterculture "was ultimately nothing more than an empty set of symbols that could never contribute to the formation of a genuine religion".⁹⁶ Many historians reproached hippies this lack of rigor, arguing that because of that the youth movement of the 1960s could not be taken seriously. In my opinion, it is precisely because of its experimental substance that it should be taken as worthy. Thinkers would rather be confronted to logical developments because it is what they are used to deal with. But when it comes to a free exploration of life, they don't understand anymore and feel obliged to logically explain why it is not worthy.

Is it really necessary to say it: hippies rejected any rigor? They applied the absolute freedom they believed in. Indeed, if they had settled a logical set of beliefs, rigorously related to one another in a rational discipline, how could they have praised real freedom? And they would not have accomplished the revolution which shook the world in the 1960s and still influences many young people around the world. The counterculture of the 1960s touches young people in the world generation after generation as the symbol of freedom. Because following this common focus which was freedom, they allowed themselves to go wherever they wanted to.

But the mainstream society fought very hard to crush the counterculturists' rebellion. The Establishment dictated what was right and what was wrong and did not bear to be contradicted. Why? This memoire gave two answers to this question: the political one, from the Gay Liberation Manifesto, and the psychological one, from Eckart Tolle's *The Power of Now* and Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider*.

In 1970 about 3 million people were involved in the counterculture, out of a population of about 203 million. It represented a tiny minority. Still the number was significant. More than their number, "hippies" were all but unassuming. Their visibility and fundamental claims about individual freedom ensured their influence on the rest of the population. The counterculture was part of an era of rebellion whose consequences has never stopped being discussed. Most agree that the Civil Rights Movement provoked a

⁹⁵ Quoted in *Rocking the classics*, 69.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

certain recession of racism, the feminist movement liberated women on every level, the antiwar movement reduced the faith on the American government for many people.⁹⁷ The particular changes brought by the counterculture are more tolerance in personal choices about physical appearance (clothes), ways of living, sexuality.⁹⁸

However, the central topic of the counterculture – spiritual enlightenment – has not lasted in the mainstream society. Though hippies' claims contributed to the focus on personal fulfillment and well-being, it has actually been co-opted by the consumer society and so drifted away from its former meaning. Well-being centers flourished in the United States and in the world since the 1970s. They provide body care, massages, yoga classes. But none of this activity has anything like a message of universal unity. It is all about personal and immediate well-being. Therefore, though personal liberties has been extended by the 1960s, whose the counterculture was part, according to counterculture understanding, the level of consciousness has not changed. American people can dress, have heterosexual or homosexual sex more freely, but they don't feel closer to the rest of humanity, they still do not understand the meaning of the unity, of the simple life praised by the counterculture people, the one praised by Eastern philosophies, by Thoreau.

Instead, a parallel culture has survived and developed, as a direct inheritance of the counterculture. The New Age gathers spiritual teachers, conferences, major and minor events all around the world delivering the same message than the hippies: human beings are inherently love beings and when they will give up their ego, they will find out that all they believed in were illusions.

Some people have used a fake spiritual message to manipulate others. In western societies they are commonly called "gurus". This term is a Hindu one, formerly designating a spiritual master. The Medias has siphoned it off and used it to talk about sectarian manipulators. This participates of the confusion intentionally created in the Medias between fake and true spiritual messages. It makes people scared of words like "spiritual enlightenment", "universal love", "meditation". Or, if they are not scared, they laugh at it. This vision of the New Age by the mainstream society does not come from the people. It comes from a manipulation of the Establishment, through the Medias, to prevent the masses from grasping the sense of real spiritual enlightenment. Because it will

⁹⁷ *The Movement and the Sixties*, 421-423. *America Divided*, 305-314. Edward P. Morgan, *The 60s Experience: Hard Lessons about Modern America*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 263-265.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 422.

probably make people realize the illegitimacy of the American government which from the very beginning of the country has used fear and violent repression to control people and make them work for the wealth of a minority. Who knows how the Civil Rights Movement would have evolved without the assassination of its leaders Martin Luther King (though we have no evidence that the FBI was involved in it, the Agency did want him dead), Malcom X and Huey Newton; how the hippy movement would have evolved without the repression of the 1970s; how the world would turn without the constant interference of the FBI in peaceful organizations fighting for equality?⁹⁹

Historians' debates about the legacies of the 1960s focus on the evolution of democracy in terms of race, gender, economic equalities. None, of the one I have read, talks about the core message of the counterculture. None challenges the terms of the debate by exploring the spiritual vacuum of Western societies. The universal spiritual message of the hippies has no meaning for them. And so they incorporate it to their comprehension by calling it an "alternative consciousness".

However, the tolerance brought by the counterculture did relieve many Americans from a too rigid way of life. This relief changed the American society forever. As such it must not be underestimated. Eventually, this step may lead to a massive and real opening of consciousness.

⁹⁹ Andrew Cornell's lecture on American Civilization, 2012.

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The Counterculture of the 1960s in the United States: An “Alternative Consciousness”?

Résumé

Ce mémoire analyse le thème principal de la contreculture: l’“ouverture de conscience”. Il argumente que les historiens passent à côté du point essentiel de la contreculture lorsqu’ils l’envisagent en tant que « conscience alternative ». En trois parties, ce mémoire analyse le climat politique et culturel de l’après-guerre, les revendications essentielles de la contreculture et les ouvertures philosophiques et intellectuelles qui l’ont précédée et influencée. Il conclut que la contreculture ne revendiquait pas une « conscience alternative », mais la conscience même, en opposition à l’inconscience de la société hégémonique Américaine. Cela signifie que les « hippies » se percevait en unité avec le reste de l’humanité, comme exprimé dans les philosophies hindous et bouddhiste dont le mouvement s’est fortement inspiré. Finalement le message central de la contreculture – l’Eveil spirituel – est complètement ignoré par les historiens qui analysent les effets de la contreculture sur les générations suivantes, jusqu’à aujourd’hui. En fait, ce message n’est tout simplement pas compris car il ne correspond à aucune « case » de l’hégémonie actuelle.

Mots-clés

Contreculture ; ouverture de conscience ; liberté ; Etats-Unis ; hégémonie

Abstracts

This memoir analyzes the Counterculture’s main theme: the “opening of consciousness”. It states that historians miss the point when they analyze the counterculture as an “alternative consciousness”. In three parts, the memoir analyzes post-war American politics and culture, the countercultural essence and previous traditions which influenced hippies, and concludes that the counterculture did not praised an “alternative consciousness” but *consciousness* itself, in opposition to the *unconsciousness* of the rest of the American society. This means that the counterculturists situated themselves in unity with the rest of humanity, as best expressed by Eastern philosophies which influenced them. Eventually, this memoir exposes the fact that historians who analyzed the countercultural inheritance missed the core countercultural message, which is spiritual enlightenment. This core message’s lasting in the mainstream society is not even discussed, because it is not understood.

Key-words

Counterculture; opening of consciousness; freedom; United States; hegemony



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