

American life in the 60's

A look into the Hippie Culture especially its music

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1 Introduction

The first chapter of this coursework deals with the delimitation of the topic: “American life in the sixties: A look into the Hippie Culture, especially its music” and the objectives of this chore. Moreover, the structure of the coursework is presented.

1.1 Delimitation

When I started writing my coursework, I tried to get an overview of this enfolding topic. I noticed that describing all cultural aspects of the Hippie Culture is very arduous as well as interpreting all music styles, influencing the Hippies. But nevertheless, all vital aspects of the American Hippie Culture are named, whereat in particular I investigated the music and interpreted the lyrics of the chosen songs. At this point, I decided to choose psychedelic music, which is very interesting. It enunciates the music, the spirituality and the leaning to nature religions and psychedelic¹ experiences, e.g. the fantastic lyrics and the improvised performance of the musicians.

1.2 Structure and objectives

I structured my work as follows:

At first there is the introduction, which delimitates and describes the topic. Subsequently there is the exposure of the initiation, where the basics of the Hippie culture are explained. The third chapter is the main part of the work, dealing with the interpretation and comparison of two songs, called “Purple Haze” by Jimi Hendrix and “White Rabbit” by Jefferson Airplane.

The conclusion contains a reflection and a prospectus, holding a view into the future under the aspects of drugs, music and cultural living.

With my work I wanted to give an insight into the Hippie Culture and above all, I wanted to picture the psychedelic music.

¹ Mind-expanding

2 Initiation

This chapter argues with the origins and the life of Hippies, which are crucial facts to set out the basics of this culture. Besides, the psychedelic and esoteric movements are explained, for a better understanding and knowledge of the following chapters about the former music.

2.1 The origins

The Hippie movement arose in the legislative period of President Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969). During this time, the Vietnam War was in progress and many people did not see the reasons for making war on the Viet-Cong, supporting the democratic Vietnam (see no. 7). Thereupon pacifistic attitudes started to develop in the people's minds and consequently, there were many protests against the US-government. Members of the protest marches had pinned flowers on their clothes and were carrying signs, saying, "make love, not war" or "fuck, not fight!".

The word "Hippie" is deduced from the word "Hipster". Hipsters were free black Jazz musicians, who lived on the edge of the American society in the 40's and 50's. There are different terms for the word "Hippie", like Flower Children or Freaks. The word "Flower Children" has its origin in a student protest march for the equality of black and white people, where Student-Hippies put flowers into the rifle-barrels of policemen. In addition, there is the famous "March on Pentagon", where about 70.000 Hippies protested against the war and for equal and better laws for black people (see no. 20).

Another momentous fact for the initiation of the Hippie movement were the parents of the Flower children, who were post war citizens and very embossed by the war. Their children did not comprehend their attitude of law and order and hence they built up a counter culture; the hippie movement.

2.2 The Hippie life

Being a Hippie means keeping a free lifestyle, combined with love and luck, while pursuing human ideals and joint living. Because of that, many Hippies signed off their coherence from the normal U.S. society, where many of their

ideals could not be realised. Accordingly, the Hippies created communes and declared themselves as downshifter, living their ideals separately.

2.2.1 Communes and downshifter

On these ground the Hippies created communes, spread all over natural and quiet places. In a commune lives a society “in which social justice and human rights are taken more seriously than economic power and military force-in which people collectively and cooperatively control their lives” (See no.3, 1.paragraph). A life in the community means sharing all the work but also means sharing all the happiness and luck. A famous commune in the USA was “The Farm”. Today there are still several communes spread over the country, e.g. “Twin Oaks” (See no.4).

Other Hippies, who were not settled down in communes, kept some different living. They call themselves “Downshifter” and they were backpacking and hitch hiking all over the U.S.A., to stroll from one event to another. Downshifters are people who opt out the society and affiliate themselves to the hippie culture.

2.3 The psychedelic and esoteric movements

The Hippie’s also discovered spiritual ways comparable with the reincarnation of nature religions. Old religions were rediscovered, where Drugs played an important. An important leader of the psychedelic revolution was Timothy Leary, who offered psychedelic lessons and travelled to Mexico. He mainly worked with the substance LSD.

2.3.1 Drugs

Drugs, especially entheogens², played an important factor in the hippie culture. On the one hand, they contrasted the hippies within the society and intensified the counterculture and on the other hand they enabled the Hippies to have psychedelic³ experiences. The most consumed drugs by hippies were marijuana,

² Drugs, which can be used in a spiritual way

³ Consciousness-expanding

LSD (acid), psychedelic mushrooms and mescaline, accentuating that marijuana was the most popular one (approx. taken by 80% of the Hippies). But not only did these drugs influence the peace-loving Hippies, but also the music of this time (see Chapter 2.4.1.2 “Psychedelic music”).

Marijuana (i.e. weed, Mary Jane, pot and others) is the dried bud of the feminine cannabis plant. The plant contains the psychoactive substance THC⁴, which is responsible for the mildly euphoric and lazy making intoxication (see. no. 5).

Unfortunately for the Hippies, THC³ is an illegal substance, leading back to the mid 20’s, where many politicians claimed the prohibition of hemp in the U.S.A., because mostly black people consumed it. They traced the high crime rate, especially murders, of the black people to the marijuana consumption. The American politicians injected this rumor successfully in the white American population. Additionally, the hemp opponents stated that cannabis is a gateway drug and causes sooner or later heroin addiction. Today there is no committed murder under the influence of cannabis registered and also the gateway drug thesis is disproved (see no. 15).

As the Hippies wanted to stay in friendship with the black people, they tried marijuana. They proved that the “wacky tobacco” was anything but violence promoting.

A dangerous but interesting smart drug⁵ is LSD (also called Acid, LSD-25). Synthesized in 1938 by Albert Hofmann, a Swiss chemist, it was created as the world’s most effective psychedelic drug. The scientist name of LSD is “lysergic acid diethylamide” and it causes a very high psychedelic effect on the consumers. To conclude the “trip”⁶, LSD lets people see geometric patterns in a well-balanced “set and setting” (see chapter 2.3.2) and glowing colors in their regular environment. Furthermore, the perceptiveness of the consumers is vitiated and they show very strong emotions, like intense laughing or crying. The spheres of LSD action can go up onto religious visions (See no. 6).

On the contrary, there is the so called “bad trip”. Chiefly, the bad trip happens in the surrounding of a terrible set and setting (e.g. graveyards or dark, frowningly

⁴ Tetrahydrocannabinol

⁵ mind-expanding or mind-altering drug

⁶ mind-expanding trip caused by smart drugs

premises) and so causes the consumer to experience horror visions, reality loss and anxiety states. Very similar to LSD are some psilocybin-containing fungi (also called magic mushrooms, psychedelic mushrooms, shrooms). The main difference between the two drugs is that LSD is chemically produced and the mushrooms are naturally growing organisms (See no. 8). The next chapter deals with LSD and psychedelic mushrooms more precisely.

Additively, there was another entheogen used by the hippies, another psychedelic drug containing hallucinogens. Its name is mescaline and it is extracted from the Peyote and San Pedro cactus. Normally it is used by Native Americans for religious rituals but the Hippies, who were very attracted to other cultures and especially the Native American culture, consumed it, too (see no. 9).

2.3.2 Objectives of the movement (Timothy Leary)

The founder of the psychedelic movement was the Harvard lecturer for psychology Dr. Timothy Leary (1920 – 1996). He detected his interest for psychedelic drugs in 1957 when he discovered an article about psychedelic mushrooms, written by the fungus scientist Gordon Wasson. For a magazine, Gordon Wasson wrote about his experiences with the “magic mushrooms”, which he consumed in Mexico, under the constructions of Maria Sabina, a mazatecian shaman. Having read this, Leary travelled to Mexico, in order to take the “interesting” mushrooms. He soon was fascinated and inspired by the psychedelic effects. Kindled, he also tried LSD and described the trip as simile to the mushroom trip (see no.12 → Timothy Leary). At this time he also invented the term „Set and Setting“, whereat the „Set“ is the psychological state of the consumer and the setting is the place and social environment where the consumer is located. To specify: the “Set denotes the preparation of the individual, including his personality structure and his mood at the time.” (See no. 2) and the “Setting is physical - the weather, the room's atmosphere; social -feelings of persons present towards one another; and cultural- prevailing views as to what is real.” (See no.2). A bad Set and Setting can trigger a „bad trip“ and additional, a “bad trip” can cause latent psychosis.

Furthermore, Leary researched the impact of LSD on criminals and its long-term successions. Many of the criminals improved their attitude towards life and people in general. Supposable, the spectacular trip had influenced them.

Besides, Leary offered trips to Mexico, which he praised with the famous slogan „Turn on, tune in, drop out“. He supplied volunteers with some dosages of LSD and taught them how to use it safely as he wanted to present the drug as good as possible in order to confute the U.S. government, making bad propaganda on LSD and Leary. These psychedelic journeys to Mexico ended when Leary was arrested for owning some marijuana (LSD was not illegal at this date). But still Dr. Timothy Leary obtained what he wanted as he had influenced many people and the psychedelic movement actuated (See no. 12 → Timothy Leary).

2.4 Music in the 60's

This chapter deals with different music styles, which influenced the Hippies. Moreover, it is essential to mention the most momentous music events at this time in the U.S.A., for instance the Woodstock Festival 69' and the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967.

2.4.1 Origins of Rock

A very popular music style was the Rock' n' Roll in the 50's. In the 60's, there were some further developments in the way of performances and styles of play. E-Basses were used, instead of acoustic basses. E-guitars have an overdriven sound and the voices turned from singing into screaming. Not all the time, of course, but still when the bands wanted to be really hard. From now on, they called the style simply Rock. Famous pioneers of Rock music and probably impelling on the Hippie movement were *The Beatles* and *The Rolling Stones*. A famous U.S. Rock-pioneer was *Bob Dylan*, who wrote significant songs like “Blowin' in The Wind”, “Knockin' on Heavens Door”, “All along the watchtower”, etc. But also important to mention are *The Doors*, who got famous with hits like “Light my fire” and “Riders on the Storm”. Those had become the most successful rock groups in the country (see no. 11).

During that time, Rock divided itself in many different styles, like Hard Rock, Psychedelic Rock, Brit Rock, German Rock, Folk Rock, etc.

2.4.1.1 Psychedelic music

Psychedelic Rock (also called Acid-Rock) is a part of the rock music and it started in 1964. Psychedelic Rock can be described as follows:

The characteristic features are such as modal melodies and the esoteric lyrics are often describing dreams, visions, or hallucinations. The songs are longer and often contain lengthy instrumental solos and electronic effects such as overdriven, reverb and delayed sounds (see no. 13).

“The album that brought psychedelic rock into pop culture was *The Beatles's Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.” (See no. 13)

Famous U.S. Bands are/were: Pink Floyd, Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, Jefferson Airplane, etc.

Famous psychedelic hits are: White Rabbit, Purple Haze, Somebody to Love, Wind cries Mary, Lucy in the Sky with diamonds!

2.4.2 Music events

There were two very famous music festivals in the U.S.A. during the sixties. The first one is “The Woodstock Music and Art Festival”. It had its premiere from the 15th to the 17th August 1969, located in Bethel, near New York. The organizers expected 50,000 attendees, but 500,000 came to the festival and therefore there were not enough groceries and lavatories. Another important fact is that there was no violence at all over the three days. Until today it is the biggest, most peacefully and also most famous Music Festival ever (See no. 14).

The most famous artists at the Festival were Joan Baez, Santana, Canned Heat, Janis Joplin, Grateful Dead, The Who, Jefferson Airplane and Jimi Hendrix.

The other famous event is “The Monterey International Pop Music Festival”, which was held in the Summer of Love from June 16 to June 18 in 1967.

The most famous acts at this festival were Simon and Garfunkel, Jefferson Airplane, The Who, Grateful Dead, again Jimi Hendrix and also The Mamas & Papas (See no. 10).

Of course there were other festivals as well but they were only very tiny and are not worth to be mentioned.

3 Investigation and interpretation of the music

In this main chapter I have interpreted the lyrics and investigated the style of music of the two songs “Purple Haze” by Jimi Hendrix and “White Rabbit” by Jefferson Airplane and thereupon I compared them. Both songs are ranged in the psychedelic music genre.

3.1 Interpretation and comparison/contrast of Purple Haze by Jimi Hendrix and White Rabbit by Jefferson Airplane

White Rabbit:

The song “White Rabbit” was written by Grace Slick in 1967 and performed by Jefferson Airplane. It came out on the LP „Surrealistic Pillow“ and directly addresses the listeners, asking them to empathize with the described part. This would be a similar person to Alice, from Lewis Carroll’s book “Alice in Wonderland“ from 1865 (see 1.), and the song character goes through a similar story, caused by the consumption of LSD. To obtain a better understanding of the following interpretation, I provide a short summary of “Alice in Wonderland”. The book is about Alice, a little girl that falls asleep and has a very psychedelic dream. She is chasing a white, talking rabbit and on her way she gets to know a lot of mad and strange characters and places, like the mad hatter or the Cheshire cat. In the end, the Queen of Hearts decides to decapitate Alice but she awakes in the last second and is saved.

As the song does not have a rhyming scheme and appears to be one complete strophe, the actual interpretation affiliates.

The first two verses of the song are an Anaphora, „One pill makes you larger /and one pill makes you small“. It enables the author to highlight the contrast between large and small, which also plays an important role in the novel (see 1, chapter 2 „now I’m opening out like the largest telescope that ever was...“ and chapter 4 „...So she swallowed one of the cakes, and was delighted to find that she began

shrinking directly ...”). But both verses show also a vital difference to the novel. Instead of calling it cakes and drinks, the song is about pills, which change the body size. This indicates the relation to the consumption of drugs, especially LSD, which usually was sold in pill form during the sixties.

The next two lines are related to the speaker

The lines 5-10 are addressed to the listeners/readers and ask them to empathize with the character and to imagine undergoing such bizarre events. It also shows the readers/ listeners what consequences the loss of reality can have. There is also the relation to the novel when the rabbit dash (l. 7 „And if you go chasing rabbits“) and the hookah-smoking caterpillar (l. 9“a hookah-smoking caterpillar”) are mentioned.

The lines 11-16 describe the high loss of reality occurring to the speaker (l. 13 – 14 „When the men on the chessboard/get up and tell you were to go) and even give a reason for it (ll. 15 - 16 „... some kind of mushroom/ And your mind is moving low“).

The relation to the book is brought up by the lines 17 and 18 which intercede that Alice was befallen with the same symptoms (l.17/18 “Go ask Alice; /I think she’ll know”).

The words „logic“and „proportion“are impersonated (ll. 19 – 20 „When logic and proportion/Have fallen sloppy dead“) and it is evinced that they sample out when drugs have been taken. The lyrical and musical climax as well as the end is reached in the lines 21-22 where the queen of hearts wants Alice’s head off. There is a very strong relation to the book and both, the song and the novel end with Alice’s awakening.

The last two verses of the song encourage the listeners/readers to take mind-expanding drugs like magic mushrooms or LSD in order to reach such consciousness-altering states.

In my opinion, the song conciliates in a fantastic way how psychedelic drugs can work. Another interesting aspect is the fact that one is accosted to personally and gets influenced by the numerous requests of taking drugs. This makes it a lot easier to empathize into the song.

Purple Haze:

The song „Purple Haze“ by Jimi Hendrix from the LP „Are you experienced?“ from 1967 deals with the speaker, experiencing a LSD trip.

The song consists of four strophes, whereat after the second strophe a verse is interpolated.

Only in the first strophe, there is a steady rhyming scheme. This strophe is introduced with “Purple Haze are in my brain...”. Purple Haze stands for the drug LSD and the metaphor “Purple Haze are in my brain” indicates that the drug is already in the speaker’s body.

The second verse is told by the speaker who has now an altered perception. Subsequently, the speaker tells in the third and fourth verse how he feels under the influence of LSD and it appears that he is quite euphoric which is highlighted by the metaphor “I kiss the sky”.

Oppositional to the first verse, the drug’s influence is increasing in the second verse and causes the speaker to be subject to reality loss. Now the drug raises desperation as the speaker does not know what is happening.

The rhetorical question “Am I happy or in misery?” supports this thesis and the interpolated verse in line 9 expresses the speaker’s helplessness (l. 9 “help me”).

Throughout strophes 2 and 3, the music is getting more and more psychedelic. The number of higher and shriller tunes and mystical voices coming up in the background increases. The speaker is now experiencing some kind of trance.

In strophe 3, the speaker is awaking from his trance for a short time, a characteristically sign for LSD trips. The tenth line indicates that the speaker has now very strong hallucinations and is blinded by the drug so he does not know whether it is night or day (l.10/11 “Purple Haze was all in my eyes/don’t know if it’s day or night”).

Line 12 can be interpreted in the way that the speaker talks to („you’ve got blowin...”) the girl that bewitched him (l. 8, “What ever it is that girl putt a spell on me”). The speaker does not live in reality. Finally, there is a rhetorical question in the end that highlights the reality and time loss once more (l. 13, “is it tomorrow or just the end of time”).

The last strophe is just a bundle of helpless interjections expressing the trip becomes stronger. Now the music is reaching its climax, the part that can also be

interpreted as the climax of the schizophrenic desperation the speaker has been captured by.

Comparison:

Both, “White Rabbit“ and “Purple Haze” indicate some remarkable differences and commonalities.

The commonalities are definitely the psychedelic drugs that are the main topics in both of the songs. In both songs, the speaker’s brains and behaviours are altered by the drug.

The music of the songs is also very similar. They show willingness for improvisation and are targeting the climax of the LSD trips. There are also structural similarities. Both songs do not have a clearly structured rhyming scheme as well as they have no chorus. But this is typical for many songs.

Considering the differences, “Purple Haze” attracts attention as the speaker is telling his experiences during the trip whereas “White Rabbit” is more related to “Alice in Wonderland” and entitles the readers/listeners personally. In addition, I think that “White Rabbit” is more innovative and ingenious.

4 Conclusion

4.1 Reflection

All in all, I can say about this coursework that it is covering all the important aspects of the American life in the Sixties.

I described the history and development of the Hippie movement and also their lifestyle and aims. Although this is a very capacious topic and it is very hard to cover all aspects in detail, I think I have adequately discussed it.

After this, I directed special attention to the drugs and their development during the sixties and as it is a very large topic, I had much information to work up and did this very detailed.

Another point I paid my full attention to, was the music at this time. During the 1960s, there was a large musical development which I tried to cover sufficiently

with information about the styles of music and their representatives. I also gave adequate care to the festivals, although it is a very small topic.

The last but most important part of my coursework was the comparison of two songs. I chose two psychedelic songs which I analysed and interpreted very precisely. The difficulty with them was that insider knowledge was implied in order to interpret them. So finally I have to say that I think I have covered this comprehensive topic quite well and partially very detailed.

4.2 Prospectus

Commonly, one can say that since the Sixties a lot of things went through a change in the U.S.A.

The role of the woman in society was improved immensely, not at last because of the Hippies and their open, liberal attitude. Additionally new ways of communication were invented, like the internet, that scraped the world together more closely.

But still there was a lot the Hippies could not change. Marijuana is still an illegal substance, likewise is LSD. And still there are wars and terror is dominating the world more than ever.

And it is exactly the Americans that should revolute the most, as they are the ones that have to suffer under all the pointless wars President Bush is campaigning. I am astonished that there are so many accepting the wastefully policy of the American government. They think the USA is the best and most economic country but it is not. They cause so much pollution with their big cars, their air conditions and weak built houses. Their consumption of oil and other natural resources is relatively seen higher than the rest of the world. And although they know it, they still refuse to change these circumstances. They refuse to agree to the Kyoto protocoll and keep on polluting the ozone layer and nature around them. This arrogant behaviour is deeply disgusting me and I wish there were more Hippies in the world, like in the sixties, so that they could peacefully protest against war, pollution and all the things destroying our precious earth.