

SONIC COUNTERCULTURE: WHEN THE BEAT GENERATION CHANTED HARE KRISHNA TO SCARE THE WASP SPIRIT AWAY

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DOSSIER RELIGIONS: THEIR IMAGES,
PERFORMANCES AND RITUALS

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ABSTRACT

We analyzed the American society of the 1950s-70s as influenced and reverberated by an accentuated and unquestionable indomania. Along with such indomania, there were religions, intellectuals, alternative movements, and gurus – among which Swami Prabhupada, the founder and propagator of Hare Krishna movement, stood out – who were seen as havens in the eyes of restless young people (college students from Columbia, Berkeley, Stanford and San Francisco) that promoted the beat generation. Such young people rejected Protestant ways of acting and seeing the world, as well as a whole voracious capitalist system that grew around them, seeking mystical (exogenous or native) and oriental means and reversals against the bourgeois and lobotomized social conformities prevailing in America. Finally, they discovered that the sound of the mantras and all the vibration that it could provide perfectly resonated all the enchantment they needed.

KEYWORDS
Counterculture;
North America;
Hare Krishna;
Gurus; Mantras.

“I will make a first proposal: that everybody who hears my voice try the chemical LSD at least once - every man, woman and child over fourteen in good health. Then I prophesize we will have seen some ray of glory or vastness beyond our social selves, beyond our government, beyond America even, that will unite us into a peaceful community. America’s political need is orgies in the park, on Boston Commons,¹ with naked bacchantes in the national forest. I am already acknowledging what is happening among the young in fact and fantasy. I am in effect setting up standards which include drugs, orgies, music and primitive magic as worship ritual”. Allen Ginsberg (*apud* Goswami 2011, 116-117)

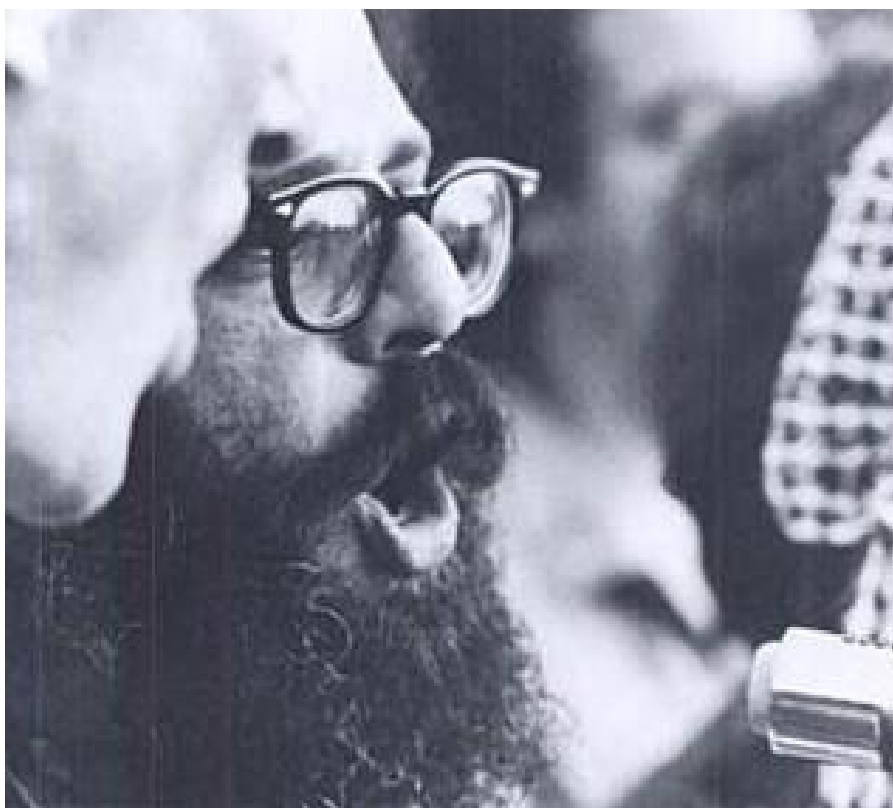


IMAGEM 1
Ginsberg cantando mantras com os Hare Krishnas¹

THE WASP SPIRIT

“Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare”. Along with the chanting of this

1. Boston’s central park, in which, ironically, many were accused of witchcraft and hanged by the former Protestants.

2. Anthony, Gene. *Ommmmmm*. Fotografia, in *New York City: A Photographic Portrait* (Montrouge: John Libbey Eurotext. 1995), 118.


Indian mantra,³ widely vociferated in the 60s and 70s by the Hare Krishnas⁴ and in movies like *Hair* (one of the symbols of the American counterculture), Ginsberg prophesies and wishes that minds are on high, on other planes and well aware of the futile American dream. He is one of the protagonists of our script, provoking values and inciting us to propose and analytically delineate some ways of thinking and being of a movement unprecedented in modernity, which embraced Indian thinking, creating an unimaginable subversive intellectual body that would make the German romantics or the transcendentalist countrymen of the 19th century envious; movements in verisimilitude of ideas (protest, return to nature, perceiving the gloomy economic scenario etc.)

Here, we give flame to the verbs in countercurrent and allow ourselves to coordinate opposing (temporal, spatial, and symbolic) ideas, namely: the American world in the 1950s-70s (following Oppenheimer's dating, 2003), which had emerged a particular hippie counterculture, well observed and summarized by Marvin Harris (2001, 72) with the following elements: "new ways of singing, praying, dressing, and thinking were inserted [in this period] in the name of a 'counterculture'". And giving us more detail, Messeder Pereira (1986, 20-22) adds that, on one hand, the term counterculture can refer to the set of youth rebellion movements that marked the 60s: the hippie movement, rock music, a certain movement in universities, backpacking trips, drugs, orientalism, and so on. It is, then, a dated and historically situated phenomenon. On the other hand, the same term can also refer to something more general, more abstract, a certain spirit, a certain manner of contestation, of confrontation with the prevailing order, of a profoundly radical character and quite strange to the more traditional forms of opposition to this same dominant order. A counterculture, understood in this way, reappears from time to time.

We are dealing, with the former case, a movement dated and historically situated, a manifestation of repudiation of the WASP (acronym for White, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant) modus vivendi, predominant in the USA, but, as Pereira will say later, not from a popular or working class, but coming from a wealthy and intellectualized youth, which had access to the dominant culture and rejected this same culture from within. But

3. From Sanskrit: man = "mind", tra = "protect". Mantra, therefore, designates a metrical process of recitations of mystical, enchanted or sacrificial verses for various purposes (Monier-Williams, 2002, 786). Gilbert Durand presents mantra as one that contains "dynamic words and magic formulæ which, through the mastery of the breath and of the word, dominate the universe" (Durand 1999, 151). It is, however, an isomorphism of pneumatic images, that is, a reunion of the air-word with the vision of reality in symbol.

4. The Hare Krishnas - which we will use with initial capital letters to differentiate from the mantra - as they are commonly known in the West for chanting a homonymous mantra, are part of a Hindu religious lineage, Vaishnavism, which has in modern times a special reference to the reform movement of the Bengali philosopher, mystic and renunciant Chaitanya (1486-1533 E.V.). Religion which has been propagated and registered in the USA in 1966 by the Indian guru Swami Prabhupada.



they rejected not only the established values, but basically the structure of thought that prevailed in Western societies. And it is this structure of thought that interests us. A structure that basically summarizes what Max Weber (2004) called “Protestant ethics”, which, notoriously, started to feed a “capitalist spirit” with its Judaizing re-significations. Ethics and spirit, in the years exposed here, repudiated in a single movement and from the inside out.

To understand this social effervescence, therefore, the neologism “counterculture” is often used, which was coined by the late emeritus professor of history at California State University, Theodore Roszak (Shea 1973, 95), who also propagated the idea of “technocracy” as the apex of a devastating social engineering, through which everything goes through a purely technical examination and purely technical manipulation (Roszak 1984, 20). Technique that manifests the realm of experts and imposes “necessities” on man, as Weber also warned us about the Western rationalization process and its “spiritless experts”.

All this – Protestantism, capitalism, and the domination of technique –, according to Weber, produces a voracious rational action toward ends or ambition for profit, which tends to be associated with purely agonistic passions. A real “development monster”, through which, or in order to combat it, it is not known whether new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals. What is known is the “last men” are the ones who are heard: those “specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart” (Weber 2004, 166), that is, “the Nothings” who delude men through utilitarian disposal, which leads to the progress of cultural values becoming a senseless hustle in the service of worthless, moreover self-contradictory, and mutually antagonistic ends, seeming even the more meaningless the more it is made a holy task; culture thus becoming senseless as a locus of imperfection, of injustice, of suffering, of sin, of futility (Weber 1979, 407).

A system that reverberates, in antithesis, what Marcuse (1987) will call the struggle for life or the struggle for Eros, and this will be a real countercurrent, countercultural struggle.

Thus, the term “counterculture” allows us to limit the whole context without further and larger definitions, without the need to crumble countless theories about culture, transculturalism, metaculture, *kulturkritik*, or multiculturalism. Mainly, for our focus one can also think of the term *vacoculture*, *vac* (from Sanskrit) being the Vedic Goddess of speech, who is in the poets, visionaries, and mystical hymns, thus a culture that represents well the poetry of the writers presented in this work.

For, when one takes a closer look at the images and matrices reflected from hippie times, they see ideas stemming from Indian culture everywhere, which landed in the US and established identities, behaviors, and magical choices. And we see “new prophets” rising with “old ideals” and new transcendentalisms with old romanticism. It seems like a cycle that revolves again and again with ideas that overwhelm by means of sounds that tear veils.

For Maffesoli (2007, 98), one can speak, in this sense, of “regredience”, as a spiraling return of archaic values entwined with technological development. He currently proposes another term: “ingression”, or to enter (in-gress) without progressing (progress),⁵ this is what seems to be at stake for the contemporary tribes. They do not have to wait for an end, an economic, political, social project to accomplish. They prefer to “enter” the pleasure of being together, to “enter” the intensity of the moment, to “enter” the enjoyment of this world as it is.


One, thus, understands that such a movement is much more than a clash or an affront, it’s more than a syncretism of cultures, more than pluralisms or comparisons, more than resistances, and much more than evasions of consumerism or escape from the cult of futility. All of this is in this “social pack”, but it goes beyond, becoming a return, a repagination, a revolution of natural and sensitive human practices, a search for the life-giving song, which provoked a more attentive look at the Eastern worlds that were then being searched for or that came (to the West) again. At last, an (*alter*)*native* emerged, a kind of woodcutter or anti-capitalist woodstock, indeed wood, indeed *paganus*: the sound of the East.

One sought who they were, one clung to what liberated and to a recomposition with re-enchantment, and all this with the help and addition of *ahimsā* or non-violence, *ganja* (marijuana with spiritual purpose), *jaṭā* (long hair in dread), incense, yoga, vegetarianism, mantras and other Indian elements that greatly influenced an entire generation – including the Rastafari⁶ movement, also present in this context. But the mantra will be, in fact, its maximum emblem; the contagious, the frenetic, the whirlwind of consciousness that was so much wanted, and the *summum bonum* of an art capable of supplanting the chaos brought about by the WASP spirit.

The American society of the 1950s-70s is outlined, therefore, and its premises, marks, communicating vessels, and reverberations of a marked and unmistakable indomania. Along with such indomania, there were religions, intellectuals, *swamis* (renunciants) and Indian gurus – such

5. In the materialistic sense of the term.

6. Relationship well documented by ethnographer Linda Aïnouche in *Dreadlocks Story* (2014).



as Vedantists and Hare Krishnas – who claimed to be or were seen as alternatives in the eyes of the baby boomer generation.


Let's first do an imaginary-comparative exercise with some quotes about Indian renunciates, or as the Greeks called them, the gymnosophists, and try, whenever this Indian category is mentioned, to replace it with hippies or counter-culture intellectuals.

About these gurus, Louis Dumont (1993, 37-38) informs us that the man who seeks ultimate truth abandons social life and its restrictions in order to devote himself to his own progress and destiny. When he (the renunciant), hippie, looks behind him at the social world he has abandoned, he sees it at a distance, as something devoid of reality, and the discovery of the self is confused for him, not with salvation in the Christian sense, but with liberation from the hindrances of life as it is lived in this world.

Huston Smith (1997, 66) adds, in a tone of intellectual elegance, that renunciates (and imagine the hippies or countercultural agents), far from wanting to “be somebody”, remain a complete non-entity, on the surface, to unite with everyone at the root. The external life that best suits this total freedom is that of the homeless mendicant. Other people will seek economic independence in old age; the *sannyasin* (renunciant, like the hippies) proposes a total break with all economy. With no fixed place on earth, no obligations, no goal, no belongings, the body's expectations equal zero. Social pretensions also find no soil in which to sprout and interfere. No pride remains in the one who, mendicant bowl in hand, stands at the back door of the house of the one who once was his servant, and would never exchange roles.

However, and still according to Dumont as a debater in this comparison, we can broaden the concepts, the practices, and the imaginary of this Indian renunciant or the hippie, observing that both the hippie and the renunciant or *swami*, by being “outside the world” (as Weber would say) or “socially dead”, close themselves off from the idea of the individual. Except, of course, that this “individual” (Indian or hippie) is unable to erect individuality as a value, because the absolute interdependence inherent in the caste hierarchy or in the counter-cultural world prevents them from having such an individualistic vision or desire. And going even deeper into the imaginary of both, we observe that the motivation for renunciation, each in their own way, is tied to the idea of becoming an individual “outside the world”, in order to liberate the world itself, rather than to satisfy one's condition as an individual.

Dumont and Smith seem to be telling us: if you want to be an individual, be a renunciant or a hippie, but know that by becoming an individual



in this context and with such boldness, you will become an individual “spiritually” responsible for everyone. This is what the *swamis* who arrived in the New World tried (and try) to do, and all those who, in one way or another, followed in their footsteps or simply drew inspiration from them.

As Eric Hobsbawm (1995, 323) complements, this youth culture became the matrix of the cultural revolution in the broadest sense of a revolution, whether in manners and customs, in the enjoyment of the body or trance, or in art, increasingly forming a climate breathed by urban men and women, but who rejected disenchantment or ways of acting and seeing the world around them. Nevertheless, seeking mystical and Eastern means and setbacks against the current WASP, enclosed, bourgeois and lobotomized social conformity.

Victor Turner (1974, 137-138) says that these are the “audacious” members of the adolescent and young adult categories – who do not have the advantages of the national rites of passage – who have “chosen” to escape the social order linked to “status” and have acquired the stigmas of the humblest, dressing as “vagabonds”, ambulant in their habits, “popular” in their musical taste, and subaltern in whatever casual occupation they incubate. They value personal relationships more than social obligations.

Turner seems to sum up a scenario of Indian renunciants, their desires and behaviors; intellectuals’ vow of poverty that infected Buddhists so much, and then spread grossly to the West with the monastics. But unlike the latter and the asceticism of Puritan accumulation, the counterculture returns to the original Indian life/renunciation: without pietistic walls, desiring expanded consciousness, minimalism, not getting caught up in economic chains or corporate parties, escaping from an enticing and alienating gear, knowing the body deeply, realizing that in sex lies the greatest of powers, purifying the mind with natural food, and for all that, immersing oneself in art and being self-conscious. Somehow, therefore, the caste of the intellectuals of ancient India, through the modern Indian masters who arrived there, fit like a glove to those who were escaping from the disenchantment of the world or the Protestant-capitalist prison.

CONTEXT AND PROTEST

Such mental and social jails are verifiable in all bourgeois institutional actions and patterns: in the conservative family nucleus, in the repressive education, in the disguised conformist secularism, in the wars that maintain consumption patterns, and in the Protestant seedbeds that maintain all this, spreading through the stone forests divinizing exploited and expropriated labor, usury and the accumulation of surplus. An overwhelming avalanche of ambition for profit that kills worlds and minds. In the face of this avalanche, Weber (2004, 156-157) makes the point that the

religious valuation of restless, continuous, systematic work in a worldly calling, as the highest means to asceticism, and at the same time the surest and most evident proof of rebirth and genuine faith, must have been the most powerful conceivable lever for the expansion of that attitude toward life which he called the spirit of capitalism.

This is which, in our times, we can call the WASP spirit – and Weber had predicted it –, Disneyfication (Kehoe 1991) Coca-colonization (Wagnleitner 1994) or McDonaldization (Ritzer 2009). Here is the thread that unveils a rational specificity of Western development, and here the “spirit” of consumption and the sanctioned iconoclastic and puritanical “ethics” fit in. All this is what we can glimpse as the *ethos* and the cradle of the technocratic, mechanistic or disenchanting life of American culture; this real nightmare for hippies and loss of meaning for Hindus. But why is it a nightmare or a loss of meaning? Colin Campbell (1997, 20) explains that the West itself no longer showed a similar enthusiasm for its own values and beliefs. It was in the very heart of the West that ‘Westernization’ was facing its wildest challenge; a challenge that was based on a perspective that was, in essence, Eastern. This was happening because that dominant paradigm, or “theodicy” that had served the West so effectively for two thousand years, had finally lost its grip on the majority of the population in Western Europe and North America.

Linking such inferences and thoughts to Weber again, a modern paradox emerges: the extension of an instrumental rationalization – an engine that was supposed to free beings from the irrational shadows of magical thinking – that now culminates in the creation of an iron cage and armor for oneself, generating an interior in which the meanings of life and freedom dissipate and vanish into thin air.

According to Weber, it will be the Puritan asceticism, when transferred from the Catholic monastery cells to professional and secular life, the master spring that comes to dominate worldly morality (intramundane), and to order the economic cosmos of machinery and machine men. Spring that transforms daily and methodical work into a religious duty, and into the best way to fulfill the materialistic wills of a despotic god. This order that today determines the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, and perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt (Weber 2004, 165). Weber further notes that possibly the capitalist spirit has escaped from iron cage molded by the Puritan ethos, but he also argues that even with the apparent fading of this rosy gallantry, one sees its ghost in the bourgeois ethos – even if the Puritans failed in wanting to enjoy two “lords”, succumbing to the Judaizing temptations of the pleasures of wealth – hanging around the lives of everyone and everything.

Weber will add that such an effect also occurred with the accumulation of wealth of Jewish or Catholic monastic asceticism, even before the schism, sometimes yielding to ennoblement, sometimes subduing or renewing the secularizing effect of possessions, but those great religious movements, whose significance for economic development lay above all in their ascetic educative influence, generally came only after the peak of the purely religious enthusiasm was past. Then the intensity of the search for the Kingdom of God commenced gradually to pass over into sober economic virtue; the religious roots died out slowly, giving way to utilitarian worldliness (Weber 2004, 160).

The Protestant lust for profit, therefore, has survived and continues to fuel capitalist economic dictates, yet today one sees the same lust irresistibly shifting from mere profit and enrichment (or coercion to save) to the exacerbated custom of accumulating frivolous goods, and with no further restraint or reins weighing on one's shoulders, as if gaining increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history (Weber 2004, 165). This represents the victory and superimposition of a solvent spirit, which now dissimulates the Protestant material crutches, keeping them as subjective shadows for man to remain motivated to hard work, since the machines cannot stop and the consumption of "novelty" never ceases.

In other terms, the spirit of a good American wing and its unconditional yuppie doctrine is the absolute transcendentality of God and the corruption of everything pertaining to the flesh, explains the entirely negative attitude of Puritanism to all the sensuous and emotional elements in culture and in religion (Weber 2004, 96). Here, Weber seems to decipher everything that the counterculture feels on the skin and in the mind, as such a spirit exudes "convenient thoughts" and full of moralisms saturating individualism (Maffesoli 2007, 97), which provokes, in our times, the reaction of the societal power of a "subterranean centrality", as Maffesoli will say, that surfaces inverse attacks: with artistic sensorialism and taste for the beautiful, Dionysian tribalism and accentuation of the "archaic" with a communitarian dimension.

In the American counterculture there is the perception, therefore, that the West is impermanent, mega-conservative, rationally unhealthy, and all its social structures cause and profit from chaos. But that, even in the face of such disenchantment, a way out is possible, since there are more solid, older, and vibrant societies and ideas that can teach or inspire another way. It is interested in the subtlety of the profound expression of an alternative world, which, circumstantially, since the discovery of its existence, slowly and deeply arrives and vibrates, presents itself and sings, and sings, and sings.

However, even without witnessing the future optimism of hippie cognition, Weber, in the face of this disenchantment, delineates an almost indelible chaos for everything that was and is being built by Puritan asceticism, since it laid the groundwork for *homo economicus* and its unbridled instrumental capitalism with the ghost of dead religious beliefs (Weber 2004, 158). But the counterculture is tired of all this, and focuses determinedly on anti-consumerism, the breakdown of the Christian *habitus*, and the psychedelics of mind, sex, and art. Factors that inhibit, at least for the moment and internally, the whole WASP foundation or framework.

Nevertheless, the WASP “spirit” is there, with very little or no depletion of its disillusioned individualism and bloodthirsty coloring, preserving itself, via capital and the desire for divinized labor, the chimerical attempt (and heir to Judaism) to subjugate the world in order to devalue it. As Louis Dumont (1993, 43) explains, the infinite value of the individual is, at the same time, the debasement, the devaluation of the world as it exists. And within the Western context, this individualism is a value, a value like any other: acquired, coercive, and contagious, but also, and here is its particular core, disenchanting.

Its power, in the 20th century, is transferred to the cultural industry, expanding its control over (still passive and) disillusioned minds due to wars and the promises of enlightenment and scientism, which generate unprecedented consumption epidemics, leading Sérgio do Carmo to conclude that in those years, the world discovered a new fear: the permanent threat of nuclear war, but the prosperity generated in the postwar years had created in the United States a climate of comfort and consumerist euphoria that indicated a new rhythm of life (Carmo 2000, 29); and of a life that was now intended to be globalized.

Globality that reverberates in what Erich Fromm calls “cultural narcotic” and Adorno calls “the monopoly of culture” or “barbarism of the culture industry”, which is linked, as Weber confirmed before them, to the development of technocracy that deprives the human spirit of autonomy, binding it to the market mechanism and the verdict of supply and demand. This inevitably causes the only use value, the only quality they enjoy (Adorno 1985), which consequently becomes illusory purchasing power without *beruf* or “meaning” to life, but as mere fickle and recycled therapies, destroying free thinking. In other words, a total alienation of man, who now has a bar-coded identity: *homo consumens*. Adorno warns that with such narcotic impacts of the consumerist industry, they can be sure that even the distracted will consume them, each being a model of the gigantic economic machinery which, from the first, keeps everyone on their toes, both at work and in leisure (Adorno 1985, 105).

For the counterculture protagonists, all this is a rotten human side that is dying, as so warns Stephen Prothero (1991, 209) that somehow Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, a book the Beat studied and discussed in the late 1940s, could help them. Inspired by Spengler's apocalypticism, the Beat announce the death of the tribal god of materialism and American mechanization. "There is a god dying in America", Ginsberg proclaimed. And following Spengler's cyclical view of history, they prophesied that a new deity was emerging from the wreckage.

And the Indian alternative values and Gods fit like a glove to reverse the culture and put leisure back in the place of business, curbing the neurosis of consumption and the association of having with being.

But what differentiates basic consumption from *homo consumens*? Erich Fromm informs us that they live for consumption and from consumption, having it as a relief from anxiety, insecurity, despair and depression, underlying our way of being and thinking. He says that one who's depressed feels as if there is an emptiness in their guts, they feel as if he is paralyzed, as if they lack what it takes to act, as if they cannot move properly for lack of something that could set them in motion. If you consume something, the feelings of emptiness, paralysis, and weakness can temporarily leave them, and, in the meantime, they will be able to feel that they are somebody after all, they have something inside them, they are not an empty thing. They fill themselves with things to expel their inner emptiness. It is a passive personality that senses to be little, and repress these suspicions, becoming *homo consumens* (Fromm 1986, 15-6).

Here is the modern neurosis, since producing and consuming has become a valid tendency and is acclaimed by the social niches that live under the tutelage of "cultural narcotics". Emotionally, emptiness, as never thought of before, is produced since now the meanings of life and the Gods have been erased by the technocratic mode, the world of appearances being all that is left; that which accelerates death (internal/emotional and external/bodily).

In the face of this whole American dream system, poets, artists and intellectuals emerged, aiming at an anonymity that would deprive them of the rights and duties of a *homo consumens*. They claimed to live an Eastern and Native American truth, around their long hair, colorful headbands, peacock feathers, "gods' eyes" mysticism, beads, miniskirts, the abolition of bras, the rejection of national symbols and anthems, the ruptures in the face of racism, speciesism, and homophobia, and the use of flowers in their hair with great care, esotericism, and the building of alternative rural communities. Jackets replaced ties, and the guilt over sex and nudity was thrown away. In short, a "un-refrainment", or disinhibition of the affections. With long robes, they ingested old and new hallucinogens,

defended pacifism and environmentalism, and made use of underground, folk, and oriental music with their respective instruments. In short, various attempts to revive ways of being and thinking in a pagan and pre-modern style, far removed from any WASP doctrine.

Marcuse argues that aesthetics, together with affectivity, has a basic acuity, since they allow one to go through and experience nature itself, abolishing man from the vision proclaimed and inflicted by *homo consumens* (Marcuse 1987). In epitome, Sérgio do Carmo (2000, 29) wonders what meant for a discontented young man to live in a country that boasted the largest middle class in the world. The malaise was caused by the tyranny of the masses, by the tendency to form herds of mediocre citizens. The writers of the beat generation were not satisfied, and sought to reflect on the solitary multitude absorbed by the desire for security, generalized submission, conformism, and the need to identify with the image that society demanded of each person. Against this criticism, the press coined the term *beatnik*, a fusion of beat and nik, the end part of the word *Sputinik*, the first Soviet satellite launched into space in 1957. It designated young American rebels alluding to the supposed sympathy for leftist ideas and revolt against conformism.

Marcuse also ponders over this probability of a subversion in industrialized society, now triggered by those who abdicate the order of labor as behavior, as an end in itself, within the youth and among artists, that is, surrounded by those who would remain motivated to let themselves be led by a plane of attunement between art and life, or resist by a “non-repressive principle of reality” (Marcuse 1987). In this way, the arena of struggle would no longer be between capital and labor, as Marx intended, but between those who would be equipped to soften labor and tune it to an aesthetic spectrum of the world, as the hippies, alternative intellectuals, and the entire North American counterculture try to do.

GURUS, PSYCHEDELICISM, MANTRAS AND HARE KRISHNAS

The arena turned to pacifism, environmentalism, and romanticism to purge itself of WASP: privileging nature and its language code, rather than an institutional religiosity; perceptual communal individuation, rather than dogma; and instinctive man, rather than puritanical morals. Thus, connecting to nature, one used instinct in communal and chanted, sang, and resonated.

Dissenting voices emerged, such as that of Scott McKenzie, through the song San Francisco on the album *The Voice of Scott McKenzie* (1967). So also did the renowned The Byrds, The Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, The Doors, Steely Dan, Morphine, the shrill and irreverent Janis Joplin, the wizard Jimi Hendrix, the self-taught prodigy Bob Dylan, Lou Reed, Patti

Smith, and Neil Young. In addition to Haight-Ashbury's newspaper, *The San Francisco Oracle*, and a psychedelic underground journal published in 12 issues (September 20, 1966 to February 1968) by editor Allen Cohen (1940-2004) and art director Michael Bowen. The latter even exhorted such passages as: "We were suspicious of your god who never failed you – always loving, a Christ with no human faults. The terrible truth was that your Christ carried hell with him, and that each of you had a hell, a darkness" (*apud* Goswami 2011, 153).

Connected to all this is the LSD guru, Harvard Ph.D. professor, psychologist, and neuroscientist Timothy Leary (1920-1996), who inspired the song "Come Together" and participated in John Lennon's famous *Give Peace a Chance* video anthem. Leary is in the lyrics of "The Seeker" by The Who, in "Let the Sunshine In" from the movie *Hair*, in the title of a song by the American heavy metal band Nevermore (album *Nevermore* 1995) and by the Swedish band Tiamat ("Four Leary Biscuits", on the album *A Deeper Kind of Slumber*, 1997), among other notable appearances. And, although he was one of the founders of psychedelic psychotherapy, with the use of hallucinogens, he was expelled from Harvard (October 6, 1966) after conducting an experiment on his entire class of students (Johnson and Richards 2008, 606).

Leary (1990, 11) argued that the psychedelic experience was a journey into new realisms of consciousness, with no limits to its reaches, whether with the perception of language, space-time, ego, and identity itself.

On Leary's pace, anarchist activist Abbie Hoffman (1936-1989), cofounder (along with Jerry Rubin, Anita Hoffman, Nancy Kurshan, and Paul Krassner) of the *Youth International Party* or the *Yippies* movement (1967),⁷ also notorious as one of the biggest icons of the counterculture, he sent by mail, along with other friends, on Valentine's Day 1967, three thousand envelopes with marijuana sticks to New York City residents, randomly chosen from the phone book. Enclosed with the wrappers was a letter that read, "Happy Valentine's Day. This cigarette contains no harmful cancer-causing ingredients. It is made from 100 percent pure marijuana. [...] [A postscript warned] Oh, by the way, possession of the item you now hold in your hand can bring up to five years in prison. It matters not how or from whom you got it" (Hoffman 1998, 190).

Despite all this, the North American media only began to give full attention to the counterculture on January 14, 1967, with the premiere of the music festival (attended by more than 20,000 people) *Human Be-In*, in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. This festival would be the "birth" of

7. This *International Youth Party*, whose members were known as *Yippies*, turned to the unfolding free speech and anti-war activism of the 1960s.

the counterculture on a large scale, managing to bring together diverse tribes and philosophies. During the festival, Leary, in front of thousands of spectators, uttered his famous phrase: “Turn on, tune in, free yourself”, which became a great slogan of the counterculture. Cesar Carvalho (2002) expresses it as a slogan that has a precise meaning: to turn on is the act of ingesting any hallucinogenic substance, which means to perform an introspective dive, enabling access to multiple and differentiated levels of perception; to tune in denotes the need for a harmonious and interactive search with the outside world, based on new internal perspectives, and to free oneself designates the self-confidence acquired with the discovery of personal singularities. Thus, Leary’s slogan meets the millennial longings that certain drugs have provided for their users throughout history, as it is very evident in India.

Gayathri Prabhu (2013, 11) will say that at the *Human Be-In* festival, Ginsberg and Gary Snyder performed the Hindu rite of *pradikshina* (circumambulation usually done around a deity in temples) and thus the whole event was granted the status of an encounter in pilgrimage. Through such performances, the (Beat) poet’s individual and experiential quest was consciously shared and transformed into a common space.

Three days later, on January 17, 1967, Ginsberg, accompanied by dozens of hippies, greeted the founder of the Hare Krishnas in the West, Swami Prabhupada, on the occasion of his first visit to California, with a bouquet of flowers at the San Francisco airport (Muster 1997, 25). And, although he was not sympathetic to two ideas coming from Prabhupada, because the *swami* was opposed to the practice of sex without commitment and to hallucinogens – something that Ginsberg advocated with appreciation –, the poet sympathized with everything else, especially his erudition, mystical joy, and the boldness to preach a simple life with elevated thinking (via mantras). In other words, for the *swami*, being a spiritualist meant being musical. This is what Tomas Turino (2008) calls “participatory art”.

Ginsberg was enamored with the *swami*’s catchy pamphlet phrases, such as “Get high forever, practice Krishna consciousness!” or “Just imagine a room full of LSD. Krishna consciousness is like that”, which demonstrated what his target audience was (Hann 2008, 70-71). Ginsberg also always chanted the hare krishna mantra publicly as part of his philosophy of life (Brooks 1992, 78-79), recommending it to provide great states of ecstasy (Szatmary 1996, 149), and recognizing that such a mantra was the greatest gift the *swami* had given to Americans, and a real weapon against the evils of war and consumerism. The *swami* had always warned that this mantra was a powerful bomb against the castration of consciousness, and more expansive and liberating than any other practice. Not for another

reason, such mantra is very evident in the movie *Hair*, a seventh art emblem of the counterculture.

Turino will call all this a process of musical transformation through the deterritorialization of culture, that is, expressions that have been displaced from their places of origin and made available to geographically distant people, which leads, Turino (2008, 118) adds, to a trans-state cosmopolitan cultural formation.

To this end, Mark Slobin has adopted the term “interculture”, referring to the “the farflung, expansive reach of musical forces that cross frontiers” (1992, 42). Of the three types of intercultural he visualizes – the industrial, the diasporic, and the affinity –, it is the affinity intercultural that is most attuned in our case. The groups it produces, which Slobin characterizes as “charmed circles of like-minded music-makers drawn magnetically to a certain genre that creates strong expressive bonding”, serve as “nuclei for the free-floating units of our social atmosphere, points of orientation for weary travelers looking for a cultural home” (*Ibid*, 72-73). The basic, subcultural overtones of this characterization make it doubly appropriate to the kinds of countercultural networks we present here.

Tullia Magrini (2000), on the other hand, relies on the concept of “sound groups”, formed by people who choose a particular song or chant primarily because they identify a part of themselves with the values they connect to that song. Again, while such groups may coincide with ethnic, generational, or social groups within a given society, they can also be transnational and, crucially, remain open, acting as voluntary communities of consent (as opposed to prescribed communities of descent). Similarly, Veit Erlmann (1998, 12) adapts Kant’s notion of the aesthetic community, which forms and falls apart based on taste, by applying it to all social formations, loose affiliations, neotribal groupings, and the cult groups of individuals that float freely or are not anchored in rigid structures of control, habitus, and membership. Erlmann (1998, 12) also describes how world music styles become demarcators of community through the formation of affective bonds between dispersed places, as seen in the counterculture period.

Such themes of ritual, celebration, and intercultural identity building around sound recur in Turino, who offers an eloquent exposition of the ways in which music is socially significant. Turino’s (2008, 1) central thesis therefore shares the proposition that music is not a unitary art form, but this term refers to fundamentally distinct types of activities that serve different needs and ways of being human. Making music in this way leads to a special kind of concentration on the other people with whom we interact through sound and movement and on the activity in

and of itself. This heightened concentration on the other participants is one reason why intercultural music is such a strong force for social connection. Moreover, this participatory performance is the most democratic, least competitive, and least hierarchical, which is to say that it does not fit well with the broader cultural values of the capitalist-cosmopolitan formation, where competition and hierarchy are prominent and profit-making is often the primary goal. This is, in itself, a reason why participatory activities exist below the radar of official mainstream and of popular attention in capitalist societies.

The Hare Krishna movement is, in fact, participatory: once it started its activities in New York in 1966, it reinforced India as a pilgrimage destination, a sacred icon and the cradle of a unique thought – just as it had happened with American transcendentalism after contact with Indian philosophy, but now with the possibility of a faster, “direct” and sound contact. In fact, as Dale Riepe (1970, 273) points out, India exerted more influence on American philosophical thought than any other non-Western culture.

In addition to Professor Leary and British philosopher Alan Watts, Ginsberg (2002, 36) intended to incorporate Swami Prabhupada into the great corner of hippie ideology, and to that end organized the Mantra Rock Dance (January 29, 1967, a fortnight after the *Human Be-In*), held at Avalon Hall in San Francisco, featuring Big Brother and the Holding Company, Jefferson Airplane, The Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, and Moby Grape, and with an audience of approximately 3,000 hippies (Bromley 1989, 106, Chrissydes 2006, 213). According to Kimmo Ketola (2004, 304), the stage had been taken over by many lights, strong incense and a gigantic sensory atmosphere. And after two hours of heavy music, the *swami* enters with huge garlands of flowers, receiving a shower of petals and applause from hippies and rockers, like a real pop star. And to enhance his entrance, many images of the Krishna icon were projected, while Ginsberg took the microphone and spoke, next to the *swami*, about the hare krishna mantra. After brief explanations, Ginsberg starts playing the harmonium and chanting the mantra, which caused a commotion among everyone. And soon one could see thousands of hippies dancing and gesticulating with the *swami* in his footsteps. A mantric frenzy that lasted almost two hours.

For Ketola, it will be these frequent, public, mantric frenzies, real festival-rituals that will be stigmatized by the American and academic perception that the Hare Krishnas are a religion or philosophy of life typical of the counterculture. We would even say with a lot of beat.

Ginsberg made a point of accompanying this and other mantras during his poetry readings and interviews, often using one of Swami Prabhupada's

favorite musical instruments, the harmonium. Besides the hare krishna mantra, he used to recite the famous *Bhagavati Prajñāpāramitā Hrdaya Sūtra* or simply “*sūtra of the heart*”,⁸ included in the lyrics and with backing vocals of his own in *Ghetto Defendant* (1982), by the English punk-rock band The Clash.⁹ For, according to Ginsberg himself, his protests are also religious, going so far as to state that *Howl*, his 1956 book, is a statement by individual experience of God, sex, drugs, and absurdity (Ginsberg 1976, 21), exposing that the poems are religious and he intended them to be (*Ibid*, 32).

But where did he get the idea that such sonic festivals were the best way to combat the spirit of warlike, consumerist America? Five years before all this effervescence with festivals in the US, Ginsberg, at the age of 37, traveled to India, where he stayed for two years. It was the early 1960s, and in an India full of equal protest. It was the time of the *Hungryalists* in Bengal, for example, a group of anti-establishment poets, led by Malay poet, playwright and novelist Roy Choudhury. In 1962, Choudhury hosted Ginsberg at his residence in Calcutta for a few days – days that certainly taught Ginsberg how to fight through artist, in the sense of attracting not only with words, but uniting them with gestures, sounds, and symbols. And nothing better than Indian culture and its rebel poets to show him this. What the Beats were to America, the Hungryalists or Hungry Generation were to Bengal – an emblem of modern rebellion, questioning everything that was considered conservative, in the Indian case, trying to rescue the freedom of thought and the sacredness of sex that always characterized classical India. Choudhury got into trouble for his impactful poem “Stark Electric Jesus”.¹⁰

Ginsberg, from America, already familiar with Hindu or sympathetic texts, thoughts, and friends, such as the Englishman Adous Huxley, tried to see the real India without the lens of an outsider, immersing himself in the culture and trying to adapt to the food, clothes, imaginaries, ideas, and sensibilities. Among other things, he was dazzled by the ease with which Indians understood and accepted death, for rather than being just a deeply philosophical concept, he realized that they treated death as part of everyday life, as “normal”. Consequently, his contemplation towards death and the Hindu rituals surrounding it became a constant theme in his poetry and in the *Indian Journals* – his personal pilgrim’s diary in the land of the *swamis*. Hundreds of romantics and hippies, seeking an unusual, full life and new sensations that could completely disaggregate

8. The *sūtras* are Buddhist sacred discourses, and this particular one is part of the Mahāyāna Buddhist school.

9. For more details on the relationship of the lyrics to the Buddhist mantra and Ginsberg, see: Thompson 2011, xxi-xxiv.

10. Inspired by this poem, there is a 2014 film of the same name, directed by Mrigankasekhar Ganguly and Hyash Tanmoy.

him from the WASP world, followed Allen Ginsberg to India, decades after his first trip. “Ancient heaven”, “initiation”, “existence like God”, are phrases Ginsberg uses to describe his experience in India during his interview with Thomas Clark for *The Paris Review*. In the same interview, he compares his poetry to “Sanskrit prosody” (Ginsberg 1966).

In his diary, it is more than clear his fascination with all aspects of Hinduism: yogis with huge dreadlocks, covered in mortuary ashes, some smoking sacred herbs, ecstasy in minimalism, visible expanded consciousness, smells never before known, the chanting everywhere, public philosophical debates, unparalleled musical tradition, street theater on every street corner, deep intoxicating eyes, the madness of the Gods, and, most importantly, feeling free with one’s sexuality, one’s dress and one’s thinking. Everything was, in short, poetic. And he concludes, “how can Da Vinci beat an elephant on a mouse?” (God Ganesha). Ginsberg’s point is that all the rationality of a Western genius neither conceives nor surpasses the symbolic depth of the Indians. In a letter to Kerouac, he will say, “The great rock cut [34] cave temples of Ellora, where the Great GLORY of Indian art really is, makes Michelangelo’s Renaissance look Western little” (*apud* Schumacher 2016, 376). All of this will be catalysts for the endless counterculture festivals.

It will be no different at the psychedelic summer (August 15-18, 1969) of the famous Woodstock festival. The Hare Krishnas were also present there and the Indian gurus Maharishi Mahesh and Swami Satchidananda. The attention of the media and hippies also turned to the charity New York “Indoshow” (with 40,000 spectators) organized by George Harrison and the Indian musician Ravi Shankar, *The Concert for Bangladesh* (August 1971) at Madison Square Garden.

A GENERATION IN INDOMANIA

The Beat Generation was, therefore, an event that had begun in the 1940s with the young students at Columbia University – William Burroughs, Lucien Carr, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and other comrades –, who were emerging with an original poetic and literary movement that later became known as the counterculture. And it all started with their contact with the poetry of the Irish occultist and translator of Indian philosophical works, William Yeats. Yeats ignited in Carr and Ginsberg the inspiration to run a *New Vision* in America, from what the Irish poet, armed with his indomania, called *A Vision* (Lane 2017, 165).

Charles Wrenn summarizes the relationship of the poet who impacted the Beat Generation with Indian thought saying that “There was one period in [Yeats’s] early life when his imagination was captivated and stimulated by India – not the India of politicians, or historians or travellers, but

an India of pure romance, which bears some subtle yet obvious relation to old romantic Ireland” (Wrenn 1920, 09). And P. Sri (1995, 61) adds that:

This was a period when he experimented with “many pathways” in order to find his true poetic subject and voice (VP 845). One of the paths Yeats travelled on was revealed to him by Mohini Chatterjee, a young Brahmin who came to Dublin in 1885 as a representative of the Theosophical Society, but went beyond the “contemporary” eclecticism of theo-sophy to the *philosophia perennis* of Vedanta to the ageless perceptions of human existence enshrined in the Upanishads, the *Gita* and in the works of the eight-century South Indian seer Sankara. The teachings of Mohini Chatterjee left a vivid and lasting impression of Yeats; initially, they strengthened his youthful romanticism, cast a dreamy atmosphere over his early poetry and inspired some specifically “Indian” poems [...]; eventually they impelled him to transcend his cultural and national boundaries to articulate themes of universal validity and cosmic significance.

Kerouac was inspired to create the term *Beat Generation* in 1948 with the same “renewal of the Indian spell” (Dabić 2016, 59) and through Yeats, possibly reading poems like “The Indian to His Love”, “Mohini Chatterjee”, “The Indian upon God”, and “Anushuya and Vijaya”, characterizing an anti-conformist youth movement in New York. But the name actually came about in a debate about Yeats with the poet John Clellon Holmes, the term “beat”, according to Kerouac, being coined by Huncke, a street dealer, who originally used it in his colloquial phrases. The adjective “beat” meant, within its initial context, colloquially “tired” or “down”, but Kerouac soon expanded the meaning to include the connotations “optimistic”, “mystical beatific”, and an association with the “beat” of unorthodox jazz, which had already become popular among the intellectuals of his day.

The term now blended beatitude, jazz beat, and rhythm, that expressed tiredness or saturation of the system, of the “normal”, and that took everyone to a *New Vision*. Beat had become a magic word also for young Englishmen, hence the name Beatles, a fusion of the words “beat” and “beetles”.

Very quickly, beat became part of the youth and intellectual language, becoming even more popular when Holmes published an article in The New York Times entitled “This Is the Beat Generation” on November 16, 1952.

The most incisive non-conformism of this generation took a significant turn, strictly speaking, with Kerouac’s *On the Road*, which set the whole generation in motion with its account of nomadic life, like an Indian *swami*. Written in 1951, Kerouac typed the text frantically on 40 meters of a roll of telex paper to avoid the constant changing of sheets, in an attempt to symbolize the road as a journey in spiritual search. But, according to Sérgio do Carmo, all this will only have a profound impact as a rejection

of bourgeois values and in the blossoming of beat aesthetics in 1957, when the hippie counterculture will be preannounced, with all its valorization around spontaneity, nature, and the expansion of mystical perception. Something embraced via hallucinogens, alternative music, and Eastern religions (Carmo 2000, 28).

The emblematic Bowen even designed the *Human Be-In* poster with a picture of an Indian *sadhu*, attached to a triangle with a very evident mystical third eye. In another poster of the same show, one can emphatically see: “bring flowers, incense, feathers, candles, posters, flags, families, animals, percussions, bells and flutes – which, in fact, was the same kind of suggestion that the Hare Krishnas made to their public gatherings. Timothy Leary is also seen wearing Indian necklaces. The event, as always, began and ended with Ginsberg chanting various Indian mantras.

Bowen was one of the American counterculture thinkers to make a pilgrimage to India in 1969, an occasion that marked his entire artistic career and personal life, given his dedication (five decades) to the study of *Vedānta* and outcropping of various themes that represented the *Sukhāvati* or “Pure Land”, a description of the *Buddha Amitābha*¹¹ or heavenly abode of Buddha, according to the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist school.

Bowen, also known by the initiatory name Baba Kali Das (“servant of the holy Goddess Kali”), upon finding a six-foot-tall granite column (assigned to the San Francisco traffic) abandoned in a grove, immediately, because of its phallic formation and resemblance to the god Shiva’s symbol, the *linga*¹² – a symbol already well known to Bowen – “christened” it as such and such. He began to worship it daily (with flowers, incense, and the sounding of shells and mantras), along with dozens of other followers, believing the lithic object to have magical powers like the famous Indian *lingas*.

According to the American magazine *People* (1994), several of Baba Kali’s followers claimed the stone to be a healing element, and with the healing fame of the magic stone, its attraction to many pilgrims from all over the United States increased alarmingly, becoming (in disenchantment) a major problem for the administrators of the park and the nearby churches, and a supposed hotbed of state-conflict. It got to the point where local

11. In Tibet he is known as *Od Pagme*, and in Japan as *Amida Niorai*. He is one of the Buddhas who purifies the *karma* of desire.

12. The most popular and worshiped of the sacred deities in ancient and modern India is the *Linga*, the phallic symbol of universal manifestation and procreation. The *Linga* is seen as a popular orgiastic symbol and creative core of cosmic existence (*Prakti*), just as the pole that complements it is the feminine principle *yoni* (“womb”, “source”). This hierophany of stones represents a lithic cratophony, embodying a magical and vibrant cultural incidence. Therefore, Eliade (1998, 178) says that the cult does not address the stone, considered as a material substance, but the spirit that animates it, the symbol that consecrates it.

state authorities ordered the removal of the stone. Baba Kali fought the removal in the courts until January 1994, when it was removed from the park and taken to his garage, which soon became his personal temple and a new pilgrimage site.

Bowen catalyzed a vibrant movement of crowds of young people, claiming and propagating love in the face of an anti-Belicism; changes appreciated by many utopias and societies today. John Starr Cooke (1920-1976) joined Bowen in 1958. He was the one who created a meditation center in 1958, an Aquarian Age tarot, and the psychedelic preaching group *The Psychedelic Rangers*. Cooke meditated six hours straight in Mexico for the benefit of the *Human Be-In* event organized by Bowen, presided over Bowen's initiation ritual with the consumption of *Datura stramonium* (a plant with high hallucinogenic power), founded the *Church of One* in 1967 (Anthony 1995, 130), and, in the same year, in a large march against the Vietnam War in front of the U.S. Pentagon, he distributed thousands of daisies to the demonstrators, which were photographed when held next to the rifles and became, from then on, icons of the fight against the war, creating the stigma of flower power among them (Lee 1992, 205).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As already seen, Ginsberg's striking poetry and mystical activism, along with the entire Beat generation, made him a charismatic eloquent on the function of sexual freedom in America (Turner 1974, 138), as well as a great sympathizer and disseminator of Indian religions. His sympathy generated many great nationally televised events and interviews involving and relating hippies to India. And the main relationship was through music, especially with the chanting of mantras, which Ginsberg wanted to introduce and coin as songs or hymns of the counterculture, for carrying an energy and identity contrary to the world proposed by modern America. He had started his mantric journey from his first trip to India, and when he returned, he met Indian masters and again echoed ancient sounds, especially the hare krishna mantra divulged by Swami Prabhupada, with whom he had long conversations and coexistence. Ginsberg even donated money and helped Prabhupada on several occasions, including for the establishment of his second temple in the West (in San Francisco) and in several excursions to promote his spiritualist cause, even getting the *swami* his first visa to stay in the USA.

Thus, the apothegm that matters to us is: the hare krishnas mantric songs, along with all the trappings of a counterculture outlined here, significantly permeate the American counterculture or *vacoculture*, possessing in the eyes of the hippies and their prophet poets, such as Ginsberg and Kerouac, an attempt to abstract or eliminate the vehement WASP way of being.

The hare krishna mantra that the musical Hair used in the lyrics “Be-In”, the clarinetist Tony Scott titled one of his songs in the same year, and the New York band The Fugs, in 1968, did the same with their song “Hare Krishna”; and even with Ginsberg reciting the mantra. Englishman Marc Bolan introduces it in his song (“Frowning Atahuallpa”) of the same year, the American singer Marion Williams includes it in her album *Standing Here Wondering Which Way to Go* (1971) and the pianist and harpist Alice Coltrane makes a beautiful arrangement with the mantra in *Universal Consciousness* (1972), besides titling another one in 1976.

Something similar will be done by Ruth Copeland, Fleetwood Mac, Stevie Wonder, Marion Williams, Hüsker Dü, N.O.R.E., Ivan Wilzig, and Travel Corporation; by George Harrison, Boy George, Goldblade, Quintessence, Bill Oddie, Kula Shaker, David Sharp, and Placebo; by Nina Hagen and Toxoplasma, and by Brazilians Zeca Baleiro, Nando Reis, Karnak, Seu Jorge, among others.

Thus, under the influence of counterculture thinkers, Hair, and especially Swami Prabhupada, nowadays countless bands and artists of various musical styles chant the hare krishna mantra, whether as a form of minority protest, as an alternative to American customs or WASP, or to reach other consciousnesses.

Finally, it is well known that, as Timothy Leary himself eloquently warns us (2007, 9-10), counterculture flourishes whenever and wherever some members of a society choose lifestyles, artistic expressions, and forms of thought and behavior that sincerely embody the ancient axiom that the only true constant is change itself. The hallmark of counterculture is not one particular form or structure, but the fluidity of forms and structures, the disturbing speed and flexibility with which it emerges, mutates, morphs into another, and disappears. Counterculture is the moving crest of a wave, a region of uncertainty in which culture becomes quantum. To borrow a phrase from Nobel Prize-winning physicist Ilya Prigogine, the counterculture is the cultural equivalent of the “third state of thermodynamics”, the “nonlinear region” in which equilibrium and symmetry have given way to a complexity so intense that it looks like chaos to our eyes.

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