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**WAR AND PEACE IN THE RHETORIC
OF THE PSYCHEDELIC REVOLUTION
IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED KINGDOM**

WOJNA I POKÓJ W RETORYCE REWOLUCJI HIPISOWSKIEJ
W STANACH ZJEDNOCZONYCH AMERYKI
I WIELKIEJ BRYTANII

Abstract

First, the idea of “warfare” as inherent in the initiation aspect of the psychedelic experience is discussed; then this experience is highlighted as the nucleus of the so called new consciousness, understood by T. Leary as the “revolution of the mind.” Other ideologists of the Hippie generation, though, interpreted it in terms of socio-political “warfare” (J. Sinclair), i. e. in contradiction to “love and peace”: most immediately associated with the Hippies, and here interpreted to some extent along the lines of Baudelaireian “artificial paradise.” The resulting paradoxes, as well as various meanings of “warfare” or “conflict,” are subsequently exemplified on the

Streszczenie

Na początku omówiono koncepcję “walki” w kontekście inicjacyjnego aspektu doświadczenia psychodelicznego: centralnego dla “nowej świadomości”, według T. Leary’ego oznaczającej “rewolucję na poziomie mentalnym”. Inni ideologowie pokolenia hipsowskiego interpretowali jednak “nową świadomość” w dosłownym sensie socjo-politycznej “walki” (J. Sinclair), czyli w sprzeczności z filozofią “miłości pokoju”, naturalnie kojarzoną ze światopoglądem hipisowskim, bliską też jednak “sztucznym rajom” w rozumieniu Baudelaire’a. Wynikające stąd paradoksy, jak również różne znaczenia pojęć “walki” i “konfliktu”

basis of relevant rock lyrics of the era (e.g. The Beatles, Tomorrow, Jefferson Airplane, MC5), when “artistic articulation” basically meant the musical one. Finally, the paradoxical nature of LSD as *the* weapon of the Hippie Revolution is elucidated through the analysis of Country Joe & the Fish’s second album.

Keywords: psychedelia; acid rock; Hippies; non-violence; escapism; revolution.

zilustrowano następnie przykładami z klasycznych piosenek rockowych okresu rewolucji hipsterskiej (m. in. The Beatles, Tomorrow, Jefferson Airplane, MC5), wyrażającej się głównie przez muzykę. Na koniec podjęto próbę wyjaśnienia paradoksalnego charakteru LSD jako głównego oręża tejże rewolucji na przykładzie drugiego albumu grupy Country Joe & the Fish.

Słowa kluczowe: psychedelia; acid rock; hipisi; pokojowe nastawienie; eskapizm; rewolucja.

1. Introduction

Considering that the ideology of the Hippie Generation (that, as shall be seen later, may be readily identified as “Psychedelic”) is usually associated with the ideas of “love and peace,” one could initially wonder how the notion of “warfare” may fit into this apparently idyllic picture. Still, under a closer analysis, it will appear that this notion is inseparably connected with the course of the psychedelic, or mind-expanding experience: the one of fundamental importance for this generation, both in the individual and collective aspect.

The psychedelic experience is sometimes described in terms of *instant mysticism* [Dobroczyński, 1999, p.17], which suggests that it leads to the transcendental illumination with the necessary help of mind-expanding, most often chemical substances, such as mescaline, psilocybin or LSD. They naturally make the road towards this illumination easier and shorter than “pure” meditation, according to Georgi Gurdzhijev concept of *shrewd man’s path* [Dobroczyński, 1999, p. 18]. This notwithstanding, both the psychedelic and mystical experience are supposed to expand the scope of the subject’s cognitive powers, which is usually accomplished through initiation *alias* acquiring new, unexpected knowledge. Don Juan Matus, a Mexican Indian shaman presented in Carlos Castaneda’s renowned “reports,” compares the effort involved in the process to going to war [Castaneda, 1996, p. 106], as, in order to advance the faculty of cognition, one has to “fight” one’s long established habits in this field. Moreover, the “fight” in question is understood in the psychedelic sense, as, according to Don Juan, it is *mescalito*, or peyote, known even better in the chemically synthesized form of mescaline, that is the teacher and defender of people [Castaneda, 1996, p. 11].

Consequently, in the pertinent literature there frequently appear words and phrases related to conflict, confrontation, or even warfare. Timothy Leary, stressing the power of LSD to revolutionize the individual consciousness, indicates its subversive potential in the realm of social and political life [Leary, 1998, p. 73]. John Sinclair, one of the ideological “fathers” of the Hippie Generation and the leader of the White Panthers, conceived as a “twin” of the militant or even terrorist Black Panthers, speaks about *cultural revolution*, whose LSD-driven *weapon* is *rock and roll* [Sinclair, 1972, p. 113].

The British authors of *The Illustrated New Musical Express Encyclopedia of Rock* hear the sound of *the battle-cry* [Logan and Woffinden, 1977, p. 118] on Jefferson Airplane's album *Volunteers*.

There is, however, the opposite aspect of the psychedelic or mind-expanding experience, identified almost a century before the term "psychedelia" was actually coined by Humphry Osmond, a British psychiatrist, who in 1956 produced the classic definition: *To fathom Hell or soar angelic/Just take a pinch of psychedelic* [Rick, Bigwood, Staples, Ott, and Wasson, 1979, p. 146]. In 1860, Charles Baudelaire, one of the foremost representatives of Romantic dandyism, published *Artificial Paradise*, an essay on the qualities and effects of wine, hashish and opium, continuing on Thomas De Quincey's historic *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821) and prefiguring Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956), inspired by the author's mes-caline experiments.¹ In this unusually perceptive analysis of the temptations and traps of narcotic/psychoactive² intoxication, the famous poet put forward the historic concept of "artificial paradise" that provides a temporary release from the dullness of everyday existence and makes it possible to *buy genius and happiness for a handful of dimes* [Baudelaire, 1992, p. 53-54].

Thus the opposite, escapist, that is non-revolutionary aspect of the psychedelic experience became defined: to be later endorsed, for example, by Huxley, who maintained that humanity cannot exist without artificial paradise [Huxley, 1991, p. 38]. This concept was still alive and well also in the times of the Psychedelic Revolution in the US and the UK, its two main scenes, to which our further analysis shall be restricted.

2. War or peace?

In the lyrics or titles of relevant songs of this era-as the Flower Power Generation articulated itself mainly through music³-we regularly find the rhetoric of warfare against the "pigs"⁴ (street rebellion, as fervently promoted in the title track from *Volunteers* by Jefferson Airplane, a leading band of the Hippie San Francisco, or violence, underscored in "I'm Mad Like Eldridge Cleaver" by MC5 from Detroit, initially under John Sinclair's ideological guidance).⁵ At the same time, we just as easily come across the instances of naive, albeit frequently drug-informed Hippie idealism, expressed either via individual temporary excursions into the "artificial paradise" of colourful phantasmagorias ("Mr. Tambourine Man," a famous song by Bob Dylan, later covered by The

¹ Let it also be remembered that in 1932, in Poland, St. I. Witkiewicz *alias* Witkacy, a highly innovative dramatist, fiction writer and philosopher, published the seminal *Nikotyna, Alkohol, Kokaina, Peyotl, Morfina, Eter + Appendix*, presently known as *Narkotyki* ["Narcotics"], where he elaborated upon his experiences with nicotine, alcohol, cocaine, peyote, morphine, and ether.

² The term used synonymously with "psychedelic."

³ It was probably only natural for the children of "nonliterate age" - according to Lawrence Ferlinghetti, speaking on behalf of the Beats: immediate predecessors, if not spiritual fathers, of the Hippies [Wright, 1985, p. 36].

⁴ As the middle-class establishment was defined in the counter-cultural slang.

⁵ Eldridge Cleaver was the Minister of Information of the Black Panther Party.

Byrds or Melanie), or through collective dreams of humanity living in love and peace, that is the equally “artificial” paradise of socio-political utopia (“Let’s Get Together,” a classic anthem of this generation, originally recorded by the composer, Dino Valenti, still in 1964). In “swinging London” of the late 1960s, much less radical politically than San Francisco or Detroit, there appeared, nonetheless, a declaration of “war” against the capitalist service industry, entitled “Let’s Loot the Supermarket” and recorded by The Deviants, a Hippie proto-punk group, while the word “revolution” became almost a cliché: due to the generally admired Fab Four (“Revolution,” “Revolution No. 9”), or Tomorrow, also popular at the time, mainly in the UK (“Revolution”). Even Daevid Allen, a seminal figure of the avant-garde of British psychedelic rock (as a co-founder of politically indifferent Soft Machine), having settled down in Paris before the rebellion of May 1968, openly declared in the song “Glad to Sad to Say” that *we are gonna change the world, as this is the world of revolution* [Allen, 1969]⁶.

Under a closer analysis, however, those apparently uncompromising, belligerent declarations in most cases reveal surprisingly non-violent content. Starting from the most extreme end, as defined by “White Panther Party 10-Point Program” postulating *total assault on the culture by any means necessary, including rock and roll, dope, and fucking in the streets* [Sinclair, 1972, p. 105], one may wonder why dope, which usually encourages peaceful, passive behaviour, should be prominently featured as one of the main weapons of this “assault.” Similarly, one may speculate why marijuana, generally known for relatively mild effects, should have been mentioned in the immediate context of war in “Mexican Grass War” from *Think Pink* (a “cult” classic of British rock psychedelia) by Twink (John Alder), basically known as the drummer of Tomorrow and Pink Fairies. Moving on to the analysis of lyrics, one shall not fail to notice that “revolution” in The Beatles’ understanding is by no means a violent one: *but if you talk about destruction/Don’t you know that you can count me out*, as, in the first place, *you’d better free your mind instead* [The Beatles, “Revolution”, 1968].

This suggestion obviously refers to the concept of revolutionizing one’s mental attitude with the help of peyote or LSD, promoted by Casteneda and Leary respectively. The ultimate result, especially in the latter case, was to reach the utopian *world in harmony* [Fleetwood Mac, 1970/1089] (to quote one of the songs by a seminal British blues-rock band of the time) – which, as has already been mentioned, in practice amounted to little more than “artificial paradise.” Still, in the “Summer of Love” of 1967, the dream of universal Flower-Power happiness was very much alive: *vide* Tomorrow’s vision of “revolution” that consisted in *Flower Children spreading love* [Tomorrow, 1967]. Two years later, in “Glad to Sad to Say,” D. Allen—quite far removed from this group of beat/R&B roots as a rock aesthete of Beat literary connections—still saw the final destination of *the world of revolution* in “love and peace”.

⁶ A similar message, *We can change the world/Rearrange the world/It’s dying to get better*, was voiced in Graham Nash’s “anti-political” [Logan & Woffinden, 1977, p. 166] “Chicago” (1971); the song was inspired by the ultimately unsuccessful Yippie Festival of Life, held in this city in summer 1968 in opposition to the Democratic National Convention.

In the Psychedelic Revolution era, similar scenarios of “warfare”—understood as revolution, change, or confrontation—appeared also at least in The Doors’ “Five to One,” with the significant contrast of “violent” protectors of the establishment (the policemen armed with *guns*) and non-violent preachers of “revolution of the mind” (the Hippies armed with *numbers*, which in the counter-cultural jargon meant marijuana or hashish cigarettes) [The Doors, 1968]. In the immediate aftermath of this short-lived phenomenon, they were featured, for example, in “Children of the Grave” by the British hard rock, or even heavy metal band Black Sabbath, strongly informed by the Hippie idealism of the late 1960s (despite widely publicized satanic leanings). At the beginning, a perspective of violent confrontation is outlined—...*the children start to march/Against the world they have to live in/Ah! the hate that’s in their hearts* [Black Sabbath, 1971]—even though it is simultaneously stressed that the children have *revolution in their minds* [Black Sabbath, 1971]. In the end, it appears that the children’s objective is to *show the world that love is still alive* [Black Sabbath, 1971], which, paradoxically, brings this angry protest song relatively close to the aforementioned piece by Tomorrow, with its almost idyllic picture of the youthful protest.

The latter qualification could be justifiably applied to The Beatles’ song and cartoon film *Yellow Submarine* (1968), which, nevertheless, was immediately recognized as a metaphor for an alternative community and anti-establishment opposition by the participants of students’ protests in Berkeley (see the film documentary *Berkeley in the 60s*). In fact, however, the confrontation between the music-loving community of Pepperland and the music-hating Meanies, ending with the latter being defeated by means of beautiful sounds, betrayed closer affinities with the “artificial paradise” of colourful psychedelic phantasies⁷ than with socio-political reality of this turbulent period.

Closer to this reality were undoubtedly artists such as Country Joe McDonald and his band The Fish, neatly combining the tradition of folk protest movement with extensive acid rock⁸ improvisations and arrangements. Country Joe’s version of non-violent “warfare” against the establishment obviously referred to the transcendentalist traditions of “civil disobedience,” as his most famous song, “Fish Cheer & I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag,” demonstrated. The American Hippie bard, exactly like Thoreau in his classic essay, demanded the official recognition of the right to stay away from the unjust (Vietnam) war his country was waging. Rather than destroy the largely imperfect socio-political system, both of them opted for pursuing independent, alternative lifestyle on the fringes of the establishment. For the members of communes founded by transcendentalists, it meant living in harmony with God and nature as well as self-perfection through meditation. For the members of much more numerous Hippie communes around one hundred years later...

⁷ The film was remarkable for the richness and sharpness of colours as well as for the fluidity of shapes, typical of the visual side of the psychedelic experience. In this particular case, they were due both to Heinz Edelmann, the art director of the production and a pioneer of the “psychedelic” style of animation, and, possibly, also to The Beatles’ experiments with LSD at the time [Chaciński, 2010, p. 34].

⁸ As rock music of the Psychedelic Revolution era was often called, with reference to LSD (commonly known as “acid”).

On the cover of *Eric Burdon Declares War* (1970), the first album recorded by the famous English blues-rock singer with the funky-R&B-Latino-jazz Afro-American group named War, we read that *we the people have declared war against the people for the right to love each other* [Burdon & War, 1970]. This belligerent statement—much in line with the standard Hippie rhetoric, regularly featured in Burdon’s recordings after he settled down in California in late 1967⁹—was in fact strikingly close to the aforementioned vision of *Flower Children spreading love*. It perfectly summed up the paradoxical semantic twist resulting from “war” being embraced or, in a sense, instrumentalized by “love and peace,” as we have managed to observe at least a few times so far. It does not mean, however, that, within the Hippie ethos, similarly bold anti-establishment declarations remained a purely rhetorical gesture.

The Beatles, who in 1968 included on their eponymous double album¹⁰ the tempestuous rock number “Helter Skelter,” along with much mellower “Revolution,” could hardly imagine that, only in the following year,¹¹ the title of the former would become the motto of Charles Manson’s Family,¹² literally aiming at “war” against “pigs.” The “war,” exemplified by the director Roman Polański’s wife, Sharon Tate, her three guests,¹³ as well as La Bianca married couple being stabbed to death in August 1969, was occasionally interpreted as an instance of bloodshed *for laughs* [Stone, 1974, p. 64], inspired by *a hippie thrill killer* [Stone, 1974, p. 64]. Still, those murders were arguably closer to the ritual slaughter as referred to for example in W. Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954): the members of a peer group becoming reduced to the level of barbarism (due to the suspension of individual responsibility) by the psychopathic leader, driven rather by an unfulfilled rock musician’s complexes than by any alternative ideology. Though supported during the trial by some prominent figures of the American counter-cultural movement (such as Jerry Rubin, evidently misled by his occasional rhetoric of socio-political protest), Manson, along with his recordings such as the album *Lie: The Love & Terror Cult* (1970), ought to be viewed rather as an aberration of the Hippie movement and its idea of warfare. Implemented by the criminally misguided guru and his immature followers, the latter was definitely bound to assume the dimension of bloody (self)destructive violence.¹⁴

Far more typical representatives of the Hippie mainstream were, in contrast, the aforementioned Country Joe McDonald and his band, neatly, though, in fact, inadvertently exemplifying the escapist aspect of the Flower Children’s idea of generational

⁹ See, first of all, “San Franciscan Nights,” his famous song from this particular year, or “Monterey,” released a year later to commemorate the historic musical event in held in California in June 1967.

¹⁰ Informally known as *White Album*.

¹¹ Marking, paradoxically, both the peak and decline of the short-lived Hippie Dream, symbolized by the Woodstock and Altamont music festivals respectively: the former remarkable for “love and peace” vibrations at their most effective, the latter – for irrational, bloody violence.

¹² In this particular case, it was actually misspelled as “Healter Skelter.”

¹³ Jay Sebring, a renowned Hollywood stylist, as well as Wojciech Frykowski, a playboy from the communist Poland, and his American partner Abigail Folger.

¹⁴ A captivating image of the Flower Power ideology becoming fundamentally degenerated by Manson’s Family is to be found in *Helter Skelter*; two films of the same title, made in 1976 and 2004 respectively and based upon the eponymous non-fiction bestseller by Vincent Bugliosi of 1974.

“warfare.” This aspect that we have already managed to identify finds its significant illustration in the arrangement of the musical content of *I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die*, Country Joe and The Fish’s second, most renowned album. Having started with the civil rights protest song in the shape of “Fish Cheer & I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to-Die Rag,” it quickly evolves towards musical contemplation of psychedelic landscapes of the mind, ending with atmospheric instrumental tracks, “Eastern Jam” and “Colors for Susan.” In other words, from the involvement in the socio-political reality of the Hippie Revolution and Vietnam War era, the artists steer directly into the “artificial paradise” of pure mind-expanding (narcotic?) escapism - similarly, to some extent, to Tomorrow in “Revolution” or even The Beatles in *Yellow Submarine*.

In this way, Eldridge Cleaver’s remark that *LSD is a counter-revolutionary drug, sapping the will to change the world by replacing it with a false new one* [Cope, 1996, p. 74], becomes perfectly exemplified and the paradoxes we hitherto observed – neatly summed up. What remains to be added is that it was also (first of all?) the unrestrained promotion of “dope” as one of the basic weapons of “cultural revolution” that was bound to have adverse, that is counter-revolutionary effect. When it became “cool,” as well as rather easy, to manifest one’s rebellious attitude mainly (only?) through psychedelic/narcotic consumption, “dope” became a commodity: one of many in the capitalist consumer society, whose rather well-off members have always been unlikely to undermine the socio-economic system within which they were more or less safely positioned. In the long run, however, this commodity could not only *sap the will to change the world*, but also irreversibly influence personal lives of many people.

3. Aftermath

Thus we arrive at the final issue of the present essay, that is the complicated problem of evaluating the outcome of the Hippie rebellion against the “Monster” - as the “imperialist” American establishment of the late 1960s was metaphorised in the title song from the famous fourth album by Steppenwolf, one of the leading American Hippie rock groups.¹⁵ Declaring “war,” one usually hopes for victory, or, at least, for some measurable success. What, then, was the balance of gains and losses of the 1960s’ psychedelic “warfare” in the United Kingdom and, first of all, in its former colony on the opposite side of the Atlantic Ocean?

What was to be successfully achieved by the “warriors” in question was, in the first place, the change of individual consciousness, intended to have a revolutionary impact upon the society at large [Leary, 1998, p. 22]. As a result of more and more individuals becoming mentally liberated, civil disobedience-restricted to the fringes of democratic society in the times of transcendentalists—would become one of the main rules of social conduct. The “unjust” wars—*vide* the one between the USA and Mexico, against which Thoreau protested—would no longer be the case, having no general consent on the

¹⁵ The title was most probably inspired by the second part of Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*, where the “imperialist” America of the former decade was presented as “Moloch.”

part of the citizens. Furthermore, the technocratic drive of the contemporary civilization and the ensuing devastation of the natural environment would gradually diminish: so much so that, as T. Leary prophesied in 1968, in ten years' time grass would grow all over Times Square [Leary, 1998, p. 192]. On the artistic (musical) side, the dictatorship of commercial agencies and phonographic companies would be ultimately broken, giving way to the independent concert/record market.

As history showed, the emancipation of the individual consciousness—owing to the new electronic media, such as the Internet—took place remarkably later than the Psychedelic Revolution, the link between the two being, in fact, much weaker than Leary would have his followers believe [Leary, 1998, p. 25]. The long awaited end of the unjust war in Vietnam may only marginally be credited to the Hippie protesters, many of whom soon decided to “sell out” to the establishment - see, at least, the renowned film *The Big Chill* (1983), or a bitter reworking of Simon and Garfunkel's “Scarborough Fair” by Tuli Kupferberg¹⁶ in “Vanity Fair” (1989), the song about a girl who *once had ideals in the past* [Kupferberg, 1989]. The foundations of the “official” record industry remained basically untouched: considering that, from the very start, many acid rock groups became contracted by major companies, for example Jefferson Airplane by RCA, or Moby Grape by Columbia (the former, in the subsequent incarnation of Jefferson Starship, going unashamedly commercial). Leary's aforementioned prophecy proved to be just ridiculous, while his propaganda of the chemical tools of the consciousness change being virtually harmless – highly debatable. Among those who voiced most fundamental objections in the latter issue was John Lennon, who, in the wake of his regular LSD “trips,” found himself reduced to *nothing* [Turner, 1997, p. 62].

One might only wonder if this uninspiring aftermath of the psychedelic “warfare” could have been avoided: regarding that, as early as in 1967, there had appeared rather unequivocal predictions as to the course the Hippie Revolution was actually taking. In order to illustrate this point, let us refer at least to The Seeds, a “psychedelic punk” group from Los Angeles, and their concept album *Future* that triumphantly starts with “Introduction – March of the Flower Children”: only to conclude with “Six Dreams” and “Fallin,” born out of suicidal, drug-induced nightmares.

At the same time, there have to be observed some unquestionable gains of the Psychedelic war era, which, under the guise of “New Age,” is still with us. Sociologists and political scientists would probably see the demonstrations against the American intervention in Iraq in 2003 as a direct reflection of Hippie demands to put an end to the Vietnam war. Just as well, they may be likely to identify the advanced ecological awareness and increased sensitivity to the minority rights as a legitimate part of the heritage that the 1960s' counter-cultural movement left behind. Music lovers and critics would argue, for their part, that it was in the Flower Power era that the music of the young generation fully developed as a legitimate artistic medium: naïve beat turning into ideologically significant rock. The issue whether these “assets” counterbalance the

¹⁶ In the 1960s, a key figure of The Fugs, a group of counter-cultural rebels from New York's Greenwich Village, betraying significant affiliations with the Beat/Hippie movement.

aforementioned “liabilities” is necessarily open for discussion, as well as determined by historical or generational perspective.

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