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## **Love, Peace and Psychedelia: the Role of Symbols in the Sixties Counterculture**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*The Hippies are often caricatured in postmodern discourse as disaffected college dropouts, long-haired liberals and drug-fuelled rebels. In their roles as social influencers, they consciously stoked the fervour of civil protest and change through idealist acts. This study attempts to find out the specific forces which led to the development of the Hippies' ideological beliefs and values, and how much these influences drive the counterculture phenomenon. The paper aims to trace and examine the Sixties' means of expressing anti-establishment stance through studying several counterculture devices featuring symbolic associations, including record album sleeves, festival posters and decorative emblems. It also discusses how the range of counterculture devices were designed to help define, and relate the Hippies' ideals to mainstream society as means of group identification, self-expression and shared values. The key question is posed in regards the extent of the legacy left by the Hippies era: how the significant experiences, artefacts, and attitudes which shaped (and was shaped by) the political, social and cultural ideologies of the Sixties, still influences postmodern society, and the cultural critics, authors, and thinkers today. To conclude this analysis, the paper aims to provide a critical insight of the Sixties' residual effects for today's generation.*

**Keywords:** hippie, psychedelic, symbol, counterculture, social change

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

*What can a thoughtful man hope for mankind on earth? Given the experience of the past million years? Nothing. History... read it and weep. ~ Kurt Vonnegut, Cat's Cradle (1963: 252)*

The Sixties is often sketched by historical and cultural researchers as a cauldron of permissiveness, rebellion and revolutionary cultural and social change (Marwick, 1998); its narratives characterised, legitimised and instigated primarily by an enlarged pool of about 3.6 million college- and university-age youth. These figures were not trivial, as they marked a doubling up from two foregoing decades (Gitlin, 1987: 21; Walsh, 2010).

#### **1.1 What brought on the Sixties?**

Historians regard the Sixties as significant from a wealth of evidence that mostly focus on events and attitudes behind the civil protests of the decade. These movements challenged the American government on issues centred on its foreign-policy decisions, besides providing

raucous platforms for the awakening of Baby Boomers and educated, audacious youth who spontaneously revolved into the “flower-power” generation also known as the Hippies.

The use of an array of communications tools fuelled primarily by television and motion pictures, together with urban city population growth, created a wealth of unprecedented cultural information, from music to fashion to gender rights controversies (*Oregon Public Broadcasting*, 2005a), compounded in the Russian-American “space race” and the first moon landing that heralded “hope, promise, failure, innocence and cynicism” (Walsh, 2010). The demographic explosion in the United States post-World War II defined the ‘Hippies’ era, but also drove a wedge between them and the latter, antecedent generations.

This paper examines the range of counterculture devices that helped define, create shared meaning, and relate the Hippies’ ideals to larger society. A key research question posed is whether the Sixties’ many artefacts, experiences, ideologies, relics of group identification and self-expression have relevance to the postmodern era, and how influential they are among culture critics, authors, and thinkers. The research aims to provide a critical insight of the Sixties’ residual effects on today’s generation.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Popular culture is yet imprecisely understood. For some, it’s nothing more than a perpetuation of cultural learning; others are keener to engage with ‘what happened and the ways it was experienced by themselves and by many’. The dichotomy occurs as experts and academic researchers involved in ‘rewiring’ cultural studies into contemporary scholarship are in constant battles between picking out and capturing the ordinariness of people’s lives, and the elements they view as more tasteful, more intellectual, more refined, and the most distinctive aspects of said lives (Hall, 2014).

For Stuart Hall, the “culture of the masses” is in essence a self-presented suite, a self-portrait created through social life, politics and economic power, viz. distinctive fashions, hairstyles, consumption behaviour and ways of speech, and these form stake their social significance by emphasising a break with rustic, folk sensibilities and rural characterisation (Hall, cited in Campbell, 2006: 47). It is signalled by the adoption of popular commodity traits such as novelty, coolness, hedonism, individuality, self-fulfilment and consumerism (Hinds, cited in Campbell, 2006: 54).

The Sixties’ agenda of social change hinged on individuals’ willing adoption of a liberal set of beliefs and values that would instigate the development of a unique, iconoclastic youth culture founded on nothing more than “love and truth” (Stanley, 2013: 39). Media played a constructive role to present the bizarre behaviours and ways of thinking in the Age of Aquarius (a moniker for the Hippie era), as revellers sought to foment tangible social changes in the normative cultural fabric in symbolic aspects (Stanley, 2013: 105). The essence of *counter culture* is encapsulated in various non-conformist acts, reactionary speech and attitudes (individually and in groups), open public activism centring on advocacy issues, such as revoking oppressive laws within the context of cosmopolitan Western societies (McBride, 2003).

## 2.1 Politics, Social Revolution and Cultural Changes

Spread from the United States, the social identities marked by extremities in attitudes and values diffused to Canada, England and other countries (Marwick, 1998). Besides being a period of civil and political unrest, the Sixties was a saturation of personal and collective consciousness over economic and social power imbalance, and it was also an expressive, posturing era of innocence, rebellion, and espousal of communal experiences. As college and university students outnumbered farmers by 1969, American campuses were tangible symbols of unlimited freedom for aspirational men and women (Gitlin, 1987: 20-21). The seed of contention against America's portend of war against communism grew from sizeable and confrontational youth movements such as *Students for A Democratic Society* or SDS (Gitlin, 1987: 15).

Socially self-conscious, middle and upper middle class youths had become vulnerable to fears over bureaucratised academic institutions (Gitlin, 1987: 4). Mingled with the international proliferation of communism, the youth generation were stirred to demand and entreat for peace, leading many to express their feelings and thoughts through emblems, performances and the consumption of products that spoke their anger and discontent (Heath, 2001; Sayre, 2008). Anti-war street rallies, campus protests against nuclear testing, public sit-ins and the torching of draft cards (Figure 1) escalated into spectacles (Gitlin, 1987: 239-281; Sayre, 2008), until the Kent State University shootings in 1970 by the Ohio National Guard that killed and injured a dozen peaceful student demonstrators, turned the tide (Lewis and Hensley, 1998).

The Sixties' ideologies broke out in an apparent aberrance to ordinary political conflicts. Instead of formal factions, they were situated in the hearts of ordinary people: college and university students, mothers, religious groups, journalists and other non-political community groups (Lamb, 2012). As public moods veered to make sense of drugs, sexuality, gender rights, law and order, radical thinking led to public agitation for civil reforms (Grunenberg and Harris, 2005: 89-91). Vocal in opposing America's role in the Vietnam War, the Hippies

searched for ways to peace, fomenting a 'cultural revolution' whose key principles was toleration and freedom to express every form of opinion and tendencies, barring judgement based on appearance (Marwick, 1998).

Saul Alinsky, the Chicago social reformer who wrote *Rules for Radicals*, defined true political justice as that which lay in the hands of citizens (Atkinson, 2014). Agitation and change comes before the community that shares "mass power" (Alinsky 1971: 7) could be organised. To affect that change for a more equitable distribution of power, he suggests that the communication between people must be built on:



Figure 1: American protesters with anti-war placards in 1965

*“[...] legends, anecdotes, values, idioms [...] he knows that worn-out words like “white racist”, “fascist pig” and “motherfucker” have been so spewed about that using them [serves] only to identify the speaker as “one of those nuts” [...] Relationships are sensitive areas that one does not touch until there is strong personal relationship (with others) based on common involvements. Otherwise, the other party turns off and literally does not hear, regardless of whether your words are within his experience ...” (Alinsky, 1971)*

Alinsky (1971) was concerned that respect for people's dignity was not buried under means and ends in organised conflicts, when people with egos fight to get things organised for community change (127-28). An increasingly cosmopolitan American society was by then wracked with identity politics, substantiated with the growth of scholarship in fields such as cultural criticism and popular culture studies.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study presents several major cultural references in the form of representations that symbolises the range of countercultural ideologies for the rule-breaking Hippies generation, which - in sum - were to celebrate experiment and transgress (Campbell, 2006: 59).

A large measure of Hippie artefacts denote the times in uplifting modes: hearty hues, flowery designs that heed a pro-feminist stance, expressed in shapes, symbols, colours and archetypes, viz. that *‘peace and love looked like this’* (McCarthy, 1990: 84-98). Other representations of the Hippies lent a commercial hand to cultural merchandise. Qualitative case studies of vibrant advertising posters were a crucial device designed for information and persuasion: promoting albums, music festivals, events, and other aspects of rapidly developing consumer lifestyles. Critical analysis will be provided through a multitude of messages, posters connected those who share similar interests and enabled scruffy rock stars to attain acclaim. The public took notice of who, where, when and how to gather to consume these “new modes of self-presentation”; and to celebrate their unflinching attitudes in their personal and social relations (Marwick, 1998).

The key questions: *How are the significant experiences, artefacts, and attitudes which shaped by the political, social and cultural ideologies of the Sixties, still influence postmodern society, and the cultural critics, authors, and thinkers today? Can the range of rhetorical devices helped define and relate the Hippies’ ideals to larger society as means of group identification, self-expression, shared visions and values?* Underscore the process of searching for answers.

### **4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

As the effects of widespread economic, political and social conflagrations were mediated from within the cultural climate itself, these symbolic representations served the cause of urging various American classes to rally against what they perceived as discriminatory and unjust practices against minorities (Campbell, 2006: 32), and to present themselves (Figure 2)



as the new, hip subculture positioned in ‘New Left’ communities (McMillian and Buhle, 2003).

Popular consumerism and materialism outgrew mainstream criticism in the Sixties (Heath, 2001). Expectations of social and economic transformation grew in key urban populaces such as Liverpool and San Francisco (Grunenberg and Harris, 2005: 271) and Los Angeles – the latter’s legendary Sunset Strip would morph into a rock and roll boulevard in the 1970s (McBride, 2003: 123).

The anti-consumerist faction conversely spurred counterculture protestations. The Hippies personified authentic living and individuality (Heath, 2001: 12) - living outside the city, closely embracing nature and environmentalism, making their own clothes, turning into instinctual units of organic, self-sustaining communes (Marwick, 1998; McBride, 2003; Morrell, 1997). Exemplifying mystical social groups, they wrote folk music, produced naïve art forms and cultural objet d’art in “tribes”, dressed in the borrowed stylings of Native American such as headbands, finger rings, fringed tops, moccasin, feathers, beads, buckskin jacket, long hair and braids (Sayre, 2008).

The revolution of hippie fashion was an expression of a generation free from societal restriction, out to find and restore meaning to life (McCarthy, 1990: 100), a factor that was responsible for bringing to head political debates on the commonalities for existence.

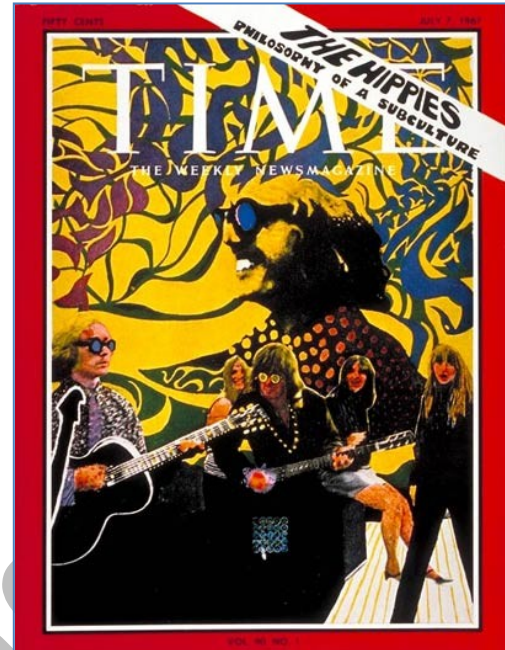


Figure 2: *Time Magazine* cover on July 7, 1967

#### 4.1 Anti-War Rhetoric: Woodstock 1969

The Woodstock Music and Art Fair (Figures 3a, 3b, 3c) epitomised the combined power of political and entrepreneurial opportunities. Organised as a commercial rock venture by four financiers (Mason, 2012; Spitz, 1979), Woodstock brought a stellar congregation of American pop and rock acts to a farm in New York in 1969. The music festival, attended by an estimated 450,000 has since come to symbolise a successful mass-organised event, branded on a non-violent credo in protest against war, and was rightly billed as “three days of peace and music” (McCarthy, 1990: 110).

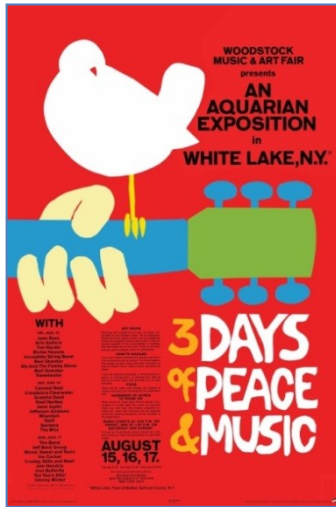


Figure 3a:  
Woodstock Poster



Figure 3b:  
Woodstock Advertisement



Figure 3c:  
Woodstock Entrance Ticket

## 4.2 Peace Symbol and Other Permutations of Peace

Despatched in service of the anti-war cause, the peace symbol was extensively utilised in the marketing of popular culture in the Hippies heydays (Stanley, 2013: 96). A nifty, familiar and easily recognisable sign (Figures 4 and 5a), it was the product of an outgrowth of religious fervour among Quakers and pacifists who in 1958 protested the British government's involvement in atomic research by marching from Trafalgar Square to Aldermaston, where Great Britain's nuclear weapons research facility was situated (Gable, 2008). The symbol, a semaphore-inspired graphic representation of two letters, N and D, stands for 'Nuclear Disarmament' (Gable, 2008).

The 'placard effect' was another popular anti-war visual rhetoric, borne from Lorraine Schneider's 1967 succinct war protest statement, "War is Not Healthy for Children and Other Living Things" (Peters, 2009). Measuring four inches in width, the child-like graphic poster (Figure 5b) eschewed stereotyped perceptions of flower-decked demonstrators and LSD-high freedom radicals. Created for an art exhibit, Schneider used primary colours emblematic of innocence, to capture a mother's petition for peace, and bore enough significance for decision-makers in Congress to reflect on the consequences of the Vietnam War (Peters, 2009; Popova, 2014). Surviving five decades since Gerald Holtom conceived it for the



Figure 4: Beatles member John Lennon in  
'Make Love Not War'



Figure 5a:  
Various symbols of 'peace'

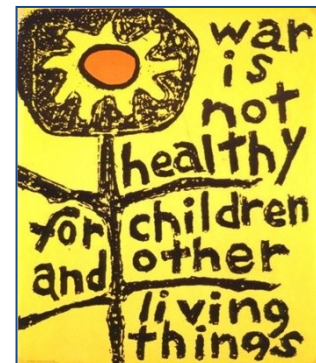


Figure 5b:  
Schneider's poster



Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), the peace symbol endures as a cherished graphic icon, emblazoned on T-shirts, as well as wide uses in visual design, jewellery and other crafts.

### 4.3 Psychedelia: The Hippies' Alternative Reality

The Sixties drew much of its inspiration from widespread drug use among students, as cannabis and LSD fuelled the rebellious zeal of culturists seeking 'hip' conventions, relaxed attitudes and hedonistic establishments (Gitlin, 1987: 5).

The focus of controversy was the open use of the hallucinogenic drug known as lysergic acid diethylamide, or LSD (known by street names such as mushroom, acid, Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds, Yellow Sunshine, Zen, etc.). LSD was the *cause célèbre*, ingested to attain a languorous mental state, as the self and the cosmos "harmonise" (Grunenberg and Harris 2005: 305-6); or what The Beatles' mystical guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi called 'cosmic consciousness' (McCarthy 1990: 100). Listening to acid rock music, embracing the liberal sexual revolution, the Hippies attempted to explore alternative states of consciousness, gabbling mantras such as "Tune in, turn on, and drop out" (Stanley, 2013: 49); self-administering as it were, hallucinatory states that influenced perceptions of colour and sound.

Psychedelic design, the motley schema of gaudy whirls and patterns derived from LSD hallucinations was "*intended to be seen, heard and felt*" (Vulliamy, 2007). Swathed in kaleidoscopic swirls, drug affective states birthed the Sixties' pernicious cultural products. Brazen Hippie codes, slangs and day-glo infusions were applied to fashion, album covers, paintings and murals, underground comics, books and newspapers (Grunenberg and Harris, 2005), characterising the wish of an alienated generation to break with conventions, with or without mind-altering drugs.

Psychedelic colours were mythologized by novelists such as Tom Wolfe (Figure 6a) and Ken Kesey (Figure 6b). In 1964, Kesey documented the Sixties' freewheeling lifestyle induced

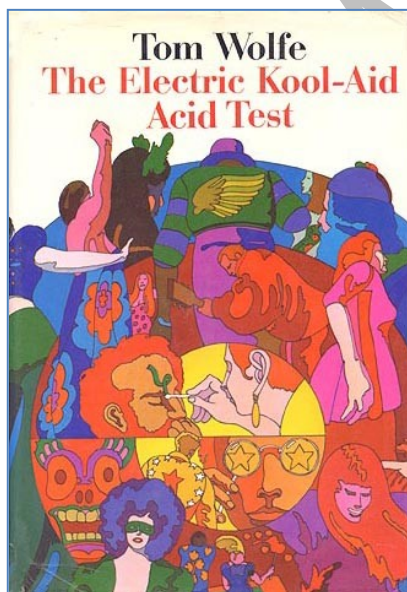


Figure 6a:  
Cover of Tom Wolfe's 1968 fiction



Figure 6b: Ken Kesey's 1964 journey on the bus, 'Further'

by drugs, by making a trip across the US with his friends, the ‘Merry Pranksters’ on a converted school bus they christened ‘Further’. The “endearingly innocent” journey was immortalised in the 2011 film, *Magic Trip* (Helmore, 2011).

#### **4.4 The Power of Music**

Deeming themselves victims of alienation and hopelessness as unrests mounted (Gitlin, 1987: 38), the Hippies distinguished themselves through music. Like cannabis and LSD that gripped their imagination. It was an accessible means of fellowship with similar others who disdained conventions and class in favour of equitable achievement (Gitlin, 1987: 167; Stanley, 2013). As an indulgent fabric of Hippie ideals, emotions and expositions, music was the territorial identity of counterculture Aquarians, a place where members were assured of acceptance, yet embraced by a “larger-than-myself” sense of belonging.

The sheer enormity of its role in the Sixties’ Age of Innocence brought music into centre stage, by providing a way to divert from humdrum urban living and the menacing threats of nuclear technologies, to obviate inter-communal tensions, to expression mass revolt against conservatism:

*For those who come to San Francisco  
Summertime will be a love-in there  
In the streets of San Francisco  
Gentle people with flowers in their hair  
[...]  
All across the nation such a strange vibration  
People in motion  
There's a whole generation with a new explanation  
People in motion people in motion* (McKenzie, 1967)

Music was tied to the grand Hippie ethos – ideals of love and peace which among many streams of inspirations, found outlet through a psychedelic stream of Oriental karmic beliefs. Zealous music industry opportunists began churning out vinyl pop singles and LP (long-playing) albums (Osborne, 2012), while for rock provocateurs, political, social and real world subjects were dished out into public audience consciousness (Hudson, 2006: 10).

While other experimentations in nouveau, surrealism, pop art and other mystique-laden abstractions abounded in shaping Sixties’ artistic output (All Art News, 2010), as a counterculture device, music played a leading role in communicating communal rituals and reinforced the values and attitudes of these counterculture ‘tribes’: the mods, rockers, surfers, skaters and skinheads (McCarthy, 1990). Artists Wes Wilson and Rick Griffin were among Sixties designers who expressed characteristics of psychedelic designs in the Sixties, with manipulated and distorted letterings in posters (Figures 7a and 7b) and album cover art (Harvey, 2007; Morseburg, 2003).





Figure 7a: Fillmore Concert Poster 1967

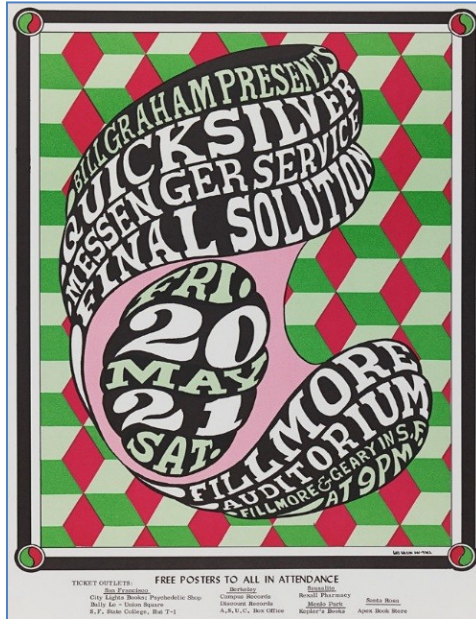


Figure 7b: Quicksilver Concert Poster 1966

#### 4.5 Album Covers

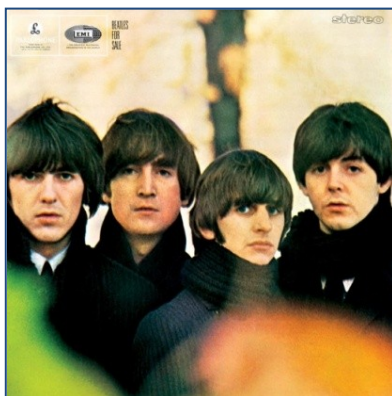
Albums are collections of artistes who create and publish musical compositions, photographs, or literary works at a particular time. Pop-rock albums such as vinyl records, cassettes and compact discs are released to commercial markets packaged with designed album covers (or sleeves). The sleeves announce the content of the recording while communicating a synthesis of artistry and musical concepts, and occupy prime position in music marketing and promotion (Hudson, 2006: 10).

Album cover artworks are designed to communicate, and were yet a methodical tool of branding and persuasion, a powerful form of direct engagement between the music, artistes and listenership (Museum of Modern Art, 2015). Albeit so, album covers' effectiveness and impact on audiences have not been comprehensively studied (Hudson, 2006: 10). Aside from the use of interesting and stimulating designs to capture artistes' musical offerings, aesthetics and design may have influenced purchase, but they were essentially branding and publicity tools: to supply information; documenting the music-making processes, providing glimpses of the other entourage and musicians who share credits with the recording artistes (Hudson, 2006: 20).

The Beatles, otherwise The Fab Four, epitomised the middle-class Brit band. Comprising Ringo Starr, George Harrison, John Lennon and Paul McCartney, they excited "scream-fests" on arrival in the popular music scene, which coincided with the sexual revolution that thrust Elvis Presley into the celebrity limelight (McCarthy, 1990: 44-53). Skyrocketing to fame in 1964, The Beatles' rambunctious albums of danceable hit songs and a tour of United States brought on frantic forms of juvenile adoration (the 'Beatlemania' phenomenon), as well as record-breaking airplay and album sales (Stanley, 2013: 137-152). American media were charmed to contend with "four articulate young men who could run rings around their list of stock questions, mixing rapid-fire witticisms with [eagerness] to please ..." (McCarthy, 1990: 49-50).

Rock albums of the Sixties presented a compelling array of design concepts, and some were more than willing to explore designs that could only be described as “scandalous” (Whiting, 2013). The Beatles chose to present an aspect of sobriety on the sleeve of the 1964 album, *Beatles for Sale* (Figure 8), creating audiences’ expectation of musical gloom and dolefulness; while the controversial cover for the US- and Canada-only album, *Yesterday and Today* (Figure 9), did not even make it past censorship authorities.

The Beatles’ *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* released in 1967 (Figure 10) featured a commissioned cover art to symbolise the cultural narrative of the Sixties through a colourful pastiche of images, and manages to create a tasteful branding tool that portrays the band’s stylish experimentation with musical direction and genre (Hudson, 2006: 20-21).



**Figure 8:**  
**Cover of *Beatles for Sale***



**Figure 9**  
**Cover of *Yesterday and Today***



**Figure 10**  
**Cover art for *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band***

The Fab Four pose with their own iconic heroes in an album sleeve designed and conceptualised by Peter Blake, whom the band - in spite of costs – commissioned (Hudson, 2006: 20). Flowers form the words, “Beatles”, offset the vividness of the Fab Four’s marching outfits, even as the album was made further enticing to its target followers with the inclusion of printed song lyrics, as well as cut-out souvenirs (McCarthy 1990: 97).

Another famous album cover during the decade is The Rolling Stones’ *Let It Bleed*, released in 1969 (Figure 11).

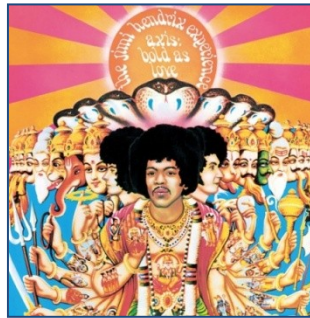
The lyrics to its enigmatic title track appeared to explicate direct references to sex and drugs, an example of the band writing about and connecting listeners to similar experiences. The record sleeves feature a record player/cake assemblage (Museum of Modern Art, 2013). Robert Brown john’s design of a stacked frosted cake, tyre, pizza, clock face, and film canister (with the symbolic sliced-off cake and shattered record on the album back sleeve) prophesied what would be the first and last contribution of initial Stones’ member Brian Jones before his untimely death (McCarthy, 1999).

Psychedelia also influenced cover albums in terms of bright colours and wavy fonts. Examples can be seen in album cover artworks by The Jimi Hendrix Experience (Figure 12) and The Who (Figure 13).





**Figure 11**  
Front and Back sleeve, *Let It Bleed*



**Figure 12**  
Hendrix's *Axis Bold as Love*



**Figure 13**  
The Who's *Magic Bus*

## 5. CONTENT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

As a mirror of history, the Sixties is a singular reminder of transformative cultural symbolisms of the West. Living inegalitarian communes, chanting for love and peace, drugs, police beatings, riots and shootings frayed into their summer of love and peace (Grunenberg and Harris, 2005: 90-91; Marwick, 1998; McCarthy, 1990; Turner, 2013). Youth radicalism, drug excesses, anti-war sentiments, public demonstrations, music, nonchalant cohabiting lifestyles and the climate of protest were inseparable.

Yet, in spite of being inextricably drawn into a radical cultural revolution, among many critics, the expectation of *real change* coming from, or produced by, artistes, was low. Author of dystopian literature, Kurt Vonnegut proclaimed in 2003:

*"Every respectable artist in this country was against the war. It was like a laser beam. We were all aimed in the same direction. [But in the end,] the power of this weapon turns out to be that of a custard pie dropped from a stepladder six feet high."* (Utne Reader, 2003)

Masked as "hip" and "groovy", countercultural devices were, in truth, forms of "self-indulgences ... distractions from discipline" for the bourgeoisie (Gitlin, 1987: 209). It is not accidental that by the end of the 1960s, other cultural forms swiftly replaced the psychedelic 'trip' that had sprung up in the throes of the Summer of Love. Widening the gulf from conservative institutional sectors and capitalists, LSD-tripping was an attitudinal stance embraced by counterculture advocates receiving education at universities, who were "bored, burned out, frustrated with academic pursuits and [wanted] something new" (Ray Browne, cited in Campbell, 2006: 33). This corresponded with unprecedented campus sit-ins that were often criticised as being "self-serving claptrap for the propagation of 'progressive' ideas" (Marwick, 1998).

Having no definitive, unified, cultural ideology, the excitement of hedonism, antagonism and decadence were eventually scorned by mainstream media. Psychedelic aesthetics were parodied in various affectations, for instance, in studio or set design for wholesome TV fare like *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Advertisers, marketers, and artists began appropriating the basics elements of psychedelic art to produce creative outcomes in different genres, using fluorescent colours and swirling forms *sans* reference to the Hippies or drugs (Coates, 2014; Traditional Fine Arts Organisation, Inc., 2010).



Finding antithetical reasons for the Hippies movement is a formidable task. In *The New Left Revisited*, McMillian and Buhle (2003) argue that the liberalisation of a tightly conservative America had been dented by the uprising of “tenured scholars” who review the Sixties decade with a flawed “historical vision”, one that attributes nearly “all of today’s social problems” to these exciting revolutionaries (McMillian and Buhle, 2003: 1-2).

Critic Jackson Lears, reviewing Thomas Frank’s *The Conquest of Cool* (1997) puts his finger on America’s latter age confusion by identifying the Sixties as an age of ‘Bohemianism and aberration’ with regards its overt forms of overexploitation:

*“[... we now] understand why, throughout the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, Americans have increasingly confused gentility with conformity, irony with protest, and an extended middle finger with a populist manifesto [...] Frank deftly shows the myriad ways that advertising has redefined radicalism by conflating it with in-your-face consumerism”.* (Lears, 1997: 28-30)

Some Baby Boomers attempt to connect today’s Internet-savvy youth to their fabric of values, attitudes and acts through online chronicling projects (e.g. Goodwin and Bradley, 2011; *Spirit of Change*, 2002), while some strive to introduce Sixties ideals via retrospective discourse analysis (e.g. Stewart, 2011). Web archives like *The People History*, *Oregon Public Broadcasting* and *The History Channel* give glimpses of the stories, people, places and reasons behind the socio cultural upheavals of the era.

That the Sixties, as a journal of historical, political and cultural transformation, centralised its temporal myths and “micro-narratives” within the interpretive sense-making of large masses of participants, is obvious (Campbell, 2006: 198). Accessibility was undoubtedly a crucial part of the appeal: Sixties pop culture seemed openly invitational and anyone could join in (*Oregon Public Broadcasting* 2005b).

Seen through a cultural interpretive lens, anthropologist Thomas de Zengotita (2005) believes the perpetuation of pop culture occurs via mediation – tales, legends, stories, environments and artefacts are ethnographically preserved, recreated, reconstructed and presented to the contemporary public as timeless, so that a 19-year old today would “know more about the Beatles and Bob Dylan than [we] do, and not only their music but their lives too ...” (Zengotita, 2005: 34). A design blogger, researching vintage posters, remarks: “I don’t know ALL of the bands on these posters, but if I saw these on the street I would definitely check them out!” (*Speedy Signs*, 2012).

On the other hand, suspicion, indifference and lack of interest in historical nuances of Western culture have led to side-lining of the Sixties’ influence among the alienated generations of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. Discussions about the Sixties are laced with tones of mockery, bafflement and cynicism, derived partly from differences in cultural outlooks produced by intergenerational shifts in attitudes. The Hippies were a blot of temporal distraction, subordinate to the more important issues of saving the planet’s resources, social changes, solving national debt and climate crisis.

Current ‘hippie-bashing’ by futurists has widened into a cultural discourse criticising the originality of Sixties’ “stranglehold” on today, noting that the postmodern reinvention of commercial commodities from the Summer of Love simply caters to a generation of noisy

non-visionaries (Turner, 2013). Some post-Baby Boomer cohorts politely disparage the Hippies as merely ‘pranksters’ high on drug, rock and sex (Gitlin, 1987: 407), relegating the Sixties to the antique exhibitions, memorabilia shelves, vintage car parades, nostalgia parties, retro films and music.

In 2008, the National Geographic published *Peace: The Biography of a Symbol*. While recognising its symbolic cultural use in protesting nuclear disarmament, analysts liken the futility of the Baby Boomers’ emblem to a cup that is “half full as well as half empty” (Westcott, 2008). Critics of cultural elitism of the 1950s, tracing the outpouring of Sixties’ rebellion against class distinctions, find lesser associations in the attitudes of modern American society with class disaffection and “revulsion with the artifice” (Heath, 2001: 13), as some consumers today willingly “opt to adopt”, as it were, the Sixties subculture style, but relegate its original substance to the memorial closet.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

By the end of 1969, 65,000 American troops were withdrawn from Vietnam and with civil protests “quieting down” (Gitlin, 1987: 400), the Hippies could barely be blamed for the movement’s waning enthusiasm. Though the Vietnam fracas was not fought on a global scale, the ramifications of undertaking a useless war were scattered and much felt, as societies and Americans deliberated the inter-relatedness of cultural development and political trends that occurred during the Sixties (Lamb, 2012).

### **6.1 An Enchanted Education ... But Was It Legitimate?**

In spite of later scholarly treatises questioning the value of civil protests and cultural nihilism, it is the final argument here that the cache of retrospective evidence—those represented in unruly street demonstrations, symbols, music, publications, events, poster designs, fashion, cartoons, graffiti and artworks – which form the backbone of the ‘enchanted education’ of the masses, empowering them about the world of flaws and sorrows, giving them awareness (even if only seen through John Lennon sunglasses) about social repressions, unwieldy economic and political structures, laying the foundations for mass mobilisation of society that, several generations later, would strategically transform into organised, systematic non-governmental and social activism.

Cultures, state Marwick (1998), produce truths and meanings through substantive actions. Regardless of our collective consciousness about the obsolescence of the Hippies’ and the legitimacy of their driving principles, their experiences and preoccupations are reflexive products of counterculture exponents. By participating in their social world, it has resulted in a more authentic strain of globalised social interaction and cultural relations today.

The Sixties allows new generations to turn their heads back to a historically unprecedented era, with youth who grappled with cultural realities and progressive thought, industry and enterprise, consumption and media, signs and dreams; aligning every possibility with those of their hostile adversaries. As statesman Adlai Stevenson avows, “We must never neglect any work of peace within our reach, however small.”

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