

Sociology of dissent: American Beatniks and pre-sixty-eight Europe

Introduction

In the Fifties of the XX century, American provincial and urban roads were occupied by “groups of vagrants”, who theorized an unusual “on the road” culture with their own ethics and their own “way of life”. The *assault on culture* was the characteristic of this group of “beatnik”^[1] poets, artists and literary men, which, retrospectively analysed, becomes an archetypal condition of XX century avant-garde. Historically the *beat* movement has been considered the first outcry phenomenon prior to an increasing movement of teenager opposition, holding the key points of what will prove to be a radical breakup of an all-embracing and absolutist system. Its rebellion came out of a widespread feeling of clear, visible refuse towards the dominant power, so that the *beat* alienation from the “system” was to be understood as a real revolutionary process rooted in the Self and directed to the liberation from any oppressive power.

Sympathetic towards the present, narrated as it presented itself to their own eyes, the various “*Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs* – Goffman wrote- *avoided the direct participation to some of their hipster friends 'desperate excesses, preferring to observe and express solidarity.*” They could understand and identify themselves with Bill Cannastra, who danced on the broken glass and on the mouldings, who once lost his challenge with the death while climbing the window of a New York subway car. They offered comfort and shelter to Herbert Huncke, a heavy drug addict who used to get money pilfering in Time Square. An extraordinary performance, a kaleidoscope of images and sounds from the *underground*, through which the *beat* wanted to give a violent shock to the romantic views of civil society, to the routine and usual ways of observing and analysing the real world, the one represented indeed by “*Cannastra's death, drug addicts and street thugs who passed by the windows of a diner in Time Square, where they spent...their time with Huncke*”. These desperate lives represented to the *beat* writer the evidence that “we were detached from the official perspective of history and reality”. An unconventional socio-political context mixed with an idyllic, raw and releasing language, used to eviscerate the American low-lives: it is here, among run-down premises and dump houses, that they were involved in the lives of dropout hipsters, developing a literary identity marked by independence and experimental research.

Without any directional structure and without any organization to embrace the whole movement, the key aspects of the *beat generation*, besides the change and subversion of linguistic models, were the absence of a fixed commitment, the non-violence, and the absolute freedom, which prevented the emergence of any centralized and hierarchical structure. In fact, as Holstein writes, we- the *beat*- “*before the links of a society characterized by any structure, recognized the tribal links proper of a primitive communitarian feeling, directed to mutual help, hospitality, refuse of property, friendship and solidarity facing the world outside.*”

The places of these tribes changed continuously, given the extreme openness of this movement and its perennial wandering between the East and the West. In San Francisco, a gigantic gathering point of the movement was around the City Light Books, an independent library and forthcoming publishing house founded in 1953 and spearheaded by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, which, as well as The Cellar Cafè, contributed to the creation of a public for frequent poetical readings and artistic performances. Their wandering out of the American borders, in the perpetual search of a comprehensive and unconventional

environment brought them to Europe, where they elected as a bohemian town the romantic Paris. The Headquarter of the beatniks' enclave was the dilapidated and run-down *Beat Hotel*, at 9, rue Git-le-Coeur on the Rive Gauche. In those little and uncomfortable rooms, artists like Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, William Burroughs created many of their poems and novels (among them Burroughs' "Naked Lunch" and Ginsberg's "Kaddish") between sex and drug consumption, giving also life to absurd and eccentric experimentations.

The peculiar characteristic of the movement seems to be the transmigration; the *beat* is always *on the road*, quoting Kerouac. Along with its frequent nomadism, there was the thought of being able to escape the system, its constraints and ties. Continual geographical shift displayed two constants of the movement: disquiet and the image of freedom. J.K. in "Dharma's Trumps" wrote about the beat wandering: "*I have in my eyes the view of an immense travellers' uprising; thousands, or even millions of young Americans wandering through the world with back pack, climbing mountains to pray, making children laugh or cheering old people, gladdening girls and even more old women, all crazy Zen wandering, poems that randomly arise in their head without any reason in the world, moreover being kind with some strange unpredictable gestures, they continue to give visions of eternal freedom to anyone and to all living creatures.*" All was made to reach autonomy, aiming at the individual release. The premise of the *beat generation* comes from the refuse of social lies until the revaluation of subjectivity, whose "*ultimate purpose is the liberation of the individual, in other words being able to become what one really is, a Seraph, a leader, a hero, a lamb or a wolf, [...] destroying the common evaluation criteria, the so-called logic and the society itself, and putting in the right order chaos, truth, transformation.*" And giving the fact that the *beat* upsurge is presented as a rebel and contentious position against everyday reality which inhibited all this, jazz music, nights full of alcohol, Lsd and marijuana were of the utmost importance to the beatniks; artists expressed their informal, raw language, without academicisms, through their poetry and its verses, their euphoria, their ecstasy and new life. From the *beatniks* came a frontal attack on the corrupting influence of society, choosing the path of voluntary poverty, avoiding the occurrence of the dominant aspects of official society in the tribes: hierarchy, exploitation and corruption. The answer to the insistence and the trends of the system was the departure from the vicious circle of production and consumption, with a voluntary position: "*they barely bought newspapers and they didn't possess radio or television, which they blamed for making propaganda both in a conspicuous and disguised form. Also religion was charged of the same bunch of mistakes and hypocrisies, as responsible of countless social abuses; as well as the middle class morality, whose the beatniks revealed the classist nature; [...] and politics, in which they discovered the greed for profit and the egoistic personal interest behind the official face.*" This reaction appears immediate and is based on the beatnik's critic towards their own time, the "world which revealed to be a fantastic deception", declaring war to the official society with the construction of the heart and the outer shell of the underground society, which will high-handedly break into the networks of the young arena some years later, subverting the position of ordinariness and belonging.

In a total breakdown, under the beat pressure, also in the pre-sixty-eight and pre-revolutionary Europe, a "derelict" and counter culture dimension begins to appear, even if the ground was still not breeding for a psychic and physical conflict, pushing tons of disgust into a fractal, schizophrenic cultural system. From Berlin to Stockholm, from Amsterdam to Milan passing through Paris, London, Bruxelles, an articulated and healthy anti-authoritarian conscience took root and developed, a decade after the beginning of J.K. and his mates' experience. There were coherent young stances directed to a modern retelling of XIX century *bohemians*, with wandering metropolitan knives indulging freedom and individual pleasures, expressing a strong disappointment towards a conformist model and a system, which, maybe for fear, ignored even conceptually this socio-cultural phenomenon mobilising young proletariats (a few) and middle-class sons, inviting them to step on the tarmac of European metropolis. The refuse of institutions

(and notions) conflicted with the spread of the phenomenon in a premature social context. Its rapid expansion captured necessarily the interest of a society only careful until then about productivism and accumulation, key values of the post-war capitalistic system which all government parties in the Europe of the Fifties and Sixties seemed to share. The “noise” and the increasing blast of young bodies, raised the media attention on what immediately seemed to be a disorganized group of protesters, and analysts tried to draft several sociological taxonomies, in search of a defined and definable interpretation framework. Enragés, Beatniks, Hippie, Pleiners, Gammler, Freaks, Capelloni, Nozem, as they were called the new protesters in all the occidental linguistic area, belonging to the metropolitan environment, were able to work on the semiotic of the body and on the articles of consumption subverting their value of use and absolute meaning. Their protest, presented as the exaltation of an individual and subjective scene, without proselytism and organized propaganda, soon became a mass living phenomenon, able to generate a divergent cultural movement embracing geographical areas far away and only apparently different for history and ideology, sharing the same disgust for the dehumanised civilization described by Alain Ginsberg and opposing to the routine and fixed society the nomadism, expressed by Jack Kerouac in “The Darma’s Vagrants” . A new way of being, the collectivisation, the sociability and the character –forming process in the beatniks’ romantic idea of the existence “*on the road*” – mixed to a substructure of young disease- left an indelible imprint to the protest which arouse as a plant of wheatgrass on the metropolitan pavement of the following decade, threatening rules, taboos and norms. It’s so that the metropolitan occidental arteries were crossed by a constant flux of thoughts, ideas, art, literature and music, witnessing in those years an embryonic teenager discrepancy directed to the occupation of the social arena and to the recovery of subjectivism, with an increasing display of rebelling and provoking attitudes, which incubated deep socio-political implications.

The hippies: A look to Marry Pranksters and the Diggers’experience

During the stormy Sixties the open young refuse of the socio-cultural environment of the “*American dream*”, “the utopia outside History”, or “*the idea that anyone in the United States can be successful and gain a foothold*” sounds an alarm bell in front of a raising disease which infected millions of young people in the New World. A cultural revolution which connected the Fifties to the Sixties, as a lava scrolling along the streets of American metropolis and strengthened the burning cultural antiauthoritarianism haired by the beatniks, enriching it with a more irreverent style and a breeze of Dionysian freshness. The new alternative scene had put a gravestone on the alienation syndrome and on the nihilist existentialism typical of *beat* forerunners, envisaging a flamboyant and illuminating psychedelic world, an absurd travel inside the *non-places* of the human conscience mixed to a vital optimism and a sophisticated intellectualism. In California the new generation born from a white middle-class asserted an existence which expressed an idiosyncrasy with the plain and conformist life, a conception supported by a feeling of pleasure and love as early conditions obeying to individual needs and improving personal interactions.

The beatniks, for the rising hippie movement, did not appear radical enough in their displays of dissent about the system, as “flower children were convinced that freedom could be reached only deserting the official society without compromises and without maintaining any link with it”. It was necessary to jam the machine; to throw body and soul against the functioning apparatus of the State machine and abandon the monotonous routine: social obligations, the work slavery, the evenings spent watching T.V., and all those bland customs become religious rituals, questioned with a note of intolerance which envisaged a divide with the adult society. The real hippie of “Go away; leave society!”, was a valuable indicator for the image of the new young subject, who improvised an action of cultural resistance with an anti-prohibitionist and naturist way of life, rising above the beatniks ‘nihilist criticism and showing also externally this optimism. While beat were lovers of dark colours and fond for hipsters’ jazz music, the hippie loved to colour their

bodies, appreciated psychedelic clothes and listened to *rock music*. Nevertheless the hippie phenomenon embraced a kaleidoscope of colours and socio-cultural background; there were hippies living in collectives, in towns, taking psychotropic drugs, simple smokers, vegans and not, musicians, Buddhism followers or isolationist, an articulated and complex world sharing the refuse. Hippies expressed an open revolt against the system, and this also explains the characteristic, the origin and the name of the movement. The term “hip” comes from the jargon of Afro-American musicians migrated to the *States* in the Thirties and Forties, and was used to mean an “experienced” or “smart”^[2] person. In the years of racial intolerance this term conveyed a very strong sociological meaning, symbolizing black American people’s will to fight against what inhibited them a dignified existence, to rebel against the repressive apparatus which was the extreme consequence of the violence proper of the racial hate felt by many white Americans who hid their fears and uncertainties standing over those “different”. We are here, say the black people, and are smarter than you and we can prove it. Hippies retrieved this way of doing, acting, abandoning the system and exhibiting social desertion. The voluntary atomisation and neglect of social obligations presumed the search for an environment which could let them free from social oppressive restriction. They choose, not casually, the cities of San Francisco and New York, where in the first half of the Sixties the first flower children appeared, a few picturesque individuals who started passengers’immagination. Both the cities were suitable for living apart, in the borders of society. The Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco was the ideal for an urban existence, the inhabitants were accommodating and permissive, and furthermore, it was possible to live with little money. Also the East Village in New York presented similar habits and in a short time became the second hippy gathering point in the Country. In 1966, after an exponential rising of the movement, Californian Haight –Ashbury community registered from forty to fifty thousand hippies, and East Village from twelve to fifteen thousands. Besides there was a significant number of sympathisers who participated to the crazy –entire-days- lasting parties which also revealed anti-regulatory regurgitations, embracing utopia and rebel spirit as key aspects of a both prohibitive and illuminating parabola, where alchemy consisted in the entanglement of a festal culture and the existence of a radical life. This breath of spontaneity also contaminated the whole Country: Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Seattle, Texas were, soon or late, invested by hippie turbulences, by the blossom of little and big flowers children centres, as for Europe and specifically Monaco, Bruxelles and Stockholm. The movement had recruited now, after new accession from all around the world, nearly half a million adepts leaving their houses to follow a dream called freedom.

The enormous importance of the phenomenon gave much work to sociologists, psychiatrists and...Theologians, trying to draft interpretative studies or quantitative taxonomies, depending on the case. The American sociologist Harry Silberstein classified hippies as the open manifestation of a temporary disease, which will end in a few time with the return to the towns of nearly all subjects involved. On the contrary, the Californian bishop Pike thought, as well as the British historian Toynbee, that hippies were as the first Christians, whereas the theologian Marty saw in this social phenomenon an advanced form of decomposition of the contemporary occidental society, based on values of profit and productive accumulation: the hippies in fact defined their dissent as an essential outcry against the present condition of American society. On this respect the German sociologist W. Hollstein writes , “their opposition, less reflective and less differentiated than other young protest movements, immediately revealed to be an essentially emotional fact: the suck and disgust for the system had prevailed on the rational confrontation with what appears. Hippies refused a barren wealth society, only careful about the amount of dollars earned, only anxious about the achievement of status symbols, with work, production, possess, social-climbing, success, power as the most important values [...] They criticized the plainness, the uniformity, the conformism, which ruled in all the Nation; they complained that life had become more and more bloodless and the existence more and more boring. “ Maybe because of the capillary spread of the movement and of the enlargement outside the *States* of the new radical and alternative way of life that

they started, hippies had an impressive impact on public opinion because of their eccentric social presence which always made them highly visible. In fact, there were both massive protests against Vietnam war, the State, bureaucrats and collective orgies where exaggerated amounts of psychotropic drugs were consumed, which catalyzed the public curiosity, until the creation of a new social organization consisting in the implementation of real communes, with evident cultural differences among the dominant values in contemporary society (refused by hippies) and the "New" society: in these tribal contexts with socio-political and ideological traits, values such as arrivism, careerism, monetary accumulation were substituted by egalitarianism, collectivism and utopianism.

The hippy refuse was to be read as a generational conflict. They protested against the stereotyped rhetoric of human rights, almost deprived of its content, the spiritual decay of humanity in the present, the frustrating T.V. addiction, all complementary aspects in a machine made of similar and different cogs, which worked for a much wider project, with the ultimate purpose the creation of passive, morally irreproachable and nonaffective, consumers. This is certainly the base of the rebellion of a movement directed in the opposite direction, opposed to a society which did not distinguish anymore wealth and possess, "happiness and comfort". So it became evident over all, from a sociological point of view, the weakness of a system which lost thousands of young people it thought it could control with money, luxury, cars and parks, prerogatives and status symbol of high/middle class. Many of them were destined for a brilliant career in an important American firm, for bivouacking in lush villas, for having servants, possessing expansive cars. Reeling off some figures disclosed in 1967, in East Village the 12% of hippies came from high classes, 22% from the high bourgeoisie, 48% from the middle bourgeoisie and 18% from the little bourgeoisie; in S. Francisco the 8% came from high classes, 17% from high bourgeoisie, 49% from the middle and 18% from the little bourgeoisie. In both cases hippies were simply middle students, university students, employed, employees, most of them were not married and the other ones chose non-marital cohabitations. If they just wanted they could have used all facilities of the system. Only if they had cared. But history, this entity overlying human destiny, brings on its shoulders since Ancient Greece the burden of neurotic and rebellious attitudes of sons towards their parents. And since the Sixties a page of healthy rebellion has been written also by the young "flower children", as they liked to be called. « Isn't life beautiful, isn't life gay? Isn't life the perfect thing to pass the time away? », said a song of theirs. Their slogan was « Make love not make war », choosing the flower as a symbol of purity, bringing everywhere this distinctive icon. They made international appeals inviting all to live in harmony, in peace with oneself and the others, disapproving the erection of a macho and patronising model of sexuality, leading to a dual gender system. Actually hippies became famous for being able to change the surface of American society, also influencing future groups of cultural opposition in Europe and raising their protest against the individualism and the destruction of individuality, opposing to a pragmatic and routine society a libertarian and legalitarian community, with Haight-Ashbury as the nucleus of this counter society, and with High-Street which became for a period a Love-Street. To a hierarchical way of life, they opposed an informal society where young people, men, women and adults coexist friendly, with Free Shops which constituted the higher representation of collectivism and the synergy for the satisfaction of one's needs. The outpost of the new society was represented by freedom, equality, respect, brotherhood, sharing, creativity, happiness, all social and human conditions which would triumph over property, conformism, productivism, individualism, the boredom of everyday life, by destroying the key elements of the modernity paradigm.

Merry Pranksters and the Diggers

A contribute to *psychedelic* countercultural trends came from the eccentric American writer Ken Kasey, author of the book "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*", in 1964, born from a project of creative writing in

Stanford University, where Kasey had won a research doctorate. The final result was a study altered by an intense use of LSD and from the peculiar working experience in a psychiatric hospital where he was employed as a janitor. Former wrestler graduated at Oregon University in Language and Communication, during his PhD Kesey attended Parry Lane's bohemian fraternity in Palo Alto and, in 1964, when he published his second book, *"Sometimes a Great Notion"*, with a group of fourteen visionary early-hippies, the Merry Pranksters, crisscrossed the States with a school bus of the Thirties, re-named "Further", customized with a touch of creativity and painted with the flamboyant colours typical of hippie philosophy. This group of "Merry Pranksters" is considered the fulfilment of the Kerouac perspective of the Fifties of "the generation with the backpack", real psychedelic crazy always moving and tireless bystanders of lysergic paradises fabricated by the chemist Augustus Stanley Owsley. A *coast-to-coast* travel with the aim of experimenting the origin of a new "way of life", based on the "psychotropic imagination", and "flower power", clumps of a new way of interaction which revealed an increasing detachment from the "socio-national slavery". Tons of acid eased the burning evolutionary process which Frank Zappa had called "freaking out", or "a process of individual liberation from out-dated restrictive ways of thinking, from the look and the social labelling, in order to creatively express one's relations with the environment of living and the social structure as a whole[...]" .Haag wrote that the lysergic potential had *"literally ripped from their houses young Americans throwing them on the road and changing the clean Ricky Cunningham, character in Happy Days, in the crazy and adventurous Ken Kesey. In no time America's children grew their hair, changed their clothes in odd and coloured ones, substituted or complement alcohol (their parents were used to drink) with drugs, their cars in merry vans and filled roads with people, with the only purpose expressed by Cat Stevens in "If you want to sing out": "If you want, just be free, 'cause there is a million things to do"*.

The flooding of these rivers of LSD, the new world of psychedelic saints and mystic-spiritual paradises, put the bases for the creation of a new community founded on cognitive freedom, whose aim, according to Kesey, was to "detect individual reactions and subverting them with mocking attitudes.

It is the only way to invite people to ask questions and, until those questions are not asked, individuals are damned to remain unconditioned robots". Psychedelic was a mental bomb with thousands of colours which lightened the world and modified the behaviour of San Francisco underground, showing a gradual shift from the geographic centre of gravity of the cultural Californian ferment, nearly tracing a gap between hippies and the defeatist existentialism of beatniks. The Haight –Ashbury was elected as the centre of the new psychedelic trend, receiving the bohemian youth migrated from the North Beach with dionisiac bacchanals and merry nights. Lee writes about the noisy and emphatic atmosphere of the Californian block: "Since 1965 Haight-Ashbury became a vibrant bohemian enclave...a little psychedelic city state took shape and those inhabited it...accepted a series of norms and rhythms completely different from the daily routine of an office which ruled the wealthy society. Over all, Haight-Ashbury was an exceptional mental state, an arena of exploration and celebration".

The 4th December of the 1965, after the Rolling Stones 'concert in the Oakland Civic Auditorium, the hippy pranksters dressed with sparkly customs and coloured bodies, distributed to thousands of bystanders flyers with a psychedelic writing, as to affirm the seriousness of the proposal: "Are you ready to test Acid?" They mean LSD administration, wagons of lysergic acid taken in mass and in a controlled way, something similar to government experiments on drugs which had involved Kesey during Stanford years, earning a living in a very original way and comparable with chemical existences of those thousands of test-case in drug companies experimentations . Acid test consisted in several "mass events based on word-of-mouth." Pranksters put big cups of Kool-Aid filled with huge amount of LSD and amplifiers which would add disorienting noises and sound effects to the loud music played by a group of upset musicians,

the Warlocks, in places where participated meetings happened. Flashing lights, projections of pulsing colours and particular images completed the cacophony. Tom Wolfe's "*Electric kool-Aid Acid Test*" is the history of these Kesey and Merry Pranksters' hallucinated experiences in search of an equilibrium between psychedely and naturism, a telling of the challenge these odd and always stoned subjects issued to the national commonly shared reality, in a vortex of lights, flamboyant colours and a sound system blared by the old school bus. The top of the Acid Test was reached in January 1967 with the "Trip Festival" organized in Longshoremen's in San Francisco. Three days of music, sounds, lights and movement.

The Acid Tests organized in enclaves on the hills of La Honda at the gates of San Francisco, represented a "lysergic paradise" adorned with bizarre eastern atmospheres and a background for hundreds of young people feeling free to swarm around the paths of Eden. Ken Kesey with his *underground band* in his continuous migrations from Atlantic to Pacific, also wanted to become a bulwark in defence of the free thinking, provoking people and sublimating in this way the unexpressed young potential of fantasy, giving a touch of liveliness to a uniform and bland society, where only youth seemed to be available to revolt and protest. Merry Pranksters, without refraining from "teasing people", were used to observe from their bus, driven by Neal Cassidy, the protagonist of the beat manifest/novel "On the Road", the surprise of a country facing the staggering of its theorems, ancient dogmas and rituals. Once they desecrated the political demonstrations of the conservative Barry Goldwater, walking around urban roads with improvised customs and unrolling a huge banner with written: "Vote for Goldwater, if you want to have a laugh", meaning their choice not to participate in the electoral assemblies and showing their dissent towards a system which did not permit anything different from the usual praxis, refusing to stay inside the out-dated schemes and traditionalisms, extremely restrictive for the individual creative abilities.

In 1966, the fearless young movement challenging public morality created much agitation and alerted authorities, increasingly allergic to psychedelic attitudes. The "mainstream" press, following the usual script of disinformation and mystification, published: "5 year- child takes LSD and gets crazy", "Exciting drugs twist mind". Columns of police vans raked nearly every day Haight-Ashbury hippie block in San Francisco and East Village in New York, prohibited gatherings, street parties, impeded access even to some public places attended and managed by zealous citizens and overall made waves to stop or at least start limiting LSD assumption, for most people the real starter of rebellion against institutions. After several federal discussions whose aim was that of perusing the acid assumption, the 6th October of 1966 in all the country each State began to pass prohibitionist laws to stop the consumption. Immediately in San Francisco hippies gathered in squares, occupied roads, joined at Golden Gate Park to protest against new legislation which, according to Leart, openly violated the human right to control one's states of mind. According to the original definition of freedom, the inalienable right of every human being to express one's ideas and one's personal inclinations, without interfering with other people's freedom, the right to manage one's internal and mental space seems to be obvious, nearly an elementary concept, which met nevertheless very high walls to climb in the centres of power. In fact, from the unanimous chorus "for LSD" some dissonant voices raised in disagreement with the unconditioned support of the alteration of states of mind as the only device for an existential revolution, and this weakened the hippie movement. An internal opposition led by the Diggers community in San Francisco, a group of anarco-lysergics who, as Joy and Goffman report, "*weren't strong supporters of the theory that psychedelic conscience constitutes by itself the way to create a wonderful, ecstatic and freed society.*" Born under the pressure of Emmet Grogan and Peter Berg, members of the Mime Troupe in San Francisco, the Californian Diggers had haired the name by a reformist movement of protestant inspiration which developed in England in the first half of Seventeenth Century, during the years of the English Revolution. Anglo-Saxons claimed for the right to use the land as "a common good" and were strong opponents to the private property seen as a consequence and the original cause of human slavery. Their program, based on the communitarian ideal,

included the decentralization of the State into little rural cooperating communities. Only some centuries later, their spirit and their socio-political ideas were transferred in Haight Street, with the Diggers theorizing that freaks should experiment a new social model, live on the fringes of consumeristic society stealing food and clothes, living streets as places of exchange and radicality. Change passed through the interaction with the territory of everyday life, until the creation of an alternative society, far from the endemic logic of capitalist society and from alienation in social relations, always more mediated by power and money. They wanted a society made of mutual help, self management and cooperation”, founded on love and chemistry”, serving a collective and revolutionary project of life, with free stores and free welfare services (food, clothes, houses)”, “proclaiming the end of money and using provoking happenings as a powerful weapon, such as burning bunches of dollars in front of the Banks”. “Free Food, Free Store, Free Clinic...” the Diggers combined the antimaterialism to the individual freedom typical of counterculture, raising the issue of repossession of wage shares, through the direct collection of clothes and charity from a community claiming for its territory. An irreverent operation which freed the collective imaginary and removed its cultural habits, minimizing the importance of money, hierarchies, work, regaining play as a practice of civil disobedience, pushing this “pack of freaks” into publishing a kind of vademecum for a “Free City” , a claiming platform including concrete proposals, such a free food court, houses, the implementation of a rural farm for food self-sufficiency and organic production, a shop for the creation of clothes made with waste material and so on...The Diggers, with their claims and their appeals for self-organization, had opened the door to a generation who had decided to accelerate, abandoning the careerist and isolationist ideology belonging to that time. They created a social base in support of the Afro-American movement for civil rights, in which the same Roy Ballard, attracted by their experience, invited his mates to follow their examples, inaugurating some months later the *Black Man Free Store* in the black block of Fillmore, similar to Diggers Free Shops. Ramon Sander and Lou Gottlieb, founders of the Morning Star Ranch, a community hosting individuals of all ages and based on the principle of open land, let the Diggers, at home in that territory, use a part of that structure to create a Free Food and an area for the direct cultivation of land. It hosted all those hippies wanting to escape even for a while from the hectic life and the polluted cities, finding a little rest in the quiet country life, also tasting some good wine without toxic substances and chemical poisons.

The system, with the Diggers in particular and the hippie movement in general started during the second half of the Sixties an infiltration process which led to the commercial exploitation of the cultural alternative proposed by this segment of young creativity. So, the Haight-Ashbury became known as a holiday resort run for profit for the tourists and media's use. The urban bus company Gray Line began to propose a “*San Francisco- Haight Ashbury Hippie Hop Tour*” with the bus driven by an expert sociologist, who would show far and wide the block and would provide to lucky visitors a dictionary with the most commonly used hippie terms. The movement answered, before with a satiric action, breaking in the bus and giving the tourists some mirrors with the writing “Know Yourself”, and after, with the rise of the protest, the bus became perfect target for the launch of tomato bombs. In a few weeks, repeated attacks made the company suspend the service with the pretext of urban viability, stopping the visits to “the zoo” which had attracted the attention of national media and profit companies for some months. On balance, even for a very few time, the Diggers had been able to repossess the more unconventional block in San Francisco, involving an heterogeneous social group such as that of young people thanks to their street politics, disseminating underground culture, preventing it to live in hiding, advocating and developing “the activist theory of radical social subversion, with the experimentation of a communard and releasing way of life.”

Footnotes

[1] □ The *beat* term was introduced by Jack Kerouac in 1947, but it is the 1952, when he published the tale *John Clellon Holmes* (considered the first beat tale), its official year of birth. In 1962 in America this term means the nomadi and vagrant way of life of Group of teenager. In Italy only in 1964-1965 it was known to indicate the first form of protest of young people in big cities.

[2] □ In literature there are divergent opinions about the origin of the name hippie. The historian Sally Tomlinson writes in her "A Brief History of the Hippies" in 1968- I quote- "According to the chronichler of Haight-Ashbury, Charles Perry, were the beats to invent the term [hippie] as a mocking nickname, to indicate a cunning boy- "junior grader hipster"- from middle school."

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