

Postdoctoral Research Project – Abstract

Working title: “Politics of Ecstasy. A Transnational History of the Body in Western Countercultures, 1960s-1980s.”

In 1970, London-based *Oz-Magazine* published the article “The Chemical Revolution. To Trip Is Human, to Revolt Divine!” The article contains several passages of a speech given by Victor Jasha, the director of the Sociological Institute at Adelphi University, at the Psychedelic Convention in New York two years before. Conceiving LSD as a “psycho-chemical technology” that would enable human beings to transcend their “spatial, one-dimensional conscience”, Jasha depicted the social conditions he identified as the driving forces behind the emerging “international movement” of Psychedelics: the materialism and the resulting “spiritual vacuum” in Western, bourgeois societies.¹ Additionally, he also diagnosed the transcendence of the individual and, by extension, of society as a whole as effects of LSD. For instance, in Java’s narrative wars were constructed as a phenomenon of a Pre-LSD-society, irreconcilable with the rise of a “planetary culture” that would supposedly transcend national boundaries and that he predicted to arise with the widespread consumption of LSD.²

Assuming a transnational and transcultural perspective, my project focuses on the body politics of ecstasy practiced by Western countercultures. Like in Jasha's article, these were often heralded as the driving forces of the social and cultural transformations to come.³ In this context, I will look at the interwovenness of countercultures in the USA, Canada, England, France, Italy, and the Federal Republic of Germany. In these countries, countercultural activities were an important historical phenomenon that exerted a significant social and cultural efficacy. Members of these countercultures were in a close dialogue with each other, for instance via journeys.⁴ Ex negativo the transnational character was expressed in the following statement of an Italian citizen: “Intensify the border control and don’t let the longhair into the country.”⁵ However, even though the countercultures of these countries were embedded in a close network of contact

1 Drawing on Stuart Hall and Edward Said I understand the concept of ‘the West’ as a historical construct which is closely intertwined with global power relations.

2 [Anonymous], “The Chemical Revolution. To Trip Is Human, to Revolt Divine!” In: *Oz-Magazine*, No. 27 (April 1970), p.5f., 8.

3 For the term „counterculture“ cf. Peter Braunstein; Michael William Doyle, “Introduction. Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s.” In: Peter Braunstein; Michael William Doyle (eds.), *Imagine Nation. The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s*. New York/London: Routledge 2002, p. 5-14.

4 Cf. Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, *Die 68er Bewegung. Deutschland, Westeuropa, USA*. München: Verlag C. H. Beck 2001; Jan Kurz/Marica Tolomelli, “Italy.” In: Martin Klimke/Joachim Scharloth (Hg.), *1968 in Europe. A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977*. New York: Palgrave 2008, p. 83-96, here p. 91.

5 Margret Kosel, *Gammler, Beatniks, Provos. Die schleichende Revolution*. Frankfurt: Verlag Bärmeier & Nickel 1967, p. 79.

and exchange, important differences can be identified between them. For instance, the existence of a potent Old Left in Italy and France influenced the process of formation of the countercultures in these countries.

In addition to the consumption of conscience-changing substances, the project also turns its perspective towards the “sexual revolution” propagated in countercultural contexts. Pioneers as well as members of countercultures interlinked the “psychedelic revolution” with the “liberation of sexuality.” Consequently, they understood the “sexual revolution” as another sphere of alternative body politics that would make possible the “development of new behavior patterns and new character structures” and, in consequence, the overcoming of ossified social conditions.⁶

During the late 19th as well as early 20th centuries, intellectuals and bohemians in Western countries had already understood sexual-orgastic as well as drug-induced experiences of ecstasy as practices of (individual) transcendence.⁷ Since the 1960s, the dissemination and efficacy of this conception expanded enormously. However, the rise of these ecstatic body politics also caused vehement resistance. For instance, parts of the political left perceived the consumption of drugs to be a counterrevolutionary practice, whereas feminists attacked the sexism and male dominance inherent to the politics of sexual liberation.⁸ As a result, modifications of the discourses on the liberation of sexuality and the consumption of drugs as well as changes of the practices took place throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. First, the notion of the ‘sexual revolution’ as a means of a radical societal transformation significantly lost relevance and a feminist critique of sexism and male chauvinism connected to the ‘sexual revolution’ got a more and more powerful voice. Second, since the early 1970s the strong and explicit politicization of psychedelic drug use lost influence. Consequently, the practices of drug consumption changed. Events like the smoke-in, which took place in July 1969 in Berlin and which was organized by the “Zentralrat der Haschrebellen”, were a phenomenon of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

To date, some historiographical research has been done on countercultural politics of ‘psychedelic revolution’ and the ‘sexual revolution’ in the United States.⁹ With regard to the

6 Ronald Steckel, *Bewusstseinsweiternde Drogen. Eine Aufforderung zur Diskussion*. [?]: Edition Voltaire [?], p. 52f.

7 Walter Benjamin, *Über Haschisch*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2000; Wilhelm Reich, *Massenpsychologie des Faschismus*. Köln: Anaconda Verlag 2011.

8 Cf. Robert P. Stephens, *Germans on Drugs. The Complications of Modernization in Hamburg*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 2007, p. 207f.; Dagmar Herzog, *Die Politisierung der Lust. Sexualität in der deutschen Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts*. München: Siedler 2005, p. 282-286.

9 Cf. David Farber, „The Intoxicated State/Illegal Nation. Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture.” In: Braunstein; Doyle, *Imagine Nation*, p. 14-40; Tim Hodgdon, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius. Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities, 1965-83*. New York: Columbia University Press 2008; Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo,

politics of ecstasy in Canada, Great Britain, France, Italy and Western Germany there only very few studies exist. Especially about the ‘psychedelic revolution’ in these countries very little is known so far.¹⁰ Against this backdrop, three research *desiderata* can be identified. First, despite the markedly transnational character of Western countercultures, an in-depth examination of their transnational interwovenness does not exist to date.¹¹ Second, previous studies have focused mostly on the 1960s and early 1970s. As a consequence, the discursive transformations and disruptions that took place during the late 1970s and early 1980s very often remain untold. Furthermore, the historiography on countercultures displays a third – and quite astounding – lacuna. Although contemporary notions of the human body were fundamental for the politics of ecstasy – in a certain way, members of countercultures conceived bodies as territories of political conflict and power struggle –, very little research has been done on countercultural practices from a body-historical perspective.¹²

Counterculture and Transnationality

During the 1960s, countercultures arose in different Western countries. Advocating hedonistic practices of daily life, they differed fundamentally from other factions of the New Left more oriented to conventional political concepts and strategies. They tried to initiate a cultural revolution and create alternative spaces beyond the influence of capitalist society. They countered what they understood as the human alienation in capitalist consumer societies with a politics of the self that was supposed to establish solidarity among communities oriented towards sustainability, ‘naturalness’ and holism.¹³

Analogous to the more ‘conventional-political’ factions of the New Left, these countercultures were transnational in multiple ways: in their analyses of society (“*Frontières = Repression*”),¹⁴ in their self-conceptions, and in their practices of daily life. Interpreting the social conditions of Western societies as “interrelated and interlocked by a web, a network of shared social,

Daughters of Aquarius. Women of the Sixties Counterculture. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas 2009; W. J. Rorabaugh, *American Hippies.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015;

10 Cf. Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe. A Twentieth-Century History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011; Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties. Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974.* Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 1998; Kathleen Rodgers, *American Dissidents in British Columbia.* Vancouver: UBC Press 2014; Florian Schlecking, “Drogen, Selbst, Gefühl. Psychedelischer Drogenkonsum in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland um 1970.“ In: Pascal Eitler und Jens Elberfeld (eds.), *Zeitgeschichte des Selbst. Politisierung – Therapeutisierung – Emotionalisierung.* Bielefeld: transcript 2015, p. 293-326.

11 Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft. Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren.* Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag 2014, p. 33.

12 Cf. Schlecking, “Drogen, Selbst, Gefühl“.

13 James J. Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties. Making Postwar Radicalism.* New York et al.: Routledge 1997, p. 203.

14 Joseph Berke (ed.), *Counter Culture:* London: Peter Owen Limited 1969, [p. 3].

economic and political practices,”¹⁵ these countercultures were themselves integrated into a more closely intertwined transnational web within which knowledge and experiences circulated. Via the extensive networks of the alternative press, the (scientific) exchange on conferences and gatherings, contacts in daily life or in the context of the long journeys that led great numbers of alternatives to the East (especially India) by traveling the Hippie Trail, members of countercultures shared experiences, learned from each other and interacted in shaping and framing their worldviews, their visions of life, their practices, and their constructions of identity. With regard to this phenomenon, contemporaries were talking of the “International of dropouts”.¹⁶

In this global process, U.S. counterculture functioned as a primary driving force. Rooted in the urban communities of the Beatniks and Bohemians, U.S. counterculture spread slowly during the first half of the 1960s and expanded rapidly since 1967.¹⁷ In the following years, strongly influenced by the experiences made by alternatives in the U.S., countercultures emerged in other Western countries. Until the early 1980s, these alternative cultures exerted a significant efficacy.¹⁸

Sources

In alternative newspapers and journals, comics, scientific and belletristic monographs, travel reports, diaries and memoirs, the alternative project of creating a new human subject materialized in a myriad of texts. Advocates of the ‘psychedelic revolution’ and the ‘sexual revolution’ like Timothy Leary, Abe Hoffman, Ronald Steckel, Herbert Marcuse, or Günter Amendt as well as their antagonists published a myriad of (scientific) books that approach countercultural body politics from different perspectives. Additionally, numerous monographs dealing with experiences connected to drug use were published during the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁹

Important and influential journals like the British *International Times* and *Oz Magazine*, the US-American *Liberation News Service*, the German *Agit 883* and *Konkret*, or the French *Actuel* as well as pamphlets and documents of countercultural groups like the ‘Zentralrat der Haschrebellen’ or ‘The Diggers’ are available online. In addition to these digitized materials I will also draw on a wide range of archival materials in my project. The archives “APO und soziale Bewegungen” and “Archiv für Alternativkulturen”, both of which are located in Berlin, as well as the archive „Protest, Widerstand und Utopie in der BRD” in Hamburg provide a huge

15 Ibid., „The Creation of an Alternative Society.“ In: ibid. (ed.), *Counter Culture*, p. 12-35, here p. 16.

16 Kosel, *Gammler*, p. 85.

17 Farrell, *Spirit of the Sixties*, p. 203.

18 For the Federal Republic of Germany cf. Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft*, p. 34-38.

19 Cf. Rudi Wormser, *Drogen, Erfahrung und Erkenntnis. Selbstzeugnisse, Dokumente, Analysen*. München: Luchterhand Verlag 1988.

number of sources dealing with the German counterculture. Collections based in U.S.-archives like the “Underground Press and Alternative Newspaper Collection” (Special Collections at Michigan State University), “The Ludlow-Santo Domingo Library” (Houghton Library at Harvard University) or the “Liberation News Service Records” (Special Collections Research Center at Temple University) do not only entail a vast amount of sources documenting the body politics of the U.S.-counterculture, but also of its Canadian, British, French, and German counterparts.

State documents such as court papers and police records which are stored in archives like the *Landesarchiv Berlin* constitute another important kind of source material for my project. Taking into account these manifold types of sources enables me to look at countercultural politics of ecstasy on two interrelated levels. Firstly, by examining (newspaper) articles, monographs, and court papers, I will reconstruct contemporary discourses on alternative, ecstatic body politics. Secondly, I will focus on the actual body practices that alternatives engaged in by looking at ego-documents like travel reports or diaries

Theoretical and methodical Approaches

Politics of Ecstasy situates itself in the fields of transnational history, social history, and cultural history, with body-historical approaches being of particular importance for my research. Rather than understanding bodies as biologically determined and historically fixed entities existing independently from social conditions, I conceptualize them as the products of discourses and practices. Therefore, I conceive both bodies and notions of bodies as deeply related to social relations of power.²⁰ Consequently, by referring to intersectional approaches, I assume that multiple and sometimes contradictory notions and configurations of human bodies exist simultaneously, which are, in turn, interwoven with social categories like class, race, sex, age, etc.

Applying this theoretical conceptualization, I understand countercultural body practices as a significant part of social power struggles. Therefore, the countercultural politics of ecstasy, aiming at the reconfiguration of human bodies, has to be understood as an attempt to overcome the social conditions of late capitalism, which were often perceived as violent and ossified.

To examine alternative body politics and their embeddedness in networks that transcended national borders, it is essential to draw on transnational and transcultural approaches.²¹ Applying

20 Michel Foucault, *Der Wille zum Wissen. Sexualität und Wahrheit, Bd. 1*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1983; *ibid.*, „Die Machtverhältnisse durchziehen das Körperinnere. Ein Gespräch mit Lucette Finas.“ In: *ibid.*, *Dispositive der Macht. Über Sexualität, Wissen und Wahrheit*. Berlin: Merve Verlag 1978, S. 104-117.

21 Madeleine Herren-Oesch et al., *Transcultural History. Theories, Methods, Sources*. Heidelberg: Springer 2012; Margit Pernau, *Transnationale Geschichte*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2011.

such a methodical set of tools makes it possible to examine the development of transnational Western countercultures without losing sight of the specific adaption of the body politics to different national contexts. Furthermore, it is possible to analyze the enormous perception, appropriation and transformation of Eastern, and especially Indian philosophies by Western countercultures.

To get into view the manifold transnational and transcultural contacts that significantly configured countercultural body politics, I will focus on certain contact zones which were important for Western countercultures. In places and spaces like music festivals, journals and conferences, India and the Hippie Trail, the transnational and transcultural contacts condensed.

To illuminate these contact zones, I will draw on the method of historical discourse analysis to reconstruct the knowledge underlying the countercultural body politics of ecstasy. However, the examination does not remain on the discursive level. Rather, it also draws on theoretical conceptions of social practice²² Such a methodical set of tools does not only enable me to look at discourses on countercultural and ecstatic body politics. Instead it also sheds light on the concrete patterns of practice as well as on the interactions between discourses and practices.

Working plan for the one year in Tel Aviv

My project fits perfectly into the frame of the post-doctoral seminar “Contextualizing the Self: Creating and Recreating the First Person”. Both in the context of my Ph.D.-thesis, which deals with masculinity and modern antisemitism in the US-South from the 1860s until the 1920s, and of my post-doctoral project I have worked with different theoretical approaches to processes of subjectivization. Drawing on this knowledge and experiences I want to contribute to a vivid and fruitful culture of exchange and discussion in the seminar.

In regard to my postdoctoral project, I will primarily analyze sources either available in digitized form on the internet or already in my possession. In March 2017, I will visit the Archives and Special Collections at Indiana University Bloomington to look through collections relevant for my project (for instance the “Kinsey Institute Library and Special Collections”; the “Wakefield Mss.” in the Lilly Library Manuscript Collections). Furthermore, in summer 2017 I will visit the “APO und soziale Bewegungen-Archiv” and the “Archiv für Alternativkultur” in Berlin. In addition, I am already in possession of a great number of contemporary monographs and pamphlets on the ‘sexual revolution’ as well as many issues of the magazine *Konkret*, which was and continues to be one of the leading journals of the German radical left.

22 Andreas Reckwitz, „Praktiken und Diskurse. Eine sozialtheoretische und methodologische Relation.“ In: Hubert Kalthoff et al. (Hg.), *Theoretische Empirie. Zur Relevanz qualitativer Forschung*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag 2008.

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The results of this analysis of my sources will provide me with material for at least two articles. The first one will deal with gender and the 'psychedelic revolution' in Western Germany and Great Britain. As I will show in this article, the notions and practices of the 'psychedelic revolution' were highly gendered and sexualized, due to the close connections contemporaries established between the 'psychedelic revolution' and the 'sexual revolution'. The second article will focus on transnational contacts and exchanges between members of countercultures in the United States and Western Germany with regard to the politics of ecstasy. Journals in which I would like to publish these articles are *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* or the *Journal of American History*.

Besides the research I will do on my postdoctoral project, I would like to organize a workshop or a small conference on the transnational and transcultural dimensions of Western countercultures in cooperation with, at least, one faculty member of the Zvi Yavetz School of Historical Studies. And last but not least, it would be a great pleasure for me to present some of the results of my Ph.D. thesis in one or two public lectures. Discourses on masculinity in connection with racialized sexualities in the famous Leo Frank Case would make for an excellent topic of one of these lectures.