

# Hip Santa Cruz and the Chaos Revolution

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## Abstract

Based on a talk at the Logos bookstore in Santa Cruz, October 6, 2016, introducing my new book, *Hip Santa Cruz*. The genesis of Hip Culture in the 1960s is described as a bifurcation of a complex dynamical system.

## INTRODUCTION

I have to wonder what it is about this book about Santa Cruz in the 1960s—*Hip Santa Cruz*—that could actually bring us all together. I think it is something about this 50-year interval. Its not only the passage of a certain amount of time that demands remembering, but also the themes of the 1960s seem to be coming up again, coming up again as they came up then, for more or less unknown reasons. And its those unknown reasons that I have been pursuing, especially during these past two months. There is a book by Mark Kurlansky (2004), entitled *1968: The Year That Rocked The World*. Its a rather thick book entirely devoted to this one year. In the introduction it says:

There has never been a year like 1968, and it is unlikely that there will ever be one again.

And from the back cover,

To some, 1968 was the year of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Yet it was also the year of the Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bobby Kennedy assassinations; the riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago; Prague Spring; the antiwar movement and the Tet Offensive; Black Power; the generation gap; avant-garde theater; the upsurge of the women's movement; and the beginning of the end for the Soviet Union.

For me personally it was also an important year, because that is the year I moved from the East Coast to the West Coast, from Princeton, New Jersey to Santa Cruz, California, and from Princeton University to UC Santa Cruz. In all my days and many transformations, this has been my largest dislocation. Astrologically, it somehow coincided with all these other big things that happened in 1968.

My official title here is *Hip Santa Cruz and the Chaos Revolution*, so I want to start with these two questions: Why should we be interested in Hip Santa Cruz? and, What is the Chaos Revolution? Ill start with the Chaos Revolution.

## 1. THE CHAOS REVOLUTION

At Princeton University, before I moved, I was studying chaos theory. I gave a graduate course on it in 1966. The lecture notes became a book, my first book, and in that course I encountered for the first time the idea of a revolution or paradigm shift, such as a revolution in the sciences, or in mathematics. For example, I came to understand the origin of chaos theory as a major revolution in the history of mathematics.

### Chaos, Gaia, Eros (1994)

After coming to Santa Cruz, chaos theory had a brief moment of fame. For a year or two from 1987 it was all in the news, and then of course forgotten. But while the subject was hot I was besieged by journalists asking me: What is chaos theory and why should we care? How did it happen? Is it really revolutionary? They naturally wondered: Is it news or not? In trying to answer these questions, I had to dig into the history of the chaos concept over the ages. This resulted in my first historical book, *Chaos, Gaia, Eros*.

In looking at this history, I had to look at the data and consider it from my own point of view, which was the point of view of chaos theory, that is, history as a series of paradigm shifts. In other words, chaos theory, looking at itself.

### Complex Dynamical Systems

Chaos theory is not well named, as it is not about chaos. It is about complex dynamical systems. These comprise a class of mathematical models which are similar somehow in their structure to the systems within which we live, also called complex dynamical systems. In the mathematical systems, virtual experience may be obtained through computer simulation, in which the chief characteristic feature is discontinuity, or major transformation, which mathematicians call *bifurcation*.

So I saw the beginnings of chaos theory as a bifurcation in the history of mathematics, radiating outward into the sciences, the arts, and popular culture, and coinciding with the major cultural transformations that took place in the 1960s.

### **The Chaos Avant-garde (2000)**

After the wave of chaos curiosity passed, I wanted to record the origins of chaos theory before the principals passed away. Jointly with the first chaos pioneer, Yoshisuke Ueda of Kyoto University, most of the pioneers were asked for a memoir. And these became a book, *The Chaos Avant-garde*. This is a collection of first-person accounts by the mathematicians who actually initiated and carried through the Chaos Revolution, which happened to coincide with the 1960s.

This became a prototype for my current book, *Hip Santa Cruz*, which comprises first-person accounts of the pioneers of Hip Culture in Santa Cruz in the same time frame, the 1960s. Chaos theory is about the specific mechanics of bifurcation, that is, the major transformations of history, machines, chemistry, or whatever. And my idea now, on the history of Santa Cruz in the 1960s, is to apply the mathematical ideas of bifurcation theory to this data.

### **The Santa Cruz Hip History Project (2002)**

Within a year or two of *The Chaos Avant-garde*, it occurred to me to apply this same idea to the Hip Culture of Santa Cruz. So I began the Santa Cruz Hip History Project. This is a group of people who experienced Santa Cruz in the 1960s. These people participated in an oral history project in which people took turns, sitting in a circle of 15, 20 or more people, telling their story into a recording device. Then the stories were transcribed and posted to a website, which is the virtual home of the project. And recently, I decided to bring some of the collected material together as a book.

## **2. HIP SANTA CRUZ**

The period of Hip Culture in Santa Cruz spanned from about 1964 to 1970. It was a relatively short period, with a definite beginning and ending. When I arrived in Santa Cruz in 1968 it was almost over. So considering my mathematical question — How did it start? — I had to rely on the observations of other people. This was the motivation of my Hip History Project: I wanted to find out from the 1960s pioneers how it all began in Santa Cruz.

From the thirteen chapters of the book, written from different perspectives and times and places, you may piece together the anecdotes to get a picture of what was going on, including the beginning of Santa Cruz Hip History.

From the testimonies of the pioneers whom I had known, I came up with my theory that Hip Culture derived from the Beat Generation by a major social transformation.

## The Beats

When you read about the Beat Generation and Hip Culture, its amazing how similar their ideas were. It is clear that Hip evolved from Beat. In their outré ideas and behavior, the Beats were even more extreme than Hippies. The Beat movement began with the meeting of three people at Columbia University in 1944, the Beat KGB: Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsburg, and William Burroughs. These three people were the skeleton of the group that came to be called the Beat Generation.

Two years after they met, a fourth important actor joined them in New York City, Neal Cassady. He wrote little but talked a lot, and he had a great influence on other people. He had a very close relationship with Kerouac, and they traveled together. That is the story of Kerouac's *On the Road* and subsequent books. Kerouac wrote twenty-one books in eighteen years, all autobiographical. His role carried a different name in each book.

He had a great knack for telling true stories. Each of his novels is written in a different style. One of them, *The Subterraneans*, was written as a stream of consciousness with little punctuation, the style in which Cassady was famous for speaking. A little over 100 pages, it was written in three days. Well, the principal drugs of the Beat Generation were alcohol and Benzedrine,

The Beat Generation emerged into the limelight in 1955, when the three principals (and two others) gave a poetry reading at the Six Gallery in San Francisco. One of the works was a poem by Allen Ginsburg, read by himself, called *Howl*. This poem, like most of his work, was obscene to a degree, so of course it was attacked for obscenity by the law-and-order people. So it became famous thanks to the obscenity laws, and the Beats emerged into the media.

Later they hung out at the newly (1953) formed City Lights Bookstore co-founded by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, a French-speaking intellectual from Morocco. It was the first bookstore in the United States that carried paperback books exclusively. The Hip Pocket Bookstore in Santa Cruz was modeled on it. The Beat Generation came to an end around 1970, when some of the principals died.

## From Beat to Hip

Now let's consider the question: What is the transmission from the Beat Generation to the Hip History of Santa Cruz? So now I have to tell you my main idea here: In the chemical reaction that turned Beat into Hip, there was a special catalyst called LSD.

Other psychedelics were involved in the cultural history of twentieth century North America: mushrooms and psilocybin, peyote and mescaline, yage and DMT. But LSD specifically called forth the Hippie cultural features from the confusion of the Beat psyche. And two vectors carried it: Allen Ginsberg and Ken Kesey, of Merry Prankster fame. Ken Kesey himself said,

I'm too young to be a Beat. I'm too old to be a Hippie.

That suggests that he is, in fact, a vector from the Beats to the Hippies.

The LSD story is particularly interesting because of the role played by the CIA. Our heroes Ken Kesey and Allen Ginsberg were given LSD through the CIA in 1959, two years before Timothy Leary turned on with LSD. Allen Ginsburg had gone to Boston to read *Howl*, and told Leary, who had already established a research project on psilocybin, about LSD.

## Ken Kesey

Kesey's story is particularly amazing. From the unique charisma and power of this one personality grew up a whole phenomenon, the so-called Acid Test, which was a prototype for the emerging Hip Culture.

First he was given LSD in the Palo Alto Veterans Hospital. Then he was living on Perry Lane, where a group of friends were already morphing into the Merry Pranksters. When Perry Lane was sold to a developer who bulldozed all the houses, Kesey and company moved to La Honda, a hamlet between Palo Alto and Santa Cruz, and the idea evolved for a bus trip to New York and back. The idea was to spread the news about LSD to everyone, to leapfrog cultural diffusion through the media.

Back in those days, people read magazines. You know, the Gordon Wasson's story about the psilocybin mushrooms in Oaxaca was published as a 17-page spread in LIFE magazine in 1957, and because of that a lot of people turned on. But Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters wanted to turn on the whole of North America without delay.

What had been happening in their La Honda living room evolved into a public ritual, the Acid Test. There was a series of Acid Tests in California. By making a

spectacle of themselves, performing Acid Tests all across the country and all the way back, they would turn on a nation.

The first Acid Test was here in Santa Cruz. There were about forty or fifty Pranksters, including those on the bus and others off the bus. Of those forty or fifty people, there were seven that were for awhile residing in Santa Cruz. One of them, Ken Babbs, number two in the Prankster heirarchy, took over when Ken Kesey was put in jail. Babbs lived in Soquel, a suburb of Santa Cruz. So the first Acid Test was held here, almost exactly 51 years ago.

### **The seeds of Santa Cruz Hip**

The germinal event in Santa Cruz was the opening of the Hip Pocket Bookstore in 1964 by Pranksters Peter Demma and Ron Bevirt.

And Neal Cassady, who (like Allen Ginsberg) had moved from Beat to Prankster, helped out in the store. The bookstore served as a staging ground for the first Acid Test, giving people directions to the event.

Then Cassady brought in his friend and housemate, Leon Tabory, who started The Barn. The bookstore opened in 1964, the first Acid Test was in 1965, the Barn opened in 1966, when the bookstore closed. The Barn became a stationary Acid Test. It was there every day, every night, with 300 people stoned on LSD, weird music, psychedelic art, and light shows by Dr. Richard Smith, a dentist in Scotts Valley. The Barn became the nucleus of Hip Culture in Santa Cruz.

## **CONCLUSION**

So from Beat to Hip: a bifurcation in which Santa Cruz played a crucial role. From the Acid Tests outward, LSD catalyzed a spreading wave of major cultural transformation.

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