PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS:
COUNTERCULTURES AND SOCIAL CHANGE*

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It was a rather simple issue which I decided to examine on this occasion: to design as parsimonious a theoretical statement as possible regarding a set of problems with which I have been concerned for many years. The set, as it turns out, has several parts:

Religious sectarianism and such related concepts as charisma, heresy, antinomianism, gnosticism and revitalization. Anomie and alienation—the causes and effects of normative voids and individuals' experiences thereof. Freudian and other depth psychologies, with their conceptions of a characterological underworld, filled with impulses and tendencies in sharp contradiction with the conscious life of the ego and the normative order of the superego. Socialization and social control—particularly the forces that interfere with socialization and increase the intensity of social control. Deviation, its sources and outcomes; the inverted values of some criminals and delinquents. Youth groups and age groups generally; generation conflicts and their causes. Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft; the mass society; the return to community in communes; utopias. Collective behavior and its relationship to customary behavior; the influence of mass media. Political sociology; protest movements; revolutions; modernization and countermodernization. Social stratification, discrimination, prejudice; and the forms of protest against them made by dominated groups. Rites of rebellion and rituals of reversal in tribal societies; saturnalia, feasts of fools, and "Abbeys of Misrule" in feudal and modern societies. The sociology of knowledge, of literature, art, and music. And, of course, in such a melange, social change.

Indeed, it was a rather simple issue—simple enough for a good question on a doctoral exam: "Read the literature dealing with the following thirteen topics and then write a paper showing how that literature converges on a common set of problems." I've been giving myself that exam for thirty years and have written rather extensive answers to some segments of it. But none of the answers grapples with this complex of issues as a whole. What one needs is a unifying theme, a concept that will focus attention on the analytic problems common to the segments.

To serve that purpose, I am working with the concept of counterculture, which I will define here—postponing a fuller definition briefly—as a set of norms and values of a group that sharply contradict the dominant norms and values of the society of which that group is a part. My aim here is to examine a few of these topics to discover what they may contribute, when studied by use of the concept of counterculture, to our understanding of society. This is certainly a paradoxical way to approach problems of sociological theory. The central questions have always been: How can we account for social order? And how is change from one system

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of order to another brought about? I am proposing that we approach these questions in a different way, that we look for explanations of disorder in the hope that we can increase our understanding of the basic problems of sociology by seeing them in a new light. This light will also cast its shadows, of course, and leave dark places; so it is best used in conjunction with, or in alternation with, other perspectives. It may be well, therefore, to glance at the basic questions in the more usual light before seeing them counterculturally.

Social theorists have developed, of course, three partially competing theories of social order:

It is a product of a mutually shared normative system—a blueprint for action that has been internalized by a set of persons in interaction.

It is a product of reciprocity and exchange, of perceived mutual advantages.

It is a consequence of the power of some to command the behavior of others—the reciprocal of power being the fear of sanctions, of loss or pain or death.

Statements such as these are best seen as analytic. A given interaction, a specific social situation is likely to be a product of all three factors, although one may predominate. Norms may be exploited for power purposes; exchange arrangements may get “frozen” into culture; power long exercised may take on the trappings of authority—a cultural concept.

Quarrels among theorists over the “true” or “basic” source of order seem pointless. The task is to measure the range of empirical mixtures of norms, power, and reciprocity and then to explore the conditions under which these mixtures occur. The mixtures undergo continual change, hence the study of social order must at the same time be a study of social change. Any one of the three sources of order—or more commonly some combination—may be involved in the process of change: Normative agreement may break down; power balances, or more precisely stable power imbalances, may shift; individuals and groups may gain or lose in what they have to offer in exchange. Under these conditions, expected satisfactions are unfulfilled and newly envisaged satisfactions are kept tantalizingly out of reach.

This is where countercultures come in. Some individuals and groups feel particularly strongly that the social order is unable to bring them the accustomed or the hoped-for satisfactions. Depending on their social location and on their personal tendencies, they attack, strongly or weakly, violently or symbolically, the frustrating social order—that is, the normative-power-reciprocity system. The nature of the attack varies widely, with some believing that they have been caught in very bad bargains, others that they are being exploited by unjust and unwise leaders or rulers, and still others emphasizing that they are surrounded by a shoddy system of norms and values. All three elements are found in most protest movements, even though they can be distinguished analytically. Giving the terms sharper and more limited meanings than they ordinarily carry, we can say that reform movements are efforts to change the social bargains—the exchange rates; rebellions are attempts to change the rulers and the bases of power; and countercultural movements are attempts drastically to reorganize the normative bases of order. Revolutions, which are rare and usually require several decades, include all three.

Our concern here is with normative systems in sharp opposition to the prevailing culture, and with the groups and individuals who are proponents and carriers of the oppositional culture. Attention to social organization and social structure must be complemented, we have come to agree, by attention to the fact that conflict is

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1 It has become nearly standard to use the term “counterculture” to refer both to the norms and values and to the groups with which they are identified, after the fashion of most anthropological uses of “culture.” This is not my preference. I think it blurs distinctions that are often essential to clarity. Yet I do not want to carry the burden of another neologism—countergroup or countersociety—to serve as a parallel concept. Therefore, I will use various circumlocutions to make the distinction between culture and society, between normative systems and the groups that carry them; and on occasion will refer to both by “counterculture” when I think the context prevents misunderstanding.
endemic, presenting a need for synthesis. Similarly, the emphasis on normative integration, on culture as a governing blueprint, must be modified by continuous attention to countercultures, while working toward synthesis. I am suggesting not simply a philosophical dialectic, based on the belief that every theoretical argument is self-generating, since every thesis contains the germs of its own contradiction, but a cultural dialectic: every normative system contains the seeds of its own contradiction. This is not propounded as a truth, of course, but as a point of departure, a fruitful way to begin the study of societies.

In each of the thirteen topics mentioned at the start, the cultural-countercultural dialectic has appeared; only by dealing with it will we be able to resolve pressing problems of analysis and interpretation. Ideological as well as evidential factors have tended to make it difficult to attain a perspective that continuously and simultaneously examines structure and change, culture and counterculture. That we must strive to do.

In the current emphasis on power and exchange, contemporary sociology is largely unaware of the deeply nonrational forces at work in all societies, forces that are built around symbol, ritual, and myth. Most of us are ready to recognize the unconscious and nonrational aspects of individual life, but pay too little attention to the counterpart on the societal level—the shared myths and rituals by which we collectively strive to avert crises or deal with them if they come. We can think of culture on its most abstract and mythical level as a paradigm that selects, interprets, and powerfully affects our impressions and feelings and desires. When culture begins to leave many questions unanswered and many needs unfilled, when individuals suspect their own emotions and experience only a blurred identity, the cultural system may be pushed aside (Tiryakian, 1974:1–15). Periods of cultural crisis (a potential at any time), of anomie, are not simply periods of loss of faith, but of struggle toward some new way to deal with the threat or reality of crisis and chaos.

THE DEFINITION OF COUNTERCULTURE

In the seventeen years since I proposed the term, several explicit and dozens of implicit definitions of counterculture have been offered. We can begin to sketch out the parameters of the concept by examining some of these definitions.

There are fundamentally two ways of defining what a counterculture is, the first on an ideological level and the second on a behavioral level. On the ideological level, a counterculture is a set of beliefs and values which radically reject the dominant culture of a society and prescribe a sectarian alternative. On the behavioral level, a counterculture is a group of people who, because they accept such beliefs and values, behave in such radically nonconformist ways that they tend to drop out of the society. (Westhues, 1972:9–10)

The statement that countercultural groups tend to drop out of society is problematic, as Westhues recognizes. Some do; others stay engaged, hoping to change society and its values; others look inward, searching for their souls, but not leaving society.

Some definitions proceed mainly by illustration. Contrast minor variations on a cultural theme, Fred Davis suggests, with sharp variations.

The gang boy configuration . . . fits nicely Yinger’s notion of a counterculture; its very meaning and existential quality inhere in its members’ patterned deviation from the dominant American cultural pattern. . . . hippies, too, are an instance par excellence of a counterculture whose raison d’être . . . lies in its members’ almost studied inversion of certain key middle class American values and practices. (F. Davis, 1971:4)

Davis then spells out these contradictions of value and practice in some detail: immediacy contra past preoccupation and future concern; the natural . . . contra the

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2 I preferred and used the Latin prefix, hence counterculture. But the voice of the people has spoken, and the usual spelling, by about three to one, is now counterculture. To my ear, counterculture is more mellifluous. I also wanted to avoid suggesting a close parallel with counter-revolution and counter-reformation, with their rather specific connotations of returning to an earlier situation. Yet, like Mark Twain, I have no sympathy for those ignorant people who know only one way to spell a word.
artificial . . . the colorful and baroque contra the classical, contained, and symmetrical; the direct contra the mediated, interposed, or intervening . . . ; the spontaneous contra the structured; the primitive contra the sophisticated; the mystical contra the scientific; the egalitarian contra the hierarchical; the polymorphous and androgynous contra the singular; the diffuse contra the categorical; the communal contra the private. (F. Davis, 1971:14–5)

There is a tendency to stereotype both the dominant and the hippie standards in Davis’ description, as in many discussions of countercultures, in order to draw the sharpest possible contrast; but he does capture the ideological tone of at least one variant of contemporary countercultures.

Some definitions proceed from an opposite perspective:

Today’s pop counterculture, especially among the young, is an awesome mix of maximum mindlessness, minimum historical awareness, and a pathetic yearning for (to quote Chico Marx) strawberry shortcut. To hell with established religions, with science, with philosophy, with economics and politics, with the liberal arts—with anything that demands time and effort. Dig the rock beat, kink up your sex life, meditate, tack a photo of Squeaky Fromme on the wall. (Gardner, 1975:46)

Amid the abundance of such descriptions and definitions, pro and con, it is difficult to reestablish the concept of counterculture as a useful part of a scientific vocabulary. Too often we illustrate the truth of Walter Kaufman’s appraisal that as it becomes increasingly difficult to keep up with events in a field of study, many people feel a need for “bargain words that cost little or no study and can be used in a great variety of contexts with an air of expertise” (quoted in Schacht, 1971:xlii).

Any analysis of countercultures faces this problem. Some use it as a word of opprobrium, an indication of incivility, depravity, heresy, or sedition. For others, counterculture means hope and salvation, a unique and perhaps final opportunity to get humankind off the road to destruction. Some devotees with whom I have talked are offended when I suggest that countercultures have occurred in many times and places. Their response is a “religious” ob-

jection to any doubt cast on the uniqueness of their experience. They are implicitly supported by the host of writers who, in recent years, have discussed “the” counterculture. Others are aware of the frequency with which countercultures have appeared, but not wanting to reduce the enthusiasm of current participants, play down the historical parallels and emphasize the uniqueness of contemporary oppositional movements.

Certainly every counterculture has unique elements that for some purposes are appropriately the focus of attention. However, I shall be climbing up the abstraction ladder—often, it may appear to you to dizzying heights—to see the similarities. The term counterculture is appropriately used “whenever the normative system of a group contains, as a primary element, a theme of conflict with the values of the total society, where personality variables are directly involved in the development and maintenance of the group’s values, and wherever its norms can be understood only by reference to the relationship of the group to a surrounding dominant culture” (Yinger, 1960:629).

This definition leaves several questions unanswered: Should we speak of countercultures when second level or subterranean values of a society are raised by some segment of that society to a primary place? The apocalyptic visions, populism, and evangelical fervor of American student radicals, Matza (1961) notes, are part of the dominant tradition. When these “counterthemes” are carried to an extreme, however, they are “publicly denounced.” Delinquent youth can also draw on a subterranean tradition of the dominant society. The search for a thrill, the use of “pull,” and aggression are scarcely limited to delinquents; they are secondary values of the dominant society (Matza and Sykes, 1961). At some point, an exaggerated emphasis on a value becomes, a counter-value by virtue of the exaggeration. We are dealing with a variable, and only careful study can tell us at what point an exaggerated value becomes countercultural, as indicated by the consequences of its use.

How is deviant behavior distinguished
from countercultural behavior? The latter is only one form of deviation, nonconformist and not aberrant, in Merton’s terms (Merton and Nisbet, 1966:ch. 15). It is also supported by the norms and values of a group. When counterculture is used to refer to deviation, whether or not it is nonconformist and group supported, we are prevented from distinguishing behaviors which, although sometimes similar on the surface, are different in causes and consequences.

Is not the whole concept of counterculture riddled with class and ethnic bias in pluralistic societies? There is a growing tendency to view urban societies as so diverse culturally that each segment is, at the most, countercultural to the other segments. Empirical study tends to support the view, however, that most youths as well as adults hold to the values of the larger society. From their study of Danish and American high schools, Kandel and Lesser (1972:168) conclude that “far from developing a contra-culture in opposition to that of adult society, the adolescents we have studied express the values of adult society.” A recent report on Britain’s Sixteen-Year-Olds (National Children’s Bureau, 1976) found that most of a sample of 16,000 were thoroughly traditional. Studies by Yankelovich (1974) and Wattenberg (1974) show wider deviations, especially among college youth; but the total impression is one of quite close identification with the values of society.

The degree of cultural diversity is not an either-or question, however; and countercultural theory must deal with the range of social situations, from those where value coherence and agreement are high to those where the common core is small (see Williams, 1970:ch. 10). To the degree that the total society has a shared culture, there can be reciprocal countercultures. And each subculture can also have countercultures. Punk rock is not just a blue-collar deviation from upper-class music: it also drastically contradicts the musical and other values of the working class from which it springs.

How counter must a statement or action be (assuming it to be expressive of some norm or value of a group) before we shall consider it countercultural? In the most limiting sense, we might say it has to be specifically a reversal of the established value. Note the use of such terms as “polarity,” “reversal,” “inversion” in the definitions I have cited. Berger and Berger (1971:20) speak of “diametric opposition.” Indeed, these ideas are central to the original concept of counterculture (Yinger, 1960).

We have no way of saying with certainty, however, that sharply oppositional statements and actions are 180 degrees different from prevailing values. We have only the beginnings of a sociometry of dominant values (as in the work of Roedel, 1973; Yankelovich, 1974; Williams, 1970; McCready and Greeley, 1976), and of measurement and scaling of countercultures (Musgrove, 1974; Wuthnow, 1976b; Wieder and Zimmerman, 1974; Spates, 1976; Spates and Levin, 1972; Wattenberg, 1974; Starr, 1974).

**VARIETIES OF COUNTERCULTURES**

One might organize material for a study of countercultures in various ways. The contrasting values and norms could be examined institutionally, with the orthodox or dominant patterns of economics, politics, education, family, and religion set against those of oppositional groups (see Wuthnow, 1976b: ch. 1; Gellach and Hine, 1973: ch. 15). Or we could build on an analysis of human behavior that has proved to be useful in several other fields. Years ago Karen Horney (1937) noted that neurotics tend to struggle with their anxieties in three different ways: by attack, by withdrawal, or by a search for shelter and protection. Charles S. Johnson (1943) skillfully described the ways in which minority-group members dealt with discrimination by aggression, avoidance, or acceptance. Turner and Killian (1957) develop a highly analogous interpretation of power-oriented, value-oriented, and participation-oriented social movements. There is a further close parallel in Weber’s (1963) description of prophetic, ascetic, and mystical sects.

I shall not develop this valuable theoretical convergence, more than to say that countercultural groups quite clearly fall
into the same threefold pattern, not the twofold activist-withdrawal categories ordi-
narily used. The closest comparison is with types of sects. The radical activist coun-
terculturalist is the prophet who "preaches, creates, or demands new obligations," to use Weber’s words. In typological terms, the communitarian utopian is the ascetic who withdraws into a separated community where the new values can be lived out with minimum hindrance from an evil society. Neither of these descriptions fits the mystics searching for the truth and for themselves. Realization of their values requires, in their view, that they turn inward. They do not so much attack society as disregard it, insofar as they can, and float above it in search of enlightenment. "The enemy is within each of us," says Charles Reich (1970:356–7).

Although every countercultural group tends to be a mixture, the strains and the splits they experience often result from sharply contrasting views of the best way to realize their oppositional values. When at the 1969 Woodstock festival, for example, Abbie Hoffman tried to generate political action by saying that the festival was meaningless until a radical "rotting in jail" was freed, a member of The Who rock band, in the words of Rolling Stone, "clubbed Hoffman off the stage with his guitar" (Denisoff and Levine, 1970), a wonderfully symbolic way to express the conflict. From the perspective of prophetic counterculturalists, the tendency of many participants in the "New Left" to define political problems in terms of personal issues, often in the language of alienation, seems a terrible deflection from the basic goal of achieving a society based on new values (Lasch, 1969; Cleck, 1973). In theory, if not always in their own ideologically guided behavior, they share Weber’s (1946:126) view that "he who seeks the salvation of the soul, of his own and others, should not seek it along the avenue of politics."

A group may seek to mix the mystical-experiential and the ascetic-communal countercultural modes, until it is clear that the search for wisdom and the ultimate trip doesn’t get the corn planted or the groceries bought, whereupon the group breaks up, or some members leave for a setting more in keeping with their inclina-
tions. In recent years, persons who had sought salvation through drugs and unre-
strained sex have sometimes turned to ascetic and highly restrained religious groups—the Divine Light Mission or Hare Krishna or Meher Baba (Kelley, 1973; Judah, 1974; Zaretzky and Leone, 1974; Glock and Bellah, 1976; Robbins and An-
thony, 1972).

Other than this brief reference, I will not follow the institutional or what can be called the sectarian way of organizing the discussion of oppositional cultural move-
ments. We can develop more meaningful comparisons and more useful general principles by examining the following questions.

Are there drastic shifts in the criteria and the methods by which a group claims to know what is true, good and beautiful? Are there drastic shifts in the standards of what are held to be true, good and beau-
tiful?

In the traditional categories of philosophy, we can define countercultures in terms of their epistemologies, their ethics, and their aesthetics. The events we study will almost always combine various elements; but we can understand the blends better if we keep in mind the elements out of which they are built.

(1) Truth, today’s counterculturalists declare, is not attained by arid research but by mystical insight. It is found in populism, homespun wisdom, in anti-
universities, in direct experience with the cosmos, in meditation, in chants, in drugs, in sensory deprivation, in sensitivity to the messages of the intuitive right hemi-
sphere of the brain—all this set over against science, technology, the knowl-
edge of the expert, and cold rationality.

Attacks on the intellectual establish-
ment are scarcely new, of course. The Taborites denounced the masters of Prague University in the fifteenth century. In England, during the period preceeding the Civil War, sectarians called for discus-
sion after sermons (a practice adopted for a brief period in Boston). Itinerant inter-
rupters, professionally skilled hecklers, moved among the churches, which were indissolubly linked with the universities,
and despite legal difficulties, denounced the self-righteousness of the pastors and their greed in taking tithes (Hill, 1975:105–6). Truth, they declared, was not the monopoly of the clergy, but could be given to anyone through an inner light. It would require little shifting of terms to use this set of activities and claims to describe a free university in London or Berkeley in the 1960s.

Many persons share the distress that underlies these views, a distress that led H. G. Wells to say at the end of World War II, that "mind is at the end of its tether." Today we see even more clearly that some of our deepest problems come from application of scientific findings. The countercultural epistemology appears in response to this predicament. Pursue a sense of mystery and fantasy, unlock the occult, meditate, and you (Brown, 1966; Roszak, 1973; A. Smith, 1976).

Belief in the occult and the pursuit of understanding through mystery are, of course, persistent elements in human history. But their strength alternates, with waves of mysticism occurring when a society has experienced, as Tiryakian has put it, "a loss of confidence in established symbols and cognitive models of reality. . . . Occult practices are appealing, among other reasons, because they are seemingly dramatic opposites of empirical practices of science and of the depersonalization of the industrial order" (Tiryakian, 1972: 510, 494; see also Gellner, 1974; Wuthnow, 1976a).

The way was paved for the countercultural epistemology of our time by the long tradition of unmasking in European and American thought (along with other sources). Do not trust appearances or presumed objective truth, for there are deeper realities, say Hume, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Pareto, and many others. Truth requires that we bring these deeper realities to light (See Mannheim, 1936; Merton, 1968; Ellenberger, 1970). If this unmasking laid the groundwork for the sociology and psychology of knowledge in the thought of some persons, it supported the search for truth through mysticism and the occult among others for whom science itself has been unmasked. (My statement itself, of course, is an hypothesis in the sociology of knowledge.)

(2) Countercultural ethics contradict the values of the dominant society as sharply as countercultural epistemology. Proponents of one, however, are often not proponents of the other. Those who oppose the established ways to truth may be quite conservative in their definitions of the good life; while those who condemn the morality of the establishment may be quite comfortable with its epistemology. The search for a "new head" has much more often been associated with quietism, introversion, and withdrawal from an evil world than with efforts to change it. These tendencies are not characteristic of those I call ethical counterculturalists. They challenge the world with new visions of the good life.

To the seventeenth-century English Ranters, the prevailing moral law was not binding on the true believers. "I know nothing unclean to me," Clarkson wrote, "and therefore what Act soever I do, is acted by that Majesty in me" (quoted in Cohn, 1970:312). Do your own thing is a somewhat less elegant way of putting it. Many Quakers and Ranters went naked through the streets and into churches—no segregated nudist beach for them (Cohn, 1970; Hill, 1975). Abiezer Coppe and his more effervescent followers were a free speech movement, using obscenity as a weapon; they affirmed the rightness of sex before marriage and attacked the monogamous family; they supported the use of drugs to heighten spiritual vision (though it was alcohol and the new drug tobacco); they dismissed the prevailing doctrines of the church and its structure of authority; they rejected private property in favor of communism.

The Ranting ethic, as preached by Coppe and Clarkson, involved a real subversion of existing society and its values. . . . all that matters is here and now. . . . Nothing is evil that does not harm our fellow men. . . . "Swearing i'th [giveth] light, gloriously,'" and "wanton kisses" may help to liberate us from the repressive ethic which our masters are trying to impose on us. (Hill, 1975:339)

To the contemporary counterculturalists, what feels good is good. This sometimes collides with another principle:
if it is good to the establishment, it is bad for us. Since the establishment takes a somewhat ambiguous middle position with regard, for example, to aggression and sex, countercultural groups have to push away from the center, toward pacifism and celibacy or toward violence and sexual exhuberance, meanwhile claiming that the establishment is not in the center, but actually occupies the opposite pole from the one being held up as good. Counterculturalists do not escape the common human tendency to make their enemies, as well as their leaders, into what they need them to be—need them in an effort to justify their actions and handle their ambivalences.

(3) A culture is as fully defined by its aesthetic standards as by its epistemology and its ethics. In many ways the opposition of artists has been negative, in the sense that they have held societies and their cultures up to fundamental criticism more than they have affirmed the values of a counterculture. Yet some oppositional art by its very creation defines an aesthetic counterculture, by using forms and sounds and ideas that formerly were taboo. As culture rather than as criticism, the contemporary counterculture scarcely runs the gamut. Its range is more nearly from yoga to yogurt to zen. The appeal to chaos and dissonance and the overwhelming of the senses correspond with many experiences of our time; but when that point has been made, we may begin to demand of our artists that they help us find—help us experience—some new sense of order and consonance.

I have said, help us experience, because it is not art as argument, but art as experience that more strongly carries the countercultural (or the cultural) impact. "The world doesn't fear a new idea," D. H. Lawrence wrote. "It can pigeonhole any idea. But it can't pigeonhole a new experience" (quoted by Trilling, 1966:xvii). In a society whose major values are intact, the artistic experience, though filled with turmoil and agony, becomes, in the last analysis, an affirmation of those values. In a society torn by doubt, much of the art—often including some of the best—will take us into a different world. The pilgrim in Dante's Divine Comedy moved from low to high, into a kind of rebirth. Samuel Beckett has his heroes, if that is the word, still Waiting for Godot as the curtain falls. The protagonist of Kafka's fable is no nearer The Castle at the end of his journey than at the beginning.

As experience, many novels and plays in the "theatre of the absurd," using that term in a broad sense, are countercultural comments on the world (see Esslin, 1973, for a more restricted usage). Even this absurdity that we dramatize, they say, makes sense by comparison with our sorry state. Let a brief comment on Jean Giraudoux's The Madwoman of Chaillot stand for a variety of plays and novels. To understand the world they affirm, we shall have to turn our usual perceptions upside down. With a wonderfully comic touch, Giraudoux holds the rich, the power hungry, the presumably successful up to ridicule. The industrialist, the general, the broker, the southern fundamentalist minister, and the commissar are seen as truly mad. They are about to destroy Paris and the world as they seek to get the oil they believe is under the city, while the "madwoman" with her eccentric friends recognize the absurdity in the powerful and try to stop them.

I shall only point to some of the other forms of aesthetic counterculture—those drastic efforts to redefine the beautiful, to break away from old standards that seem not only to inhibit the imagination but to confirm the whole culture within which they are embedded. Some of these innovations, by their artistic merit and the timeliness of their appearance, change the culture and become part of new aesthetic traditions, whether classical or popular. Other innovations fade rapidly, particularly if they are to an important degree a vehicle for carrying other kinds of protest than the aesthetic one.

Most great musicians push back the boundaries of the received tradition and are sometimes regarded as countercultural by defenders of the prevailing classicism. Though counterpoint has long been regarded simply as one aspect of harmony, when it first appeared in the late medieval period, with its polyphonic styles, its in-
dependent rhythms and distinctive sets of sounds, it was an affront to those who knew how music "should" sound. Even some of Bach's contrapuntal forms—turning a melody upside down or running it backward—seemed harsh to some of his contemporaries. But it was inevitable—if I can offer a sweeping and quite unsupported hypothesis in the sociology of music—that the growing complexity of society should be expressed in the growing complexity of music.

To leap into our own century, Schoenberg and Stravinsky and many others turned against the romantic tradition, as many of their literary contemporaries did, to explore the farthest possibilities of dissonance—one is tempted to say in a world filled with crashing sounds and disharmonies.

Seen against the history of music, it comes as no surprise that popular as well as classical forms can drastically challenge prevailing standards. The contemporary counterculture in music, to be sure, seems to bring a much more powerful dissent, both in the sharpness of its reversal of standards and the breadth of its influence. The enormous power of the electronic media to give voice to new sounds, the economic resources to produce them and listen to them, the depth of the disenchantment and its expression in so many other ways, all support the musical protest of our time. For some, of course, rock music is entertainment, fad, and declaration of independence; or it is a source of great profit (Eisen, 1969:xiii). For others, however, it is the chief ritual of a new life; it is community; it is religion. The whole culture complex—the music, lyrics, volume, artifacts, audience, set, and setting—facilitates, as Harmon (1972:81) puts it, "an unprecedented questioning of basic cultural values and institutions." The "acid rock" groups have given coverage and confirmation to the use of drugs; the lyrics define a new morality ("All the things they said were wrong are what I want to be"); the festivals bring together a community that supports the new values; the music itself declares that the old harmonic and well-modulated sounds of the past are the sounds of a repressive society.

CANDIDATES FOR COUNTERCULTURES

Countercultures can best be identified, I have suggested, by studying movements based on epistemological, ethical and aesthetic standards sharply at odds with prevailing norms. Why are some people drawn to the new standards while others are repelled by them? A theory of countercultures must connect oppositional normative movements with individual personalities. Freud saw us all as good candidates for behavior that contravenes the norms because, as he put it, "what we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery" (Freud, 1962:33) by blocking strongly motivated activities. Freud stated a principle that today we call hedonic relativism, a term similar to relative deprivation: "We are so made," he wrote, "that we can derive intense enjoyment only from a contrast and very little from a state of things. Thus our possibilities of happiness are already restricted by our constitution. Unhappiness is much less difficult to experience" (Freud, 1962:23–4). Although he does not locate the cause in the individual psyche, Durkheim had earlier made a similar point. One can only be disillusioned, he remarked, if one moves toward a point that "recedes in the same measure that one advances... This is why historical periods like ours, which have known the malady of infinite aspiration, are necessarily touched with pessimism" (Durkheim, 1973:40).

We all know, from experience and experiment, how readily we accommodate to new standards of enjoyment, so that what seemed pleasant yesterday is now unacceptably bland. "Where pleasure is concerned, humans are insatiable animals, shifting their criterion level upward when the level of pleasurable input increases, so that once again experience is scored as one-third pleasure, one-third pain, and one-third blah" (Campbell, 1975:1121). We do not make equally quick adaptation to any downward pull of experience. There is nothing more painful, as Veblen noted, than a retreat from a standard of living.

Granted this principle, a society that enormously raises the aspirations but only
modestly raises the pleasures of its members, or some of its members, is furnishing an essential ingredient of protest. Even if there are gains in some objective sense, many will feel cheated by society and disenchantment with its values. These are perhaps the conditions under which a shift occurs, in Ralph Turner's (1976) terms, from institutional definitions of "the real self" toward impulse definitions. What he calls impulse selves also require social validation and support from others. What start out as impulse selves may be collectively validated as the partially institutionalized selves of a counterculture.

The criteria by which Turner defines the impulse self are similar to those used by Keniston and others to describe alienation (Keniston, 1965; Bloy, 1969). Living for today, rejection of "success," emphasis on "being" rather than on "doing," self-expression and the lowering of inhibitions are tendencies that Keniston (1965:81) sees as point-by-point denials of the established values and replacement by their opposites.

In addition to impulse self and alienated self, other terms can be used to help us examine the individual counterpart of countercultures. Adler (1972) discusses the antinomian personality, and Erik Erikson, using perhaps the most useful psychological analogue for counterculture, develops the term "negative identity." In an often desperate choice between being a failure, a nobody, an "invisible man," and being a shockingly visible anti-hero, a person to reckon with, some choose the latter, expressing their frustration "in a scornful and snobbish hostility toward the roles offered as proper and desirable in one's family or immediate community." It is not simply that standard roles are abrogated. "They choose instead a negative identity, i.e., an identity perversely based on all those identifications and roles which, at critical stages of development, had been presented to them as most undesirable or dangerous and yet also as most real" (Erikson, 1968:172-4).

Erikson tends to assume that a negative identity is pathological. It may be wiser to reserve one's judgment on that issue, asking in each instance what a person is being negative against, what balance of creativity and insanity is found in the available positive identities, and what the consequences are for the individual and society in the various choices. Such self-feelings may be part of the character not only of the neurotic, but also of the prophet or the highly creative person who finds the preferred identities too closely bound to an unacceptable society. It is not only that individuals may be alienated, societies may be alienating. One psychiatrist, "when asked what he thought the best therapy was for students who had been severely alienated by the Vietnam war, replied, 'Stop the damn war!' " (Bloy, 1969:651).

Those driven to define themselves in terms that quite reverse the standards of their time and place are often torn by ambivalence (on ambivalence, see Merton and Barber, 1963; Room, 1976). Redl and Wineman note that although some delinquents so identify with criminal activity that they have few problems with guilt, "others are not quite that advanced. They still have mighty chunks of their value-identified superego intact. . . . In that case, the 'delinquent ego' has the additional task of 'duping its own superego,' so that delinquent impulsivity can be enjoyed tax-free from feelings of guilt." (Redl and Wineman, 1951:144).

Perhaps the counterpart of this is the need a participant in the dominant society—one who is also ambivalent about dominant values—has for duping his own id. The "long-haired, ne'er-do-well pot smokers" are the hidden and repressed parts of his own life—the dreams and fantasies of freedom from routine, inhibition, and the demands of work. By making advocates of such freedoms seem abhorrent, one can more easily resist temptation.

This interpretation ought not to be pushed too far in either direction, however. Genuine value conflicts exist; and the opponents are those who hold contrary values, not the hidden selves.

Because of their ambivalence, counterculturalists need opposition. In recent years, they have needed a "police state" and have helped to intensify already-existing tendencies in that direction.
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(Douglas, 1970:179). Harsh opposition helps to justify their feelings and actions and helps to push them away from the center, win attention, sympathy and converts, and draw sharper, value-protecting boundaries.

Although persons with feelings of negative identity are symptoms of and sources of countercultures, it is necessary to distinguish the individual from the group level. Not all those with negative identities support countercultural values or groups; not all who support countercultures have negative identities. Under some conditions, however, persons struggling with problems of identity and leaning toward a negative formulation are drawn into a social movement that validates their self-definitional and thus aids in the repression of the doubt and guilt that characterize ambivalent feelings. Or, in the absence of a countercultural group that gives validity to their negative identities, individuals may make tentative and ambiguous gestures to each other suggesting counter values, but leaving room for retreat or modification if the exploratory gestures don't lead toward consensus on the oppositional values (Albert Cohen, 1955:59–65; Klapp, 1969).

Even when the influence of social factors is taken into account, we should note that the concept of identity is not without problems. It has become loaded with implications and connotations related to the uncertainties of our time, as Bennett Berger (1971:90) says: "who would be so fatuous as to announce that he has found his identity." It is not even clear, in Berger's judgment, that finding it is a good idea. "A person who does not know who he is might just be anybody, and hence is fit for the unanticipateable opportunities and eventualities which rapidly changing industrial societies provide" (Berger, 1971:97). Having long thought that a dose of alienation and a dash of anomie were not only inevitable but essential in the modern world (Yinger, 1965), I share Berger's view to some degree. We are a long way from knowing, however, what the long-run consequences of identity diffusion and of various levels of alienation and anomie are. Whatever the case, what requires study is the interaction between given individual tendencies and countercultures, treating them alternately as the independent and dependent variables (see Kaplan, 1975; 1976).

RITUALS OF OPPOSITION AS COUNTERCULTURES

If countercultures are a continuing part of human experience, rooted in characteristic logical and social constants, one should find them, in one form or another, in all societies. Their strength can be expected to vary widely, along with their specific or precipitating causes, but they should be found everywhere, in incipient or highly developed form.

This argument is put to its most severe test in its application to small, tribal societies, relatively isolated from contact with other societies. Many authors have described the role reversals and the rituals of rebellion and opposition that are not only permitted but sometimes required of persons occupying certain positions. Related to them are the saturnalia, the feasts of fools, the charivaris that come down to us from, at least, the days of classic Greece and Rome.

From James G. Fraser's The Golden Bough, to Gennep's Rites of Passage, to the work of Max Gluckman, Victor Turner, Jack Goody, Edward Norbeck, Peter Rigby, T. O. Beidelman, and many others, we have had a steady flow of ethnographic description and a variety of interpretations of rituals of opposition and of role reversals. Many American Indian tribes had burlesque ceremonies during which clowns "parodied serious rituals, introduced obscenity into sacred places . . ., and showed open disrespect for the gods themselves" (Wallace, 1966:136). A striking feature of the organization of the Zulu "is the way in which they openly express social tensions: women have to assert license and dominance as against their formal subordination to men, princes have to behave as if they covet the throne, and subjects openly state their resentment of authority" (Gluckman, 1963:112).

Such activities can be matched in the medieval and contemporary worlds. By the late fiftieth century, All Fools Days were banned by the cathedrals, but they
were picked up by laymen, by families, craft guilds or "sociétés joyeuses" who planned ribald festivals, Abbeys of Mis-rule. Lyon had a Judge of Misrule and a Bench of Bad Advice; Rouen's Abbot had serving him the Prince of Improvisation, the Cardinal of Bad Measure, Bishop Flat-purse, Duke Kickass, and the Grand Patriarch of Syphilitics (N. Davis, 1971:41–4).

Needless to say we have Halloween, football weekends, Mardi Gras, New Year's Eve, and twenty-four-hour rock concerts, all tolerated and to some degree protected by the agents of the official culture. Less obviously, but perhaps more powerfully, some teaching, particularly in the humanities and the social sciences, can be seen as a ritual of opposition attacking the established order and describing, or implying, an alternative cultural world.3

To some degree, to analyze a society is to weaken the mythic hold of its culture. I do not argue against this—indeed, at this moment I am engaged in such analysis—because the alternative, a kind of rigid ignorance, is more risky. Yet we need continually to remind ourselves that "a little learning is a dangerous thing." In a brilliant essay "On the Teaching of Modern Literature," Lionel Trilling (1966:3–30) observed that most of the best of modern literature is subversive, filled with "strange and terrible . . . ambivalence toward the life of civilization." From Blake and Wordsworth to Nietzsche, Conrad, Lawrence, Gide, Yeats, and Joyce (make out your own list) there runs a "bitter line of hostility" toward the dominant culture. By the time students have read Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy, Conrad's Heart of Darkness, and Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground, they seemed ready, as Trilling (1966:25) put it, to engage in "socialization of the antisocial, or the acculturulation of the anti-cultural, or the legitimation of the subversive."

Such study—and the exams on the material—are a kind of ritual of rebellion, allowing strongly countercultural feelings and ideas to be expressed, but within a culturally permitted and ritualized frame of reference—the classroom—where participants see themselves and are seen as in a liminal phase, to use Gennep's (1960) term, surrounded by cultural ambiguities as they move from one social position to another.

How can we account for these sanctioned, even sponsored, deviations from the established cultures, these culturally circumscribed countercultures? They are most commonly seen as cultural inventions that serve, whatever their origins, as lightning rods. Gluckman (1954) described rituals of rebellion that blatantly subverted the usual moral and sexual norms as cathartic release mechanisms that lowered anger and resentment. It seems paradoxical, Wallace notes, that some people should be permitted, even required, to do the "wrong" thing, the culturally forbidden. "The paradox, however, is only a seeming one, for the ultimate goal is still the same: the maintenance of order and stability in society" (Wallace, 1966:135). Gluckman (1963) developed the distinction, formulated earlier by Aristotle (or, if you prefer, by Weber) between rebellion and revolution, and argued that only rebellion against rulers, not revolution against the system, could develop in tribal societies because they could envisage no alternatives. Such rebellions, he argued, were culturally contained and ritualized even as they permitted drastic counter-normative behavior.

These explanations seem to me to be, at best, incomplete. Even in the most isolated societies, persons who feel abused can imagine alternative norms and values in the form of contrast conceptions to those that prevail. Rites of opposition express a contradiction in society. They do not resolve that contradiction, but give voice to strongly ambivalent feelings. They often contain sharp criticisms of the social order, allowing some persons to express values that stand as potential reversals of the dominant values. This keeps such values alive while not compelling the participants to see themselves wholly in

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3 Particular circumstances, make a given discipline "a fulcrum for the rejection of established social arrangements" (Ladd and Lipset, 1975:73). During earlier periods, the physical sciences were also a source of radical challenge.
terms of them. Such rituals also allow the orthodox, the "straights" to see and hear and sense the force behind alternative ways, perhaps breaking their cultural isolation and rigidity. As Victor Turner puts it, describing the contemporary "rock" experience: "The structure-dissolving quality of liminality is clearly present . . ." (V. Turner, 1974:263). He then goes on to note that the "rock" experience is ancient, arguing against those who suppose that contemporary rock music, with its accompanying group experiences and multiple stimuli, is unique. "Anthropologists the world over have participated in tribal 'scenes' not dissimilar to the rock 'scene' . . . 'synaesthesia,' the union of visual, auditory, tactile, spatial, visceral, and other modes of perception . . . is found in tribal ritual and in the services of many modern religious movements. Arthur Rimbaud, one of the folk heroes of the counterculture, would have approved of this as 'un derèglement ordonné de tous les sens,' 'a systematic derangement of the senses' " (V. Turner, 1974:264). As a writer for the Oracle put it: "imagine tasting G-minor."

Of course we lack the kind of controlled study that would allow us to speak with confidence about the countercultural aspects of rituals of rebellion or more contemporary forms of sanctioned deviation. What we do have is the experience of seeing such rituals being developed before our eyes, in the form, for example, of rock festivals licensed by city officials and aided by the police—even as many of the norms and values of the dominant society are disregarded. By careful study over time we may be able to determine to what degree such rites promote cultural integration (or rigidity) by serving as safety valves and the degree to which they promote cultural change and conflict, by keeping alternatives alive.

**Countercultures as Mutations**

One way to study the connection between social change and oppositional movements is to glance at genetic mutations, which stand as powerful analogies to countercultures. If we take them as suggestive hints about similar processes that occur on the cultural level, study of these analogies can help us to describe, if not to explain countercultures.

Biological systems are self-reproducing, but they are not closed systems. In addition to natural genetic variations, they experience drastic discontinuities. Most mutations are maladaptive, and individuals whose genes are thus modified are less likely to survive or reproduce than more standard members of the species so long as the environment remains relatively stable. If there are significant changes in the environment, however, deviant individuals—those carrying the mutant gene—may have a survival advantage. Recessive genes can be thought of as a kind of gene bank where maladaptive mutations are sometimes stored, a survival resource to be drawn upon if drastic changes of environment make them adaptive (Gerlach and Hine, 1973:224–5).

Some cultural deviations can be seen as the mutations of a society's normative system. Since it is difficult to believe, however, that the individual-societal-environmental system is as well-balanced as the organism-environment system—the result of a process of evolutionary selectivity—we ought not to assume that most cultural deviation, like most mutation, is maladaptive. Nor should we assume the opposite, after the fashion of those who believe that any kind of change is preferable to stability. Some cultural deviations, like most mutations, are lethal.

Most social scientists today believe that rigidity is a greater threat than are cultural mutations. As Donald Campbell (1975:1121) has argued, in an important paper, social scientists and psychologists may be overeager "to discover and believe antitraditional, antirepressive theories"; they may be especially receptive to "the phredonic message of liberation."
The old ways, of course, may contain social adaptations that have become destructive under new sets of circumstances. Pressure against the traditional cultures, however, comes not only from their failures to adapt to new circumstances, but also from the hedonic individualism and self-centeredness that are the product of biological selection. The continuing task, Campbell argues, is to arrive at a minimax solution or a stable compromise between the needs and requirements of the biological and the social systems (see also Meddin, 1976).

Social norms the world over seek to limit selfishness, greed, and dishonesty, even though it can be argued that biological evolution favors individuals who practice them. "Look out for your own interests" may be as important as "thou shall not covet," Campbell observes, but spontaneous compliance with the former generally makes normative reinforcement unnecessary.

This is a powerful argument, but I would emphasize somewhat more than Campbell does the rigidity built into social systems, partly as a result, ironically, of the social virtues that make social life possible. He notes that in Moses' day, as in ours, honoring one's parents could have been carried to dysfunctional lengths, "but such excesses were so little of a social problem that 'Thou shalt show independence from thy parents' was usually omitted from the limited list of reiterated commandments" (Campbell, 1975:1118); usually omitted, perhaps, but not always. Several centuries after Moses, a charismatic prophet with countercultural tendencies declared: "For I have come to set a man against his father, and daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes shall be those of his own household (Matthew 10:35, 36).

This quotation prompts me to suggest that major countercultural mutations often—I am tempted to say in the majority of cases—appear as religious movements. "The sect," says Werner Stark (1967:129) "is typically a contraculture." A set of values that changes life drastically, that threatens not simply opposition but persecution, that is entangled with deeply ambivalent feelings about one's self and others, demands a powerful revelation to a charismatic leader or a deep-going mystical experience or the support of a select community of believers if they are to be experienced as a viable new way of life. Charisma can be counterposed, not only to the sense of an excessive rationalization of life, but also to the sense that an established moral order must be broken (Weber, 1963; Roth, 1975). (Under some circumstances, of course, the charismatic leader seeks to protect and repair an endangered moral order [see Wilson, 1975].)

The religious element in oppositional movements is well expressed in Wallace's concept of revitalization—a term that overlaps the meaning of counterculture in many ways. "It can be argued," Wallace (1956:268) writes, "that all organized religions are relics of old revitalization movements, surviving in routinized form in stabilized cultures, and that religious phenomena per se originated . . . in the revitalization process—i.e., in visions of a new way of life by individuals under extreme stress."

To say that many cultural mutations are religious is not to say that they are good—or that they are bad. Most persons would probably agree that certain prophetic movements with which they identify have been major forces in transforming an unjust or otherwise inadequate social order. Not many are inspired with awe, however, by hearing from the Church of Satan that greed, pride, envy, anger, gluttony, lust, and sloth are cardinal virtues, not the seven deadly sins (Moody, 1974; Alfred, 1976). In noting that many countercultures are religious, I want simply to emphasize that those involved connect them with the fundamental problems of existence.

Countercultures as the Result of Social Change

Major countercultural movements are, in the first instance, indicators of a society experiencing severe stress. The common tendency today to associate countercultures only with the middle and upper classes fails to see that they are often a
two-pronged attack on the established culture, expressing different kinds of stress. On one side we get the countercultures of the privileged who say, in effect: here are values we can respect, that give us a sense of meaning. On the other side are the countercultures of the deprived who say: here are values we can attain, that give us a sense of control. To cite a diverse list of the latter, without explication, there are countercultural elements in "the culture of poverty"; among the Black Muslims, particularly in their earlier period; and in the values of delinquent gangs.

Thinking of countercultures as the dependent variable, we see many kinds of social change that upset the moving equilibrium of a social order, the structural-cultural-characterological balance of a given time, and make the appearance of countercultural movements more likely (none of these is a sufficient cause; some may be necessary; all are interdependent):

1. Drastic reorganization of the way people make their livings. These ways are closely bound up with shared values and norms, with the power distribution, and with accustomed reciprocities. Rapid economic growth and related political changes, whether in industrialized or developing societies are closely connected with occupational changes and magnify their destabilizing impact.

2. Changes in the size, location, age distribution, and sex ratio of a population. Insofar as a low average age is a factor, the most highly industrialized societies can expect a reduction of countercultural inventiveness, for better or worse. The average age in the United States is now 29—up from 25 a decade ago—and may be nearly 35 by the end of the century if present trends continue. The graying of America may prove to be a more accurate prediction than the "greening of America."

3. Rapid importation of new ideas, techniques, goods, and values from alien societies or from earlier periods. By itself, this explains little, since one needs to know why the new ideas or goods seemed attractive, rather than repugnant, why cultural tariff barriers didn’t keep them out. It is clear, nevertheless, that countercultural movements often use foreign norms and values for their contrast conceptions; and the production and use of goods from another culture can, under some conditions, have a powerful dissolving effect on the established ways of doing things.

4. Sharp increase in life’s possibilities, hopes, dreams, and actualities, followed by a plateau, actual loss, or serious threat of loss. This has long been recognized as a factor in revolutions. Countercultural movements do not typically occur when desired values are becoming more difficult to attain, despite the ideology of the protesters, but when they have become more accessible over a period of time, although at a rate slower than the increase in demand. The result is a stronger sense of relative deprivation.

5. Lower participation in intimate and supporting social circles—families, neighborhoods, work groups (Hendin, 1975; Berger and Berger, 1971). Many counterculturalists ranging from the utterly deprived to the "poor little rich kids," share in common a broken bond between parents and children that predisposes the latter to many forms of negativism. Some turn the negative impulses inward, which in our time has meant a sharp increase in rates of anxiety and suicide, or they may find support for turning the hostility outward. Feuer (1969) speaks of the de-authorization of the older generation as the major cause of the coalescing of individual oedipal problems into a shared revolt. He is one-sided in his interpretations and imprecise in his discussion of the sources of such de-authorization, though it seems reasonable to note its interdependence with the other sources of countercultures we have noted. The loss of intimacy between generations does not seem to have been overcome by the "love" generation, whose children are usually neglected in the name of permissiveness, much as they themselves were neglected (Yablonsky, 1968:302–15; Rothchild and Wolf, 1976).

6. An increase in the number of aninomian persons, or those with negative identities, or in the strength of tendencies in those directions.

7. A loss of meaning in the deepest symbols and rituals of society; or, if you
will, a religious crisis (Wuthnow, 1976b). The other factors we have mentioned doubtless contribute to the loss of meaning and several are, in turn, strengthened by it; but we are far from knowing why a major reduction in the legitimacy of the values of a society—rather than endemic but scattered skepticism—occurs. In a recent study of over a thousand university students in six countries (Yinger, 1977), I found that sixty percent believed that problems of meaning were the most fundamental issues facing humanity. (About half of these also mentioned problems of injustice, suffering, or both.) The present crisis of meaning is now generations old, and many feel, with Matthew Arnold (1907:321) that they are

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born... .

Many of those caught in such a situation grasp for faith; they invent what they can (glorious religions are seldom the outcome) and they borrow meaning systems that seem uncorrupted by the society around them.

We need a theme? then let that be our theme: that we, poor grovellers between faith and doubt,
the sun and north star lost, and compass out,
the heart’s weak engine all but stopped, the time
timeless in this chaos of our wills—
that we must ask a theme, something to think,
something to say, between dawn and dark,
something to hold to, something to love.
(Aiken, 1936:2)

We are moved by the poet more than by prosaic facts, but I think we need to guard against pluralistic ignorance—a shared belief in pseudo facts. It may be that a moderate reduction in the sense of shared fundamental values is so threatening that we are drawn to those sensitive voices warning of imminent danger.

(8) Such social and personality factors as we have mentioned create the context in which countercultures are likely to occur, but at least one other element is needed: communication among those with predispositions and living in situations that can precipitate countercultural values. Potential members need to identify one another; leaders need audiences; powerful signals to and from the dominant society are required to help give protesters a sense of identity and to set boundaries. It is not by accident that the Diggers, Ranters, and Seekers, not to mention the more moderate Levellers, spread rapidly across England at a time when small printing presses were appearing in large numbers, when literacy was growing, and when the Puritans and the Royalists, struggling with one another, were for a brief period relatively tolerant of radical notions, each hoping to win support. It is scarcely necessary to note how much the TV camera, the mass circulation magazines and newspapers, the movies, as well as the enormously variegated underground press have spread the word in the contemporary Western world. More generally, the recurring conditions for countercultures are reinforced by direct lines of communication to the past and by the rediscovery and reemphasis of past leaders and movements (see Hill, 1975:ch. 18).

Countercultures as the Source of Social Change

When we turn the question around to ask how and to what degree countercultures are the cause of social change, we come to some of the most critical problems of sociological theory. With respect to recent American countercultures, a basically functionalist interpretation is now commonly given. Chief Justice Warren Burger of the United States Supreme Court recently declared “that turbulent American youth, whose disorderly acts he once ‘resented,’ actually had pointed the way to higher spiritual values” (Cleveland Plain Dealer, May 29, 1976:5-A). Philip Slater writes that a basic characteristic of successful social systems is the presence of devices that keep alive alternatives antithetical to the dominant emphases.

These latent alternatives usually persist in some encapsulated and imprisoned form (“break glass in case of fire”), such as myths, festivals, or specialized roles. . . . Such latent alternatives are priceless treasures and must be carefully guarded against loss. For a new cultural pattern does not emerge out of nothing—the seed must already be there. (Slater, 1971:110–1).
Well, some of them are priceless treasures and others are lethal bombs; but we may not be able to have one without the other. Slater’s argument is close to Durkheim’s interpretation of crime, which Durkheim declared, is necessary to the evolution of morality and law. “In order that the originality of the idealist whose dreams transcended his century may find expression, it is necessary that the originality of the criminal, who is below the level of his time, shall also be possible. One does not occur without the other” (Durkheim, 1938:70–1). And, of course, Durkheim goes on to say that crime not only implies that new ways are open; it may even be an anticipation of new collective sentiments. Socrates was a criminal, but he helped pave the way for a new morality.

I am uncomfortable with such unqualified functionalist views. Countercultures may stimulate the growth of highly resistant antibodies in society that make wise and necessary changes less likely. Opposition to the bizarre may deflect attention from basic needs; it may furnish those most resistant to change with superficially strong moral arguments, not to mention allies.

Antithetical groups do not escape each other’s influence. We take on the face of the adversary, as the French proverb puts it, whether we wish to or not. Or, more technically, culture and counterculture are bound together in linked evolution. Under conditions of lowered legitimacy and loss of faith, efforts on the part of the dominant society to repress new norms and values can lead to deviation-amplification, not to a reaffirmation of the established norms and values. Efforts to coopt the deviants can, by legitimating their more moderate practices, have the same effect. Thus we need to complement Durkheim’s view of the way deviation strengthens a group by an evolutionary view of the way it modifies a group. “If you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the problem” is one of today’s slogans. Gerlach and Hine (1973:260) offer us a similar notion: “if you’re not part of a mutation, you are part of the environment which selects for or against it. No one can escape an evolutionary role.” Deviant ideas that become the operative values of a group tell us, at the least, something about the stresses faced by the members of that group. On another level, they can tell us something about the larger system, indicating points of inadequacy. On still another level, they can prove to be new values required to meet a new situation.

The changes in values and norms propped by countercultures cannot proceed far without concomitant changes in social structure and character. Social change, as I use that term, is the process of movement from one relatively stable structural-cultural-characterological system toward another. This does not imply “that societies move from situations of relative balance, through periodic of disruption, into new situations of balance. New forces may enter a system at such a rate that the realignment process cannot proceed rapidly enough” (Yinger, 1970:477). A situation where structural, cultural, and characterological elements are continuously out of phase with each other may now be endemic. It should not be assumed to be either exceptional or pathological. Nor should we assume that change must begin with one part of the system, with structural change in the economy, for example, or with the revelations of a charismatic leader, or with a shared cultural vision of what the new world should be. Whichever part of the social change process occurs first, its impact will be strongly influenced by the extent and direction of changes in the other parts.

Most revolutions show that structural change is more likely to be carried through than cultural change. In the early stages, revolutions usually contain a counterculture, carried along by a utopian conception of a new world. But those whose first concern is the transfer of power may believe this objective is threatened by demands for a new culture (Abner Cohen, 1974:ch. 3). After the transfer of power—often carried out in the name of new values—the new rulers don’t seem very different from the old. From czar to commissar is not so far. Radicals fight the revolution; conservatives write the constitution. The family is attacked, to break the linkage of generations, but usually re-
turns to a pattern quite similar to its pre-revolutionary form.

The indirect effects of countercultures are probably more important than the direct and intended effects. The protest movements of mid-seventeenth-century England created a dissenting tradition that has outlasted some of the content of particular dissenting movements. This tradition has strongly influenced English and American history ever since. France and Germany, on the other hand, with much less strong traditions of dissent, have been more subject to revolutionary-counterrevolutionary cycles (see Baltzell, 1972:217–8).

Insofar as some upper-middle-class WASPs and Jews persist in their opposition to and withdrawal from technological society, Berger and Berger (1971) observe, they are less likely to modify that society drastically than to create new room at the top for the sons and daughters of manual workers—"The blueing of America."

"If Yale should be hopelessly greened," the Bergers write, "Wall Street will get used to recruits from Fordham or Wichita State. Italians will have no difficulty running the RAND Corporation, Baptists, the space program" (Berger and Berger, 1971:23).

The effects of a given form of counterculture depend not only on its own characteristics, but on the situation. Suppose that it becomes essential for the United States to shift into a lower consumption, lower resource-using style of life. In the last few years we have discovered, once again, that even a small drop in accustomed levels of living exposes the society to enormous strains. All the political compromises and hard bargains through which a given distribution of resources has been attained are exposed. Without unusual support, lower consumption values would come about only from the effects of the slow and painful erosion of necessity. Now into this scene may come, not as a purposive invention but as a cultural mutant, a movement that reduces certain pleasure demands in the name of a powerful ideology that satisfies other needs. The reduction in what was formerly thought to be a high standard of living is not defeat; it is, in fact, the good life. We find "religious" support for the shift rather than sullen and strife-ridden retreat. Communities, ascetically inclined sects, hippies may help to devalue the pleasure currency, helping those involved and the many others pushed toward the new values by their appraisals of the situation, to balance their psychic economies. Without such shifts, we would have to think in terms of a continuously escalating pleasure-demand standard. The new values, of course, have a cost: painfully won disciplines, essential to other values, may be weakened; additional value shifts are tied into the change by the counterculturalists.

CONCLUSION

Someone has said that every country gets the socialist party it deserves. It is equally true that every society gets the countercultures it deserves, for they do not simply contradict, they also express the situation from which they emerge—pushing away from it, depleting its contradictions, caricaturing its weaknesses, and drawing on its neglected and underground traditions. If we shudder at the illegal drug problem, we ought more carefully to study our rates of alcoholism and lung cancer and the results of the use of other legal mind-altering drugs. If we shudder at the Manson family or the Symbionese Liberation Army, we ought to do more than contemplate the violence we do to some of our children in the ghetto or to the Vietnamese. If we shudder at the Church of Satan, we should at the same time note the aberrant violations of basic values by "respectable" people, violations that such nonconformist cults have transposed into virtues.

Lest I seem to be confirming only the negative image of countercultures, let me add: If we applaud the emphasis on gentleness and love, on conservation and sharing, on self-reliance and self-discovery that characterizes many oppositional movements today, we should recognize that these too—although expressed in the context of drastic value reversals—borrow from the dominant culture even as they oppose it.

The most important lesson from the
study of countercultures is not what it tells us about our times—or any specific time—but what it tells us about the human condition. In some ways, such a study underlines the points made by conservatives: the social fabric is delicate, it is based on long experience, it is built on constant factors in human life. Therefore, don’t touch. This is often the wrong conclusion, however. Because the social fabric is delicate, we need continually to weave in new threads. A cultural-countercultural confrontation, a consequence of changing conditions and inflexible structures, is a costly way to proceed. We need to learn how to respond to early warning signals rather than waiting for over-compensating attacks powered by ambivalence and anger.

In my judgment, we are in the midst of a major civilizational transformation. The critical issue that humankind faces today is: How to create a rolling adjustment to the incredibly rapid and drastic changes taking place on the planet. We’re faced with the problem of rebuilding the station, relaying and changing the gauge of the tracks, and accommodating vastly more passengers, while still keeping the trains running. Some say: don’t change, civilization can be breached too easily; or, in the language of the train analogy, patch up the station a bit, but don’t tamper with the basic structure. Others say: stop the trains; the building isn’t worth saving; it’s about to collapse; we need a clean field on which to build anew. That is the position taken by countercultures. If we think of them as art forms, we may find that, like other forms of art ranging from the sublime to the ugly, they highlight, dramatize and anticipate drastic problems. Whether as “voices crying in the wilderness” or as symptoms of major disorders—unintended warnings and illustrations of what may lie ahead—countercultures require the most intensive study by those whose aim and task it is to study societies and to see them whole.

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