

Caution: Capitalism May Be Hazardous to Your Health (Conclusion)

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HIP POLITICS

The danger facing freeks—even many so-called “cultural revolutionaries”—is that hip culture is close to a revolutionary cultural movement, but more of a lumpen middle-class culture, deformed by capitalist society, to the extent that it even preserved class-lines between the upper and lower middle-class (plastic hippie and freek).

Nowhere is this deformity better shown than in the underdevelopment of hip politics. After Yippee! apoliticism is on the wane. But there is still a tendency to shirk confrontation, to avoid cultural forms and projects like the Berkeley Peoples' Park which galvanize the people, and expose and shatter the status quo.

There is still confusion about the need for a politics to protect and extend the cultural revolution; and even the naive belief that we can “change our mind instead,” as if we could change our middle-class conditioning without changing our behavior.

Most freeks realize that apoliticism is the luxury of the rich hippies who preach it. But they are also disillusioned with much of the left. Throughout the '60s, people in the folk, civil rights, student rights and peace bag learned that reform within the system was impossible.

The problem with the left was that almost anyone could grasp the contradiction of blatantly middle-class, authoritarian groups talking “liberation” while they were themselves so unliberated. How do you accept sectarianism that attacks brothers more viciously than it attacks imperialism? A paranoid politics acting out of hatred for ‘Daddy’ rather than love (as Che counseled) for the people? Without necessarily giving up politics, people began to concentrate on the problem of finding a way of life outside of repressive middle-class culture.

They studied the writings of the small, brilliant, anti-materialist beat movement. They found not only the word, but a style and charismatic identity figure in Bob Dylan, the first distinct hippie to emerge in the mass media. His biggest single, “Like a Rolling Stone,” captured the whole fall from middle-class comfort to the sub-proletarian street: “you’ve gone to the finest school alright...Ain’t it hard, having to be scrounging your next meal...When you ain’t got nothin’, you got nothin’ to lose.”

His surreal-rock reached the mass of U.S. youth, with a revolutionary message: escape from “rational, liberal discourse” into real, super-intense experience. Instead of slogans, he created poetry that people listened to again and again, straining after the seductive lyric until they freaked right out of middle-class consciousness into sudden understanding.

Dylan’s use of profit-oriented mass media to spread this revolutionary message established both the dominant pattern of hip activism, and the foremost contradiction within the hip movement. Indeed, the contradiction between liberation and the use of capitalist media is the basic problem for any cultural revolution under capitalism. Can the artist-activist escape being co-opted or censored by the media owners? Can he transcend the entertainment-package straight-jacket?

Yes, but only when his corporate master cooperates, only if his audience responds with an intense sensitivity that transcends middle-class unconsciousness. People turned themselves on through Dylan.

Meanwhile, this contradiction between capitalism and liberation has deformed the hip movement and weakened its politics—completely. Because the mass media were easy to manipulate, the hip activist became a media guerilla.

The success of an Abbie Hoffman or a Ken Kesey meant that the whole movement, even those who shun the media, tended to adopt this approach, to work on the basis of flashy “exemplary leadership”—through the propaganda of example and deed—rather than patient education, and by organizing projects to_ involve new people and develop more leaders.

Unfortunately, exemplary leadership has very limited effectiveness outside the TV screen, and specific situations like street-fighting, where leadership should fall on those who show it. While many freaks have won over straights by the power of example, psychedelics and the underground press have both been far more important to the spread of hip culture. Both have involved a lot more people, a lot more intensively.

Besides being a cultural bond, pot stimulates perceptual awareness (illuminating what lies outside of middle-class consciousness like a light in a darkened room), and fantasy—the imagination of the revolutionary alternatives hidden within the “normal”. The underground press follows fast behind, filling up the fantasy with specific content, inciting specific actions.

Both are a lot more effective than the unfocused subversive consciousness created by a few ‘superstar’ media guerillas. Real cultural revolution means that we all exercise our imaginations, that we all break out of middle-class passivity and participate, that we all become guerillas.

Exemplary leadership and action neglects the most successful practices of the underground press—the slow education of a mass constituency, and the organization of a few others to keep on working, no matter what happens to the “leaders.” Purely exemplary action is often nothing but “doing your own thing” without relating to the community; and it can fail to organize the community, in spite of concrete, daily oppression.

Very simply, the exemplary leader often doesn’t have a definite constituency, so that when he is unsure of himself, his leadership is weak, and when he is decisive, people say he’s on an ego trip. Becalmed between liberation and capitalism, the community sits. Real economic control of hip culture has fallen into the hands of “hip businessmen.”

From the beginning hip entrepreneurs have tried to turn hip culture into a purely money-making proposition. The early hip movement wanted to turn on the whole world, not to a passive drug thing, but to a total experience of free, creative activity.

Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters provided the direction, originating the communal lifestyle and “acid tests,” the first rock-dance-drama-lightshows. Meanwhile economic control of the San Francisco hip community was in other hands.

When Kesey came up with his greatest scheme—a plan to lure the biggest fascist cops, judges and legislators in Northern California to a phony “Acid Graduation” and secretly feed them LSD—the ‘hip establishment’ intervened to deny him a hall or a band. They used the exposure their money gave them to spread rumors that Kesey was working with the cops. In the end their effort to protect their prosperous psychedelic shops and drug dealerships didn’t matter, because the police smashed Haight anyway. But again and again the same greed-heads sabotaged any leadership that arose to turn the people away from profits toward liberation. Later they opposed the West Coast Yippies.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The hip community continues to move against the resistance of hip capitalists toward cultural liberation, but at a slow crawl. Meanwhile we are the Jews for a fascist police-state society. The government is about to pass a law aimed at drug users, authorizing secret police and permanent “mental commitment” of anyone, without a jury trial and with no legal appeal whatsoever (Preventive Detention Bill).

Our only hope as a movement is to grow like crazy. But to do this we must turn hip energies back from making money, toward cultural liberation. By word and by deed, communist hippies have got to turn on every freak to

cultural revolution. When the whole movement lives cultural revolution, we can become the vanguard for the total cultural revolution of this society.

Better than creating new organizations, we can galvanize the ones that exist, by showing everyone a clear direction. For instance the underground press, which reaches millions, is in most places far ahead of the hip community. Most underground papers are run for revolution rather than profit. And now the staffs of the remaining capitalistic papers are liberating them, following the example of the *Berkeley Tribe* (formerly the *Barb*). They already have the best style for reaching not just the freaks but all the people—simple, undogmatic, imaginative and colorful. They will be the first to join in reaching out for a liberated way of life, and putting down selfish plastic hippies.

We have to go beyond the underground press, though. The Yipees projected a beautiful media-image, yet failed to grow beyond a small initial cadre. The N.Y. Motherfuckers built cadre and did beautiful community organizing, ignoring the establishment media. But they neglected mass education and organizing new base areas outside New York's Lower East Side. The tactics of most of the left are even more sterile. Endless meetings and rallies that never attract new people, street leafleting that reaches good people maybe once, seem to be nothing but excuses for the self-important social life of left wing cliques.

What we need are more and better ways of reaching people—an avalanche of wall-posters, street theatre, minstrels, life celebrations and living cultural alternatives like the Peoples' Park. Most of all we have to reach people with our own conversation and deeds, and with projects that serve their vital needs, in which they can actually participate. People learn best through participation, through real experience and action. "Advertising" is secondary.

1. The mimeographed "instant news" sheets that appeared during the Berkeley Peoples' Park struggle once again proved to be a fine medium of mass education, providing simple explanations of events, leading naturally into calls to action. The underground press is better in depth; wall-posters reach the street better. But the news sheet can provide instant news delivered door-to-door.

First the community must be canvassed to find all free-minded people who want the service. Then it can be divided into sections, each with one person who has a list of addresses. News sheets are delivered to him, and he just goes around shoving them under doors.

Instant news is a proof of the community you can hold in your hand—a vehicle for its gradual growth and its instant, total mobilization to resist repression.

2. Once people get used to the free news sheet and, the community, local organizers can begin to visit each house where instant news is delivered, rapping with people about their ideas, resources and needs, talking about cultural revolution. The organizer becomes a center and a catalyst for action.

3. Free school teachers/organizers set up classes and study-groups in people's houses, to study everything from sensitivity to hard revolutionary ideology. The Free School creates and perfects new cadre, and performs the essential cultural revolutionary task of raising mass consciousness.

4. Simultaneously free community services are organized—practical alternatives to capitalism. Free switchboards, housing, jobs, food, medical and legal aid, car pools, etc. are communism in practice. Not only will free services free us for cultural revolution; participation is the best way to learn communism.

When people learn that they can provide for themselves more cheaply and with less hassle communistically (while the imperialists provide fewer and fewer services because they need every cent for repression), then we will surely win. It is no accident that the Black Panthers took over the idea of free food from the Diggers.

5. Finally, we must never forget the importance of mass community gatherings. Be-ins to celebrate our thing and confrontations to protect it are living, breathing experiences people have of our community. The crowd surpasseth itself..

Partial as this program for cultural revolution is, it doesn't exclude the necessity for socio-political change. To do so is not cultural revolutionary—it does not promote revolution—but "cultural nationalism." A cultural nationalist may talk cultural revolution, but he just wants to sell you some "revolutionary" product. True cultural revolutionaries are trying to free people from passive consumerism—from the whole capitalist behavior syndrome—so people make their own culture, for revolution rather than profit.

When people make real revolutionary culture, and bring their communities together to liberate the way they live and relate to one another, they are taking the line of least resistance in dealing with U.S. cultural imperialism.

And these communities are natural bases for the struggle against fascism, besides giving people a chance to look at the alternative.

When we understand that the only difference between U.S. imperialism in Greece and at home is, for the people, one of privilege and degree; that this country is a neo-colony too (never really decolonized—power was merely transferred to native imperialists); then we see how close we are to fascism.

This society is already totalitarian; it plays whites off against the Black Colony, wreaking total assault on the Black's identity and robbing him of his manhood. More: in the process of regimenting whites into middle-class puppets of U.S. imperialism at home and abroad, society also humiliates white identities, assaults their psyches, and dehumanizes them to the point that they don't perceive this society as totalitarian. Before they can be psychologically prepared to deal with the cop in the street, they have to externalize the cop in their heads.

To undercut the cop in people's heads, we have to provide people with the experience of our alternative—of participation in a community liberated through cultural revolution—with which the middle class can regain their own repressed 3rd World identity.

When they find themselves hated and super-exploited aliens within the imperialist mother country, they will be ready to join with the peoples of the world in overthrowing the oppressor.

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