

Theory of Hip Part Two

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I concluded last issue by saying that, whereas in previous ages, nonconformists were able to “escape” society by taking refuge in an agrarian life, etc.; nonconformists in the interdependent society cannot escape. They can only rebel. And their rebellion demonstrates the absolute contradiction between the Social System and the Human Id (as a symbol of human freedom and satisfaction).

I stressed that Hip involved the free choice of alienation; it is not an “inevitable” by-product of the system.

Now it is true that the alienation of Hip is generated by the system, but only as a NEUROTIC DISORDER. (Critics of Left and Right would agree to this.)

Neurosis is the result of the instinctual conflict of love with aggression, (death vs. life) and more particularly, the inability to satisfy libidinal claims.

Actually, civilization itself is a “neurotic disorder,” due to the unreasonable (to Freud) conflict of instinctual drives. But only those behavior styles socially designated as “nonproductive” are commonly termed “neurotic.”

Society institutes useful and acceptable rituals by which we can discharge, sublimate, repressed energy. Thus while all behavior patterns in civilization (as we know it) are to an extent “neurotic”, Hip is more commonly recognized as such as it is “nonproductive.”

The Hip—unwilling to use the standard mechanical means of draining his Id—withdraws into his rebellious subculture. This initial refusal is of prime importance. Freud’s definition of neurosis as “the expression of the rebellion of the Id against the outer world” becomes true for the Hip, not just at the unconscious mental level, but at the conscious existential level!

Hip, like all “asocial” (Freud’s term) nonconformists, is the self-conscious “rebellion of the Id” via the ego against the false constraints of the external world or society.

“Due to an excess of instinctual strength, or a pathological disposition” Freud elsewhere comments, “Probably (our emphasis) a certain percentage of mankind will remain asocial.”

“The attempt to practice these (nonconformist) virtues constitutes the most vital act of rebellion,” writes the revisionist Erich Fromm. However, lacking a dynamic theory of the instincts, Fromm’s rebellion is one of the spirit, not of the flesh.

He thinks it is possible to adapt and “love and be creative” WITHIN the system.

But in reality, the rebel is no more “loving” than the Cynic that is Mass Man. Neurosis in civilization is inescapable; all saints are guilt-ridden frauds. Fromm’s nonconformist “virtues”, when actually practiced in a neurotic civilization, appear corrupted as perversions.

And the Hip, in an inescapably antagonistic position vis a vis the society that prevents the realization of the life he desires, finds that society a suitable object on which to displace his aggressive impulses.

“The only alternative,” writes Freudian Norman Brown, “is to turn the aggression outward to the external world as the energy to change the world.” But Brown lacks an appreciation of the kind of opposition that is required, and concludes by referring to the Meaning of Christianity and the Statesmen of the World, as alleged “forces for change.”

Does it even make sense to talk about changing the very structure of civilization itself in a manner that would end neurosis and repression?

This would be the fulfillment of the vision of Art: freedom and nirvana. “That would be the golden age,” commented Freud, “but it is doubtful whether such a state of affairs can be realized.”

But Norman Brown and Herbert Marcuse (not to mention the notorious Wilhelm Reich!) orthodox Freudians, have shown that such a radical transformation of civilization is possible, given an advanced industrial society in which the necessity of labor is slowly abating.

Then there is Hope for the artistic vision which unfolded, becomes the desire of LIVE art, to BE art instead of merely portraying it.

This is the underlying reason why “so many artists today are more concerned to BE Poet or Painter than to create works of art” as Eric Gill has observed.

These artists are Hip. Cathartic sublimation is being replaced by the demand for the real Experience. The psychedelic dance becomes representative of this over and against the flat canvas smeared with ejaculated phantasy.

We have said that the Hip tries to imitate the freedom and satisfaction of the utopian world of the artistic vision, but in the totally interdependent society, his every action—from making love to blowing grass—is done in the shadow of The Man. His behavior patterns become a “negative” or “neurotic” expression of what is really desired.

Every act of freedom becomes an act of defiance.

Society normally funnels our non-reductive neurotic activity into superfluous ritual. But the content of the Hip neurosis is determined by the original REJECTION of the social structure and its rituals.

The CONTENT of Hip becomes a neurotic life-style that is in dichotomous opposition to the Cool lifestyle of civilization.

The initial choice of the great refusal makes Hip what we might call freely chosen “total neurosis.” Again, I do not mean that the CONTENT is freely chosen, but the initial refusal which thus determines the content, and which determines that this will not be merely superfluity, but rebellious opposition.

And the negatively/neurotic content coincides with the *raison d’être* of the great refusal, the attempt to live the artistic vision of freedom and satisfaction. By which we mean:

Hip represents 1) the existential rebellion of the Id, which in the society of total interdependency becomes 2) rebellion AGAINST civilization (i.e. society). Therefore the Hip is both the negation of this particular society, and at the same time, the negative form of the “artistic vision.”

(to be continued)

Related

see ‘What Have You Got?’ A Theory of Hip, Part One, FE #18, November 15–30, 1966.

Sidebar

MEMO:

To: The World

From: The Bible

Subject: Lyndon Johnson

All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

—Isaiah 40:17

Jerry Hopkins

fifth Estate

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