

1976

The Yippies.: an inquiry into the concept of cultural revolution.

Joseph R. Porcari

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses>

Porcari, Joseph R., "The Yippies.: an inquiry into the concept of cultural revolution." (1976). *Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014*. 2467.

Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/theses/2467>

This thesis is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses 1911 - February 2014 by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

FIVE COLLEGE
DEPOSITORY

The Yippies: An Inquiry Into The
Concept of Cultural Revolution

A Thesis Presented

By

Joseph R. Porcari, Jr.

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

September 1976

Political Science

The Yippies: An Inquiry Into The
Concept of Cultural Revolution

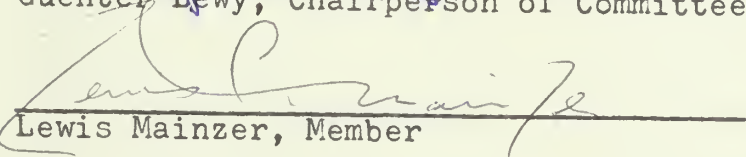
A Thesis Presented

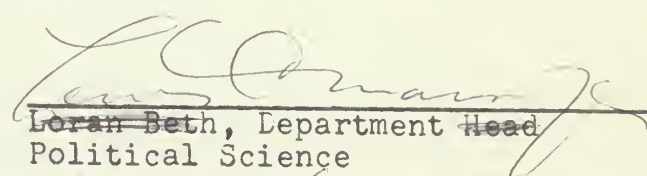
By

Joseph R. Porcari, Jr.

Approved as to style and content by:


Guenter Lewy, Chairperson of Committee


Lewis Mainzer, Member


Loran Beth, Department Head
Political Science

Acting Chairman

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE.	Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER TWO.	The Aesthetic Revolt Against Bourgeois Society.....	9
CHAPTER THREE.	Dada.....	31
CHAPTER FOUR.	The Yippies and Cultural Revolution.....	60
CHAPTER FIVE.	Conclusion.....	110

C H A P T E R I

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary cultural revolution (of which the Yippie movement provides a typical example) can be viewed as emerging from the tradition of opposition by certain 19th and early 20th century European aesthetic movements to the dominant bourgeois culture. Indeed, a distinct thread of consciousness appears to connect such phenomena as the bohemians' efforts to epater la bourgeoisie, the nihilistic gestures of the Black International, and the cultural subversion and disruptions of the Dadaists and Surrealists, with such events as the May 1968 uprising in France and the Yippie inspired chaos in the streets of Chicago the same year. Anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, anti-rational, and post-Christian, this consciousness has manifested moral and aesthetic revulsion against bourgeois society in various ways, ranging from savage satire and ridicule of the idols of bourgeois culture, the flaunting of unconventional life-styles, and carefully staged confrontations, to gratuitous acts of terror and vandalism against the general population as well as against the symbols of authority. It will be argued that this conscious-

ness and its attendant aesthetic revulsion against bourgeois culture, which has developed over the past century and a half, has provided the motivation for what has come to be a new form of radical political action. This essay will attempt to characterize this consciousness, trace its development, and examine its embodiment in contemporary cultural revolution as practiced by the Yippies.

A basic concern of this essay will be to examine the complex of sentiments, perceptions, and values which have structured the attitudes toward society of those driven to cultural revolution and of their predecessors. It will be necessary to consider the relationship of various forms of personal and cultural alienation and withdrawal from conventional society, the cultivation of aesthetic visions or ideals of expanded and alternative realities, and the revolutionary impulse. Aesthetic opposition to bourgeois culture has been principally expressed by the culturally alienated, the deracines, the "outsider" element in society, by those initially drawn to escape from the conventional modes of life patterned by modern society, into private worlds of dream, visionary imagination, drugs, etc., and the sub-culture which grew up around them. The tendency to seek some kind of escape from the conventional world and the will to revolt are both produced by a feeling of alienation, and can thus be viewed as two sides to the same coin. The Yippie form of cultural

revolution is primarily a revolution of the "drop-out". The Yippies have been moved to revolt by a deep feeling of alienation from the established cultural and political order, and their biographies usually reveal a cyclical pattern of politicization.¹ This cyclical pattern is approximately first, by an initial commitment to more traditional leftist forms of political action, followed by feelings of frustration and deeper alienation created by the apparent failure of political activism, the urge to "drop-out" and "turn on" to drug induced visions, to experiment with the different values and life-styles which flow from them, and finally by repoliticization at the level of cultural revolution. We shall see that the cultural revolutionary impulse is shaped by the visionary quest for a truer reality than that offered by the conventional cultural and political order. Contemporary cultural revolution represents the politicization of the Romantic/Symbolist/Dadaist/Surrealist opposition to bourgeois reality. Cultural revolution attempts to solve the problem of alienation by destroying the established cultural order, cleansing men's consciousness of the old cultural forms and conventions,

¹Cf. Jerry Rubin's Do It, Abbie Hoffman's Revolution for the Hell of It, and Joseph Berke's Counter-culture.

and restructuring the world on the basis of visions and dreams of expanded realities.

Contemporary cultural revolution should be viewed as reflecting a war of values and of competing visions of the world. Its motivating consciousness is heir to the alienation of early 19th century artists and intellectuals (all those devoted to aesthetic and expressive ideals of human development) from what they perceived to be the growing mechanization and rationalization of modern life. This alienation was grounded in an experience of the ugliness and dehumanization of life in industrial society, first expressed by the English Romantics. It was later expressed, especially by continental artists and intellectuals, as a repulsion to the bureaucratic organization of life, to the utilitarian values of a marketplace society, and to what was perceived to be the impoverished horizon of experience provided by the logic of modern science and bourgeois culture in general. In a cultural climate characterized by the eclipse of traditional spiritual and transcendental values, the growing artistic and literary revulsion against every aspect of bourgeois civilization marked a refusal to allow a rationalistic and scientific vision of life to fill the cultural vacuum. Contemporary cultural revolutionaries, and the counter culture from which they spring, continue the fight against this vision as now embodied in their great ogre, technocracy.¹ They rail

against the role specialization, regimentation, and psychic repression of the individual they claim is necessary to run the post-industrial cybernetic society, while championing the values of spontaneous expression, passion, and the drug stimulated imagination.

We're natural men lost in this world of machines and computers.²

We are fighting the machine society and the machine man and machine woman. Pot is an anti-machine drug. Pot brings along with it the pot culture, which is anti-government and anarchic.³

This essay will seek to show that the species of cultural revolution exemplified by the Yippies is primarily aesthetically motivated and of an anarchistic nature, predicated upon the rejection of the established cultural and political order. We shall see that the Yippie cultural revolution is based on an aesthetic and expressive ideal of life. The Yippies have believed that life should be lived and experienced as a work of art. The feelings of ecstasy, excess, and infinite possibility are seen as the measure of the good life. Indeed, one object of the cultural revolution is the dissolution of all boundaries placed on experience by conventional culture. The Yippies

¹Cf. Theodore Roszak's The Making of a Counter Culture for the standard counter cultural arguments against "technocracy".

²Jerry Rubin, Do It, p. 93.

³Jerry Rubin, We Are Everywhere, p. 145.

have envisioned themselves as the forerunners of the "birth of a new nation of freaky artists" who are not alienated because they have bridged the gap between art and every day life.⁵

There is an intimate relation between the emergence of cultural revolution as a distinct form of radical political action, and the evolving conception of the revolutionary and liberating potential of the artistic imagination and aesthetic experience. The Dionysian, irrationalist and visionary heritage of the avant garde (especially the examples of Rimbaud, Lautreamont, and the Dadist and Surrealist movements) has played an important role in shaping the goals and tactics of contemporary cultural revolution.⁶ Cultural revolutionaries have sought a style of action that simultaneously liberates the individual and transforms society, and they have tried to fuse revolutionary action with the resources of the visionary imagination. To imagine and create the new society are conceived as part of a single revolutionary process.

Cultural revolution reveals its anarchistic nature in that it is fought for the sake of the autonomous ima-

⁵Ibid., p. 43.

⁶For example, we shall see the crucial influence Artaud's ideas on theatre have had on the Yippies' conception of revolution as "theatre in the streets".

gination against every form of authority, whether political, bureaucratic, intellectual or moral. It reflects the more adventurist, fantasy ridden type of revolutionary anarchism, given to sensational action, which emerged during the late 19th century in Europe. Ideologically anti-ideological, anarchistic cultural revolutionaries do not follow any programs or claim to represent any distinct and organized public will, nor do they directly strive to realize any concrete revolutionary ends such as the redistribution of wealth and power. Theirs is an undisciplined, "visceral" revolt⁷, which views such conventional revolutionary struggles as merely part of a larger struggle for the liberation of the individual psyche and for the transformation of social reality.⁸ Cultural revolutionaries do not consider themselves a revolutionary elite or vanguard, but as provocateurs whose role it is to galvanize the masses into spontaneous revolt by means of revolutionary myths and "propaganda of the deed". The very breadth and amorphousness of the cultural revolutionary aim should suggest

⁷Cultural revolution can be either authoritarian or anarchistic in nature. Although both varieties seek the destruction of the established cultural and political order, they are anarchistic or authoritarian, respectively, according to whether individuals possess the autonomy of imagination and desire to determine the range of experience of their lives, or whether a new system of values, conventions and institutions is imposed on individuals by some external revolutionary authority (as in the case of the Maoist revolution).

⁸Whether revolutionary movements of any kind, and in

the visionary, even apocalyptic nature of the consciousness underlying it. It is the revolution which "knows no confines or borders"⁹, which cannot be compromised or "co-opted", because it desires "everything".¹⁰

particular, cultural revolutionary ones concerned with the quality of life and experience, can properly view political (exterior) needs and ends as merely ancillary to psychic (interior) ones is a question we shall explore in this essay. We shall note the tension between the anarchistic demand for the autonomy of the individual spirit, desire, and imagination with the practical demands and disciplines necessary for effective revolutionary action. Another question concerns the problem of ascertaining the relative value of a personal (interior) revolution as opposed to a purely political and economic (exterior) revolution as the most effective means to total liberation. These questions will receive attention when we look at the relationship between the Surrealists and the French Communist Party, and the Yippies' attempt to reconcile the apolitical, hippy counter culture with the New Left.

⁹Rubin, Jerry. Do It, p. 105.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 240.

C H A P T E R I I
THE AESTHETIC REVOLT AGAINST BOURGEOIS SOCIETY:
THE 19th CENTURY

To a large extent, the contemporary cultural revolutionary consciousness represents a politicization of the radical aesthetic opposition to bourgeois culture and society which emerged in Europe over a century and a half ago. It will therefore be necessary to examine the origins and development of this opposition. We shall look at the perceptions and reactions of the artist to bourgeois society; the role of certain Romantic and post-Romantic conceptions of the imagination in shaping these perceptions; and the apocalyptic and nihilistic sentiments that tended to be expressed in the aesthetic revolt.

The Romantic Aesthetic and Opposition to Bourgeois Society

The final destruction of the feudal aristocratic order during the French Revolution cleared the way for bourgeois domination of European society. The period after the Revolution marked the zenith of the bourgeoisie's consciousness of itself as the founders of a new social order, replacing that of the ancien regime, as the carriers of Reason, and the fountainhead of Progress. However great the success and power of the bourgeoisie, and despite the in-

creasing prosperity they achieved for society as a whole through their mastery of scientific and industrial techniques, their political and moral leadership did not go unchallenged. A general climate of opposition to the bourgeois ideology emerged by the early 19th century which took conservative (Coleridge, La Mennais, de Maistre, etc.) or socialist (Fourier, Sismondi, St. Simon, etc.) as well as aesthetic forms. It is this latter aesthetic opposition to bourgeois society by a certain type of artist and intellectual¹¹ that was to form the thread of consciousness leading to contemporary cultural revolution. The product of a profound alienation from the whole fabric and ethos of bourgeois culture, their opposition was shaped by a certain aesthetic sensibility that perceived bourgeois culture to be destructive of the values and conditions they believed necessary for leading a healthy and creative life. The values at stake here - autonomy of the imagination, freedom to explore the whole possible range of human experience, etc. - were generally articulated in the Roman-

¹¹The type of artist and intellectual associated with radical aesthetic opposition to bourgeois society is best referred to as avant garde, to signify his preoccupation with the autonomy of the creative imagination (as opposed to the artists and intellectuals who chose to limit the reign of the imagination, for example, by following academic and neo-classic forms).

tic movement.¹² The apparent frustration of life in modern industrial society frustrated the Romantic quest for the totality of life. The resulting feelings of alienation were first expressed by the English Romantics.

William Blake is a good example. His poetry communicates a sense of alienation of man from nature, from society, and from the spirit. Blake reinforced his criticism of bourgeois industrial society by drawing precise social connections between these forms of alienation and the new modes of work, the metropolis and its new social relations, and the system of capitalist trade which accompanied the industrial revolution.¹³ Blake raged against the "allegoric riches", the "dark satanic mills", the "mind-forg'd manacles", etc. Contrasts between man's lost innocence and the corrupting experience of industrial society, between art and trade, and vision and reason everywhere inform Blake's imagery.¹⁴

¹²Although the Romantic movement was an extremely complex phenomenon, manifesting itself in many and often contradictory forms, it generally marked a break with the past (classical) conceptions and categories of aesthetic experience and expression for the sake of a greater exploration of reality. Cf. Jacques Barzun, Classical, Romantic, Modern, esp., p. 88.

¹³Raymond Williams, "Prelude to Alienation, p. 154,

¹⁴Blake especially attacks the "functional" variety of reason (as opposed to the "substantive" reason).

Probably the most important element in Romantic aesthetics was the central cognitive role attributed to the imagination.¹⁵ Conceived as a composite of intellect, feeling, instinct and, above all, vision, the imagination was believed to have the power of penetrating the secret and intimate relationships of things, and of discovering more exalted realms of existence than those sanctioned by the conventional world. This doctrine can have either political or apolitical implications. Typically, Romantic and post-Romantic artists of the 19th century sought refuge in the imagination, seeing in it a means of escape from an impoverished social reality. However, some artists were to view the imagination as a potential source of vision and power capable of realizing a revolutionary transformation of the world. In Blake's prophetic works the visionary state of the individual is taken to be the fundamental ground of revolution.¹⁶ Though an exegesis of the Blakean cosmology is essential in the explanation of Blake's ideal of revolution, that would take us far afield. Suffice it to say that the Blakean revolution, like the cultural revolution is essentially an interior revolution (a psychic revolution), whose visible signs are located in an apocalyptic transformation of the world.

¹⁵ Monroe Beardsley, A Short History of Aesthetics, p. 256.

¹⁶ Peter Fisher, Valley of Vision, p. 144.

I will not cease from mental fight,
 Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
 Till we have built Jerusalem
 In England's green and pleasant land.

"Jerusalem" (from Milton)

Blake's edenic vision of the revolutionary society evokes the spirit of the medieval millenarian revolts.

A perfect unity
 cannot exist but from the Universal Brotherhood
 of Eden.

He saw the revolution as leading to the recovery of man's lost innocence, and the attainment of a more perfect measure of existence, natural to man, but which has hitherto been obscured by the conventional world.

Though Blake had much sympathy for the American and French revolutions and recognized that the destruction of "false" social power was a necessary condition for the recovery of man's lost innocence, he did not believe that the basis of true revolution lay in politics.¹⁷ According to Blake, the revolution is not to be achieved by concentrating on a change of political and social institutions, nor by "the external pressure of a technique imposed by reason..., nor even by the drive of man's instinctive needs, but by art - that is by the use of the creative imagination."¹⁸ Only the cultivation of the imagination (uniting man's feelings, intellect, instincts and vision)

¹⁷Williams, op. cit., p. 158

¹⁸Fisher, op. cit., p. 147.

can communicate a common revolutionary aim to men, by illuminating their most basic perceptions and by tapping previously unknown resources of will to achieve it.

The visionary politics of Blake have had a distinct influence on the cultural revolution in America (which has adopted the notion of the primary importance of an interior or psychic revolution as the true basis of revolutionary change), reaching it via such links as the transcendental movement, Whitman, and the Beats. However, the continental tradition of aesthetic revolt against bourgeois-industrial society, culminating in the Dada and Surrealist movements, has probably had an even greater influence, not only by virtue of its affirmation of the revolutionary power of the visionary imagination but by supplying a range of methods of contestation for use against the established order.

Aesthetic Revolt on the Continent

Aesthetic opposition to bourgeois society was even more hostile and widespread in the advanced countries of continental Europe, particularly in France, because there the myth of the French revolution had the greatest hold on the imagination of artists and intellectuals, and there the failure of the revolution produced the greatest disillusionment and bitterness. The frustration of revolutionary hope, combined with the reality of bourgeois dominance of moral

and political life produced in many artists a feeling of extreme revulsion against the conventional world.

Artists and intellectuals have always functioned as critics of society and as creators and articulators of new values, but never had such large numbers of them been so thoroughly alienated from the established order and so uncompromising in their opposition to it until the 19th century. There were certain sociological reasons for the emergence of the alienated artist and intellectual during this period. For example, the social separation of the artist from the elaborate system of institutional and class patronage, which disappeared following the disintegration of the feudal aristocracy, helped produce feelings of anxiety in the artist and to a sense of breakdown in cultural continuity. The artist was left to the mercy of the marketplace demands and to the tastes of the growing bourgeois class.

One should not overlook, however, the relationship between artistic alienation and the artist's perception of bourgeois society in terms of principles and values internal to aesthetic consciousness itself. They believed that bourgeois society was basically a utilitarian, marketplace culture dominated by quantitative or exchange values which undermined the inner life of the individual. The service of instrumental values is inherently antithetical to the aesthetic consciousness, which naturally regards the qualities of things and experi-

ences for their own sake, and which seeks to penetrate behind the conventional blueprints of social order (upheld by fixed designs of values) in search for deeper truths. "From the (aesthetic) point of view the great flaw of the bourgeois, its great inner deformity, was a creative poverty and cowardice of the imagination natural in men who were slaves to pragmatic design...and schooled in the cult of the materialistic ego, with no impulse other than self-preservation."¹⁹

Aesthetic criticism of bourgeois society, unlike more politically minded criticism, was not primarily motivated by concern for social justice, for the welfare of exploited classes, etc. Rather, it received its impulses from more personal concerns such as the vitality of the inner life and the freedom of the individual imagination. Thus Stendahl, Flaubert, or Baudelaire, for example, did not condemn the bourgeois order for its "wage slavery" or "labor torment", but the increasing mechanization of life and the primacy of rational techniques over the spontaneous and creative imagination. They feared that the routinization of life in modern industrial society would dull the senses and atrophy the human spirit. While there are similarities to Marx's criticism of the dehumanization

¹⁹Cesar Grana, Bohemian Versus Bourgeoisie, p. 65.

of labor by bourgeois capitalism, Marx did not reject technology and other modern techniques in themselves. Dehumanization and alienation, according to Marx, lay not in technology but in the capitalist mode of production. Indeed, Marx had great faith in technology and rational techniques, and believed that a revolution in the mode of production would unlock their liberating potential. The aesthetic rebels, however, were uncompromising in their rejection of these things.

The avant garde became estranged from virtually every aspect of bourgeois society. They expressed their abhorrence for the acquisitive spirit and the race for status they saw becoming the only means of expression available in bourgeois society. Bourgeois goals and values were boring to them, and they were repelled by what they felt to be the meanness and hypocrisy of the dominant values and institutions. Participation in political life was also unthinkable as it was so thoroughly dominated by the bourgeois mentality, by bourgeois statesmen and bourgeois kings.²⁰

In this context of a radical rejection of bourgeois

²⁰For example, the July monarchy of Louis Philippe and the ministry of Guizot unabashedly championed the interests of the bourgeois class above all others. Tocqueville remarked that by the time of its downfall in 1848, the government resembled a trading company which transacted all its business with a view to the profit of its shareholders. Cited in Grana, op. cit., p. 10.

culture and society there emerged a spirit of withdrawal among many artists of the avant garde. With the revolutionary outlet apparently closed off, escape into private worlds of the imagination, drug induced visionary states²¹, exoticism, and other paradises artificiels represented the only alternative to that of accepting the despised bourgeois reality. This divorce of art from the social world²² was manifested in Dandyism and the l'art pour l'art movement of Gautier, Nerval, Flaubert, Barbey d'Aureville, and Baudelaire among others. Artistic creation was held to be an autonomous realm of discourse and expression, independent of politics and morality, and the cultivation of the senses, a self-sufficient form of life. The dandies ridiculed every convention of bourgeois life. They aspired to sculpt their personalities into works of art, making a virtual religion of art, much like des Esseintes in Huysmans' A Rebours. Flaubert was moved at one point to say that "Life is so horrible that one can only bear it by avoiding it. And this can only be done by living in the world of art."²³

Certain motifs in the work of Baudelaire, for example, reveal the extent to which frustrated revolutionary hope

²¹Cf. Aleatha Hayter, Opium and The Romantic Imagination, for detailed accounts of the romantic artists; experimentation with drugs.

²²Arnold Hauser refers to the "gap which opened up between art and social reality", in The Social History of Art, Vol. III, p. 194.

²³Quoted in Hauser, op. cit., Vol. IV, p. 36.

was suppressed and sublimated into the imaginative art of the period. In his letters and journals Baudelaire spoke of his feelings of intoxication during the popular uprising which occurred during the revolution of 1848, and of his bitterness after Louis Napoleon's coup.

From that moment on Baudelaire insisted that he was 'physically depoliticized' in the sense that literary activity which had become his exclusive concern, was no longer felt to be compatible with any form of political activity...²⁴

Yet in spite of his "physical depoliticization", Baudelaire never completely suppressed his intense desire for a revolutionary transformation of the world. Many of his poems express a yearning for some remote, yet earthly paradise:

How far away you are, perfumed paradise
Where under a clear blue sky, all is love and joy
Where all that we love is worthy of our love
Where the heart is drowned in pure voluntuousness!
How far away you are, perfumed paradise.²⁵

The same revulsion against the whole of bourgeois civilization which drove Baudelaire to search for a more satisfying "reality" in drugs and poetic language also led him to embrace a nihilistic conception of the revolution. At times Baudelaire indicated that he would welcome revolution even if it were certain to fail in achieving real

²⁴Richard Klein, "Baudelaire and Revolution", in Yale French Studies, no. 39, p. 86.

²⁵Baudelaire from "Moesta et errabunda", in OEuvres Completes, p. 135. (The rough translation is my own.)

change. The prospect of permanent chaos sometimes appeared more attractive to him than bourgeois order. In Mon Coeur Mis A Nu he attributes his intoxication in 1848 to a thirst for vengeance and destruction.²⁶ Near the end of his life he wrote:

Let it be added that when one speaks seriously of revolution they are terrified...But I am not a dupe, I have never been a dupe. I say Vive la Revolution! as I would say Vive la Destruction! Vive l'Expiation! Vive le Chatiment! Vive la Mort!²⁷

The aesthetic revolt against bourgeois society was carried even further in the work of Rimbaud. The spirit of revolt infused every facet of his life and art during his short span as a poet - from his chronic flights from the oppressive provincial life of his boyhood home in the Ardennes²⁸, his affair with Verlaine, to revolutionary sentiments expressed in his poetry. Rimbaud attacked Christianity, bourgeois morality, the family, patriotism,

²⁶Klein, op. cit., p. 87.

²⁷Quoted in Klein, p. 87.

²⁸He was totally alienated from conventional existence: Je meurs, je me decompose dans la platitude, dans la mauvaiseite, dans la grisaille." Rimbaud, OEuvres Completes, p. 264. "On est exile dans sa patrie.", p. 258.

all the idols of bourgeois civilization. "Le Bateau ivre" is one long celebration of youthful liberation from the conventional world. It has been argued that the example of the Paris Commune reaffirmed on a social and political level the personal revolt that had already been taking place in Rimbaud.²⁹ Unlike Baudelaire, who became deeply pessimistic about the prospects for success for revolution, Rimbaud, buoyed by the revolutionary explosion of the masses during the period of the Commune, was more assured that a genuine revolution was possible and that the bourgeois order was doomed to fall. The Commune impressed him for its semblance of anarchic liberty, as "une fete de l'imagination".³⁰ It was the apocalyptic nature of the revolt, the spirit of intoxication which seemed to possess the people of the Commune³¹, the apparent destruction of the established order, and the unlimited horizon of possibility for the creation of a new world which moved him.

Spring is in evidence, for
 From the heart of green Estates,
 The flight of Thiers and Picard
 Holds wide open its splendors!³²

²⁹Cf. Pierre Gascar, Rimbaud et la Commune.

³⁰Ibid., p. 63.

³¹Ibid., p. 76.

³²From "Chant de guerre parisien", Rimbaud, OEuvres Completes, p. 73. (Translated by Wallace Fowlie in his Rimbaud.)

It was during this revolutionary state of mind that Rimbaud crystallized his conception of the poet as seer (voyant)³³, and that his awareness of the revolutionary potential of the poetic imagination was sharpened. Rimbaud came to believe that the poetic imagination was a source of vision of a deeper reality than that of the conventional world which could fill the vacuum created by the destruction of the old order by revealing to men the way to a better life.³⁴ The goal of poetic vision, as Rimbaud saw it, was to change life ("changer la vie")³⁵, to regain a lost innocence, a more natural realm of existence hitherto obscured and frustrated by the conventional world. Only the unfettered imagination, Rimbaud believed, could guide men to recreate a more perfect existence.

The impulse to "change life" proceeds from the perception that the present life, the present reality, is not the true one. In Une Saison En Enfer Rimbaud wrote, "La vraie

³³Cf. Rimbaud, OEuvres, p. 270, and Gascar, op. cit., p. 78.

³⁴This conception of the poetic imagination represents a movement beyond formal art, to the point where poetry becomes more important as a creative activity in itself (as opposed to the objects, oeuvres, it produces), for the revolutionary changes it can make in human perception. Visionary art is no longer conceived as a route of escape by Rimbaud, but as a liberating force. Rimbaud praised Baudelaire for being the "first seer" but criticized him for living in too artistic a world. (Encore a-t-il vecu dans un milieu trop artiste...), OEuvres, p. 273.

³⁵"Un Saison En Enfer", OEuvres, p. 230.

vie est absente. Nous ne sommes pas au monde."³⁶ It has been pointed out that "changer la vie" is a corollary to "la vraie vie est absente".³⁷ This relationship between the perception of an imperfect world and the desire to change or transform life (taken to mean change of a sweeping and apocalyptic sort) provides the basic pattern of the cultural revolutionary impulse. As we shall see, the Surrealists were to read much political significance into Rimbaud's invocation to "changer la vie", and his emphasis on the liberating potential of the imagination was to provide them with their basic notion of revolution.

Anarchism, Terrorism, and Aesthetic Revolt

The aesthetic revolt against bourgeois society took an increasingly hostile and violent turn by the late 19th century. Bohemian subcultures in the major European cities became hot beds of revolutionary sentiment. The typical late 19th century bohemian did not live the picturesque existence depicted by Murger in La Vie Boheme. Rather, it was one of miserable poverty, offering few chances of artistic success, a truly marginal existence, exacerbated by feelings of deep alienation from bourgeois life and values. Outraged by the inequities of bourgeois society, and per-

³⁶Rimbaud, OEuvres, p. 229.

³⁷Wallace Fowlie, Rimbaud, p.

ceiving themselves as victims of similar kinds of injustice as the proletariat, the tendency among many avant garde artists and bohemians was towards a greater social consciousness.³⁸ Thus the personal revolt against the morals and conventions of bourgeois society acquired greater social and political connotations.

Previously, the alienated state of the artist had been exalted (in the l'art pour l'art movement, for example) as a precondition for establishing the creative tensions which gave expression to genius. However, the euphoria produced by this belief was shortlived, and by the late 19th century revealed itself to many as a "morbid illusion".³⁹ From then on, artistic alienation vented itself more frequently in violent rage against society. The 1880's and '90's witnessed the emergence of the artist as saboteur, and the interrelation of bohemia with the Black International and terrorists.⁴⁰

This politicization of the aesthetic revolt against bourgeois society was most notably expressed through anarchism. Anarchism's affirmation of the primary value of individual autonomy or freedom of the individual from every kind of authority has always exerted a special appeal to those

³⁸Eugenia Herbert, The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium, 1885-1898, p. 104.

³⁹Renato Poggioli, The Theory of the Avant Garde, p. 110.

⁴⁰Cf. Kenneth Coutts-Smith, Dada, pp. 35-39.

artists for whom absolute liberty is believed to be a necessary condition of artistic creativity.⁴¹ Referring to the involvement of artists in the anarchist movements of this period, James Joll remarks that anarchism:

...seemed to offer a political theory which could combine a vision of a just society with the assertion of individual freedom; and those artists and writers who believed in a bohemian rejection of bourgeois conventions found in anarchism -- and especially in le propaganda par le fait -- a compelling example of total revolt.⁴²

It was during the late 19th century that anarchism earned its notorious reputation, on account of its association with terrorism. The emergence of anarchist terrorism (as opposed to the mainstream of anarchism which was more a product of 18th century rationalism⁴³) must be seen as a frustrated reaction on the part of many anarchist revolutionaries who were disillusioned at the failure of the Paris Commune. They despaired over what seemed to be the increasing co-optation of the working classes who were being won over to reformist and parliamentary politics. The resort to terrorist acts can also be interpreted as an attempt to reawaken the

⁴¹ Among the late 19th century artists who were attracted to anarchism were Courbet, Seurat, Pissarro, Signac, and several of the Symbolist poets. This is not to imply that any of these artists were terrorists themselves, but for each of these more famous artists there were probably hundreds of unknown artists and bohemian types for whom anarchist-terrorism was believed to be a fruitful means of combining personal and social revolution.

⁴² James Joll, The Anarchists, p. 150.

⁴³ Godwin and Proudhon, for example.

the revolutionary spirit of the masses that had seemed to arise spontaneously during the period of the Commune. Gratuitous acts such as firing random shots into a crowd, planting bombs in public places, throwing bombs or acid onto parliamentary assemblies, assassination of kings, government ministers, millionaires, etc., were meant to be attacks on the symbols of the established social order. The notion of "propaganda by the deed" accounts for the anarchists' understanding of the revolutionary value of terrorism. They believed in the "immediate apocalyptic value of acts of self-immolation".⁴⁴ They hoped that such action would shock the masses out of their apathy, reveal to them their real interests and their real enemies, and inspire them to spontaneous revolt. They also hoped that by attacking and eliminating the symbols of the bourgeois social order they might initiate the withering away of the state.⁴⁵

Many terrorist attacks were more overtly cultural than political in nature, committed against institutions which seemed to symbolize the "false values" of bourgeois society.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Joll, op. cit., p. 129.

⁴⁵Joll, op. cit., p. 129.

⁴⁶Joll refers to a case where in 1882 a bomb was thrown in the early morning hours into a "notoriously louche music hall in Lyon...there were some people, including the police who regarded this as the direct fulfillment of an article in an anarchist paper some months before which said, "You can see them there, especially after midnight, the fine flower of the bourgeoisie and of commerce. The first act of the revolution must be to destroy this den'". Joll, op. cit., p. 130.

The remark of one terrorist, Emile Henry, reflect the aesthetic revulsion against bourgeois society which propelled so many artists and bohemians to anarchist terrorism:

I was convinced that the existing organization was bad; I wanted to struggle against it so as to hasten its disappearance. I brought to the struggle a profound hatred, intensified every day by the revolting spectacle of a society where all is base, all is cowardly, where everything is a barrier to the development of the human passions, to the generous tendencies of the human heart, to the free flight of thought ...I wanted to show the bourgeoisie that their pleasures would no longer be complete, that their insolent triumphs would be disturbed, that their golden calf would tremble violently on its pedestal, until the final shock would cast it down in mud and blood.⁴⁷

The distinct attraction of many artists, bohemians and marginal types to anarchist terrorism would appear to be largely due to the theatrical and symbolic value which inheres in many terrorist acts. In another sense there seems to be a relation between the avant garde's belief in the virtually magical, incantory power of the artistic imagination (especially in the poetic form - Rimbaud's "Alchimie du verbe", for example) and the terrorists' faith in what amounts to the incantory power of the revolutionary gesture to provoke spontaneous, apocalyptic change. Furthermore, terrorism would seem to have satisfied the extreme aesthetic urge, which came to the fore again and again during the 19th century, to destroy the offending bourgeois order at

⁴⁷Quoted in Joll, Ibid., p. 137.

whatever costs.

What does it matter for us, my heart, the sheets of blood
And coals, and a thousand murders, and the long cries
Of rage, sobs from every hell upsetting
Every order; and the north wind still over the debris;

And all vengeance? Nothing!...But yes, still,
We want it! Industrialists, princes, senates:
Perish! Power, justice, history: down with you!
That is our due. Blood! Blood! golden flame!⁴⁸

The avant garde's attraction to terrorism can also be accounted for by its pre-occupation with the destruction-reconstruction duality, so powerful in Rimbaud, for example. The creative imagination must have a clean slate to write on. The earthly paradise can only be regained after the total destruction of the conventional world. Man's spirit and organs of perception must be purged - he must be a destroyer before he can become a creator. The voyant can only arrive at his exalted state after completing his rite of passage as a voyeu.

Conclusion

In general we have seen how feelings of alienation and revulsion have commonly marked the avant garde's reaction to bourgeoisie society. Forced by their aesthetic sensibilities to reject the conventional world, the avant garde has tended to oscillate between seeking refuge in private worlds of imagination and adopting an active revolutionary

⁴⁸From "Qu'est-ce pour nous?", Rimbaud, OEuvres, p. 124.
(Translated by Wallace Fowlie)

stand against the established order. This fickleness suggests the extent to which the aesthetically shaped revolutionary impulse is of a more ephemeral nature than a more politically motivated one. The aesthetic revolt, unlike the Marxian revolt against bourgeois society, does not proceed on the basis of a detailed picture of the concrete political world with its structures of power and interest. Nor does it pursue concrete political and economic ends. Rather, it is a revolt stimulated by the boundless aspirations of romantic imagination and for the sake of some visionary goal. As we have seen, the aesthetic revolutionary is inclined to confuse revolutionary gestures with the act of revolution itself. He is inclined to think of revolutionary change in mystical and magical terms, as an immediate, spontaneous, and apocalyptic transformation of man and the world. He often embraces the idea of total destruction, and finds intoxicating the prospect of liberation from the authority of institutions and morals, expecting the ruins of the old order to be like a blank page or a fresh canvas, an open horizon of possibility for the creative imagination to act it.

The aesthetic rebels' flirtation with terrorism was largely a brief episode, and a complete failure. However, the aesthetic revolt against bourgeois society continued, even expanded into the early 20th century, particularly in

the Dada and Surrealist movements. While less overtly violent, these movements were no less radical and unrelenting in their efforts to undermine the bourgeois order.

CHAPTER III

DADA

The beginnings of Lada were not the beginnings of art but of disgust. There is a great destructive, negative task to be done: sweeping out, cleaning out.

Tristan Tzara

The nihilism of the Dada movement reflected the spirit of self-immolation which seemed to infect Europe during the First World War. In one sense the Dada movement was an expression of moral outrage against the war.¹ The Dadaists viewed the war as the product of an insane and decadent culture, revealing to them the total bankruptcy of the elites who applauded the war, the scientific estate which perfected the instruments of destruction, and the intellectual establishments which sought to justify the war.² The world war seemed to destroy whatever vestige of meaning and justification the bourgeois order may have retained. Consequently, the Dadaist perceived their mission as one of breating the final apocalyptic blast needed to blow down the house of cards the old order appeared to have become. They hoped to expand the sphere of destruction and chaos wrought by the war into the minds of men.

¹The Dada movement was largely initiated by German

Dissolution was the ultimate in everything that Dada represented, philosophically and morally; everything must be pulled apart, not a screw left in place,³ the screw holes wrenched out of shape...

The Dadaists tried to undermine every moral and social assumption on which the bourgeois order rested. In their art, their magazines, manifestoes, and provocations they viciously attacked nationalism, militarism, scientific and bureaucratic rationality, the family, religion, parliamentary democracy, etc., from the point of view of a radical anarchism which seeks to free the individual from every form of moral and political restraint.

If the Dada movement seemed to involve a celebration of chaos and dissolution (Nous pour l'incertitude, nous ne voulons ni du sens, ni des valeurs qui flattent le bourgeois, nous voulons les non-valeurs et les non-sens!)⁴, it was not without purpose. The movement valued chaos, the absence of a predictable social order and of rational concepts and categories for organizing experience and behavior.

and French poets and artist who fled to Zurich during the war.

²Maurice Nadeau, The History of Surrealism, p. 44.

³Hans Richter, Dada: Art and Anti-art, p. 48.

⁴Dada manifesto, "Dada contre l'esprit de Weimar", quoted in Raoul Hausmann, Courriers Dada, p. 36.

for what the movement believed to be its infinite potential for the liberation and expansion of the field of perception and action. Regarding their movement as the germ of a new human type,⁵ the Dadaists claimed that their new man could only be created as part of the process of negating everything that existed before.

We wanted to bring forward a new kind of human being...free from the tyranny of rationality, or banality, of generals, fatherlands, nations, art-dealers, microbes, residence permits and the past.⁶

The Dada movement reflected the same aesthetic fascination with the creative possibilities of destruction we saw in the 19th century avant garde. The Dadaists believed that the destruction of the conventional world in both its external form and its internalization in the minds of men, would unlock the doors of perception, enabling them to reach some primordial realm of existence. Beneath the nihilism of Dada lay a faith in the existence of a truer reality, the vision of which was suppressed in the unconscious, and which they believed was revealable to men by means of cultivating the instincts and yielding to chance configurations of images and events. The Dadaists condemned the conceptualizing reason for atrophying the imagination, for distorting and

⁵Ibid., p. 36.

⁶Richter, op. cit., p. 65.

and dividing up reality.⁷ Dadaism's championing of nonsense was part of an attempt to restore some kind of balance between design and chance, sense and nonsense, and the conscious and unconscious.

Dadaist art was intended to serve the twin goals of undermining the established cultural order and of tapping the unconscious resources necessary for the transformation of life. Among the examples of attempts to realize this latter goal is the phonetic poetry of Hugo Ball and Kurt Schwitters. Phonetic poetry sought to recapture the "language of paradise", to obtain a language uncorrupted by the blinders of conventional linguistic categories and structures, which could communicate the vision of a more perfect existence. Schwitter's Ursonate is a good example:

```

Oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo (leise)
Bee bee bee bee bee --- --- ---
Oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo
Zee zee zee zee zee --- --- ---
Oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo
Rinnzekete --- bee --- bee
Oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo
Ann ze --- --- ann ze --- ---
Oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

```

⁷The late 19th and 20th centuries witnesses a widespread reevaluation of the assumptions behind positivism and Western rationalism in general as well as the beginnings of the exploration of the irrational side to human motivation. Unlike the Dadaists, who raised the irrational to the highest principle of existence, the social thinkers of this period were mostly "concerned with the irrational only to exorcise it. By probing into it they sought ways to tame it, to canalize it...". Nevertheless, the influence of these thinkers (Freud's work on dreams and the unconscious, for example) on the Dadaists and Surrealists was extremely important. For a survey of the social thought of this period see H. Stuart Hughes, Consciousness and Society.

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa (laut)
 Bee bee bee bee bee --- --- ---
 Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa
 Zee zee zee zee zee --- --- ---⁸

In spite of these visionary interests (which were more earnestly pursued by the Surrealists) the Dada movement has been chiefly remembered for its spirit of negation. The Dadaists' desire to destroy conventional art, which they identified with bourgeois culture in general, paralleled their desire to destroy the bourgeois social and political order itself. By means of their art⁹ and their manifestations (exhibitions comparable to contemporary "happenings")¹⁰ the Dadaists hoped to create a climate of chaos, disorder, and violent contradictions in which the established order might collapse. Hugo Ball described the antics of Dadaism as "gladitorial gestures...a public execution of false moral-

⁸ Excerpt from the "largo" of Schwitters's Ursonate. One must hear these poems chanted to experience their full effects. Richter's one performance of the Ursonate by the author-composer before an audience of solid bourgeois types illustrates the manner in which Dada artists wished to involve their audiences, to change their consciousness, etc. At first, the audience was completely baffled by the hisses, roars and crowings of the poem. Their next reaction was one of restrained protest (out of respect for the lady whose house the performance was being given in) and then "...they lost control. They burst out laughing, and the whole audience, freed from the pressure that had been building up in them, exploded in an orgy of laughter." Schwitters was by no means nonplussed. He raised his voice to "force ten" volume and "...simply swamped the storm of laughter in the audience, so that the latter almost sounded like an accompaniment to the Ursonate. The din raged round him...and blew itself out as rapidly as it had arisen. Schwitters spoke the rest of the Ursonate without further interruption. The result was fantastic. The same generals, the same rich ladies, who had previously laughed until

ity."¹¹ Those whom the Dadaists could not incite to revolt by awakening in them a revolutionary consciousness they hoped to demoralize and render impotent to defend the established order.

The Dadaist thought up tricks to rob the bourgeois of his sleep...The Dadaist gave the bourgeois a whiff of chaos, a sensation like that of a powerful but distant earth tremor so that his bells began to buzz, his safe deposits wrinkled their brows and his honor developed spots of mold.¹²

they cried, now came to Schwitters, again with tears in their eyes, almost stuttering with admiration and gratitude. Something had been opened up within them, something they had never expected to feel: a great joy." Richter, op. cit., pp. 142-43.

⁹The Dadaists invented the collage and photomontage to "confront a crazy world with its own image." (Richter, p. 114) The Bruitist poem "carried the message that mankind is swallowed up in a mechanistic process." (Coutts-Smith, op. cit., p. 17) Duchamp's "readymades", for example, his "Fountain" (an inverted urinal), "In Advance of a Broken Arm" (a snowshovel), etc., were meant to express contempt for art, to outrage bourgeois taste and to underscore the fundamental nihilism of the age when the aesthetic value of a urinal seemed equal to that of a Rembrandt or a Da Vinci.

¹⁰During the manifestations all sorts of things were done to shock the bourgeoisie and to ridicule their values. One such manifestation began with a little girl in a communion dress reciting obscene verse. Cf. Coutts-Smith, pp. 116-117 and Michel Sanouillet, Dada a Paris, pp. 152-72, for detailed descriptions of some Dada manifestations.

¹¹Quoted in Coutts-Smith, p. 22.

¹²Hans Arp, quoted in Richter, pp. 37-38.

When in Do It Jerry Rubin speaks of his desire to "outrage Amerika until the bourgeoisie dies of apoplexy"¹³ he is very much in the spirit of Dadaism. Both the Dadaist and the Yippie movements (and aesthetic rebellions in general) have a tendency to inflate the power of ridicule and outrage to provoke the collapse of a society. As Benjamin Barber put it, movements like the Yippies, which are basically anarchistic and demonstrate a faith in "propaganda by the deed" usually "...confound iconoclasm with revolution."¹⁴

During the Spartacus rebellion of 1919 the Berlin Dadaists (Johannes Baader, Raoul Haussmann, George Grosz, Richard Huelsenbeck, the Herzfeldes, and others) had the chance to put the Dada conception of art as a provocation into practice. They aspired to create a revolutionary art in direct confrontation with bourgeois society. It was hoped that Dadaism could raise the consciousness of people (particularly the working class) and somehow arouse them from their sleep, making them self-conscious of the banality and absurdity of bourgeois society.

Dadaism is a stratagem by which the artist can impart to the citizen something of the inner unrest which prevents the artist from being lulled to sleep by custom and routine. By means of external stimuli he can compensate for the citizen's lack of inner urgency¹⁵ and vitality, and shake him into a new life.

¹³Jerry Rubin, Do It., p. 112.

¹⁴Benjamin Barber, Superman and Common Man, p. 20.

¹⁵Udo Ruser, Dada Almanach, quoted in Richter, op. cit., p. 101.

This attempt to "shake men into a new life" is reflected in the collages and photomontages of the Herzfelde brothers and Huelsenbeck which lampooned the sacred cows of bourgeois society, and by clever juxtaposition of magazine cut-outs, photos, etc., turned the events of the day into political obscenities. George Grosz's drawings savagely satirized every aspect of bourgeois life. Dada magazines and manifestoes tried to stir up revolutionary sentiment, and lent their support to the various workers' councils and syndicalist communes which sprung up during the rebellion. Most of Berlin Dada's street manifestations were conducted in the working class sections of the city. The Dada slogan "Everyman his own football" became a popular expression of contempt for all authority.¹⁶

Johannes Baader, foremost Dada clown, succeeded in ridiculing the founding fathers of the Weimar Republic (which the Dadaists held in great contempt, calling it a republic of "bourgeois automatons"). During the inauguration ceremony at the Weimar State Theatre, Baader dropped hundreds of flysheets bearing the title "The Green Horse" (Der grune Pferd) onto the dignitaries' heads from a gallery. In the flysheet Baader nominated himself for the post of president of the new Republic. The incident caused great hilarity among the audience and was reported in all the German newspapers.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 112.

Richter claims that "the resulting laughter strengthened opposition (to the Republic), sowed confusion and weakened authority."¹⁷ While it would be difficult to assess the full impact of the Dada movement on the health and stability of the Weimar Republic (it would probably be more reasonable to see them as a symptom rather than a cause of the demoralization of Weimar society), at the very least one can claim that they aggravated the climate of despair and demoralization already present in Weimar society. The Dadaists appeared to be conscious of the fact that the dissolution of a cultural and political order can only be successful where that order is already moribund, already in a state of internal dissolution, where the old values have already begun to ring hollow, and where catastrophic events (world wars and great economic depressions, for example) seem to signal the end. Of course, it was their aim to hasten this process of dissolution because they hoped that the destruction of the conventional world would fulfill their aesthetic and libertarian goals. However, the case of Weimar provides a good illustration of the fact that moral and political chaos are more likely to play into the hands of authoritarian forces than lay a basis for an anarcho-aesthetic society in which the individual has the opportunity to create his own world, to author his own acts, to set his own limits on experience, etc.

¹⁷Richter, op. cit., p. 126

SURREALISM

(Apollinaire) was much closer than anyone else to realizing that to improve the world it was not enough to establish it on fairer social bases, but that one must actually effect the essence of the Word.

Breton

The Surrealist movement grew out of the dissatisfaction of Parisian Dadaists with the increasingly nihilistic tone of the Dada movement. They came to believe that the spirit of negation was insufficient for the cultivation of revolutionary consciousness and the vision of the new society. In one sense Dadaism merely represented a more violent form of the dandies' aesthetic revolt against bourgeois society. Andre Breton, originally a member of the Parisian Dada Movement, sensed the need for a more serious form of revolt. Alluding to Gautier's famous red vest (a symbol of the dandies' defiance of bourgeois conventions) he said"

The red vest - yes, is perfect, but only on the condition that behind it the heart of an Aloysius Bertrand, of a Nerval, Dadaism is a blind alley.¹⁸

That is to say, negation is justified only if accompanied by creative vision. Under the leadership of Breton the Surrealists retained the methods of Dada art (automatic writing, chance configurations of visual images and abstractions, etc.) but adapted them to a more systematic quest

¹⁸ Andre Breton, quoted in Andre Parinaud, "Entretien avec Marcel Duchamp", in Omaggio a Andre Breton, p. 36.

for a constructive vision to replace the void left by the dissolution of bourgeois culture. While it did not deny itself a negating role, Surrealism more fully embodied a positive desire for some kind of social as well as aesthetic truth.

Interior Revolution

More than any other aesthetic revolt, the Surrealist movement was grounded in a metaphysical disenchantment with the established reality of the world. It represented a total revolt against the human condition, against all that constrains and limits man, with the goal of penetrating a more perfect world of absolute freedom. It was a revolt against every conventional and arbitrary design of the world.¹⁹ The Surrealists maintained that the reality of the bourgeois world was unacceptable. They totally rejected the constraints placed upon desire and imagination by the bourgeois utilitarian culture and the rational discourse of the conventional world of perception. Believing that the transformation of man and the social world could only be achieved by liberating men's desire and imagination, and by changing their perceptions of the world, the Surrealists wished to destroy the artificial boundaries placed on perception by reason and

¹⁹This conception of the Surrealist revolt is similar to that developed by Camus in The Rebel. However, Camus' analysis of Surrealism is somewhat distorted (probably to facilitate its inclusion under his general concept of "metaphysical rebellion"). Cf. The Rebel, pp. 25-35 and pp. 88-99.

morality. In this sense the Surrealist revolt was an attempt to "...disalienate the spirit lost in the single consideration of objective reality which makes science and technology the measure of all reality."²⁰ Breton demanded "...the elimination of the prohibition resulting from the oppressive repetition of those /conventions/ that daily assault our senses and lead us to regard all that may be outside them as illusory."²¹ The Surrealists held that the dichotomy between illusion and reality was culturally determined. Breton's first Manifeste du Surrealisme bristled against what he saw as a sterile rationalism, and its companion realism, that ignores the possibility of an expanded reality solely because it has yet to be experienced.

The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only facts relating directly to our experience...It is pointless to add that experience itself has found itself increasingly circumscribed. It paces back and forth in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge.²²

Having reaffirmed Rimbaud's conviction that "la vraie vie est absente," the Surrealists made it their goal to realize a truer realm of reality, some immanent paradise hitherto obscured from men's vision by layers of convention.

²⁰Ferdinand Alquie, The Philosophy of Surrealism, p. 150.

²¹Andre Breton, Le Surrealisme et la Peinture.

²²Breton, First Surrealist Manifesto, pp. 9-10.

The realm of "true life" should not be interpreted as being transcendent, posterior to life, but an immanent beyond "...seeming to reveal itself to the one who will seize the world under the aspect of the marvelous."²³ The Surrealists believed that "...the transformation of life, the expansion of vision, could be experienced and expressed in terms of the here and now, in the confines of our material existence and in relation to the physical reality of which we are a part."²⁴ One of the fundamental principles of Surrealism was that this transformation of life could only be achieved by liberating human desire and imagination, and by regaining contact with the unconscious resources which have been suppressed by a hyperrational culture. It aimed to abolish the rational categories and concepts which structure and delimit experience. In opposition to the effort of cartesian rationalism to oppose the control of reason to the invasion of images onto human consciousness, the Surrealists wished to remove everything (e.g. norms for a logical reason, concepts of utility, moral censure, etc.) which opposed the free return of images.²⁵ Breton defined Surrealism as:

...pure psychic automatism...Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason...Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality

²³Alquie, op. cit., p. 6.

²⁴Anna Balakian, Surrealism:Road to the Absolute, p. 19.

²⁵Alquie, op. cit., pp. 126-27.

of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the impotence of the dream...²⁶

In one sense Surrealism represented a search for truth, for a revelatory or oracular kind of truth (as opposed to the strictly logical or empirical truths of modern rationalism), at once, an illumination of the full horizon of reality.

The main purpose of Surrealist art was to free the imagination, to penetrate the realm of the marvelous, to reveal the true life. The basic method of Surrealist art was in "derealization", which like Rimbaud's "dereglement de tous les sens" was meant to be the means to illumination. Derealization involves the dissolution of the ordinary world of objects and conventions which press on human consciousness. It is supposed to undermine the logical relations tied to the world hard things, and give free rein to "liquid desire" and the imagination (the two roots of Surrealist liberty). In provoking this "fundamental crisis of the object"²⁷ derealization bewilders and irritates the senses, bringing to consciousness the deeper reality (surreality) the Surrealists were searching for.²⁸

²⁶ Andre Breton, quoted in Patrick Waldberg, Surrealism, p. 11.

²⁷ Alquié, op. cit., p. 78.

²⁸ It is precisely this method of "derealization" that forms the Yippies' tactic of street theatre. The intention is to provoke a crisis in the objects and symbols underlying the established social order, thus bringing on its collapse. We shall explore this (as well as Artaud's influence on the Yippies) in the next chapter.

Thus, for example, the dreamscapes of Dali and Magritte and the more abstract mental landscapes of Tanguy reached a hallucinatory level of imagery. Surrealist objects (Dali's "Aphrodisiac Jacket", Seligman's "Ultra-furniture", Meret Oppenheim's "Breakfast in Fur", for example) were intended to render the Surrealist delirium concrete and verifiable in the outer world. It was hoped that these strange objects (often constructed after objects seen in dreams or else imaginary transformations of banal objects) would "subvert the practical and the conventional and solidify the unconscious urges."²⁹ The Surrealists believed that there was a magical and revelatory power to chance encounters (whether or words, images, people, events, etc.). One way they cultivated chance was by word games. One such game consisted in coupling questions and answers formulated separately. For example, "What is suicide?" - "Several deafening bell tolls." "If there were no guillotine?" "Then wasps would remove their corsets."³⁰ Such juxtapositions are supposed to produce a certain inquietude in the consciousness, to shake the perceptions out of the ruts of the conventional forms and enable the perceiver to penetrate a deeper reality, as a first step to "changing life". This is the meaning of the interior revolution.

²⁹Clifford Browder, Andre Breton, p. 96.

³⁰Alquie, op. cit., p. 100.

Surrealist Politics

Surrealism was even more consciously political in its intent than the Dada movement. Not only did it see its role as one of demolishing bourgeois civilization, it also appointed itself to the task of combining the interior (psychic) revolution with the exterior (political and economic) revolution into a total revolution. Surrealist politics expressed itself in the attempt to surmount the divorce between dream and reality. During the 1920's and early '30's many Surrealists perceived a fundamental complementarity between Rimbaud's invocation to "changer la vie" and Marx's invocation to "transform the world."³¹ The Surrealists' attraction to revolutionary Marxism was not based on serious reflection on politics, history, or economics, but in an emotional attraction to the ultimate promise of classical Marxism - a classless, stateless society, and the liberation of human creativity. The Surrealists' commitment to total revolution was not as much influenced by political considerations as by aesthetic ones - at the point where both visionary poetry and revolution are expressions of the desire to shape a new world.

As a result of their faith in the revelatory power of the poetic imagination and its capability of raising and an-

³¹Cf. Maurice Joyeux, L'Anarchie et la Society Moderne, esp. p. 144.

swering questions about man's nature and destiny³², the Surrealists believed that the poetic imagination was the best means for merging the interior and exterior revolutions. Of all the methods of tapping the unconscious resources, of unlocking the real processes of thought, and of derealizing the conventional world and penetrating the real of surreality, the poetic imagination was judged to be the most effective. The Surrealists believed in the spontaneous suggestive power of words. Automatic writing (and automatism in general) was held to be an "instrument of human redemption."³³ The configurations of words produced by automatism were believed to have a hallucinogenic quality which served as irritants or stimuli to the imagination.³⁴ Thus automatic texts were supposed to free the imagination by breaking down conventional language and reaching some pre-conventional state of illumination of which every formal language is only a distorted reflection.³⁵

In so far as the Surrealists saw poetry as being deeply rooted in the unconscious, they claimed it was not merely an expression of primal mental activity but of man's deep-

³²Nadeau, op. cit., p. 79.

³³Browder, op. cit., p. 60.

³⁴Balakian, op. cit., p. 176-77.

³⁵Michel Beaujour, "Flight out of time: poetic language and the revolution", in Yale French Studies, no. 39, p. 42.

est desires as well. The Surrealists did not use the poetic imagination as a route of escape or as a compensation for an impoverished social reality as did many of their 19th century avant garde forebears. Rather they viewed poetry as a source of vision, as a means to changing the world.

As the expression of desire, it involved choices and demands which sought satisfaction in the real world. The Surrealists were confident that once the mind had a vision of what was possible, the will would struggle to achieve it....The poet would lead the struggle to raise men's spiritual and social state up to the level of his dreams. In so far as the disparity between that which existed and that which was desired was the result of alterable social conditions rather than of an immutable human condition, the Surrealists came to demand a radical upheaval: a revolution.³⁶

This was the chain of reasoning that led the Surrealists to commit themselves to the goal of an external revolution as well as an internal one.³⁷

The decision of Breton, Eluard, Aragon and others to join the French Communist Party (PCF) illuminates some basic problems inherent in any anarchistic cultural revolution. The first problem is one of deciding on an effective strategy to realize the total revolution of man and the world.

³⁶Robert Short, "The Politics of Surrealism," in the Journal of Contemporary History, no. 2, 1966, pp. 4-5.

³⁷The Surrealists came to call this the "objective phase" of their revolutionary involvement, referring to their ten year long relationship with the PCF (1925-35). Cf. Nadeau, op. cit., p. 20.

While the Surrealists had always advocated an interior revolution of the spirit, a liberation of the imagination and desires, they came to feel that they had underestimated the importance of an exterior political and social revolution for attaining this total revolution. Caught up in the general excitement among European radicals during the early 1920's over the apparent spectacular success of the Russian revolution, the Surrealists began to ask themselves whether their preoccupation with the tactics of cultural provocation, their pleas for a wave of terror, for the total subversion of the bourgeois order as a preliminary to the reconquest of radical liberty were not empty and futile.

The public had remained cheerfully immune to threats of the Terror and an 'Oriental scourge' however vividly these horrors were evoked in the columns of *La Revolution Surrealiste*....Breton realized that the social order was not going to yield before mere invective whose extravagant violence rendered it ridiculous. If their revolution was not to deteriorate into an impotent nonconformism it had to be given tangible social content.³⁸

The Surrealists believed they found this "social content" in the proletarian politics of the PCF. But their apparent solution to the problem of revolutionary strategy only raised the even more fundamental problem of values.

The Surrealists' commitment to the autonomy of the individual imagination and desires as the supreme revolu-

³⁸Short, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

tionary value was bound to conflict with the demands for discipline and collective action of a political party bent on achieving political and social revolution. If during their "objective phase" the Surrealists claimed to have put Surrealism "in the service of the Revolution," it is evident they were still reluctant to relinquish their independence of imagination. Their basically anarchistic and aesthetic values disposed them to resist the party discipline and orthodoxy which placed unacceptable demands and limits upon the imagination and desires. "Persistence in any single line of political action would be contrary to the very spirit of Surrealism."³⁹ Breton, for example, was repulsed by his party cell's order that he compile statistical tables on the state of the Italian gas industry.⁴⁰ The entire focus of the PCF could not have been more alien to the Surrealist vision.

The very attempt of the Surrealists to fashion a mediating role for the poetic imagination between the internal and external revolutions should indicate the extent to which they remained attached to the idea of the primacy of the imagination. Even while members of the PCF the Surrealists did not really change their tactics much. Theirs remained a politics of confrontation and agitation. Ridicule, pro-

³⁹Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 10-11.

vocation, and scandals continued to be their principal weapons.⁴¹ These tactics, by virtue of their ephemeral character, and "constant susceptibility to change" seemed to escape the limitations on desire and imagination.⁴² Like the Dadaists, the Surrealists hoped to change men's consciousness and experience of the bourgeois order, and provoke in them the same revulsion they themselves felt for the existing order. They aimed to create a climate of emotional excitement in which total revolution might break out. Robert Short says of Surrealist politics that:

It proceeded by contradications and not by argument. It was haphazard and undisciplined, shifting its ground from one phase to the next. Its tone was invariably violent and tended to swing feverishly between the outraged and the outrageous. It expressed unmistakably the political views of poets - of idealists impatient beyond all endurance at the failure of the real to emulate the imaginable.⁴³

Needless to say, the Surrealists never were trusted members of the PCF. They were constantly accused by party officials of such sins as bourgeois idealism and diletantism. By 1935 the Surrealists were forced to choose between their

⁴¹For example, the anti-French slogans shouted by the Surrealists at a literary banquet for Saint-Pol-Roux provoked a riot at the banquet which spilled out into the streets. Cf. Nadeau, op.cit., pp. 112-113.

⁴²Short, op. cit., p. 24.

⁴³Ibid., p. 13.

commitment to the interior revolution and the vocation of revolutionary party members.⁴⁴ The reasons for this final showdown were deeper than the distastefulness the Surrealists felt in having to fetter the imagination with the demands and limits of political reality.⁴⁵ Indeed, there were irreconcilable differences between the Surrealist and the Marxian ideas of revolution. While both aimed for the liberation of man, the Marxists took the route of labor and the Surrealists took the route of the anarchic and aesthetic imagination. The very essence of Surrealism was predicated on the belief that there are more important relations between man and nature than that of labor. One could not be a Surrealist and simultaneously believe in the primacy of matter affirmed by the Marxists, or in the complete explanation of an individual and his thought by reference to the mode of production.⁴⁶ Just as Breton, for example, "refused the transcendence of God, he refused that of Matter, of History, of Society, of any an sich set up as radically

⁴⁴There were specific political issues involved in the break by the Surrealists with the PCF, but they mere occasioned the break. The basic incompatibility of the Surrealist values with those of Marxism made such a break inevitable. For a detailed political history of this period cf. Short.

⁴⁵Alquie, op. cit., p. 58.

⁴⁶During the objective phase of the Surrealists' involvement in politics Breton made an effort to compromise the Surrealists' principles with those of Marxist materialism. But he was aware of the contradictions. "Personally, the violence I had to inflict on myself did not enable me to toe the line for very long." quoted in Short, op. cit., p. 20.

anterior to consciousness and rendering consciousness a slave."⁴⁷ Furthermore, the Surrealist idea of revolution gives central importance to aesthetic visions as the life force of revolution. The Surrealists would have claimed that without the deliberate cultivation of vision, without tapping the unconscious resources of man, without changing the inner man, the revolutionary society would be destined to be as flawed as the one it was supposed to replace. Of course, the Marxists would have to deny the possibility of achieving any real measure of personal liberation within the existing substructure since that would make its overthrow less imperative.⁴⁸ The Surrealists, however, sought the deeper underpinnings of human nature. For them, a change in the mode of production could never be a sufficient basis for accounting for a corresponding change in human nature. Marcel Duchamp's tribute to Breton can probably be applied to the Surrealists in general:

Who more than he has meditated upon human happiness, upon the causes of conflict and antagonism which may be able to make themselves felt even after the establishment of the classless society; who better than he has touched upon the great surreal ex-

⁴⁷Alquie, op. cit., p. 59. There appears to be a strong similarity between the Surrealists' conception of liberty and the extreme individualist anarchism of Stirner. Cf., for example, his notion of "wheels in the head" in The Ego and His Own.

⁴⁸Short, op. cit., p. 23.

planation of life - the establishment of the total consciousness of a truth that has no frontiers; who more than he has loved this world adrift?⁴⁹

Surrealism and Marxism also differ in their conceptions of the contents of human needs. Marxism certainly interpreted human needs as being primarily material, while for the Surrealists, human needs were primarily spiritual (or psychic) and aesthetic. Breton and others were severely disillusioned with the "new" Soviet man being created in Russia. Eventually they condemned the Revolution for dealing solely with economic man and not with the unconscious, with desire, and the "marvelous".⁵⁰ They were appalled by the communists' obsession with material productivity, by their puritanism, and by the manner in which they made industry the supreme value.

The suicides of Essenin and Mayakovsky were evidence that the atmosphere of Russia was profoundly uncongenial to poetry and spiritually barren because, as the Surrealists put it, the problem of material necessity had been allowed to ride roughshod over human necessity.⁵¹

Artaud and Revolutionary Theatre

Of all the original Surrealists, Artaud probably remained most loyal to Surrealism's commitment to the value of an interior, psychic revolution as a pre-requisite to achieving a successful social revolution. Artaud believed that there could be no radical social change unless men were able to regain possession of their

⁴⁹Quoted in Parinaud, op. cit., p. 46.

⁵⁰Herbert Gershman, The Surrealist Revolution in France, p. 67.

⁵¹Short, op. cit., p. 18.

instinctual life.⁵² According to Artaud, no truly revolutionary vision of the world could be apprehended, let alone realized, unless the layers of civilization (the refinements and conventions, etc.) on man's consciousness were stripped away, and contact was reestablished with some pre-conventional, archetypal consciousness. Artaud's vision, like that of the Surrealists in general, was shared by the avant garde tradition, and reflected an anarchic and expressive ideal of life. Artaud wished to realize a "passionate and convulsive" conception of life.⁵³ Artaud came to believe that the theatre was the artistic medium best suited for breaking down men's conventional consciousness, that it could reveal truths obscured by convention, expand men's consciousness, and release the instinctual energy necessary for change.

In a collection of essays entitled The Theatre and Its Double, Artaud attacked the established theories of the function and range of theatrical expression. Artaud wished to go beyond the rational and intellectual level of expression (primarily rooted in the literary conceptions of a theatre bound to texts, etc.) and to divest the theatre of

⁵²Artaud referred to the need for an "organic" transmutation of the body without which nothing can be changed." Artaud Anthology, p. 172, "The Theatre and Science."

⁵³Artaud, The Theatre and Its Double, p. 122.

all logic and verisimilitude.⁵⁴ In place of the traditional focus on verbal language, Artaud endeavored to establish the mise en scene into a language of sense, of space and movement.⁵⁵ To liberate expressions and increase the communicative power of the theatre Artaud called for the elimination of all rational coherence on the stage (e.g., between time and space, action and convention, etc.), thus forcing the audience to perceive the happenings on stage in "a fresh and spontaneous manner, unburdened by the weight of preconceived judgements."⁵⁶ Artaud spurned the disinterested conception of theatre which separates the audience from the stage, leaving their consciousness more or less intact. To force changes in his audience's consciousness Artaud would attack their sensibility from every angle and render the conventional patterns of perception inapplicable to the happenings on stage. In his manifestoes on the Theatre of Cruelty Artaud contended that the staging of violent spectacles (involving, for example, great social upheavals, conflicts between peoples and races, the clash of primordial and unconscious forces) of mythic proportions was

⁵⁴Bettina Knapp, Artaud: Man of Vision, p. 61.

⁵⁵The Theatre and Its Double, p. 45.

⁵⁶Knapp, op. cit., p. 75.

the most effective means of involving the audience, of causing them to undergo emotional upheavals putting them in a "state of deepened and keener perception."⁵⁷ Artaud believed that the Theatre of Cruelty could cause the mask to fall from the face of society, and expose what he saw to be the lie, the slackness, baseness and hypocrisy of the conventional world. He hoped the theatre would:

shake off the asphyxiating inertia of matter⁵⁸ which invades even the dearest testimony of the senses; and in revealing to collectivities of men their dark power, their hidden force...invite them to take a superior and heroic attitude,⁵⁹ they would never have assumed without it.

Cataclysms, plagues, and great disasters are the paradigms of the Theatre of Cruelty. Artaud thought such upheavals were inherently revolutionary since they often cause the disintegration of all social forms (in effect, a chaotic de-realization of the conventional world) and compel men to return to nature, to rediscover the passionate and convulsive mode of life, unimpeded by laws and conventions. Artaud also believed that the delirium generated by these upheavals possesses a certain communicative power to incite individuals to commit spontaneous acts against the social

⁵⁷The Theatre and Its Double, p. 91.

⁵⁸One should interpret "matter" in this passage to mean the mass or stuff of the conventional world.

⁵⁹The Theatre and Its Double, p. 32.

order. The ensuing chaos liberates possibility⁶⁰, and releases the energy needed for the revolutionary reconstruction of man and the world. The theatre, then, was seen by Artaud as an important tool of the revolution in that it could create such experiences.

Conclusion

Though the Surrealists; attempt to wed poetry and politics, the interior and exterior revolutions, ended in failure, their ideal of a total revolution and their loyalty to their original commitment to the primacy of aesthetic vision and the imagination as the principal route to revolution has influenced contemporary cultural revolutionaries. For example, one of the more ubiquitous slogans of the May 1968 uprising in France was "All power to the imagination!" (L'imagination au pouvoir!). As we shall see, the Yippies have given more weight to the internal "head" revolution than to the external political and economic revolution. We shall also see how the Yippies shared the Surrealists' aesthetic concern for the quality of life and experience, for the need to surmount the divorce between art and everyday life, and between dream (or, perhaps, in the case of the Yippies, psychedelic vision) and reality. Finally we shall see that they share the same unwillingness to make the sustained effort necessary for organizing and carrying off a

⁶⁰Artaud, The Theatre and Its Double, p. 15.

successful revolution (and thus the same predilection for some kind of immediate and apocalyptic transformation of society) and the same violent rejection of a civilization in its entirety for its failure to measure up to their visions and dreams.

C H A P T E R I V
THE YIPPIES AND CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Cultural Revolution and the Revolutionary Impulse

In the previous two chapters we have examined the alienation of the European avant garde from bourgeois culture, and the relationship of that sense of alienation to the cultural revolutionary impulses. As we shall see, the Yippies have been similarly alienated from the dominant American middle class culture. However, the Yippies' perceptions and expressions of alienation also reflect a peculiarly American character.

Cultural Alienation.

In the most general sense, the concept of alienation refers to a condition of severe tension between man and his social and physical environment. One need not use the concept of alienation as Marx did, and see it as exclusively a product of capitalism. It is possible to apply the concept more broadly. Indeed, it has been characteristic of the movements under discussion to relate their perceptions of alienation to more general cultural forces such as technological civilization in itself (regardless of the mode of production), given moral systems, rationality, the mechanisms of social control, etc. Feelings of estrangement from the

conventional world, from the natural environment, perceptions of the hollowness of conventional values and institutions, of the meaningless of life, of discontinuities in one's personal experience, and a sense of distance from other men, are among the indexes of cultural alienation.

We have seen how the avant garde expressed their alienation from bourgeois culture, how they believed technology, rationality, bourgeois conventions and morals, for example, to be responsible for separating individuals from a more perfect form of life. Similarly, the Yippies have expressed their alienation from American culture because they believe it separates them from a more satisfying realm of existence. American cultural and political life has appeared to be an oppressive force that restricts them from enjoying a wider range of experience, that prevents them from satisfying certain aesthetic and psychic needs.

While such perceptions of alienation can lead to acts of withdrawal from the offending social world (the Dandies, the *l'art pour l'art* movement, the hippie dropouts, for example) they can also be translated into a revolutionary impulse against the cultural and political order which is believed to be the cause of alienation. A sense of the oppressiveness of a society is closely related to the feeling of cultural alienation. Both feelings derive from the belief that a given culture suppresses the realization of

some ideal form of life.¹ Baudelaire's "paradis parfume", Rimbaud's "vraie vie", the Surrealists "merveilleuse", and the Yippies "Woodstock Nation" have been the objects of similar yearning motivated by a profound alienation from the conventional world. We saw, for example, that the Surrealists were not content with merely the vision of a better world. They felt the need to surmount the gap between vision and reality, to get beyond alienation, and to act out their revulsion against bourgeois society by means of a total revolution. One can detect a similar effort in the Yippies' attempt to forge a hybrid revolutionary force, combining the internal revolution of the hippies with the radical political activism of the New Left.

The Yippies' vision of the Woodstock Nation, their quest for a more passionate and natural form of existence, their expressions of alienation from the "machine culture" also participate (albeit in a more primitive form) in the naturalistic strand of criticism of American culture first formulated by the transcendentalists. Before examining the nature of the Yippies' alienation we shall have to look at this native American tradition of alienation and criticism of American culture of which they are partly heir.

¹In the case of the European avant garde and the Yippies the ideal of life in question is an aesthetic and expressive one. We shall examine the Yippies' ideal in more detail in a later section of this chapter.

The American Tradition of Cultural Alienation

The basic themes of alienation in the context of American experience have focused on America's commercial and technological civilization and the degree to which this civilization is believed to tear men apart from nature, from their passions and instincts, from their inner self, from their fellow men, etc. To what ideal, then, is alienation in American life measured against? In American literature the state of alienation has almost always been contrasted with the image of some harmonious pastoral existence. The pastoral image suggests an ideal of life combining the best of the natural world (seen as the repository of human passions, instincts, imagination, and the basis of a humane community) with the best of the civilized world (reason, industry and technology, etc.).

In The Machine in the Garden, Leo Marx demonstrates the importance of the pastoral ideal on the American imagination in providing the master symbols of order and beauty, and the definition of the meaning of American life. Marx claims that the pastoral ideal lies at the very center of the American consciousness. His thesis suggests that the principal source of alienation in American cultural life can be discovered in the conflict between the "two kingdoms of force"², that is, between the symbols of the machine and the garden. Until the 19th century there had

²Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden, p. 69.

been a faith in the capacity of the American continent to absorb the harsh effects of America's growing industrial and commercial civilization into the landscape. However, by the mid 19th century hints of deep malaise, of a dissatisfaction with the gap between the facts and ideals in American life, began to creep into American literature. It was at this time that industrialization began to be perceived as a deadly threat to the pastoral ideal.³ The intrusion of the machine into the garden accounts for the spiritual tension, for the tarnishing of the vision of humane community associated with the pastoral ideal, and for the sense of the individual's separation from the natural world and his inner self. Since the mid-19th century, the renunciation of civilization and the withdrawal toward nature (in Walden, Moby Dick, Huckleberry Finn, for example) has become a common motif in American literature. Hawthorne wrote of infernal machines that kill and maim people and of pathetically alienated figures like Ethan Brand. The sense of integration of mind and body, of passion and intellect, and of nature and civilization inherent in the pastoral ideal was replaced by that of a demonic civilization

³Citing Rostow, Professor Marx reminds us that 1840 marked the "take-off" stage of American industrial development. Marx, op. cit., p. 27.

which makes men "mechanical in head and heart" and erases their sense of moral proportion formerly grounded in their relationship to the land.⁴ Thus Melville's Captain Ahab becomes the "perverted monomaniac incarnation of the Age of Machinery", one who admits that "all my means are sane, my motive and my object mad."⁵

One must turn to the transcendentalists for evidence of a more deliberate response to what was perceived to be the deviation of American society from the basic promise of American life contained in the pastoral ideal. The transcendentalists reacted against what they believed were the false ideals of American society (industrial progress, material success, etc.). They departed from the Lockean values and the economic rationalism which had become pervasive in American culture, in favor of the values of the English Romantics and the German Idealists. Transcendentalism rested on the rediscovery of the soul that had been rejected by 18th century rationalism. The transcendentalists believed in the godlike nature of the human spirit and in the authority of individual conscience. The divine was also believed to be immanent in nature as well as in the human spirit. The transcendentalists conceived of

⁴Marx, op. cit., p. 177.

⁵Ibid., p. 318.

nature not as a great mechanism, but as an organic whole, a "symbol and analogue of mind", a potential moral educator for those able to read her signs. One can see in the transcendental movement an attempt to restore man to a more intimate relationship with nature as a cure for his alienation, and to regain the pastoral ideal of life which was being destroyed by modern industrial civilization. Emerson and Thoreau inveighed against American materialism and the exploitation of man and nature by industry and finance.⁶ Evidence of the transcendentalists' alienation from the conventional American order is strongest in the example of Thoreau. His passionate commitment to the search for alternative values and ways of life represented an intensely personal form of cultural revolution. At Walden he sought the true ends of life, and hoped that his perceptions could be cleansed of the influence of false conventions by means of reestablishing contact with nature. For example, the chapter entitled "Economy" in Walden is a kind of discourse on the nature of "true" human needs as opposed to the materialistic cast given conventional conceptions of human needs.

⁶For example, Emerson warned against the "invasion of Nature by Trade with its Money, its Credit, its Steam, its Railroad, [which] threaten to upset the balance of man...". Quoted in Vernon Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, Vol. II, p. 378.

The nation itself, with all its so-called internal improvements, which by the way are all external and superficial, is....an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped by its own traps...

Thoreau's criticism of American culture extended beyond the realm of economics and politics to include the puritan ethos of work and self-denial itself. In place of the puritan emphasis on "increase", Walden expresses an aesthetic devotion to the here and now, to living for the moment, to making one's life into a work of art.

It is something to be able to paint a particular picture or to carve a statue, and so to make objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look.... To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of the arts. Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour.⁸

The transcendental movement marked a quiet revolution in American values. However, because the radical tradition in America has been weak, and because America has lacked an intelligentsia, comparable to that of France, disposed to violent expressions of opposition to the established cultural order, there was no real possibility of translating feelings of cultural alienation into more

⁷Henry David Thoreau, Walden, p. 66.

⁸Ibid., p. 65.

overt revolutionary impulses, Nor was there much chance of exploring many of the revolutionary implications of the transcendentalists; critique of American culture. The brief flowering of transcendentalism soon faded. Social experiments such as that of Brook Farm (which was as much influenced by the principles of transcendentalism as by utopian socialism) proved failures. For the most part, the fate of the alienated in America has been one of recourse to some form of exile or withdrawal (either psychological⁹, or actual expatriation¹⁰).

The alienation of artists and intellectuals from American culture which emerged in the 19th century increased to the point where by the end of World War I it manifested itself in a particularly sensational form. This, of course, is the phenomenon of the "lost generation" of the '20's. The members of this generation repeated many of the criticisms of American society voiced earlier. They expressed their moral and aesthetic revulsion against America's commercial and industrial civili-

⁹As in the examples of Poe, Melville, and Twain, in his later years.

¹⁰Of course, the dissatisfaction of many American intellectuals was channeled into the various reform movements which sprang up in America during the late 19th century. However, we are not concerned with the spirit of reform, or with the mainstream tradition of political radicalism in American social life, but solely with that uncompromising spirit of revulsion against the established cultural order which can give expression to a radical cultural revolution-consciousness.

zation, with its meretricious dreams, its idols of big money and success. They repudiated the "visions" of America's future proclaimed by the brokers, bankers, realtors, and salesmen, the Babbits who measured the good life in terms of commissions and percentages.¹¹ If the members of the lost generation expressed their disenchantment with a hitherto unprecedented degree of despair for American intellectuals, it must be attributed to their belief that the values and institutions they hated most had triumphed in the Harding and Coolidge eras. By this time, the forces of industry and technology had progressed to the point where the power of the pastoral ideal over the imagination began to dissolve. The achievement of the peace of mind Thoreau found in nature was only remotely possible in the denatured environment of an urban industrial society.

Viewing themselves as "aliens in a commercial world"¹² suffering from "emotional and aesthetic starvation"¹³, and despairing of the possibility of any radical change in American life, they believed the only cure for their alienation lay in escape by expatriation. Ultimately this

¹¹Parrington, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 363.

¹²Malcolm Cowley, The Exile's Return, p. 6.

¹³Ibid., p. 77.

goal of "salvation by exile" proved to be an illusion. While they came to realize the impotence of expatriation and of the escape into the world of art as solutions to their alienation, the members of the lost generation were unable to sustain any vision of a new society to replace the one they repudiated, or to translate their disaffection into radical action of any kind.¹⁴

With the shrinking of the natural environment, and the increasing deprivation of instinct and perception in a complex technological society, the problem of how to reintegrate human experience, how to renew the individual's relationship to his instincts, how to liberate the imagination, etc., have been seen in different terms from those of the transcendentalists. To restore the "balance of man" it was necessary to discover substitutes for direct contact with Nature. Beginning with the lost generation and continuing with the Beats and the counter culture, the emphasis has been on such means as jazz, rock music, drugs, and sexuality.

¹⁴While in Europe, many of the expatriates came in contact with the European avant garde (cf., for example, Matthew Josephson, My Life with the Surrealists). On their return to America, Josephson, Malcom Cowley, E.E. Cummings, and others tried to recreate (by means of magazines like Broom) the radical spirit of the avant garde, and hoped to provoke a climate of rebelliousness similar to that produced by Dadaism and Surrealism in Berlin and Paris. Obviously they failed. The America of Harding and Coolidge was too preoccupied with the "return to normalcy" and the business of business to even notice them. Cf. Cowley, op. cit., pp. 186-96, for a detailed account.

The Beats also fit into the tradition of alienation and disenchantment with American culture already noted above. Their withdrawal into a kind of bohemian existence was in part a reaction against the complacency and conformism of the Eisenhower era.¹⁵ The angst they expressed in their poetry and fiction has been attributed to the effect of the bomb upon their consciousness. In Bomb Culture Jeff Nuttall argues that the psychological tensions produced by the threat of the bomb induced the nihilistic attitude evident at times in the example of the Beats, and in the numerous youth cults and movements which appeared in America and Europe during the 1950's. Nuttall claims that the generation of youth which first lived in the shadow of the bomb lost all sense of the future.¹⁶ The youth sub-culture which has emerged since World War II, with its celebration of the moment, and its emphasis on orgiastic releases from tension by means of music, drugs, and sex, seems to bear this out to an extent. However, one can easily over-estimate the importance of the bomb as a cause of post-war cultural alienation among youth. A more important role was played by the greater affluence and generally higher levels

¹⁵Cf. Bruce Cook, The Beat Generation.

¹⁶Jeff Nuttall, Bomb Culture, p. 196, et passim.

of education which came to exist in the post-war era. These factors encouraged a diffusion of the romantic and avant garde aesthetic and expressive ideals of human development, of the right of the individual to unlimited self-expression. As Edward Shils points out, such ideals led to an increasing unwillingness among recent and contemporary generations of youth to accept the authority of political and social institutions, because of the boundaries on individual experience, creativity, and imagination these institutions require.¹⁷

As it was with the avant garde in Europe, the alienation and withdrawal of youth from the conventional world was merely one step away from their identifying the established order as a lethal enemy requiring certain destruction. In the 1950's it was popular for young dissidents to see the bomb as the symbol of the insanity of Western civilization. In addition to the bomb, many of them began to oppose the most basic values and institutions of Western culture. Thus, at its fringes, the youth subculture became a force against reason, science and technology, capitalism, bureaucracy, and conventional moral and political authority.

The Beats were generally apolitical, and directed their efforts to a quiet search for a new image or vision of man

¹⁷Cf. Edward Shils, "Plentitude and Scarcity: The Anatomy of an International Cultural Crisis", Encounter, Vol. 32, No. 5, May 1969.

and the world to replace the conventional ones. It was not until the appearance of the Yippies in the mid 1960's that an attempt was made to turn the developing youth culture into a revolutionary force. As we shall see, the Yippies tried to politicize the youth culture and make it into a tool of subversion against the established order. The involvement of youth in such issues as civil rights and the Viet Nam war was very important in establishing the radical state of mind supportive of a movement like the Yippies. Both Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman were one time student activists who claim to have been radicalized by their participation in the civil rights and anti-war movement.¹⁸ Jerry Rubin credits such incidents as the sit-in on Sproul Plaza at Berkeley for contributing to youth's growing consciousness of their power to confront the establishment.¹⁹

In general, the United States' role in the Viet Nam war produced a feeling of extreme revulsion against American civilization in many youth, comparable to the revulsion the Dadaists felt against European civilization for its responsibility for the First World War. It was revulsion of this

¹⁸Cf. Rubin, Do It, pp. 20-36.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 21.

type that the Yippie movement fed upon during the peak of their activity in the late 1960's. However, apart from the impact of certain issues and events of the '60's, one should not overlook the fact that the Yippies' disenchantment with American culture also reflects the America tradition of cultural alienation. For example, there is a strong element of primitive pastoralism in the Yippies' vision of the Woodstock Nation which looks back upon the tribalism of aboriginal America and recalls the myth of the "New World of milk and honey".²⁰ The Yippies appear to be conscious of the pastoral ideal and its usurpation by the forces of modern civilization. While they assert that "the myths of America are strong and good", they condemn what they call the "machine mad" sterility of American life, and express their fear that the "institutional machine is a trap of

²⁰Abbie Hoffman, Revolution for the Hell of It, p. 88. One might distinguish between primitive and complex pastoralism as Prof. Marx does in The Machine in the Garden. Primitive pastoralism consists in the categorical renunciation of every aspect of civilization, while complex pastoralism refers to some ideal balance between Nature and civilization. The former position often leads to a number of paradoxes. The Yippies, for example, appear to be very ambivalent about technology. On the one hand, they speak of destroying all machines, while on the other hand they look forward to a post-scarcity economy, a "hedonistic communism" (based, of course, on production with total automation) in which the need for work all but disappears. Their confusion on this matter recalls Ortega's Naturmensch, the modern primitive, ignorant of the complexities of modern civilization, who sees material goods as the spontaneous fruit of an edenic tree. Cf. Marx, The Machine in the Garden, p. 363.

death".²¹ They also look with favor on Thoreau's ideal of the simple economic life which grants man the freedom to pursue higher needs. "We dig Thoreau's statement that the free woman and the free man can leave the burning city naked."²² They attack advanced capitalism as an oppressive force not so much for what injustice it may hold for a particular class, but for the violence they believe it does to men as expressive beings.

We've become an island in a capitalist sea...
 The Death Culture tries to destroy our Life
 Force. We lack space in our community to
 breathe, celebrate, conspire, grow.²³

The Yippies: From Cultural Alienation to Cultural Revolution

The Yippies' perceptions of cultural alienation.

The Yippies' alienation from American culture (and Western civilization in general) appears to be grounded in three basic areas: first, the specific values and institutions of American society; second, Western rationalism;²⁴

²¹Hoffman, op. cit., p. 89.

²²Rubin, We Are Everywhere, p. 155.

²³Rubin, Do It, p. 234.

²⁴Cf. Theodore Roszak, The Making of a Counter Culture, Chap. VII, pp. 205-38, for an overview of the youth culture's opposition to rationalism, or more broadly, the "objective consciousness".

and finally, the civilizing (or socializing) process itself.

In Do It Jerry Rubin casts himself as an archetypal figure of alienated youth in contemporary America, one who has been transformed from a "child of America", comfortable and secure with all its conventions, into an "orphan of Amerika".²⁵

I dropped out of the white race and the Amerikan nation.²⁶ How can one account for this drastic change of consciousness, one which presumably has taken place in thousands of other cases? We have already mentioned the influence of the native American tradition of alienation, the bomb, and the political issues of the 1960's, and the effects of post-war affluence on the values and perceptions of youth. It is this last factor that deserves greater discussion.

It can be maintained that the newly acquired affluence of their middle class parents enabled contemporary American youth to indulge in a liberated style of life previously reserved for the very rich or the bohemian. Their parents' affluence provided them with the free time and resources to gratify their desires, and with the freedom to explore what appeared to be a wider range of experience. This new freedom of self-expression became the dominant principle

²⁵Rubin, Do It., p. 12.

²⁶Ibid., p. 12.

of the youth sub-culture,²⁷ and because of it, many youth became dissatisfied with the conventional boundaries placed on experience and with the pattern of life adopted by their parents. Many youth found it impossible to submit to the restrictions upon desire and imagination their parents accepted as a kind of dues payment to the institutionalized framework that provided them with their affluence. As Jerry Rubin put it, "Amerika was trapped by her contradictions."²⁸ On the one hand, the quest for affluence entailed a certain measure of repression for those who had to work to achieve it, and on the other hand, it afforded a taste of liberation for those who were able to enjoy its rewards. Thus the great importance of the phenomenon of middle class affluence to the Yippie revolt has been that it seemed to change the consciousness of youth by opening a window onto a vision of a more liberated way of life (which contrasts with their

²⁷Rock music is a good example. Jerry Rubin claims that rock music became a medium of youth liberation and the catalyst for awakening a tribalistic spirit in youth. "Elvis Presley ripped off Ike Eisenhower by burning our uptight young bodies. Hard animal rock energy beat surged hot through us, the driving rhythm arousing repressed passions. Music to free the spirit. Music brings us together". (p. 18, Do It) The easy availability of cars in an affluent society helped spread the impact of rock music. "The back seat produced the sexual revolution, and the car radio was the medium for subversion...While a car radio in the front seat rocked with "Turn Me Loose", young kids in the back seat were breaking loose." (p. 10.).

²⁸Ibid., p. 17.

parents' supposedly repressed existence)²⁹, and established the potential for a revolutionary class of youth bent on transforming man and the world according to that vision. One goal of the Yippie cultural revolution is for youth to purge "middle class Amerika out of their minds and bodies with drugs, sex, music, freedom, living on the streets."³⁰

One can locate the roots of the Yippies' sense of the oppressiveness of American society and their violent opposition to it in the clash of their vision of the liberated life with the realities of the conventional world (at least as these appear to them). They refuse to fit into the conventional framework of social life. American morals, values, institutions, role patterns, etc. have appeared to be no more than barriers restraining them from achieving a more perfect existence. Indeed, the mechanism of social control seems most oppressive when one desires a different set of goals and subscribes to a different set of values than those of the established society. The values of the Yippies

²⁹The clinical material in Kenneth Kenniston's The Un-Committed indicates that the repudiation by alienated youth of the values of competition and success stemmed from their awareness of the psychi costs incurred by their parents in the latter's quest for affluence. Cf. pp. 100-01, et passim. Alienated youth have rejected their parents' ambitions for them to achieve even greater status and affluence. "We didn't dig why we needed to work toward owning bigger houses, bigger cars, bigger manicured lawns." (Do It, p. 19)

³⁰Ibid., p. 195.

have fallen outside the range of those that can be tolerated by a complex technological society.

Amerika says history is over.³¹ Fit in. If we dont' fit in they lock us up.³¹

They would tear down the "walls" of America's liberal, bureaucratized, rule-bound society and replace it with one that embraces man's animal nature, enabling individuals to live according to their impulses.

If the Yippies have claimed any justification in their revolt against American society it must lie in their belief that American society is alienating and that it frustrates self-expression.

We are alienated. Existential lovers in a plastic society. [American society] suppresses adventure.³²

The Yippie revolt is intended to satisfy "deep human needs"³³ denied by the established society. In their writings Rubin and Hoffman rarely mention such conventional revolutionary goals as political and economic justice. The needs they address themselves to are of a more psychological or aesthetic nature. They express the hope that the Yippie revolution will cure all the modern forms of alienation, that it

³¹Rubin, Do It, p. 87.

³²Ibid., p. 88.

³³Ibid., p. 231.

will end loneliness and the "middle class neurosis of fear, insecurity, and boredom."³⁴, restore the wholeness of man's personality, and terminate the frustration of the individual's creative powers. Their Marxist rhetoric notwithstanding, the Yippies have believed that the cause of alienation lies in the whole of the American socio-cultural environment, not merely in the capitalist system.³⁵ For example, they link the atomized existence of millions of Americans with the urban environment in which they live.

We work in one part of town with people who are not our friends, and we sleep in another part of town and don't know our neighbors. We waste much of our time dying in mobile concentration camps called freeways and commuter trains. The city is full of walls, locked doors, signs saying, 'D'ON'T!³⁶

The goal of the Yippie revolution is to tear down the physical and cultural walls which they believe imprison "life", to transform the repressiveness of everyday life into a life of ecstasy, exaltation and free expression.

We want a communal life where the imagination runs supreme.³⁷ Feeling and emotion will be un-suppressed.

The Yippies (and the counter culture in general) have shared in the avant garde tradition of opposition to the

³⁵Cf. Do It, p. 231-34, for a kind of catalogue of the various aspects of America's alienating culture perceived by Rubin.

³⁶Ibid., p. 231.

³⁷Ibid., p. 251.

various conceptions of rationality which have come to dominate Western culture. They reject positivism because of the straight jacket they believe it imposes upon perception, as well as the functional rationality that permeates our technocratic society. The Yippies have especially repudiated the ideal of rational, analytic or conceptual thinking. They have focused their attacks on the educational system which promotes this ideal.³⁸ In their estimation, this type of thinking is alienating in that it tends to separate the inner man from the outer man, and deprives men of the benefits of non-rational modes of consciousness. Abstract thinking, the Yippies have claimed, kills the feelings and "turns the mind into a prison".³⁹ The Yippies would cure this alienation of the consciousness by throwing open the doors of perception by means of drugs, sex, music, and play, and thus tap the perceptual resources ignored by rationalism. What they aspire to is a kind of blood knowledge based on the cultivation of the senses and the imagination, a standard of truth which trusts only the impulses.

Apart from their opposition to specific aspects of American civilization, the Yippies have exhibited a tendency to repudiate the principle of civilization itself.

³⁸Cf. Do It, pp. 209-23.

³⁹Rubin, Do It, p. 213.

They appear to believe that all social conventions internalize repression and fetter the desires and imagination.

Society has taught us to police ourselves.
Only by breaking rules do we discover who we really are.⁴⁰

At the very least, the Yippies have stood for an extreme form of aesthetic anarchism which accepts the liberty of every individual to create his own existence, shape his own world of experience, and become a "total life actor."⁴¹

The Yippies and Revolution

The revolution is nothing if it is not spiritual, but the spiritual revolution by itself is nothing.⁴²

The Yippie movement can be best understood as embodying a revolutionary state of mind, born out of a powerful sense of alienation from contemporary American cultural and political life. It would be a mistake to identify the Yippie phenomenon as an organized political movement. The nearest thing to an organized structure and purpose the Yippie revolt has revealed has been its attempt to fuse the

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 103.

⁴¹Hoffman, Revolution for the Hell of It, p. 189.

⁴²Rubin, We Are Everywhere, p. 158.

world. Like the Surrealists, the Yippies have seen the goals of changing life and transforming the social world as complementary, as the two necessary facets of total revolution. By giving a liberated and expressive orientation to their action, the Yippies have sought to unite the two faces of their revolution. The expressive vision of life animating the revolution is supposed to be matched by the expressive tactics themselves. This strengthens the revolution by uniting means and ends. The Yippie "Marxist acid head, psychedelic...stoned politico"⁴⁴ can in one stroke make the revolution and live the revolution, can simultaneously destroy the old society and create the new. As we shall see, Artaud's concepts of theatre and various aspects of the youth counter culture⁴⁵ have provided the principal idioms for the Yippie revolutionary acts.

Ultimately it has been difficult for the Yippies (as it was for the Surrealists) to preserve the balance between their commitment to both an interior and exterior

⁴⁴Rubin, Do It, p. 83.

⁴⁵Rock music and drugs in particular. Jerry Rubin would like to reduce politics "to the simplicity of a rock 'n' roll lyric." (Do It, p. 113). "Revolution is poetry and our generation's poetry is our rock music." (We Are Everywhere, p. 195). "[Rock] expresses the soul of the revolution." (Ibid., p. 190).

hippies' apolitical, interior revolt of psychic liberation with the radical political activism of the New Left (including the ultra left Weathermen) and the "third world" revolutionaries.

On the one hand, the Yippies have believed that the hippies' withdrawal from the social and political world is irresponsible and ultimately self-defeating.

Hippies who have dropped out of politics have dropped out of life.⁴³

While they acknowledge the importance of the hippies' creative imagination and vision, their experimentation with alternative life-styles, etc., to the successful realization of the new society, the Yippies also acknowledge the indispensibility of some kind of political power to make the vision real. The "flower children" must reach beyond their private worlds of imagination, and grow some thorns. On the other hand, the Yippies have been dissatisfied with the mundane, if not crude and materialistic, visions of the political revolutionaries, as well as with the latter's requirements of self-denial and strict discipline for the sake of the revolutionary struggle.

Thus the Yippies have tried to merge the interior revolution, directed at changing men's consciousness and achieving total liberation of the mind and body, with the exterior revolution directed at transforming the social

⁴³Rubin, We Are Everywhere, p. 157.

world. Like the Surrealists, the Yippies have seen the goals of changing life and transforming the word as complementary, as the two necessary facets of total revolution. By giving a liberated and expressive orientation to their action, the Yippies have sought to unite the two faces of their revolution. The expressive vision of life animating the revolution is supposed to be matched by the expressive tactics themselves. This strengthens the revolution by uniting means and ends. The Yippie "Marxist acid head, psychedelic...stoned politico"⁴⁴ can in one stroke make the revolution and live the revolution, can simultaneously destroy the old society and create the new. As we shall see, Artaud's concepts of theatre and various aspects of the youth counter culture⁴⁵ have provided the principal idioms for the Yippie revolutionary acts.

Ultimately it has been difficult for the Yippies (as it was for the Surrealists) to preserve the balance between their commitment to both an interior and exterior revolution. Since the decline of the Yippie movement both Rubin and Hoffman have indicated their awareness of the problem. Hoffman has been most explicit:

⁴⁴Rubin, Do It, p. 83.

⁴⁵Rock music and drugs in particular. Jerry Rubin would like to reduce politics to the simplicity of a rock 'n' roll lyric." (Do It, p. 113). "Revolution's poetry and our generation's poetry is our rock music." (We are Everywhere, p. 195). "[Rock] expresses the soul of the revolution." (Ibid., p. 190).

I have my doubts that I can go on balancing these forces in my head much longer.⁴⁶

While the position of the Yippies in the radical movement is rather ambiguous today, it appears that Hoffman and Rubin have moved closer to the more conventionally political wing of the radical movement. The tone of Rubin's latest book, We are Everywhere, is much more sober than that of his earlier one (Do It) with its scenarios of revolutionary delirium.

Somewhere between the superdiscipline and structure of the Panthers and the chaos of the Yippies we must find a balance...⁴⁷

The Yippies as aesthetic rebels.

In spite of their original commitment to the ideal of a hybrid form of revolution, which presumably incorporates political and aesthetic goals, it appears that the Yippies (at least during the peak of their activity during the late 60's) were more faithful to their aesthetic and expressive desires than to political ones. They cast themselves as "revolutionary artists" whose goal was to destroy America's repressive and alienating culture, to liberate men's creative and sensory powers, and thus to bridge the gap between art and every day life.

The Yippies as Aesthetic Rebels

The Yippies' concern for the values of cooperation and

⁴⁶Abbie Hoffman, Woodstock Nation, p. 7.

⁴⁷Jerry Rubin, We are Everywhere, p. 231.

and community, notwithstanding, they have demonstrated an attachment to the same aesthetic and anarchistic conception of liberty as that shared by the Dadaists, Surrealists, and the 19th century aesthetic rebels.⁵⁰ This conception of liberty encourages total expression of the desires and imagination, and freedom from every kind of moral and political restraint. Similarly, the Yippies' ideal of liberty sanctions a spontaneous, protean, playful and adventurous existence unhampered by any conventional boundaries. Indeed, one must:

Extend all boundaries and blow your mind.⁵¹

One must have the freedom to live any way one wishes, to rebuild the world from scratch, if necessary.

Shock! Do the forbidden. As Abbie says, 'Break every law, including the law of gravity.'⁵²

⁵⁰The Yippie aesthetic is nowhere near as imaginative as that of the Surrealists, for example. It involves no quest for the realm of the "marvelous" nor, in its quest for heightened perception does it aspire to that surreational lucidity which Breton strove for. The Yippie aesthetic appears to be grounded in the gut and the pubes. It betrays a tendency to measure liberation in terms of how long one's hair is, how freaky one's clothes are, how many acid trips one has had, how frequently one has sex, etc. It is as if the Yippies have fallen victim to the same materialistic mentality they wished to escape from.

⁵¹Hoffman, Revolution for the Hell of It, p. 44.

⁵²Rubin, We Are Everywhere, p. 96.

The Yippies' vision of a transfigured life where the imagination rules supreme demands the destruction of the American "Pig Nation" which symbolizes what they perceive to be our repressive social order which forced individuals into narrow, unimaginative roles, fetters their instincts and creativity with needless norms, institutions, etc. The Yippies' extreme anarchistic conception of liberty prevents them from accepting the reality of the need for any kind of socialization or acculturation process. An anarchistic cultural revolution is directly opposed to the kind of cultural apprenticeship which individuals most directly receive in the schools. The Yippies would destroy the schools on account of the role they believe the schools play in atrophying the spirit of youth and for turning them into spare parts for the corporate machine. They claim the schools have channelled human beings "like so many laboratory rats ...into a highly mechanized maze of class rankings, suburbs, repressed sexuality, ulcers, hypocrisy, and psychoanalysts."⁵³

The character of the Yippies' revulsion against American society suggests the extent to which their revolt has been shaped by an aesthetic activation. They claim to combine a kind of psychic and expressive revolt against puritan

⁵³Hoffman, Woodstock Nation, p. 15.

morality, the work ethic, and all other inhibiting norms and institutions with a political revolt against capitalism. Yet the critical emphasis of Hoffman and Rubin in their writings indicates that their strongest reasons for opposing capitalist society are that it is boring, that it frustrates creative expression and passion, etc., not that it is unjust or exploitative.

Capitalism will die because it cannot satisfy its own children.⁵⁴

While moral criticism of American society has occasionally been voiced, the basic roots of the Yippies' criticism have been aesthetic. It is more their sense of the aesthetic and emotional impoverishment of daily life in modern society that any sense of moral or political outrage which has motivated them to revolt.

The Yippies have had nothing but contempt for the peace movement (which they have branded as a middle class liberal movement), whose moral criticism of the war they link with the detested rationalism, intellectualism and liberalism. If there is such a thing as Yippie morality, then it is an intensely personal morality, lying, in a Nietzschean sense, beyond good and evil. It recognizes no conventional moral norms, and is predicated on the belief that every individual ought to create his own world, like a god. The Yippies also reject the ascetic morality of self-denial

⁵⁴Rubin, Do It., p. 115.

and sacrifice that has motivated many revolutionary movements, for what might be called a hedonistic or expressive revolutionary morality. They preach that "it's gotta be more fun to be in the revolution than out of it."⁵⁵ Revolutionary acts should have a certain playful, spontaneous character, and should fully express the desires and imagination of the revolutionary while working to change society.

The Yippies have acted as if the frustration of men's aesthetic and sensual needs were the real root of the revolutionary impulse, and that the manipulation and agitation of those frustrations were a path to provoking a revolutionary uprising than the path of ideology held to by revolutionary intellectual vanguards. Like Bakunin, who complained that Marx was ruining the workers by making theorists out of them⁵⁶, the Yippies have insisted that ideologizing drains revolutionary energy. "Ideology is a brain disease", they exclaim.⁵⁷ They accuse the New Left reflecting the academic tradition and of leading activists into the trap of becoming armchair revolutionaries. One

⁵⁵Rubin, Do It., p. 37.

⁵⁶Joll, op. cit., p. 86.

⁵⁷Rubin, Do It., p. 113.

must:

Act first. Analyze later. Impulse --
not theory -- makes the great leap forward.⁵⁷

The Yippies claim that revolutions can be more effectively built around men's consciousness of the repression of human needs and desires (and particularly in the case of contemporary youth, the psychic and aesthetic needs) than on the basis of abstract principles. Assuming that the use of drugs and the development of the counter culture in general reflect the attempt of youth to satisfy these needs and desires, the Yippies have believed that arrests for drug possession and the overall harassment of the counter culture can be a more hopeful basis for revolutionary agitation than such issues as the war, poverty, imperialism, and racism. Abbie Hoffman elevated this idea into a first principle of the Yippie cultural revolution:

When I appear in the Chicago courtroom, I want to be tried not because I support the National Liberation Front - which I do - but because I have long hair, Not because I support the Black Liberation movement, but because I smoke dope. Not because I am against capitalist system but because I think property eats shit. Not because I believe in student power but that the schools should be destroyed. Not because I'm against corporate liberalism but because I think people should do whatever the fuck they want, and not because I'm trying to organize

⁵⁸Rubin, We, p. 36.

the working class, but because I think kids should kill their parents. Finally, I want to be tried for having a good time and not for being serious. I'm not angry over Viet Nam, racism and imperialism. Naturally I'm against all that shit but I'm really pleased cause my friends are in jail for dope and cops stop me⁵⁹ on the street cause I have long hair.

The Yippies as Anarchist Revolutionaries

The Yippies's refusal to center their revolution around conventional political and moral issues is consistent with the general nature of their revolutionary ideas. They intended to create a revolutionary state of mind among American youth rather than an organized revolutionary movement and ideology. The Yippie revolutionary ideal is that of a spontaneous insurrection, an irrational, apocalyptic transformation of the world and total liberation of man. One should interpret the role of Yippie luminaries such as Rubin and Hoffman as that of provocateurs and incendiaries (much like the late 19th century anarchists) bent on provoking a spontaneous revolt of youth against American society. They don't see themselves as leaders of a revolutionary vanguard.

Our power is our ability to light a fire among youth and create widespread national disruption.⁶⁰

The best mass action is spontaneous, flowing from the people. Leaders and vanguards hold back the energy and anger of the people.⁶¹

⁵⁹Hoffman, Woodstock Nation, p. 8.

⁶⁰Rubin, We, p. 232.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 234.

Rubin and Hoffman have been ambiguous about the role of violence and terror in the Yippie revolt. While it is difficult to set boundaries to almost any revolutionary aim, the Yippies' ambiguity, no doubt, derives from the amorphous nature of their revolutionary impulse, based almost purely on a state of mind, on an inarticulate sense of revulsion against a given society. What basis is there for placing limits on a revolutionary aim rooted in a sense of apocalyptic transformation? It is inherently boundless. Thus the Yippies have endorsed the terrorism of the Weathermen (who have vowed to "force the disintegration of society, creating strategic armed chaos where there is now pig order".⁶²) and other similar groups. They have felt that their perception of the very rottenness of the American system has absolved them of any responsibility for setting any moral and rational boundaries to revolutionary action.

What are the guidelines for a revolution when the house has been cast adrift in a tornado?
 What of the debates between Marat and Sade when the inmates run wild?⁶³

Yet they sometimes claimed that murderous violence is counter-revolutionary and not ripe for the revolution, at

⁶² Weathermen, p. 450.

⁶³ Hoffman, Revolution for the Hell of It, p. 14.

least at the present stage of youth consciousness.⁶⁴ On the basis of their actions from the late 1960's to the present, it appears that the Yippies have leaned more toward this latter position.

The whole notion of revolutionary theatre embraces the concept of cultural guerrilla warfare or psychic terrorism. It is a kind of symbolic revolutionary violence that obviates the need for physical violence. Thus the Yippies' provocations are very close to the spirit of the Dadists and Surrealists, those self-proclaimed specialists in revolt. The Yippies have shared their faith in the power of disruption and ridicule to provoke the collapse of a society. "Confusion is mightier than the sword", say the Yippies.⁶⁵ Though the Yippies believe (as did the Dadaists of Weimar society) that the rottenness of American society "will collapse under its own weight"⁶⁶, they are convinced that their role as cultural revolutionaries is to "give the system a few kicks"⁶⁷ and thus ensure its collapse. Theirs is an unlimited revolution which protests against everything. In Dadaist fashion one is encouraged to:

⁶⁴Rubin, We., p. 234.

⁶⁵Hoffman, op. cit., p. 30.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 199.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 199.

Rise up and abandon the creeping meatball.
 Everybody has his own creeping meatball...
 Write your own slogan. Protest your own
 issue.⁶⁸

The Yippies say, "Everyman his own Yippie"⁶⁹ as the Berlin Ladaists said, "Everyman his own football." Both slogans stand for the same radical anarchic liberty sanctioning freedom from every kind of restraint.

The Yippies also share the avant garde's faith in the incantatory power of the revolutionary gesture to produce a radical transformation of the world and to "change life" (in the Rimbaudian sense).

Our goal was to create crises which would grab everybody's attention and force people to change their lives overnight.⁷⁰

Underlying this is their belief in the possibility of apocalyptic change in which "...history could be changed in a day, An hour. A second. By the right action at the right time."⁷¹

Like Bakunin, who first enunciated the doctrine of propaganda by the deed in his Revolutionary Catechism, the Yippies minimize the value of orthodox political education, believing that the revolutionary act is sufficiently educa-

⁶⁸Rubin, Do It., p. 84.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 84.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 37.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 37.

tional in itself.⁷² They have hoped that their provocations would create a spectacular revolutionary myth that would "coalesce the energy of alienated youth" and "turn them on" to total revolution.⁷³ The momentum of the Yippie revolt is not intended to proceed step by step but rather like a fever or a kind of intoxication, "an historical explosion of body and mind."⁷⁴

Cultural Revolution

Given the models of the Dadaist and Surrealist revolts as well as that of the Yippies, one can maintain that the cultural revolutionary aim is one of total revolution, involving not only the destruction of external institutions but the symbols, values, and consciousness that underly political and social life. A cultural revolution aims at a radical redefinition of social reality and a transvaluation of values based on a new vision of the world. By means of cultural subversion, provocations, confrontations, and the establishment of alternative realities and life styles, the cultural revolution attacks the conventional construction of reality of a given society at its very foundation - in the realm of its in-

⁷²Cf. Joll, op. cit., p. 93.

⁷³Rubin, op. cit., p. 82.

⁷⁴Rubin, We, p. 107.

ternalization in the individual consciousness.

Cultural revolution can be seen as a kind of symbolic or psychological guerrilla warfare. The cultural revolutionary tries to subvert the symbols and undermine confidence in the values of sustaining the established order, to "penetrate" and "demystify" the web of social reality which he sees as a barrier fettering the desires and imagination, as a sinister veil obscuring the vision of a more perfect form of existence. The confrontations and demonstrations of a cultural revolution are intended to lift that veil and to cast off the conventional blinders formerly obstructing men's consciousness, as well as to point the way to further areas of conflict and contradiction. The flaws and contradictions of a given social order are believed to provide the points of leverage for the cultural revolutionary where "...a bomb, or a word, or some activity that can be repeated by anyone at will will disrupt the monster."⁷⁵ As we have seen, the principal flaw in the American system which the Yippies have tried to exploit has been that of middle class alienation (particularly of white middle class youth).

Given their anarchic and aesthetic conception of liberty, the Dadaists, Surrealists, and Yippies have tended

⁷⁵ Joseph Berke, Counter-culture, p. 40.

to identify the symbols, norms, and values of a social order as repressive, manipulative mechanisms which extend social authority from the external world into the interior world of men's consciousness. They see such social forms as guilty of repressing the human desires and imagination by structuring the perceptions in a fixed and limited way. As cultural revolutionaries they have believed that the authority of these social forms can be destroyed or undermined by means of counter-manipulation. That is to say, by distorting, by "derealizing" (in the Surrealist sense) these forms or objects of the social world. Thus, for example, by creating situations in which the conventional patterns of perceptions no longer fit, or situations in which the established values and symbols of society appear to be ridiculous or oppressive it is hoped that the individual consciousness will achieve liberation. In We are Everywhere Jerry Rubin writes about smashing the "magic" and myths of American society, and of the importance of symbolic violence and symbolic victories over the established order.

The best sabotage is sabotage that destroys the society's magic and create a new mythology. The true revolutionary strikes out at the symbol which oppresses the people.

⁷⁶Rubin, We, p. 150.

As we shall see, these notions of cultural revolution are crystallized in the concept of revolutionary theatre.

It is impossible to make an analytic separation of means and ends in the Yippie cultural revolution. As with most anarchist movements the Yippies seem to have tried to sustain a basic unity of means and ends. In addition to avoiding the establishment of any authoritarian revolutionary organization, they have sought to bring their methods of contestation into conformity with the desired form of revolutionary society. The Yippies' goal of a society in which the imagination "runs supreme" is meant to be reflected in the playful and spontaneous action of the Yippie cultural revolutionary, action which is supposed to liberate the individual, to realize his dreams and fantasies, while simultaneously serving to change society.

The Yippie revolution has no preconceived program or blueprint of the new society.

Our daily way of life is our program.
The new society will be the institutions
and values we create as guerrillas.⁷⁷

In the cultural revolution, the adoption of life styles based on values which are antithetical to the premises and goals of the established society assume the character of political acts.⁷⁸

⁷⁷Rubin, We, p. 208.

⁷⁸For example, it is believed that a communal style of life which emphasizes free expression and play instead of work, spontaneous association instead of authority and bureaucratic

At the core of the cultural revolutionary enterprise is the need for changing men's consciousness, to throw off the limits of the conventional patterns of perception, enabling men to expand their vision of reality. In this vain the Yippies have extolled the powers of drugs as an important source of revolutionary consciousness. They claim, for example, that pot is an "honesty drug", a truth serum, that can lead men to a higher level of self-knowledge and to a radical examination of the established social order.⁷⁹ The Yippies believe that drugs encourage a pattern of life directly opposed to the one shaped by modern technological society. Drugs are supposed to dissolve the barriers laid down by the established social order needed to regiment men to run the complex technological machine. Where modern society atomizes, packages and distorts reality, drugs are believed to flood the consciousness with the perception of the whole and true reality.

Revolution as Theatre

Artaud is alive and well at the walls of the Pentagon, bursting the seams⁸⁰ of conventional protest.

organization, free goods and services instead of private property, etc., will act to subvert the social patterns and roles prescribed by the established order.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 149.

⁸⁰Hoffman, Revolution for the Hell of It, p. 46.

The Yippies' concept of revolutionary theatre in the streets, the principal tactic of their cultural revolution, has been largely adapted from Artaud's ideas on theatre and revolution (besides reflecting the general spirit of the Dadaist and Surrealist demonstrations). This tactic is compatible with the Yippies' commitment to an anarchic and aesthetic conception of liberty.

Theatre has no rules, forms, structures, traditions - it is pure, natural energy, impulses, anarchy.

The Yippies have believed that street theatre can combine personal self-expression with revolutionary action.

In its objectives of changing consciousness, of subverting the established cultural and political order, of releasing formerly repressed instinctual energy, as well as in its appreciation of the importance of spectacle, Yippie street theatre directly follows Artaud's principles. The Yippies have shared Artaud's belief in the communicative power and reality of notion and spectacle.⁸² As Artaud put it:

The mind believes what it sees and does what it believes.⁸³

⁸¹Rubin, Do It., p. 132.

⁸²Artaud, Collected Works, Vol. II, p. 16.

⁸³Artaud, The Theatre and Its Double, p. 27.

Thus the Yippies have believed that the image of chaos created by their demonstrations acts as a kind of propaganda for the cultural revolution, capable of attracting the alienated and malcontent, and of encouraging the revolution to spread.

The image of Amerika in flames and unable to govern itself is important for young people, and oppressed people throughout the world.⁸⁴

What matters, the Yippies believe, is not any actual power they might possess to overthrow the system, but the appear-ance of threat to the social order generated by their demonstrations. They see themselves as constituting a revolutionary myth intruding upon the consciousness of spectators, stirring the emotions, forcing people to become involved. They hope that the spectacle of their actions in the street will create a revolutionary state of mind among alienated youth.

We are dynamiting brain cells. We are putting people through changes. The key to the public lies in theatre. We are theatre in streets; total and committed. We aim to involve people and use (unlike other movements locked in ideology) any weapon (prop) we can find. The aim is not to earn the respect and admiration, and love of everybody - it's to get people to do, to participate, whether negatively or positively. All is relevant, only 'the play's the thing'.⁸⁵

In the language of Mc Luhan, the Yippies see themselves as a "hot medium" whose very existence is disruptive and invol-

⁸⁴Rubin, We, p. 221.

⁸⁵Hoffman, Revolution for the Hell of It, p. 31.

ving.⁸⁶

In Dadaist and Surrealist fashion, the Yippies have attacked the symbols of American social order. From Rubin's appearance at a Congressional hearing (NUAC) dressed in a Revolutionary War costume⁸⁷, to burning dollar bills at the New York Stock Exchange, to running a pig for President in 1968, the Yippies have tried to smash what they see as the "magic" psychological hold conventional values and institutions have over the individual consciousness. Such acts reflect a Machiavellian appreciation of the construction and maintenance of political and social order as a symbolic enterprise rooted in appearances and in the manipulation of appearances. It is believed that to distort or ridicule the symbols and appearances on which social authority rest is to undermine that authority.

Life is theatre and we are the guerillas
attacking the shrines of authority, from
the priest to⁸⁸ the holy dollar, to the two
party system.

⁸⁶Ibid., p.84. They Yippies have been acutely aware of the importance of the media in inflating the image of the Yippie as a dangerous band of revolutionaries. Media reportage of the Yippie demonstrations, they feel, makes "commercials for the revolution". Television coverage, in particular, elevates their action into a theatrical spectacle, making for the most effective propaganda of their deeds.

⁸⁷Rubin has pointed out the conflict between the Yippie form of protest and the more conventional forms. He was advised by some of his friends to turn his case into a civil liberties fight rather than into a piece of theatre. He was also warned not to offend the "dignity of Congress", but, of course, that was precisely what he wanted to do. Rubin's account, pp. 57-65, Do It.

In the case of their escapade at the New York Stock Exchange, the Yippies believed that by destroying American money they were attacking the entire "role-status-consumer game" which they see as the very essence of America's alienating commercial culture. Accordingly they saw it as a revolutionary act to destroy money, the basis of a commercial culture and the prime source of alienation. The fear reportedly expressed by many of the brokers at the sight of the destruction of money suggests the extent to which such an act is like a living Surrealist image which attacks the perceptions of the spectator, subjecting his consciousness to a situation which previous mental pictures cannot explain, producing a state of inquietude, etc.

Perhaps one of the best examples of the Yippies' revolutionary theatre of the absurd is that of their conduct during the "Chicago 7" trial. Repudiating all suggestions to offer rational arguments for their defense, Hoffman and Rubin endeavored to turn the courtroom into an arena of psychological and cultural guerrilla warfare.⁸⁹ They saw in the trial (with its wide coverage by the media)⁹⁰ the chance to spread the Yippie myth by bringing their own way

⁸⁸Rubin, Do It., p. 250.

⁸⁹Rubin admits to a conflict with some of the other defendants, particularly Tom Hayden, who wished to strike a low profile and attempt to win the case. Cf. We, p. 35.

⁹⁰"The trial became an international theatrical drama and its characters symbolic figures...TV made the trial into a soap opera." Rubin, We, p. 14.

of life into the courtroom.⁹¹ By their own accounts, Rubin and Hoffman had great fun during the trial, sustaining a carnival like atmosphere.⁹² Their campaign of cultural guerrilla warfare, plus the retaliation they provoked from the judge (which, for example, produced the spectacle of defendants being bound and gagged) they feel constituted a victory for the Yippie cultural revolution. First, by undermining the authority of the courtroom and the judicial process, and secondly, by communicating to people the image of an oppressive and arbitrary legal system.

The true achievement of our trial - why we won and the government lost - is that we broke the magic of the courtroom. The spell is over. 'Judge' is now a dirty five-letter word. A lot of middle class people are now free enough from their automatic respect for courts to feel the injustice of the poor. Smashing that magic is as important as the blowing up⁹³ of 500 pig buildings through violence.

⁹¹Cf. the account of the trial in We, pp. 35-36, 52, et passim.

⁹²On one occasion they appeared in the courtroom wearing judges robes, a stunt which provoke great hilarity in the courtroom, except for the real Judge Hoffman, who was acutely embarrassed. The Yippies enjoyed manipulating the events in the courtroom, much like the directors of a happening. "... later Abbie took off his judge's robes and underneath wore the blue and white shirt of a Chicago policeman. A moment of absolute truth descended on the courtroom." We, pp. 51-52.

⁹³Ibid., p. 150.

The Yippie "be-ins" and their "levitation" of the Pentagon demonstration of 1967 provide good examples of the attempt to combine imaginative self-expression with revolutionary politics. Be-ins are unlike any conventional radical demonstration or protests in that they lack any explicit political demands or purpose. The aim is merely "to be". Jerry Rubin sees be-ins as a new medium of human relations in which self-expressing individuals come together (making music, love, taking drugs, etc.) effecting a virtual and immediate realization of the anarchic and communal world at the center of the Yippies' revolutionary vision of the world. The Yippies have valued be-ins for the liberating effect they believe these demonstrations have on the consciousness of the participants. This reflects their conviction that a successful social revolution must be preceded by the creation of "new" men and women. Be-ins are supposed to release repressed instinctual energy, curing the alienation of American life:

The fragmented life of capitalist America
reconstituted by the joyous celebrants.⁹⁴

This type of demonstration reflects the avant garde faith (which as we saw, has developed from the 19th century, through the Dadaist and Surrealist movements to the present) in the power of the expressive imagination to "change life" and recreate the world.

⁹⁴Rubin, Do It., p. 56.

The Pentagon demonstration represents a more vivid case of total theatre, an Artaudian spectacle of clashing forces, pitting the self-proclaimed "life force", personified by the Yippies, against the culture of death, symbolized by the Pentagon war machine. As with the case of the be-ins, one can only classify such a demonstration as a political act if one ignores the conventional conceptual boundaries delimiting political protest. The Pentagon demonstration was a case of Surrealists politics par excellence, in which the participants played out their fantasies and endeavored to surmount the divorce between their dream of ending the Viet Nam war and overthrowing the culture of death with the reality of the moment. The atmosphere the Yippies strove to create was one of unbounded energy, rhythm and exaltation, comparable to those "moments of madness" when politics appears to "burst its bounds to invade all of life."⁹⁵ What has emerged is a kind of expressive politics (as opposed to an instrumental politics of interests, institutions and processes) in which the only apparent bounds to the possible

⁹⁵Aristide Zolberg, "Moments of Madness", Politics and Society, vol. 2, Winter 1972, p. 183. Zolberg's article examines euphoric moments in social history such as that of the Paris Commune in 1871, the 1944 liberation of Paris, and the street revolt in Paris of 1968, when the course of events make for the temporary dissolution of the bounds of the conventional world. During such moments, the routines of everyday life, class differences and social forms seem to be transcended, leaving the appearance of an infinite horizon of possibility. There are moments of shared hope, communion among men. Movements such as the Surrealists and the Yippies have tried to make these moments into a more permanent reality.

lie in the imagination. In the midst of such a nexus of energy and spontaneous expression concentrated in a particular time and place it seems to the participants that one could change the world by magic. The actions of the Yippie demonstrators at the Pentagon reflected a faith in the incantatory power of the expressive gesture to provoke a revolutionary transformation. Certainly the Yippies didn't believe that their chants and hexes would actually levitate the Pentagon or that their shouts that "the war is over" would really end the war. What they did hope was that their actions would have a contagious conversionary power to spread the revolution.

The chaos in the streets of Chicago staged by the Yippies is the quintessential example of revolutionary theatre. As a form of Artaudian theatre of cruelty it provided the spectacle of a cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil. The Yippies' scenarios for the Chicago demonstrations planned for various kinds of street provocations against the Convention while simultaneously communicating to the world the Yippie revolutionary alternative. The Yippies believed that a powerful revolutionary message could be communicated through the contrasting images of the Yippie Festival of Life (their planned free "rock orgy" peopled with self-expressive "total life actors") with the grotesque armed camp of Mayor Daley's Chicago, representing the culture of death. The Yippies also hoped to ridicule and undermine

the liberal democratic system, and by association, the middle class culture in which it is rooted. The riots in the streets were meant to unleash a torrent of violent, instinctual energy (in the way intended by Artaud through the theatre of cruelty) and to unmake the oppressiveness of American society, thus acting as a crucible of perception in which the participants' conventional perspective of American society was melted down and reformed from a revolutionary point of view. By means of their provocations the Yippies hoped to create an image of America in chaos⁹⁶ which would force people to become involved in the revolution, expecting that their experience would forge a radicalized consciousness. The Yippies delighted in the paradox of a major party convention, one of the principal symbols of American democratic politics, occurring in the climate of a police state. Their Pegasus campaign for President also offered them a wide field for playful distortion and ridicule of American electoral politics.⁹⁷ According to Abbie Hoffman, the Yippies turned the Chicago convention into a "perfect mess" and:

...in a Perfect Mess everyone gets what he wants. In a Perfect Mess only the System suffers.⁹⁸

⁹⁶For example, the scenes of Chicago police brutally beating newsmen, photographers, housewives for McCarthy, "straight" college students, delegates, bystanders, etc.

⁹⁷Cf. pp. 176-80, Do It.

⁹⁸Hoffman, Revolution for the Hell of It.

CHAPTER V

Abbie Hoffman has said that the Yippies exist primarily in the eyes of the beholder. In this essay the Yippies have been beheld as aesthetic and anarchistic rebels, as insurrectionists against American society. We saw that the Yippies have been motivated by a powerful sense of alienation and revulsion against American culture and politics and by the search for a truer reality, a more perfect and expressive form of existence. Furthermore, we have pictured the Yippies as exponents of cultural revolutionary politics bent on two related goals -- the total destruction of the established political and cultural order, both as it exists in the external world and in its internalization in the consciousness of individuals, and the recreation of social reality on the basis of an expressive and aesthetic ideal of life.

An attempt was made to trace the origins of the Yippie cultural revolutionary consciousness in the opposition of European aesthetic rebels of the 19th and 20th centuries to the dominant bourgeois culture, and in the native American tradition of cultural alienation. We have also seen how the Yippies' expressive tactics of cultural revolution were shared by the anarchist and avant garde traditions of provo-

cation against the established culture and by certain concepts.

Dadaism and Surrealism.

Given the recent low profile of the Yippies (during the past two or three years and in particular during the recent political conventions in Miami) one might well question whether this essay is merely another contribution to the Yippie myth, whether too much of a revolutionary nature has been beheld in the Yippie phenomenon. However, the evidence of the Yippies' behavior during the late '60's (particularly at the 1968 Chicago Convention) and the pronouncements of Rubin and Hoffman in Do It and Revolution For the Hell of It strongly suggest that their movement fits the type of cultural revolution sketched out in this essay. The recent decline in the intensity of Yippie agitation against American society illustrates some of the problems we noted were inherent in the cultural revolutionary enterprise, and can partly be explained by reference to recent political events.

As we saw, the Surrealists had great difficulty in realizing the cultural revolutionary ideal in practice. For example, there was the problem of mediating the conflict posed by their attachment to an anarchistic and aesthetic conception of liberty with the demands and disciplines necessary for effective revolutionary action, and

the problem of maintaining the unity between the internal revolution of consciousness with the external political revolution. Ultimately the Surrealists acknowledged the failure of their tactics of provocation against the bourgeois order by which they hoped to "shake men into a new life," and had to choose between more conventional forms of revolutionary politics or impotent revolutionary gestures and buffoonery, or else withdraw into realms of hermetic vision.

It is apparent that the Yippies have been faced with similar problems and choices over the past few years. They have had difficulty in reconciling the hippies' interior revolution of consciousness with the revolutionary politics of the more extreme factions of the New Left. With the general decline of the New Left, the Yippies have had increasing difficulty defining their role in American radical politics. After the Chicago demonstrations of 1968 the Yippies have probably had to consider whether their strategy of revolution as "theatre in the streets" did more to radicalize youth or scare them off into more conventional politics or into apathy. In the most general sense, the sudden drop in Yippie revolutionary zeal may be attributed to their sense of failure of street theatre to galvanize the masses into action. Certainly the Chicago demonstrations produced a negative reaction in the majority of the population and accomplished little in terms of propaganda of the deed. The evaporation of much of

the Yippies' following also seems to reflect the ephemeral character of the cultural revolutionary impulse, which lacking a strong moral and political commitment to revolutionary change and based on feelings of alienation, has a tendency to oscillate between activism and withdrawal.

Hoffman and Rubin's latest "book", Vote, is evidence of what must be a period of confusion and uncertainty for the Yippies. Rubin and Hoffman make the dubious claim that their Dadaist and Surrealist-like events of the late '60's were successful in shocking people into a new revolutionary consciousness¹, and that the time is ripe to move into a new stage of revolution, one of "consolidation", organization, and communication with a broader spectrum of the American public, a new stage in which alienation is channeled into "politically constructive directions".² It appears that the Yippies have made a choice similar to that of the Surrealists in the 1920's in favor of a more conventional political course. Underlying that choice is their realization of the failure of street theatre and the "do your own thing" anarchy. In Vote, Rubin and Hoffman appear to have scaled down their ambitions and expectations for the cultural revolution. They also seem to have abandoned the apocalyptic conception of cultural revolutionary politics as involving

¹Vote, p. 51.

²Vote, p. 53.

a sudden and vident transformation of the whole of reality, and the corresponding visionary goal of an anarchic and expressive world where "the imagination runs supreme."

In this election year of 1972 Hoffman and Rubin seem to be playing a more cautious role than in 1968. They have done little to ridicule electoral politics or to upset the conventions in Miami, perhaps for fear of permanently alienating the youth at least temporarily won over to the McGovern candidacy and placated by the reforms within the Democratic party. In Vote they express fear of the repression that might accompany four more years of Nixon, and considered the threat of Agnew in 1976. Rubin and Hoffman seem to have realized that the policy of "the worse the better" does little to radicalize the alienated, but rather leads to cynicism, despair, and political apathy. Thus they have done nothing to harm the McGovern candidacy. It should be clear that their reticence does not proceed from any great love for McGovern. Indeed, they feel McGovern is as dedicated to American middle class values and capitalism as Nixon. Yet, given McGovern's greater commitment to equality of opportunity, the Yippiés believe that McGovern would hasten the day of real revolution by raising the expectations of the people, putting further strains on an already overburdened system through further reform. "People will expect more from McGovern and will be more quickly disillusioned." All this is somewhat

moot now that McGovern has been defeated. However, it shows that the Yippies have not completely given up the idea of revolution in America. The most important change in their conception of revolution has been their willingness to envision revolution in more conventional political and moral terms. The turned on vision of "do your own thing", anarchic and expressive Woodstock Nation has been dimmed, receded in favor of greater emphasis on social justice, collective identity and common purposes.

While the Yippies have been relatively inert recently there is no reason to believe that they might not resume the activism of the late '60's. Primarily a small group of self-styled professional insurrectionists they required the existence of a widespread spirit of alienation and revulsion against the American system if they are to galvanize the people into revolutionary action. The McGovern defeat could possibly generate such a current of disillusionment and alienation among youth. However, as we have seen, cultural alienation may lead to apathy and withdrawal as much as to revolutionary consciousness and engagement. Whether the Yippies can politicize such sentiments and win adherents to their scaled down vision of cultural revolution will depend on their skill and imagination as provocateurs.

Man is the only creature who refuses to be
what he is.

Camus

Apart from examining the Yippie movement as an example of cultural revolutionary politics, this essay has been concerned with the general problem of cultural revolutionary consciousness and its distinctions from the more conventional Western tradition of revolutionary politics. We have seen that a desire for the transformation of man and the world and for the attainment of some immanent worldly paradise runs through out the cultural revolutionary impulse, first as we traced it from its inchoate form in the opposition by 19th century aesthetic rebels to bourgeois culture, through the Dada and Surrealist revolts to the present day. The cultural revolutionary impulse to "change life" is based on an intense dissatisfaction with the state of reality in the conventional world. At its root cultural revolution is a metaphysical revolt against an imperfect human condition. Perceiving the reality of bourgeois, post-industrial civilization as aesthetically and psychically repressive, cultural revolutionaries have rejected the established reality and sought liberation from the web of conventions which define man and shape his experience of the world. By means of total revolution, combining an interior revolution of consciousness with an exterior revolution of political institutions they would shake men into a new life.

Cultural revolutionaries have tended to express minimal concern for issues of social justice or the improvement of man's material condition, all of which are the focus of the Jacobin-Marxist revolutionary tradition. Instead they have concentrated on the apocalyptic transformation of the inner man and of social reality in the broadest and most metaphysical sense, and bear a certain resemblance (although in a secular form) to the medieval millenarian revolts.

Like the cultural revolution, the millenarian revolts served primarily emotional or spiritual needs rather than material needs. The millenarian urge expressed itself in a striving for a kind of personal salvation, a transfiguration of the self and the world. As with the cultural revolution, the aim of the millenarian revolts were boundless. In The Pursuit of the Millenium Norman Cohen describes the millenarian revolts as social struggles for unlimited objectives, as cataclysms from which it was expected that the world would emerge "totally transformed and redeemed."³

The historial and social conditions which precipitated the millenarian revolts bring to mind the conditions we examined in tracing the development of the cultural revolutionary consciousness. As with the cultural revolution, the feelings of alienation and estrangement from established

³Norman Cohen, The Pursuit of the Millenium, p. 281.

cultural institutions were an important source of motivation for the medieval millenarian revolts. The millenarian movements had their greatest appeal during periods of social dislocation, at times when confidence in the moral and institutional order of medieval society was most weakened (after prolonged periods of war, and natural calamities like the plague). An important similarity between the millenarian movements and the cultural revolution lies in the character of the needs and desires expressed. They have both aimed at the destruction of the imperfect conventional world and the realization of an immanent worldly paradise. The millenarian movements were motivated by the gnostic desire for an immediate worldly paradise, representing an immanentization of the Christian eschaton. These movements were examples of the "volitional gnosis", discussed by Eric Voeglin in the New Science of Politics, which manifests itself in an activist redemption of man and society.⁴ As Voeglin points out, the gnostic spirit is particularly strong when transcendental faith is weakest, and fulfills the need for some kind of experiential alternative. During the high middle ages faith in conventional Christianity, as represented by the doctrines and rituals of the Church, was on the decline. Among certain groups there existed a state of cultural and spiritual

⁴Norman Cohen, The New Science of Politics, p. 124.

alienation from medieval culture (which was encompassed by the Church) similar to that we have noted in relation to bourgeois culture. Indeed, Cohen's treatment of the millenarian revolts suggests that they were largely composed of those people most alienated from the Church and its worldly priorities (its preoccupation with Luxuria and Avaritia)⁵ which did not satisfy their craving for a more authentic spiritual experience. Millenarianism promised them immediate spiritual satisfaction, a redivinization of man and the world through the ecstasy of participating in an apocalyptic consummation of history.⁶

The gnostic desire for an earthly paradise is very much evident in the cultural revolutionary consciousness. However, the gnostic element is carried a step further in secularized form. It can be seen in the Surrealists' desire for a metaphysical change of life and the Yippies' original goal of destroying the evil "Pig Nation" and replacing it with the perfect goodness of the "Woodstock Nation". In its preoccupation with interior revolution, with the transfiguration of the inner man as part of the total revolution, cultural revolution is remote from the more conven-

⁵Norman Cohen, The Pursuit of the Millennium, p. 293.

⁶Ibid., p.

tional concerns of political radicalism and closer to the tradition of the apocalyptic religious movements. Cultural revolutionaries see in the expressive ideal of life, in the liberated imagination and desire (rather than in abstract political principles) the principal key to the meaning of human existence. At bottom one can detect an anarchist faith in the existence of some natural order of existence which is spontaneously perceivable after cleansing the perceptions of the conventional world by means of the processes of cultural revolution. Cultural revolution, then, is believed to be a means to opening the doors of perception to a more perfect reality. It is believed that with the dissolution of the conventional world there will emerge an infinite horizon of possibility for the imagination and desires to shape life. Life itself is seen as an aesthetic project to be shaped at will like clay. At its most extreme cultural revolution seems to reveal a conception of revolution as a mystical, alchemical process in which the leaden conventional reality is transformed into some golden age of perfection.

There is a certain poignancy to the desire to solve all the problems of an imperfect human condition by means of revolution. Boredom, loneliness, all forms of suffering and alienation, the necessity of labor, are not seen by the cultural revolutionaries as an inherent part of some

immutable human condition. The cultural revolutionary aim is virtually boundless in its striving to realize some edenic vision, a permanent earthly state of exaltation and fulfillment. Given the widespread evaporation of transcendental faith it is not surprising that there is increased temptation to try to achieve through revolution or other political means the perfect existence that can no longer be counted on in some after life. Yet there are bounds to what one should expect to achieve through politics. Is every flaw in the human condition the product of mutable social conditions or of flawed perception itself, and thus subject to eradication by some revolutionary process? The earthly paradise cannot be any more realized by means of cleansing perception and the dissolution of bourgeois civilization than by means of a more rational and less repressive organization of the forces of production (as believed by the Marxists). Attempts to change history overnight never produce the desired changes in consciousness supportive of the new order, and rarely produce more than mere transfer of power. Men cannot be "shaken" into a new life. Consciousness is not susceptible to lightening change, and usually lags behind changes in technology or of political institutions, for example.

The cultural revolutionary urge to destroy the conventional world, its tendency to equate the execration and

annihilation of bourgeois civilization with total revolution, can only lead to some form of nihilism. If one does not share the cultural revolutionaries' faith in the existence of some perfect reality beyond the conventional one, it would be impossible to expect that any more than the most unfruitful chaos would result from the destruction of the conventional world. The expansion of human consciousness and the creation of new values should be seen as a cumulative process, one that cannot be separated from the history and collective experience of a people.

One can cite the example of Nietzsche and his failure to create new values after setting himself adrift from all the traditions and values of Western civilization. Ultimately the philosophy of the will to power, the Übermensch and eternal recurrence could not fill the vacuum he had made for himself. Similarly, if the Dadaists and Surrealists, or the Yippies in their cultural revolutionary purity of the late 1960's, had been successful in their aim to destroy bourgeois civilization they would have failed to create a new and more perfect social reality out of the ashes of the old. The autonomous will, imagination or desire, unfettered by any moral or political bounds, are unlikely to lead to the creation of a more perfect social order. Indeed, the attempt to create a permanent state of exaltation and ecstasy, a social order grounded on the passions and ima-

gination alone is more apt to lead to a form of barbarism. It is like Aristotle said, that outside the polis, outside the moral and cultural boundaries created by men as social animals, men will become either beasts or gods. The cultural revolutionaries would have everyone become godlike supermen, living beyond conventional conceptions of good and evil, with the imagination and desires the only guides and bounds. Yet if left to themselves, the imagination and desires are not self-limiting. Unbounded such a regime can only lead to chaos.

The sense of man as being trapped under a net of conventions, the sense of man as a cog in an industrial machine, as confined in an "iron cage" of bureaucratic society, is primarily a modern one, and by no means a totally unjustified one. The conventions of modern technological society, its emphasis on functional rationality, do have a tendency to inhibit the creative imagination and individual powers of expression, have led to the feeling of the deprivation of the instincts and perceptions. Yet, in their efforts to shift the balance of man from the rational and logical to the expressive, the cultural revolutionaries have been mistaken in identifying the functional rationality of technological society with the whole of reason, and in renouncing all rational limits to the desires and imagination. They are equally mistaken in assuming that the instincts,

passions and all other non-rational components of human life are weaker than the rational part of man. On the contrary, it is the reason and intellect that requires the most careful nurturing.

The feeling of cultural alienation, which reflects a condition of severe tension, between the individual and the social world, has only been exacerbated by the critical analysis of bourgeois society by the cultural revolutionaries. What is needed is a more intelligent and imaginative Kulturkritik, one that draws a less sharp dichotomy between truth and convention, appearance and reality, one than can fathom the meaning in the collective history and experience of a people for the solutions to the problems of an imperfect social world. The dionysian will to exceed all norms and conventions, if unchecked, is ultimately self-destructive. Similarly, Nietzsche's drive to annihilate all untruth and imperfection from the world destroyed for him whatever kernel of truth that existed in the conventional order. The self-styled physician of culture succeeded in killing his patient.

In the abstract, the prospect of making a clean break with established social reality by purging the senses of the conventional world and opening the doors of perception onto a more perfect realm of reality is very attractive. As a concept of revolution this reminds one of Machiavelli's comment that true revolution would be like a case of amnesia,

in which the memory of all prior history and conventions is forgotten, and of the Platonic notion of breaking free from the shadow world of appearances to some vision of absolute truth and beauty.

In practice such desired ruptures with the conventional world would seem to require violent means risking total barbarism. In their despair at the imperfections of bourgeois society, and frustrations over the failures of their manifestations and street theatre, the Dadaists and Surrealists and Yippies (at the peak of their cultural revolutionary zeal during the late 1960's) would probably have thought such risks worth taking. Like Baudelaire they would welcome any form of chaos over bourgeois order. At the very least, the attempt to "shake men into a new life" would require rigid authoritarian means, thoroughly corrupting to the anarchic and expressive principle of liberty at the core of the cultural revolutionary ideal. Such an authoritarian turn almost occurred within the Dada movement in Berlin during the Spartacus rebellion. The formation of a "Dadaist Revolutionary Central Council" was announced. Among its demands were:

the compulsory adherence of all priests and teachers to the 'Dadaist articles of faith', a state art center, the adoption of the Simultaneist poem as a state prayer, the requisition of churches for the performance of bruitist music and Dadaist poems, the organization of 150 circuses for the enlightenment of the proletariat' and the 'immediate regulation of all sexual relations according to

the views of international Dadaism through⁷
establishment of a Dadaist sexual centre.'

There may be a bit of tongue in cheek in this list of demands, yet they are largely serious. These demands reflect all the dangers involved in attempting to impose an aesthetic vision (or any kind of vision) on a society. Fortunately, the Dadaists and Surrealists, and the Yippies never achieved any political power or else they would probably have created some form of political hell in their quest for an earthly paradise.

The cultural revolutionaries have perceived bourgeois culture and modern technological society as inimical to any kind of aesthetic fulfillment, to the liberation of the imagination and desires, and would thus destroy that civilization and replace it with some edenic vision of the world. It is impossible, however, to share their gnostic faith in apocalyptic change. Visions of perfect existence can never be attained in the real world. At best, visions of perfect existence can only be approximated, and politics is that process by which such approximations can be made by working with existing social and historical forces. The problem is how to accept the inevitability of a certain measure of imperfection in the world without letting it impede one's vision and desire for change. Thus there is no reason to believe that defects in contemporary civilization the cultural re-

⁷Coutts-Smith, Dada, p. 88.

revolutionaries have pointed out cannot be modified. Though the limits on experience and personal expression levied on individuals by political regimes and cultures can be the proper subject of political action, the expressive ideal of life of the cultural revolutionaries must ultimately be a personal endeavor, entirely separate from politics.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alquie, Ferdinand. The Philosophy of Surrealism. Ann Arbor, 1965.
- Artaud, Antonin. Artaud Anthology. Ed. Jack Hirschman. San Francisco, 1965.
- Artaud, Antonin. Collected Works. 3 Vols. London, 1968-72.
- Artaud, Antonin. The Theatre and Its Double. New York, 1958.
- Balაკian, Anna. Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute. New York, 1959.
- Barber, Benjamin. Superman and Common Man: Freedom, Anarchy and the Revolution. New York, 1971.
- Barzun, Jacques. Classic, Romantic and Modern. Garden City, 1961.
- Baudelaire, Charles. OEuvres Completes. Paris, 1961.
- Beardsley, Monroe. A Short History of Aesthetics. New York, 1961.
- Beaujour, Michel. "Flight Out of Time: Poetic Language and The Revolution", Yale French Studies, no. 39.
- Berke, Joseph, Ed. Counter Culture, London, 1969.
- Breton, Andre. Manifestoes of Surrealism. Ann Arbor, 1969.
- Breton, Andre. Le Surrealisme et la Peinture. Paris, 1965.
- Browder, Clifford. Andre Breton: Arbiter of Surrealism. Geneva, 1967.
- Camus, Albert. The Rebel. New York, 1956.
- Cohen, Norman. The Pursuit of the Millennium. New York, 1970.
- Cook, Bruce. The Beat Generation. New York, 1971.
- Coutts-Smith, Kenneth. Dada. London, 1970.
- Cowley, Malcolm. The Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920's. New York, 1934.

- Fisher, Peter F. Valley of Vision: Blake as Prophet and Revolutionary. Ed. Northrop Frye. Toronto, 1961.
- Fowlie, Wallace. Rimbaud. Chicago, 1965.
- Gascar, Pierre. Rimbaud et la Commune. Paris, 1971.
- Gershman, Herbert. The Surrealist Revolution in France. Ann Arbor, 1969.
- Grana, Cesar. Bohemian Vs. Bourgeois: French Society and the French Man of Letters in the Nineteenth Century. New York, 1964.
- Guerin, Daniel. Anarchism. New York, 1970.
- Hausmann, Raoul. Courrier Dada. Paris, 1958.
- Hauser, Arnold. The Social History of Art. 4 Vols. New York, 1964.
- Hayter, Alethea. Opium and the Romantic Imagination. Berkeley, 1970.
- Herbert, Eugenia. The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium, 1885-1898. New Haven, 1961.
- Hoffman, Abbie. Revolution for the Hell of It. New York, 1968.
- Hoffman, Abbie, with Jerry Rubin and Ed Sanders. Vote! New York, 1972.
- Hoffman, Abbie. Woodstock Nation. New York, 1969.
- Hughes, H. Stuart. Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930. New York, 1958.
- Joll, James. The Anarchists. New York, 1964.
- Joyeux, Maurice. L'Anarchie et la Societe Moderne. Paris, 1969.
- Kenniston, Kenneth. The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society. New York, 1960.

- Klein, Richard. "Baudelaire and Revolution", Yale French Studies. no. 39.
- Knapp, Bettina. Artaud: Man of Vision. New York, 1969.
- Marx, Leo. The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America. Oxford, 1964.
- Nadeau, Maurice. The History of Surrealism. New York, 1965.
- Nuttall, Jeff. Bomb Culture. New York, 1965.
- Parrington, Vernon. Main Currents in American Thought. 3 Vols. New York, 1930.
- Poggioli, Renato. The Theory of the Avant Garde. Cambridge, 1968.
- Richter, Hans. Dada: Art and Anti-Art. New York, 1965.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. OEuvres Completes. Paris, 1972.
- Roszak, Theodore. The Making of A Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition. Garden City, 1969.
- Rubin, Jerry. Do It: Scenarios of the Revolution. New York, 1970.
- Rubin, Jerry. We Are Everywhere. New York, 1970.
- Sanouillet, Michel. Dada a Paris. Paris, 1965.
- Schwarz, Arturo. Omaggio a Andre Breton. Milano, 1967.
- Short, Robert. "The Politics of Surrealism: 1920-36", The Journal of Contemporary History. No. 2, 1966.
- Thoreau, Henry David. Walden. New York, 1942.
- Voeglin, Eric. The New Science of Politics. Chicago, 1966.
- Waldberg, Patrick. Surrealism. New York, 1964.
- Weatherman, comp. by Harold Jacobs. Berkeley, 1970.

Williams, Raymond. "Prelude to Alienation", in America Changing: Essays Contributing to an Understanding of Contemporary Culture. Ed. Patrick Gleason. Columbus, Ohio, 1968.

Zolberg, Aristide. "Moments of Madness", Politics and Society. Vol. 2, Winter, 1972.

