



Youth culture: humanity's last chance

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*Something is happening here, but you
don't know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?*
—Bob Dylan

now is a terrifying and disconcerting time for Mr. Jones. A new culture and people are bursting forth from his own seed, flippantly ignoring or brutally attacking the most basic precepts along which his life has always been planned. Only 10 years ago, he was so confident that an all-American, stainless steel, tail-finned Utopia was just around the corner. Now, however, the white, Western, Christian adult male has lost the initiative. The dynamic of history is being wrenched from his grasp. Worse yet, he knows it.

Even sincere adults in America are finding themselves unable to understand what is making the cutting edge of contemporary youth reject their socialization so vociferously. Some of the "reasons" behind discontent can be articulated by the young people involved, but many are only felt intuitively.

THE SOURCES OF ALIENATION

Young people feel with intensity the dehumanization of this century's triumph

of technocracy. Mankind has proliferated over the face of the earth, tripled his life span, raised his standard of living—and lost his soul. Reality is scientifically determined; that which is not amenable to scientific analysis is considered either not real or not important. Truth is objective, left to "experts" to know. Moral judgments about events like the Cambodian invasion are based on access to information, and left to Richard Nixon to make. "Professionals" are competent—but to do what? Efficiency and production/consumption are our gods. Magic, mystery, and sacrament are inappropriate. America is instant breakfast, perfumed garbage crushers, drive-in churches, and surgical face lifts.

*Plastic people, O baby, now you're such a
drag.*—Frank Zappa and the Mothers of
Invention

What are people to do who are young and strong and see their world "with eyes of fire"? They can refuse their "place among the fossils of our time."¹ They can wear long hair and colorful clothes to

¹ From the title song on the album *Crown of Creation* by the Jefferson Airplane (New York: RCA, 1968).

show that they are anti-robot. They can reject the "mad rationality"—as Lewis Mumford terms it—that made their parents' generation produce enough bombs, gasses, and germs to extinguish humanity hundreds of times over, in the name of peace. They can refuse to submit to the servitude that is "school."

In American public schools, students learn to submit to arbitrary authority over which they have no influence. They learn to follow directions, to look for "right" answers, to rely totally on the teacher, to follow schedules and meet deadlines. They learn to generate competition, aggression, and envy in their interpersonal relationships by being forced to work for grades and recognition. In short, they are punished for the crime of youth by being forced to exist with no control over their lives or their destinies.

Finally, young people are convinced that adults simply do not have the desire or capacity to deal with what is happening. Yossarian (in *Catch 22*) is right; they (someone, everyone) are trying to kill us. Zifferstein (1970) has found that "a major source of mental illness, neurosis, and alienation in 'children of the nuclear age' is a deep anxiety, conscious, unconscious and subliminal, which is based on the conviction that they will not live out their normal span of years." What incredible irony that the old, who may yet die a natural death, demand respect from a generation they have condemned to despair! The generation in power has exploited the world and must bear responsibility for much of its suffering. It has decided that the road to progress and prosperity lies in "conquering" nature, and now has made homo sapiens an endangered species. It has made the young of the counter-culture the "new niggers," discriminated against on the street, in housing, in employment, and in small and subtle ways every day of their lives.

In light of their discontent, it is not

surprising that young people turn in directions that are difficult for their counselors to understand, whether it is toward the bewildering world of drugs or to the exhilarating birth of a new culture.

THE DRUG CULTURE

Do you know what a joint is, or hash, or a chillum, or a lid or zigzags or roaches or steamboats? Or Jones? You can bet you know a lot of young people who do. The really critical question about drugs is simply this: If kids are in trouble with acid or speed or heroin, will they come to you for help? Suppose they did. Do you have the knowledge, or the compassion, or the understanding, or the means to help them more than hurt them?

Young people use drugs for many reasons, and adult example doesn't help much, since over one-fourth of all adults use either "uppers" or "downers" to get them through the day. One reason for such widespread use is indicated by this thought of Ortega y Gasset (1958):

The man who is too cultivated and socialized, who is living on top of a culture which has already become false, is in urgent need of another culture, that is to say a culture which is genuine. But this can only start in the sincere and naked depths of his own personal self. Therefore, he must go back to make contact with himself.

It is in part this desire to explore the sincere and naked depths of the self that is responsible for the use of such consciousness-expanding drugs as marijuana, LSD, mescaline, and peyote. This is obviously not the reason for using consciousness-contracting drugs like heroin or using alcohol.

Marijuana consists of the flowering tops and leaves of the Indian hemp plant (*cannabis sativa*). It is dried, crushed, and either smoked, eaten, or made into tea. Hashish is pollen from the flowers. Both have been used for thousands of years. They give the user a feeling of relaxation, mild euphoria, and heightened sense perceptions for a couple of

hours or more. Time is distorted, thoughts bounce in and out of awareness, memory may seem to fail at times; often people stop talking in the middle of a sentence, unable to remember what they were going to say. The user's pulse rate increases, he may feel hungry, he may feel like urinating, the air may seem cooler, and eyes might redden a bit (no dilated pupils).

Marijuana is really a non-issue, since, unlike nicotine or caffeine, it has not been proven harmful at all. The problem is that a couple of hundred thousand young people are in jail for using it. They think that it is a very significant issue. Laws against marijuana are nothing more than blatant cultural repression.

Hallucinogens work the same basic way as marijuana but are much stronger. Changes in consciousness might resemble psychosis, particularly schizophrenia, or the visions of ancient holy men. The initial enthusiasm for these drugs has died down somewhat, partly because of bad publicity but mostly because of the difficulty of getting pure drugs on the street. Speed and strychnine are frequent pollutants.

Could you deal with a bad trip? The mind of your client may be operating in a framework that neither you nor he has ever experienced before. It can be the pinnacle of existential terror. A lot of bad trippers are convinced that they have gone crazy forever. The wall may be melting. What to do? First, ask the person if he has a friend he would like to see. Try to find out how his mind is working. Convince him that everything is going to be all right. "Talk him down" over a period of hours by going with the flow. If you can walk around outdoors, do it. Above all, don't turn the person over to anyone he doesn't want to see (police, hospital, parents, etc.) or you may freak him out forever.

Heroin (Jones, Smack, Horse, Junk, Skag, H.) "has all the advantages of death without the permanence" (*Ann Arbor*

Argus, 1970). It epitomizes death; it kills all pain. Historically, it has been the drug of those whose lives were misery and held no hope of anything better. Now, since so many of the young feel that way, it is spreading like wildfire into the white middle class. Kids who use heroin want to escape and do it in a way that dramatizes total rejection of everything their parents' world stands for. Heroin gives life meaning; a person must hustle every day to serve his habit.

Obviously, heroin is tremendously destructive to the revolutionary youth culture. Underground media unceasingly try to point out its danger and in some cases propose that the pusher meet a violent end. They don't think much of their prospects for success, though, since "to wipe out junk you'd have to wipe out the need for junk, and to wipe out the need for junk, you'd have to wipe out the system" (*Ann Arbor Argus*, 1970).

STRUGGLING TOWARD BIRTH: A NEW CULTURE

How can I write of the "New Age," of the holy energy of creation and liberation surging through my generation, and hope to get it all together? Most of America seems to think, "This, too, will pass" or "There has always been a generation gap." What they fail to realize is that the current generation of American youth is different from any other group the human species has ever produced in so many basic ways that it is inevitable that the culture which evolves out of their lives will be new and unique.

This is the first generation to live its entire life knowing that species suicide is but a push-button away. It is the first to grow up knowing that efficient contraception has made it possible for sexual relations to be separated from having babies. It is the first to take for granted instantaneous global communication and pictures of our earth sphere shot from space to make it obvious that all human beings are in this thing together. Most

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importantly, we now live for the first time in a potentially post-scarcity environment. Human technology has the means to supply the basic needs of all people, and it is only after basic scarcity is overcome that we can begin to explore the vastness of human potential. Now is the crux of human history. From here onward, there are only two paths. Either we continue our present course toward apocalyptic doom, or we leave behind petty hostility and greed and move toward a new, necessarily Utopian vision.

This sense of urgency helped to create contemporary youth politics, which began in 1962 with the Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society. Its essence was that the dominant attitudes of "loneliness, estrangement and isolation" in this culture must be replaced by people and institutions that "regard men as infinitely precious and possessed of unfulfilled capacities for reason, freedom and love." Youth culture, blooming in the 1967 San Francisco "Summer of Love," is basically the expression in people's lives of the political ideals of the New Left.

Throughout the '60's, political activism and cultural alienation grew quickly and steadily. The Chicago Convention of 1968 killed the hope of many that the problems they perceived would ever be worked out through conventional politics. The huge protests and rock concerts, culminating with the half million people at Woodstock, gave a great feeling of power and solidarity. Western rationality and secularism came to be chal-

lenged by a resurgence of mysticism and religious quest. Astrology, mind-expanding drugs, Tarot, and the I Ching became part of youth culture, as did interest in a variety of Eastern religions. People became concerned about the "vibrations" in interpersonal relationships, and about the wholesomeness and purity of the food they put into their bodies. Many went "back to the land" to live communally on farms and to be close to the rhythm and reality of nature. Crafts like leatherwork, pottery, jewelry, or candles sometimes provided a subsistence living.

By the end of the 1960's, it was time for re-thinking. The SDS had grown huge, only to have its leadership split into factions, one group making bombs and the other talking to workers about Marx. The cultural revolution, if measured in terms of long hair and youth alienation, campus and high school militancy, and the popularity of marijuana and acid rock music, was clearly moving of its own momentum. It was time to begin to define, in real and practical terms, some new directions.

Instead of trying to build large organizations, radicals are now organizing into small working collectives, the political equivalent of the commune. The intimacy of this type of organization makes participants face the fact that social change begins in their own lives. Each person has to learn to love and live with and work with other real people to try to produce both the nonalienated labor and the kind of warm, authentic personal relationships that are the ultimate goal of "The Revolution." Many collectives produce media, such as underground newspapers or films. Others are involved in trying to form alternatives to the institutions of the dominant culture. The basic strategy is that people will see the need for revolutionary change when something clearly superior is presented. Some characteristic serve-the-people projects are free medical clinics, food-buying cooperatives, free stores, breakfast programs, free

schools, drug help programs, community switchboards, legal services, tenants' unions, and draft counseling and research.

Originally, there were two distinct strains in the youth culture, sometimes divided into hippies and radicals, sometimes neo-mystics and neo-Marxists, and sometimes the uncommitted and the committed. Now these two types have merged to the point where it is more realistic to talk about them together than apart. The hippies have realized that they will not be allowed to live their life style without struggle, and the radicals have learned that revolution means a whole new consciousness and life style—not just smashing the state. Hippies are now organizing for self-defense, and Weathermen are dropping acid.

The future is difficult to predict. The current mood is one of deep brooding and soul-searching. If the young are allowed and encouraged to grow and develop as they wish, America will experience a period of regeneration striking enough to peel the crust of cynicism off even the most hardened heart. All they want is the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of their own road to happiness. If, on the other hand, adults demand that the young live within the bounds of a culture already formed, there will be chaos and anarchy and violence and blood such as this country has never seen. America has bred some sons and daughters who are strong and free. Many of them take "liberty or death" quite seriously. *my god.*

COUNSELING FOR SANITY

This is a time of transition in which the whole role of the counselor must be re-examined. If we perpetuate our role as a bastion of the old ways, it is our fate to become irrelevant—and destructive. If, however, we sincerely and humbly try to find out "what is happening here" and aim to facilitate the transition from the

old to the new, we could be a critically important force for sanity and humanism. This would require a total reappraisal of our own value structure and life style.

Could we still change ourselves in truly basic ways? Or do we have too much to do? Or are we too tired?

Our first task must be to admit to ourselves that "professional" or not, we are Mr. Jones, and we don't know what's happening. Instead of immersing ourselves in the "literature of expertise," we will have to begin to go to the parks, to listen to the rock, to read the underground press. Most important, we will have to learn to deal with, if not to accept, notions that are radically different from the accepted norms of "American tradition." Try these on for size:

1. It is impossible to be at once a humanist and a capitalist, since good to the humanist is defined by the welfare and happiness of people and good to the capitalist is defined as the maximization of profit on investment.
2. Progress must be redefined before we pollute ourselves to death; some system of account must be devised that recognizes social as well as monetary cost.
3. The nuclear family is not the optimum arrangement for people to live in; it is almost necessarily sexist and severely limits the number of close human relationships available to both growing children and adults.
4. People should be allowed to live in vastly different ways; historically, American policy has been "melt into the pot or else!"
5. The structure of work must be made more flexible and less alienating; all workers, whether in factories, offices, or schools, must have a role in basic decision-making.

We asked whether students with drug

problems would come to you. We must also ask, Would a student feel comfortable in sharing with you his ideas for a new tomorrow?

Counselors must reject the sanctimonious supremacy that can be called *adult chauvinism*. This is the premise that one should not judge ideas on their intrinsic worth or people on their individual personalities, but should instead weigh the

age factor on the scales of truth. I suggest the opposite.

I suggest that we sincerely try to communicate with the young, whose *weltanschauung* and responses have been most heavily influenced by contemporary realities. They might reasonably be looked to first in order to intuit cultural adaptations that will increase chances that the human species will remain viable. Once it was the old who had wisdom; now it is the young. Adult chauvinism is often employed by adults to mask a severe lack of knowledge and empathy (and no small amount of defensiveness) behind the mystic cloak of age or "professionalism."

It is our task, as counselors, both to rid ourselves of adult chauvinism in our own attitudes and to try to catalyze this kind of growth in our colleagues. It is our task to recognize that our youth are an oppressed colony, that to expand their control over their own education will be good for everyone; and we must therefore be advocates of student power, institutionalizing and publicizing procedures for change. There can be no movement toward easing the animosity between generations or within schools until young people feel that they are being treated as free and equal people. Obviously, this feeling cannot genuinely occur until they have assumed a large degree of control over how their lives will unfold and until they can look forward to the future with hope.

It appears to be a long time before the dawn—doesn't it, Mr. Jones?

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Just Don't Do It Here

"You can say anything you want,
you can write anything you want,
you can do anything you want to do."

That's what they told me.

So I said anything I wanted,
And I wrote anything I wanted.

I wrote a newspaper,
I started a club,
I got people behind me.

THAT'S WHEN IT HAPPENED.

They said, "Come here, boy."
I said, "Sure, man."
they said, "Listen up."
I said, "Sure, man."
they said, "Shut up!"
I said, "What?"
they said,

"You can say anything you want,
you can write anything you want,
you can do anything you want to do.

JUST DON'T DO IT HERE."

Brandon Leavitt
West Free Press, 1968

My god, a spit in yer face an'rolo