Zine Reviews: Hip Culture & The Cultural Revolution

Arthur Maglin

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Hip Culture: 6 Essays on Its Revolutionary Potential. Times Change Press. New York, 1970. 63 pp. $1.25.

The Cultural Revolution: A Marxist Analysis by Irwin Silber. Times Change Press. New York, 1970. 62 pp. $1.25.

The material contained in these two pamphlets constitutes a useful resource for the study of what the youth culture is and what it means. The fact that there is not all that much agreement among the authors represented here points out the difficulties some radicals have had in figuring out this phenomenon.

In his pamphlet The Cultural Revolution and in his essay in Hip Culture, Irwin Silber takes an almost wholly negative view of the youth culture. He views it as escapism On the part of white middle-class young people. Of the 1969 Woodstock music festival, he writes: "Creating a mini-society for three days, they enacted a ritual of that revolution which the estranged young of America's White middle and upper echelons envisage as liberation." As Silber sees it, the envisaged liberation is utopian because it is anti-technological and is not to be attained through political struggle.

Pablo "Yoruba" Guzman of the Young Lords Party is in general agreement. With Silber's line of thought. He thinks the youth culture is a white thing that is counterposed to organizing for social change.

Paula Marcus, a radical high school student, thinking along the Same lines as Silber and Guzman, writes: "Hip culture broke away from previously established culture. It fell into similar ruts and prejudices that exist in the former culture." She, too, concludes that the youth culture is a diversion from struggle.

By way of contrast, George Metefsky, writing for the Yippies, takes a much more enthusiastic attitude toward the youth culture. Rather than viewing the youth culture as a diversion from revolutionary struggle, he thinks it is the essence of revolutionary struggle, needing only an extra bit of politicizing to make it perfect: "That hip culture has only slowly developed a Communist politics shows the tremendous anti-communist brainwashing in this society. But freeks have made the massive rejection of repressed behavior for free activity—of capitalist accumulation in favor of consumption 'by each according to his needs.'"

Murray Bookchin, well-known anarchist theorist, also thinks that the youth culture essentializes the priorities of social struggle: "In its demands for tribalism, free sexuality, community, mutual aid, ecstatic experience. and a balanced ecology, the Youth Culture prefigures, however inchoately, a joyous communist and classless society, freed of the trammels of hierarchy and domination, a society that would transcend the historic splits between town and country, individual and Society, and mind and body."

One of the greatest dangers to the youth culture's development, as Bookchin sees it, comes from "Bolshevik-type organizations" currently "infiltrating the Youth Culture."

Taking things from another angle the Lower East Side Women's Liberation Collective exposes the hip culture's rampant male chauvinism. AS in the society at large, from breakfast to bed, a woman's work is never done: "The hippy woman cooks, washes, cleans house, and she does it Without all the modern conveniences capitalist society has produced to 'lighten woman's load.' Preparing and cleaning up from macrobiotic meals is not much different from any other full course meal, except that it is a lot harder to fix than prepared food — like an hour and a half longer."

Viewing these essays as a whole, With the exception of this last article Which deliberately limits itself to a critique of "cool" sexism, one is struck by the fact that all of these writers tend to view the youth culture as a stable, unchanging phenomenon that must be either a diversion from or the essence of revolutionary activity. But the youth culture is neither a finished nor a stable phenomenon. The youth culture is an integral part of the combined and uneven development of the worldwide youth radicalization. It has long since ceased being—if it ever really was—a white middle-class thing. On the contrary, it is international and interracial—in this country it clearly overlaps with Black culture and for good reason.

The youth culture represents a revolt from the transmitted values of the status quo — bigotry, the authoritarian family, puritanism, money ae a way of life, militarism, self-effacing conformity in personal appearance, and so on. Many people Who start at this gut level make their way in time to Marxist revolutionary consciousness (and Murray Bookchin is right from his point of view to be worried about this phenomenon).

These two pamphlets can be ordered from Times Change Press, 1023 Sixth Ave, New York, N. Y. 10018.

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