



An excerpt and [images](#) from

# The Conquest of Cool

Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism

by Thomas Frank

Why do this kind of advertising if not to incite people to riot?—Nike copywriter, 1996

"Frequently brilliant." —  
*Publishers Weekly*

"Perhaps the most unfashionable man ever to appear in *Details*." —  
Roger Trilling, *Details*

"[Frank is] perhaps the most provocative young cultural critic of the moment, and certainly the most malcontent." — *The New York Times*

"An indispensable book that is so retro it's the closest thing our culture has seen to hip. . . . Superb and immensely readable. . . . With *The Conquest of Cool*, Frank —brilliant, excoriating and wickedly funny— assumes the mantle of the preeminent cultural critic of his generation." —  
Tom Grimes, *Houston Chronicle*

"This is a powerful and important argument. . . . *The Conquest of Cool* helps us understand why, throughout the last third of the 20th century, Americans have increasingly confused gentility with conformity, irony with protest, and an extended middle finger with a populist manifesto. . . . Frank deftly shows the myriad ways that

## of commerce and counterculture

For as long as America is torn by culture wars, the 1960s will remain the historical terrain of conflict. Although popular memories of that era are increasingly vague and generalized—the stuff of classic rock radio and commemorative television replays of the 1968 Chicago riot footage—we understand "the sixties" almost instinctively as the decade of the big change, the birthplace of our own culture, the homeland of hip, an era of which the tastes and discoveries and passions, however obscure their origins, have somehow determined the world in which we are condemned to live.

For many, the world with which "the sixties" left us is a distinctly unhappy one. While acknowledging the successes of the civil rights and antiwar movements, scholarly accounts of the decade, bearing titles like *Coming Apart* and *The Unraveling of America*, generally depict the sixties as a ten-year fall from grace, the loss of a golden age of consensus, the end of an edenic epoch of shared values and safe centrism. This vision of social decline, though, is positively rosy compared with the fire-breathing historical accusations of more recent years. For Allan Bloom, recounting with still-raw bitterness in his best-selling *The Closing of the American Mind* the student uprising and the faculty capitulation at Cornell in 1969, the misdeeds of the campus New Left were an intellectual catastrophe comparable only with the experiences of German professors under the Nazis. "So far as universities are concerned," he writes in his chapter entitled, "The Sixties," "I know of nothing positive coming from that period; it was an unmitigated disaster for them." Lines like "Whether it be Nuremberg or Woodstock, the principle is the same," and Bloom's characterization of Cornell's then-president as "of the moral stamp of those who were angry with Poland for resisting Hitler because this precipitated the war," constituted for several years the high watermark of anti-sixties bluster. But later texts topped even this.

By 1996 it had become fashionable to extend the blame for

advertising has redefined radicalism by conflating it with in-your-face consumerism. . . . His voice is an exciting addition to the soporific public discourse of the late 20th century." — Jackson Lears, *In These Times*

"Frank is a leading Gen-X cynic. His favorite target: how corporate America forces conformity on the masses." — *Newsweek*, "100 Americans for the Next Century"

You may also view reproductions of four advertisements from the 1960s discussed in *The Conquest of Cool*:

[Oldsmobile, 1961](#):  
detroit's utopian  
imagination

[Volkswagen, 1961](#):  
enter doyle dane  
bernbach

[Dodge, 1965](#): detroit  
strikes back

[Camel cigarettes, 1972](#):  
backlash

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unhappy events in the academy that Bloom heaped on "the sixties" to the demise of "civility" and, taking off from there, for virtually everything that could be said to be wrong about America generally. For Robert Bork, "the sixties" accomplished nothing less than sending America *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*: thanks to the decade's "revolutionary nihilism" and the craven "Establishment's surrender," cultural radicals "and their ideology are all around us now" (a fantasy of defeat which, although Bork doesn't seem to realize it, rephrases Jerry Rubin's 1971 fantasy of revolution, *We Are Everywhere*). Political figures on the right, waxing triumphal in the aftermath of the 1994 elections, also identify "the sixties," a term which they use interchangeably with "the counterculture," as the source of every imaginable species of the social blight from which they have undertaken to rescue the nation. Republican speechwriter Peggy Noonan puts the fall from grace directly, exhorting readers of a recent volume of conservative writing to "remember your boomer childhood in the towns and suburbs" when "you were safe" and "the cities were better," back before "society strained and cracked," in the storms of sixties selfishness. Former history professor Newt Gingrich is the most assiduous and prominent antagonist of "the sixties," imagining it as a time of "countercultural McGoverniks," whom he holds responsible not only for the demise of traditional values and the various deeds of the New Left, but (illogically and anachronistically) for the hated policies of the Great Society as well. Journalist Fred Barnes outlines a "theory of American history" related to him by Gingrich

in which the 1960s represent a crucial break, "a discontinuity." From 1607 down till 1965, "there is a core pattern to American history. Here's how we did it until the Great Society messed everything up: don't work, don't eat; your salvation is spiritual; the government by definition can't save you; governments are into maintenance and all good reforms are into transformation." Then, "from 1965 to 1994, we did strange and weird things as a country. Now we're done with that and we have to recover. The counterculture is a momentary aberration in American history that will be looked back upon as a quaint period of Bohemianism brought to the national elite."

The conservatives' version of "the sixties" is not without interest, particularly when it is an account of a given person's revulsion from the culture of an era. Their usefulness as history, however, is undermined by their insistence on understanding "the sixties" as a causal force in and of itself and their curious blurring of the lines between various historical actors: counterculture equals Great Society equals New Left equals "the sixties generation," all of them driven by some mysterious impulse to tear down Western

Civilization. Bork is particularly given to such slipshod historiography, imagining at one point that the sixties won't even stay put in the 1960s. "It was a malignant decade," he writes, "that, after a fifteen-year remission, returned in the 1980s to metastasize more devastatingly throughout our culture than it had in the Sixties, not with tumult but quietly, in the moral and political assumptions of those who now control and guide our major cultural institutions." The closest Bork, Bloom, Gingrich, and their colleagues will come to explanations is to revive one of several creaking devices: the sixties as a moral drama of millennialist utopians attempting to work their starry-eyed will in the real world, the sixties as a time of excessive affluence, the sixties as a time of imbalance in the eternal war between the generations, or the sixties as the fault of Dr. Spock, who persuaded American parents in the lost fifties to pamper their children excessively.

Despite its shortcomings, the conservatives' vision of sixties-as-catastrophe has achieved a certain popular success. Both Bloom's and Bork's books were best-sellers. And a mere mention of hippies or "the sixties" is capable of arousing in some quarters an astonishing amount of rage against what many still imagine to have been an era of cultural treason. In the white suburban Midwest, one happens so frequently across declarations of sixties- and hippie-hatred that the posture begins to seem a sort of historiographical prerequisite to being middle class and of a certain age; in the nation's politics, sixties- and hippie-bashing remains a trump card only slightly less effective than red-baiting was in earlier times. One bit of political ephemera that darkened a 1996 congressional race in south Chicago managed to appeal to both hatreds at once, tarring a Democratic candidate as the nephew of a bona fide communist *and* the choice of the still-hated California hippies, representatives of whom (including one photograph of Ken Kesey's famous bus, "Further") are pictured protesting, tripping, dancing, and carrying signs for the Democrat in question.

In mass culture, dark images of the treason and excess of the 1960s are not difficult to find. The fable of the doubly-victimized soldiers in Vietnam, betrayed first by liberals and doves in government and then spat upon by members of the indistinguishable New Left/Counterculture has been elevated to cultural archetype by the Rambo movies and has since become such a routine trope that its invocation—and the resulting outrage—requires only the mouthing of a few standard references. The exceedingly successful 1994 movie *Forrest Gump* transformed into archetype the rest of the conservatives' understanding of the decade, depicting youth movements of the sixties in a particularly malevolent light and their leaders (a demagogue modeled on Abbie Hoffman, a sinister group of Black Panthers, and an SDS commissar who is attired, after Bloom's interpretation, in a Nazi tunic) as diabolical charlatans, architects of a national madness from which the movie's characters only recover under the

benevolent presidency of Ronald Reagan.

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But stay tuned for just a moment longer and a different myth of the counterculture and its meaning crosses the screen. Regardless of the tastes of Republican leaders, rebel youth culture remains the cultural mode of the corporate

moment, used to promote not only specific products but the general idea of life in the cyber-revolution. Commercial fantasies of rebellion, liberation, and outright "revolution" against the stultifying demands of mass society are commonplace almost to the point of invisibility in advertising, movies, and television programming. For some, Ken Kesey's parti-colored bus may be a hideous reminder of national unraveling, but for Coca-Cola it seemed a perfect promotional instrument for its "Fruitopia" line, and the company has proceeded to send replicas of the bus around the country to generate interest in the counterculturally themed beverage. Nike shoes are sold to the accompaniment of words delivered by William S. Burroughs and songs by The Beatles, Iggy Pop, and Gil Scott Heron ("the revolution will not be televised"); peace symbols decorate a line of cigarettes manufactured by R. J. Reynolds and the walls and windows of Starbucks coffee shops nationwide; the products of Apple, IBM, and Microsoft are touted as devices of liberation; and advertising across the product category spectrum calls upon consumers to break rules and find themselves. The music industry continues to rejuvenate itself with the periodic discovery of new and evermore subversive youth movements and our televisual marketplace is a 24-hour carnival, a showplace of transgression and inversion of values, of humiliated patriachs and shocked puritans, of screaming guitars and concupiscent youth, of fashions that are uniformly defiant, of cars that violate convention and shoes that let us be us. A host of self-designated "corporate revolutionaries," outlining the accelerated new capitalist order in magazines like *Wired* and *Fast Company*, gravitate naturally to the imagery of rebel youth culture to dramatize their own insurgent vision. This version of the countercultural myth is so pervasive that it appears even in the very places where the historical counterculture is being maligned. Just as Newt Gingrich hails an individualistic "revolution" while tirading against the counterculture, *Forrest Gump* features a soundtrack of rock 'n' roll music, John Lennon and Elvis Presley appearing in their usual roles as folk heroes, and two carnivalesque episodes in which Gump meets heads of state, avails himself grotesquely of their official generosity (consuming fifteen bottles of White House soda in one scene), and confides to them the tribulations of his nether regions. He even bares his ass to Lyndon Johnson, perhaps the ultimate countercultural gesture.

However the conservatives may froth, this second myth comes much closer to what academics and responsible writers accept as the standard account of the decade. Mainstream culture was tepid, mechanical, and uniform; the revolt of the young against it was a joyous and even a glorious cultural flowering, though it quickly became mainstream itself. Rick Perlstein has summarized this standard version of what went on in the sixties as the "declension hypothesis," a tale in which, "as the Fifties grayly droned on, springs of contrarian sentiment began bubbling into the best minds of a generation raised in unprecedented prosperity but well versed in the existential subversions of the Beats and *Mad* magazine." The story ends with the noble idealism of the New Left in ruins and the counterculture sold out to Hollywood and the television networks.

So natural has this standard version of the countercultural myth come to seem that it required little explanation when, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the historical counterculture's greatest triumph, a group of cultural speculators and commercial backers (Pepsi-Cola prominent among them) joined forces to put on a second Woodstock. But this time the commercial overtones were just a little too pronounced, and journalists rained down abuse on the venture—not because it threatened "traditional values" but because it defiled the memory of the apotheosized original. Woodstock II was said to be a simple act of exploitation, a degraded carnival of corporate logos, endorsements, and product-placement while the 1969 festival was sentimentally recalled as an event of youthful innocence and idealistic glory.

Conflicting though they may seem, the two stories of sixties culture agree on a number of basic points. Both assume quite naturally that the counterculture was what it said it was; that is, a fundamental opponent of the capitalist order. Both foes and partisans assume, further, that the counterculture is the appropriate symbol—if not the actual historical cause—for the big cultural shifts that transformed the United States and that permanently rearranged Americans' cultural priorities. They also agree that these changes constituted a radical break or rupture with existing American mores, that they were just as transgressive and as menacing and as revolutionary as countercultural participants believed them to be. More crucial for our purposes here, all sixties narratives place the stories of the groups that are believed to have been so transgressive and revolutionary at their center; American business culture is thought to have been peripheral, if it's mentioned at all. Other than the occasional purveyor of stereotype and conspiracy theory, virtually nobody has shown much interest in telling the story of the executives or suburbanites who awoke one day to find their authority challenged and paradigms problematized. And whether the narrators of the sixties story are conservatives or radicals, they tend to assume that business represented a static, unchanging body of faiths, goals, and

practices, a background of muted, uniform gray against which the counterculture went through its colorful chapters.

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But the actual story is quite a bit messier. The cultural changes that would become identified as "counterculture" began well before 1960, with roots deep in bohemian and romantic thought, and the era of upheaval persisted long after 1970 rolled around. And while nearly every account of the decade's youth culture describes it as a reaction to the stultifying economic and

cultural environment of the postwar years, almost none have noted how that context—the world of business and of middle-class mores—was itself changing during the 1960s. The 1960s was the era of Vietnam, but it was also the high watermark of American prosperity and a time of fantastic ferment in managerial thought and corporate practice. Postwar American capitalism was hardly the unchanging and soulless machine imagined by countercultural leaders; it was as dynamic a force in its own way as the revolutionary youth movements of the period, undertaking dramatic transformations of both the way it operated and the way it imagined itself.

But business history has been largely ignored in accounts of the cultural upheaval of the 1960s. This is unfortunate, because at the heart of every interpretation of the counterculture is a very particular—and very questionable—understanding of corporate ideology and of business practice. According to the standard story, business was the monolithic bad guy who had caused America to become a place of puritanical conformity and empty consumerism; business was the great symbolic foil against which the young rebels defined themselves; business was the force of irredeemable evil lurking behind the orderly lawns of suburbia and the nefarious deeds of the Pentagon. Although there are a few accounts of the sixties in which the two are thought to be synchronized in a cosmic sense (Jerry Rubin often wrote about the joys of watching television and expressed an interest in making commercials; Tom Wolfe believes that Ken Kesey's countercultural aesthetic derived from the consumer boom of the fifties), for the vast majority of countercultural sympathizers, the only relationship between the two was one of hostility.

And from its very beginnings down to the present, business dogged the counterculture with a fake counterculture, a commercial replica that seemed to ape its every move for the titillation of the TV-watching millions and the nation's corporate

sponsors. Every rock band with a substantial following was immediately honored with a host of imitators; the 1967 "summer of love" was as much a product of lascivious television specials and *Life* magazine stories as it was an expression of youthful disaffection; Hearst launched a psychedelic magazine in 1968; and even hostility to co-optation had a desperately "authentic" shadow, documented by a famous 1968 print ad for Columbia Records titled "But The Man Can't Bust Our Music." So oppressive was the climate of national voyeurism that, as early as the fall of 1967, the San Francisco Diggers had held a funeral for "Hippie, devoted son of mass media."

This book is a study of co-optation rather than counterculture, an analysis of the forces and logic that made rebel youth cultures so attractive to corporate decision-makers rather than a study of those cultures themselves. In doing so, it risks running afoul of what I will call the co-optation theory: faith in the revolutionary potential of "authentic" counterculture combined with the notion that business mimics and mass-produces fake counterculture in order to cash in on a particular demographic and to subvert the great threat that "real" counterculture represents. *Who Built America?*, the textbook produced by the American Social History project, includes a reproduction of the now-infamous "Man Can't Bust Our Music" ad and this caption summary of co-optation theory: "If you can't beat 'em, absorb 'em." The text below explains the phenomenon as a question of demographics and savvy marketing, as a marker of the moment when "Record companies, clothing manufacturers, and other purveyors of consumer goods quickly recognized a new market." The ill-fated ad is also reproduced as an object of mockery in underground journalist Abe Peck's book on the decade and mentioned in countless other sixties narratives. Unfortunately, though, the weaknesses of this historical faith are many and critical, and the argument made in these pages tends more to stress these inadequacies than to uphold the myths of authenticity and co-optation. Apart from certain obvious exceptions at either end of the spectrum of commodification (represented, say, by the MC-5 at one end and the Monkees at the other) it was and remains difficult to distinguish precisely between authentic counterculture and fake: by almost every account, the counterculture, as a mass movement distinct from the bohemia that preceded it, was triggered at least as much by developments in mass culture (particularly the arrival of The Beatles in 1964) as changes at the grass roots. Its heroes were rock stars and rebel celebrities, millionaire performers and employees of the culture industry; its greatest moments occurred on television, on the radio, at rock concerts, and in movies. From a distance of thirty years, its language and music seem anything but the authentic populist culture they yearned so desperately to be: from contrived cursing to saintly communalism to the embarrassingly faked Woody Guthrie accents of Bob Dylan and to the astoundingly pretentious works of groups like Iron Butterfly and The Doors, the relics of

the counterculture reek of affectation and phoniness, the leisure-dreams of white suburban children like those who made up so much of the Grateful Dead's audience throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

This is a study of business thought, but in its consequences it is necessarily a study of cultural dissent as well: its promise, its meaning, its possibilities, and, most important, its limitations. And it is, above all, the story of the bohemian cultural style's trajectory from adversarial to hegemonic; the story of hip's mutation from native language of the alienated to that of advertising.

It is more than a little odd that, in this age of nuance and negotiated readings, we lack a serious history of co-optation, one that understands corporate thought as something other than a cartoon. Co-optation remains something we vilify almost automatically; the historical particulars which permit or discourage co-optation—or even the obvious fact that some things are co-opted while others are not—are simply not addressed. Regardless of whether the co-opters deserve our vilification or not, the process by which they make rebel subcultures their own is clearly an important element of contemporary life. And while the ways in which business anticipated and reacted to the youth culture of the 1960s may not reveal much about the individual experiences of countercultural participants, examining them closely does allow a more critical perspective on the phenomenon of co-optation, as well as on the value of certain strategies of cultural confrontation, and, ultimately, on the historical meaning of the counterculture.

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To begin to take co-optation seriously is instantly to discard one of the basic shibboleths of sixties historiography. As it turns out, many in American business, particularly in the two industries studied here, imagined the counterculture not as an enemy to be undermined or a threat to consumer culture but as a hopeful sign, a symbolic ally in their own struggles against the mountains of dead-weight

procedure and hierarchy that had accumulated over the years. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, leaders of the advertising and menswear businesses developed a critique of their own industries, of over-organization and creative dullness, that had much in common with the critique of mass society which gave rise to the counterculture. Like the young insurgents, people in more advanced reaches of the American corporate world deplored conformity, distrusted routine, and encouraged resistance to



established power. They welcomed the youth-led cultural revolution not because they were secretly planning to subvert it or even because they believed it would allow them to tap a gigantic youth market (although this was, of course, a factor), but because they perceived in it a comrade in their own struggles to revitalize American business and the consumer order generally. If American capitalism can be said to have spent the 1950s dealing in conformity and consumer fakery, during the decade that followed, it would offer the public authenticity, individuality, difference, and rebellion.

If we really want to understand American culture in the sixties, we must acknowledge at least the possibility that the co-opters had it right, that Madison Avenue's vision of the counterculture was in some ways correct.



## hip consumerism

Advertising and menswear, the two industries with which this book are directly concerned, were deeply caught up in both the corporate and cultural changes that defined the sixties. The story in men's clothing is simple enough and is often cited as an indicator of changing times along with movies, novels, and popular music: the fifties are remembered, rather stereotypically, as a time of gray flannel dullness, while the sixties were an era of sartorial gaudiness. The change in the nation's advertising is less frequently remembered as one of the important turning points between the fifties and sixties, but the changes here were, if anything, even more remarkable, more significant, and took place slightly earlier than those in music and youth culture. Both industries were on the cutting edge of the shifts in corporate practice in the 1960s, and both were also conspicuous users of countercultural symbolism—they were, if you will, the leading lights of "co-optation."

But both industries' reaction to youth culture during the sixties was more complex than that envisioned by the co-optation theory. Both menswear and advertising were paralyzed by similar problems in the 1950s: they suffered from a species of creative doldrums, an inability to move beyond the conventions they had invented for themselves and to tap into that wellspring of American economic dynamism that *Fortune* called "the permanent revolution." Both industries underwent "revolutions" in their own right during the 1960s, with vast changes in corporate practice, in productive flexibility, and especially in that intangible phenomenon known as "creativity"—and in both cases well before the counterculture appeared on the mass-media scene. In the decade that followed, both industries found a similar solution

to their problems: a commercial version of the mass society theory that made of alienation a motor for fashion. Seeking a single metaphor by which to characterize the accelerated obsolescence and enhanced consumer friendliness to change which were their goals, leaders in both fields had already settled on "youth" and "youthfulness" several years before saturation TV and print coverage of the "summer of love" introduced middle America to the fabulous new lifestyles of the young generation.

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Then, in 1967 and 1968, advertising and menswear executives seized upon the counterculture as the preeminent symbol of the revolution in which they were engaged, embellishing both their trade literature and their products with images of rebellious, individualistic youth. While leaders of both industries appreciated the

demographic bonanza that the baby boom represented, their concentration on the symbols of first youth and then culture-rebel owed more to new understandings of consumption and business culture than to a desire to sell the kids. The counterculture served corporate revolutionaries as a projection of the new ideology of business, a living embodiment of attitudes that reflected their own. In its hostility to established tastes, the counterculture seemed to be preparing young people to rebel against whatever they had patronized before and to view the cycles of the new without the suspicion of earlier eras. Its simultaneous craving for authenticity and suspicion of tradition seemed to make the counterculture an ideal vehicle for a vast sea-change in American consuming habits. Through its symbols and myths, leaders of the menswear and advertising industries imagined a consumerism markedly different from its 1950s permutation, a hip consumerism driven by disgust with mass society itself.

Capitalism was entering the space age in the sixties, and Organization Man was a drag not only as a parent, but as an executive. The old values of caution, deference, and hierarchy drowned creativity and denied flexibility; they enervated not only the human spirit but the consuming spirit and the entrepreneurial spirit as well. And when business leaders cast their gaze onto the youth culture bubbling around them, they saw both a reflection of their own struggle against the stifling bureaucracy of the past and an affirmation of a dynamic new consuming order that would replace the old. For these business thinkers, the cultural revolution that has come to be symbolized by the counterculture seemed an affirmation of their own revolutionary faiths, a reflection of their own struggles to call their corporate colleagues into step with the

chaotic and frenetically changing economic universe.

The revolutions in menswear and advertising—as well as the larger revolution in corporate thought—ran out of steam when the great postwar prosperity collapsed in the early 1970s. In a larger sense, though, the corporate revolution of the 1960s never ended. In the early 1990s, while the nation was awakening to the realities of the hyperaccelerated global information economy, the language of the business revolution of the sixties (and even some of the individuals who led it) made a triumphant return. Although on the surface menswear seemed to have settled back into placidity, the reputation of the designers and creative rebels who made their first appearance during the decade of revolt were at their zenith in the 1990s; men's clothes were again being presented to the public as emblems of nonconformity; and the magazines which most prominently equated style with rebellion (*Details* and *GQ*, the latter of which had been founded at the opening of the earlier revolution in 1957) were enjoying great success. The hottest advertising agencies of the late 1980s and early 1990s were, again, the small creative firms; a new company of creative rebels came to dominate the profession; and advertising that offered to help consumers overcome their alienation, to facilitate their nonconformity, and which celebrated rule-breaking and insurrection became virtually ubiquitous. Most important, the corporate theory of the 1990s makes explicit references to sixties management theory and the experiences of the counterculture. Like the laid-back executives who personify it, the ideology of information capitalism is a child of the 1960s; the intervening years of the 1970s and 1980s may have delayed the revolution, but they hardly defused its urgency.

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Placing the culture of the 1960s in this corporate context does little to support any of the standard countercultural myths, nor does it affirm the consensual notion of the 1960s as a time of fundamental cultural confrontation. It suggests instead that the counterculture may be more

accurately understood as a stage in the development of the values of the American middle class, a colorful installment in the twentieth century drama of consumer subjectivity. This is not, of course, a novel interpretation: in the 1960s and 1970s it was a frequent plaint among writers who insisted that the counterculture was apolitical and self-indulgent, or, when it did spill over into obviously political manifestations, confused and anarchistic. This critique of cultural liberation even extends back to the late 1950s, when Delmore Schwartz reacted to the rise of the Beats by pointing out that the attack of the "san francisco howlers" on "the

conformism of the organization man, the advertising executive, the man in the grey flannel suit, or the man in the brooks brothers suit" was

a form of shadow boxing because the Man in the Brooks Brothers suit is himself, in his own home, very often what [Bertrand] Russell has called an upper Bohemian. His conformism is limited to the office day and business hours: in private life—and at heart—he is as Bohemian as anyone else.

Michael Harrington described the counterculture in 1972 as a massification of the bohemia in which he had spent his youth, an assumption of the values of Greenwich Village by the decidedly nonrevolutionary middle class. "i wonder if the mass counterculture may not be a reflection of the very hyped and video-taped world it professes to despise," he wrote.

Bohemia could not survive the passing of its polar opposite and precondition, middle-class morality. Free love and all-night drinking and art for art's sake were consequences of a single stern imperative: thou shalt not be bourgeois. But once the bourgeoisie itself became decadent—once businessmen started hanging nonobjective art in the boardroom—Bohemia was deprived of the stifling atmosphere without which it could not breathe.

Others understood the counterculture explicitly in terms of accelerating consumer culture and the crisis in corporate thought. "having professed their disdain for middle-class values," wrote novelist and adman Earl Shorris in 1967, "the hippies indulge in them without guilt." Shorris envisioned the counterculture not as a movement promising fundamental transformation but as an expression of a solidly middle-class dream:

The preponderance of hippies come from the middle class, because it is there even among adults that the illusion of the hippies' joy, free love, purity and drug excitement is strongest. A man grown weary of singing company songs at I.B.M. picnics, feeling guilty about the profits he has made on defense stocks, who hasn't really loved his wife for 10 years, must admire, envy and wish for a life of love and contemplation, a simple life leading to a beatific peace. He soothes his despair with the possibility that the hippies have found the answers to problems he does not dare to face.

In a famously cynical essay that appeared in *Ramparts* in 1967,

Warren Hinckle pointed out that, for all the rhetoric of alienation, the inhabitants of the Haight-Ashbury were "brand name conscious" and "frantic consumers."

In this commercial sense, the hippies have not only accepted assimilation . . . , they have swallowed it whole. The hippie culture is in many ways a prototype of the most ephemeral aspects of the larger American society; if the people looking in from the suburbs want change, clothes, fun, and some lightheadedness from the new gypsies, the hippies are delivering—and some of them are becoming rich hippies because of it.

Looking back in 1974, Marshall Berman directly equated "cultural liberation" in the sixties sense with dynamic economic growth. Andrew Ross pointed out in 1989 that this curiously ambivalent relationship with consumerism has always been the defining characteristic of hip: an "essentially agnostic cult of style worship," hip is concerned more with "advanced knowledge about the illegitimate," and staying one step ahead of the consuming crowd than with any "ideology of good community faith." Nor did those who were the counterculture's putative enemies feel that it posed much of a threat to the core values of consumer capitalism. On the contrary, they found that it affirmed those values in certain crucial ways, providing American business with a system of easy symbols with which they could express their own needs and solve the intractable cultural problems they had encountered during the 1950s.

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The counterculture has long since outlived the enthusiasm of its original participants and become a more or less permanent part of the American scene, a symbolic and musical language for the endless cycles of rebellion and transgression that make up so much of our mass culture. With leisure-time activities of consuming redefined as "rebellion," two of late capitalism's great problems

could easily be met: obsolescence found a new and more convincing language, and citizens could symbolically resolve the contradiction between their role as consumers and their role as producers. The countercultural style has become a permanent fixture on the American scene, impervious to the angriest assaults of cultural and political conservatives, because it so conveniently

and efficiently transforms the myriad petty tyrannies of economic life—all the complaints about conformity, oppression, bureaucracy, meaninglessness, and the disappearance of individualism that became virtually a national obsession during the 1950s—into rationales for consuming. No longer would Americans buy to fit in or impress the Joneses, but to demonstrate that they were wise to the game, to express their revulsion with the artifice and conformity of consumerism. The enthusiastic discovery of the counterculture by the branches of American business studied here marked the consolidation of a new species of hip consumerism, a cultural perpetual motion machine in which disgust with the falseness, shoddiness, and everyday oppressions of consumer society could be enlisted to drive the ever-accelerating wheels of consumption.

Both of the industries studied here are often written about in quasi-conspiratorial terms. Many Americans apparently believe advertising works because it contains magic "subliminals"; others sneer at fashion as an insidious plot orchestrated by a Paris-New York cabal. Both ideas are interesting popular variations on the mass society/consumerism-as-conformity critique. But this book makes no attempt to resolve the perennial question of exactly how much the garment industries control fashion trends. Obviously the Fairchild company is unable to trick the public into buying whatever look it chooses to launch in one of the myriad magazines it owns, but it is hardly conspiracy-mongering to study the company's attempts to do so. Nor does this book seek to settle the debate over whether advertising causes cultural change or reflects it: obviously it does a great deal of both. Business leaders are not dictators scheming to defraud the nation, but neither are they the mystic diviners of the public will that they claim (and that free-market theory holds them) to be. I am assuming here that the thoughts and worries and ecstasies of business leaders are worth studying regardless of the exact quantity of power they exert over the public mind. Whether the cultural revolution of the 1960s was the product of conspiracy, popular will, or the movement of market or dialectic, the thinking of corporate America is essential in judging its historical meaning.

This study is not concerned with the counterculture as a historical phenomenon as much as it is concerned with the genesis of counterculture as an enduring commercial myth, the titanic symbolic clash of hip and square that recurs throughout post-sixties culture. On occasion, the myth is phrased in the overt language of the historical counterculture (Woodstock II, for example); but for the most part the subject here is the rise of a general corporate style, phrased in terms of whatever the youth culture of the day happens to be, that celebrates both a kind of less-structured, faster-moving corporation and that also promotes consumer resistance to the by-now well-known horrors of conformist consumerism. Today hip is ubiquitous as a commercial

style, a staple of advertising that promises to deliver the consumer from the dreary nightmare of square consumerism. Hip is also the vernacular of the much-hyped economic revolution of the 1990s, an economic shift whose heroes are written up by none other than the *New York Times Magazine* as maximum revolutionaries: artists rather than commanders, wearers of ponytails and dreamers of cowboy fantasies who proudly proclaim their ignorance of "rep ties."

The questions that surround the counterculture are enormous ones, and loaded as they are with such mythical importance to both countercultural participants and their foes, they are often difficult to consider dispassionately. Furthermore, the critique of mass society embraced by the counterculture still holds a profound appeal: young people during the 1960s were confronting the same problems that each of us continues to confront every day, and they did so with a language and style that still rings true for many. This study is, in some ways, as much a product of countercultural suspicion of consumerism as are the ads and fashions it evaluates. The story of the counterculture—and of insurgent youth culture generally—now resides somewhere near the center of our national self-understanding, both as the focus of endless new generations of collective youth-liberation fantasies and as the sort of cultural treason imagined by various reactionaries. And even though countercultural sympathizers are willing to recognize that co-optation is an essential aspect of youth culture, they remain reluctant to systematically evaluate business thinking on the subject, to ask how this most anticommercial youth movement of them all became the symbol for the accelerated capitalism of the sixties and the nineties, or to hold the beloved counterculture to the harsh light of historical and economic scrutiny. It is an intellectual task whose time has come.

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