

Counterculture
Through the Ages

FROM ABRAHAM TO ACID HOUSE

KEN GOFFMAN [A. K. A. R. U. SIRIUS]

AND DAN JOY

FOREWORD BY TIMOTHY LEARY

VILLARD



NEW YORK

2005 Villard Books Trade Paperback Edition

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Published in the United States by Villard Books, an imprint of The Random House Publishing Group, a division of Random House, Inc., New York.

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Originally published in hardcover in the United States by Villard Books, an imprint of The Random House Publishing Group, a division of Random House, Inc., in 2004.

Acknowledgments of permission to reprint previously published material can be found on page 403.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sirius, R. U.

Counterculture through the ages : from Abraham to acid house / Ken Goffman a.k.a. R.U. Sirius with Dan Joy ; foreword by Timothy Leary.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8129-7475-1

1. Counterculture—History. I. Joy, Dan. II. Title.

HM647.S57 2004

306'.1—dc22

2004041910

Printed in the United States of America

www.villard.com

9 8 7 6 5 4 3

Text design by Kate H. Kim-Centra

FROM KEN:

*To my fiancée, Eve Berni,
without whom the sun would go out.*

*To the late Rosemary Woodruff Leary,
who helped make this possible.*

*To my departed father and very-much-alive mother,
Arnold and Roberta: freethinkers.*

*To St. Jude, my brilliant, funny writing partner on so many
projects—RIP.*

FROM DAN:

*To Cate Leggett and Randi Mates, who helped me;
and to Timothy Leary, who showed me.*

*This book could not have happened if not for the late
Kathy Acker; James Fasci; Douglas Goffman; Harriett Joy;
David Latimer; our wonderfully supportive editor, Bruce Tracy;
and our agent extraordinaire, Laurie Fox.*

ASSISTANT DEVELOPER:

Leon Fernandez

WRITING ASSISTANCE:

Gracie and Zarkov

*Additional thanks to: Lenny Bailes, Ben Ballard, John Perry
Barlow, Will Block, Claire Burch, the Linda Chester Literary
Agency, Michael Coblenz, Allen Cohen, Helen Donlon,
Benjamin Feen, Steve Follmer, Norman Girardot,
Evan Gourvitz, Michael Horowitz, Peter Hudson, Jason Keehn,
Alison Kennedy, Beth Kennedy, Phil Leggiere, Linda Lowrance,
Sharon Martin, Walter Miles, Jay Schwartz, Dan Sieradski,
Jeremy Tarcher, and Peter Lamborn Wilson.*

✚ FOREWORD

Timothy Leary

Note: This foreword is not a message from beyond the grave, but rather one of Timothy Leary's last pieces of writing, composed when work on the conception of this book first began.

Counterculture blooms wherever and whenever a few members of a society choose lifestyles, artistic expressions, and ways of thinking and being that wholeheartedly embrace the ancient axiom that the only true constant is change itself. The mark of counterculture is not a particular social form or structure, but rather the evanescence of forms and structures, the dazzling rapidity and flexibility with which they appear, mutate, and morph into one another and disappear.

Counterculture is the moving crest of a wave, a zone of uncertainty where culture goes quantum. To borrow the language of Nobel Prize-winning physicist Ilya Prigogine, counterculture is the cultural equivalent of the "third thermodynamic state," the "nonlinear region" where equilibrium and symmetry have given way to a complexity so intense as to appear to the eye as chaos.

Participants in a counterculture thrive in this zone of turbulence. It is their native medium, the only clay malleable enough to be shaped and reshaped fast enough to keep pace with the flashing of their inner visions.

They are adepts of flux, chaos engineers, migrating in step with the ever-traveling wavefront of maximum change.

In counterculture, social structures are spontaneous and transient. Participants in countercultures are constantly clustering into new molecules, fissioning and regrouping into configurations appropriate to the interests of the moment, like particles jostling in a high-energy accelerator, exchanging dynamic charge. In these configurations they reap the benefits of exchanging ideas and innovations through fast feedback in small groups, affording a synergy that allows their thoughts and visions to grow and mutate almost the instant they are formulated.

Counterculture lacks formal structure and formal leadership. In one sense it is leaderless; in another sense, it is leader-full, all of its participants constantly innovating, pushing into new territory where others may eventually follow.

Counterculture may be found in (sometimes uneasy) alliances with radical, even revolutionary political groups and insurrectionary forces, and the memberships of countercultures and such groups often overlap.

But the focus of counterculture is the power of ideas, images, and artistic expression, not the acquisition of personal and political power. Thus, minority, alternative, and radical political parties are not themselves countercultures. While many countercultural memes have political implications, the seizure and maintenance of political power requires adherence to structures too inflexible to accommodate the innovation and exploration that are basic to the countercultural *raison d'être*. Organization and institution are anathema to counterculture.

Counterculture—as this book demonstrates—is a perennial phenomenon, probably as old as civilization, and possibly as old as culture itself. In fact, many of the figures who have come to occupy prominent positions in the schoolbooks—from Socrates to Jesus, Galileo, Martin Luther, and Mark Twain—were countercultural in their time.

This book addresses the question “What is counterculture?” and outlines the common themes that weave through countercultures in different times and different places. It also describes the important roles as catalysts of change that countercultures have played in the development of mainstream cultures, showing the ways that culture-at-large emerges from counterculture.

These discussions serve as points of reference in a colorful romp through a crowd of countercultures from Taoism to acid house. I hope that you read and enjoy this book, and that it inspires you to live out the countercultural message of individuality, courage, and creativity with your own personal splendor and glory.

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PREFACE

One beautiful day at the very height of his conquest of the Mediterranean world, Alexander the Great was abroad in the countryside surrounding Athens—which had just surrendered to his forces—surveying the rolling sunlit landscape wrapped around the city that was for him the shining jewel of the vast domain he now controlled.

In the course of this enjoyment, Alexander came upon a man relaxing beside a stream. Basking in the afternoon glow, the man was so absorbed in some kind of bucolic trance that he was clearly indifferent to both the conqueror's presence and the tumult that had freshly engulfed the nearby city. Alexander immediately recognized the man and approached him, saying, "I am Alexander. Is there anything that I may do for you?"

The man lazily opened his eyes, looked up, and replied: "Yes. Get out of my light."

Who was this man, for whom the newly ascended ruler of the known world would interrupt his hour of glory to humbly offer service—only to receive such a casually dismissive response?

The man beside the stream was Diogenes—both a renowned playwright and an utterly impoverished, eccentric Athenian troublemaker with no fixed residence. Diogenes lived out-of-doors, frequenting the streets and public areas of Athens and habitually unsettling its citizens with his

sometimes coarse but always brilliantly iconoclastic humor and impish pranks. Famous throughout the Greek world for his aphoristic wisdom and dramaturgic accomplishments, he was also a leading light of the Socratic movement, a Greek counterculture destined to change the face of the Western world forever.

Diogenes' response to Alexander—"Get out of my light"—typifies the attitude of countercultures throughout time to imposed authority: it blocks the light.

The light—the shining forth of unfettered individual expression, the radiant effulgence of human creativity unchained from external agendas and controls. The light—the brilliance released when, individually and especially collectively, human beings freely partake of inner and outer resources to shape their world according to the dictates of the authentic self. And the numinous glow of the world itself in the eyes of those who exercise this kind of freedom.

Had Alexander refused to get out of Diogenes' light, the philosopher-playwright would have been far more likely to pick himself up and move out of the conqueror's shadow than to engage him in fisticuffs. For if Diogenes had responded to the severing of his beloved sunbeam by attempting to vanquish the one who had severed it, the sun—as Diogenes had the wisdom to know—might well have set before the conflict was resolved.

The foremost aim of countercultures is not, therefore, to seize or dismantle the reins of external control or to wage war against those who hold them—although countercultures may passionately participate in such endeavors at times. Rather, countercultures seek primarily to live with as much freedom from constraints on individual creative will as possible, wherever and however it is possible to do so. And when people exercise this kind of freedom with commitment and vigor, they unblock the light so that subsequent generations may bask in its glow.

TRADITION WITHOUT CONVENTION

I deliberately chose to break with traditions in order to be more true to Tradition than current conventions and ideas would permit. The most vital course is usually the rougher one and lies through conventions oftentimes

settled into laws that must be broken, with consequent liberation of other forces that cannot stand freedom. So a break of this nature is a thing dangerous, nevertheless indispensable to society. Society recognizes the danger and makes the break usually fatal to the man who makes it. It should not be made without reckoning the danger and sacrifice, without the ability to stand severe punishment, nor without sincere faith that the end will justify the means, nor do I believe it can be effectively made without all these.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

Counterculture's lasting impact on history has all too often been dictated by the adoption of its symbols, artifacts, and practices by mainstream culture in a manner that brutally severs them from their source in living experience. Nevertheless, the historical traces left by countercultures can be identified by looking at history with an understanding of counterculture's essence. Reading the cultural record in this way offers an endless source of inspiration, information, and affirmation, allowing countercultures to derive abundant fuel from earlier historical epochs and figures.

Counterculture is "the cutting edge" by definition, but it is also a kind of tradition. It is the tradition of breaking with tradition, or crashing through the conventions of the present to open a window onto that deeper dimension of human possibility that is the perennial wellspring of the truly new—and truly great—in human expression and endeavor. As such, counterculture may be a tradition that predates and initiates almost all other traditions.

THREE CORDS OF CONNECTION

Three distinct strands of connection weave the motley array of countercultures into a continuous tradition: *direct contact*, *indirect contact*, and *resonance*. The first two are obvious pathways along which ideas, influence, and inspiration are transmitted from one culture to another, while the third involves a more subtle and mysterious kind of link between cultures.

DIRECT CONTACT

The most powerful and obvious type of connection between countercultures is direct contact. Here, participants in one counterculture interact directly with participants in another, opening pathways of communication that encourage individuality and magnify the countercultural impulse.

Direct contact is prominent in the historical impact of Sufism, the Islamic counterculture that provides the focus for Chapter 6. Through direct contact with Sufis at the interface of Islamic and Christian cultures in Western Europe, the troubadours learned the art of testifying to love's primacy in verse and song—a practice that became the hallmark of Christendom's most transcendently erotic heresy. Influenced by meetings with Sufi "Illuminates," Friar Roger Bacon subverted the religious authority of his time by laying the groundwork for the "scientific method." Contact with Sufi exemplars also inspired St. Francis of Assisi in espousing a radically pacifistic Christianity during that religion's most violent epoch.

Direct contact also comes into play throughout the twentieth century. Key participants in the European avant-garde movements mingled face-to-face with American writers in the bookstores, salons, and studios of Paris, helping to catalyze the Lost Generation literary movement. A few decades later, many participants in the youth countercultures of the 1960s were inspired and instructed in person by several of the Lost Generation's "beatnik" literary heirs.

INDIRECT CONTACT

Influence and inspiration are also passed from one counterculture to another through indirect—or mediated—contact. Here, one counterculture inseminates another across the reaches of time by way of artworks, records, and legends. In the last one hundred years, as countercultures have proliferated at an unprecedented rate and ease of access to the planetary storehouse of thought and image has evolved to cybernetic levels, this strand of connection between countercultures has begun to fold back on itself with dazzling intensity.

While not charged with the vitality and immediacy of direct contact, mediated contact has been primary in shaping the ideational content of

countercultures. Plato, whose philosophic journey was launched by his involvement with the Socratic counterculture of ancient Greece, left behind a substantial written legacy. Since then, various permutations of Neoplatonic thought have served as a focus for a variety of countercultures, from the Gnosticism of the early Christians to the Transcendentalism of nineteenth-century New England. And in the twentieth century, poet Ezra Pound's writing revived the Sufi-inflected legacy of the troubadours and passed it along to the literary counterculture of the Lost Generation. In all of these examples, an earlier countercultural tradition is revived and a later one shaped and informed through the medium of indirect contact.

RESONANCE

The third connective thread of countercultural continuity is a kind of resonance whose source is a mystery. This is the often compelling similarity of ideas, artistic products, paths of development, and ways of living that occurs between countercultures for which there is no evidence of contact, direct or indirect. The phenomenon of resonance is prominent in congruences between the earliest countercultures discussed at length in these pages, those of the Socratics and the Taoists. Though separated by half the globe's circumference, these philosophic movements appeared at very nearly the same time and were remarkably parallel in their early development.

More than two thousand years later, the life and work of prototypical American counterculturalist Henry David Thoreau resonated strongly with Taoism. As Alan Watts pointed out, Thoreau's particular flavor of anarchism, his pantheism, and his embrace of nature all demonstrated a distinctly Taoist character. Although Thoreau, like other Transcendentalists, immersed himself in Eastern philosophies such as Hinduism and Vedanta, there is no evidence that he studied Taoism. The striking coincidence between Taoism and Thoreau's Transcendentalism can therefore be ascribed only to resonance.

As Thomas Jefferson's writings demonstrate, the revolutionary counterculture of the New World drew significant inspiration and guidance from ways of living and governance practiced by indigenous American peoples. In fact, the Articles of Confederation were structured after a na-

tive intertribal agreement. A plethora of the countercultural groups that flourished on the same soil two centuries later during the countercultural explosion of the sixties turned to this same source, loosely modeling tribal living experiments and even modes of dress on Native American custom. It seems unlikely, however, that the widespread enthusiasm among sixties counterculturalists for indigenous American culture somehow took its cues from documents penned by the Founding Fathers. The similarity is once again a matter of resonance.

The key to understanding otherwise mysterious resonances between spatially and temporally disparate countercultures may be the deep, defining values that countercultures share. These values, along with other characteristics that countercultures have in common, are laid forth in Chapter 2.

PREFACE

Part I of *Counterculture Through the Ages* begins by examining the ancient tales of Prometheus and Abraham. These stories tell us a great deal about the motivations that drive countercultures and the roles they play in culture-at-large. Part I then moves on to identify counterculture's defining elements.

Part II is a chronological account of key countercultures that surfaced from 500 B.C.E. through the early twentieth century, beginning with the movement initiated by Socrates in ancient Greece and concluding with the early-twentieth-century Paris bohemia that produced Cubism, Dadaism, the "Lost Generation," and the one-man alternative language generator named James Joyce (and still other art/cultural trends). Each counterculture discussed in Part II wielded an influence that unrolled across time to achieve tremendous geographic breath.

Part III surveys the thrilling profusion of countercultures that blossomed in the late twentieth century, from the post-Hiroshima stirrings of America's fifties hipsters to the cyberpunks and anti-globalization activists of the 1990s.

SCRATCHING THE SURFACE

As an examination of world countercultures, counterculturalists, and their significance to history, *Counterculture Through the Ages* is necessarily in-

complete. Countercultures of some type and magnitude have most likely sprung up in almost every region of the world during almost all epochs of history. Likewise, many isolated individuals with countercultural values and inclinations—in other words, lone counterculturalists—have done important and influential work despite the absence of a supportive countercultural group. It would be nearly impossible to note, within the narrative structure of a single book, every counterculture or counterculturalist that has left a historical trace.

The authors have made many difficult—and, at times, somewhat arbitrary—choices that exclude important countercultural groups and figures. It could easily be argued that many of those left out—from the forest-dwelling sages and early Tantric heretics of ancient India to the towering nineteenth-century American iconoclast Mark Twain—are as important as those that have been included. In a sense, this book can only scratch the surface of its subject without turning into an encyclopedia of brief entries.

A major criterion for including countercultures was their likely familiarity to a broad contemporary readership. The authors assumed that many readers would welcome the truly fresh angle on familiar movements and figures—from Socrates to the beats—provided by the unique framework of world counterculture's progression through time. To the reader disappointed to discover that his or her favorite instance of counterculture is absent from this book, the authors offer their hope that he or she encounters within these pages several rewarding expressions of creativity, courage, and vision closely reflecting the figure or group excluded.

OF LEGACIES AND LIVES

The true poem is not that which the public read. There is always a poem not printed on paper, coincident with the production of this, stereotyped in the poet's life. It is what he has become through his work. Not how the idea is expressed in stone, or on canvas or paper, is the question, but how far it has obtained form and expression in the life of the artist. His true work will not stand in any prince's gallery.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Although revolutionary novelty in art, thinking, or spirituality turns out more often than not to have arisen from a countercultural milieu, bold innovation—no matter how contrary to the status quo—does not itself a counterculture make. Authentic counterculture is driven by an impulse even deeper than the desire to innovate or to overturn conventions.

Counterculture cannot be crafted or produced: it must be lived. Where counterculture prizes pushing the boundaries of art, it prizes even more approaching life as an ongoing artistic experiment. Where counterculture values novel thinking, it strives most to express that ideation in the action of the moment. Where counterculture embraces spirit, it does not settle for periodic acknowledgment of divinity through the repetition of some arbitrary gesture, but instead attempts to live each day as a constant, dynamic expression of spirit itself. The artifacts of a particular counterculture are by-products, not end-products, of countercultural living.

For this reason, *Counterculture Through the Ages* emphasizes telling stories as much as analyzing artworks, ideas, and beliefs. Some of the stories included in this book are well documented—Thoreau's experiments in living; the complicated but fertile social interactions of Sylvia Beach, James Joyce, and Ezra Pound; the antics of the Merry Pranksters. Other anecdotes recounted herein are apocryphal in origin—the wry, subversive teaching tales of the Taoist, Zen, and Sufi traditions; the romantic legends left in the troubadours' wake. Both kinds of tale help connect us to the lives that lie beneath the legacies.

It is stories—of those who formed and participated in countercultures; of how such people coexisted, created, risked, dared, sacrificed, succeeded, and failed—that best reveal the living source from which countercultural legacies arise. The trial of Socrates tells us more about the essence of counterculture than Plato's lengthy exfoliations and systematizations of Socratic thought; Timothy Leary's approach to his own death tells us far more than academic manuals on how to use LSD.

The distinction at issue here—the lives of people versus the cultural legacies that their lives produce—highlights the distinction between the formal and informal definitions of the word "culture" itself. Formally, *culture* refers to the beliefs, customs, habits, and mores by which people live, along with the idioms of art and craft that they employ. The word is also used, less formally but perhaps more frequently, to refer to the people them-

selves, to the individuals, groups, and societies that generate, perpetuate—and sometimes reject—these practices and traditions.

Counterculture Through the Ages encompasses both definitions of culture. While this book tells stories, it also examines modes of custom, systems of belief, and forms of art. But by emphasizing culture's less formal definition, this book seeks to tap the living essence of the cultural episodes it explores.

DAN JOY
6/23/2003

† Dis/OrIENTATION

First of all, thanks to Timothy and Dan for those *too-damned-optimistic* introductions. Like the proverbial fool in many countercultural tales of yore, I have charged headlong into the onrushing chaotic stream of human history armed only with your beautiful visions and maps.

Yes, I set out to knit a lovely symmetrical quilt from the many-colored yarn of these widely varying cultural epochs, hoping finally then to find a shapely finished object whose coherence would be clear to even the meanest intelligence.

But goddamn it, people are funny—and I mean *unintentionally* as well. Oh my maties, the things I found still make me shudder in awe. Great people, smart people, hip people, wildly creative people, flagrantly engaged not only in transformative works but in extravagant folly and contradiction; leaving behind them not just a legacy of spirited runs at authentic countercultural autonomy, but a plethora of unanswered questions. By the god(s), be they dead or alive, they were all human—all too human. And would we have it any other way?

And as for you, dear reader? I can only humbly request that, as you enter this historical narrative, you leave your expectations at the door. You can pick them up unaffected, if you wish, at the end of the trip.

There are many types waiting on line here, and I believe that you will

all find many things inside worthy of your interest and attention. But hear me out: as I was writing this over the past two years, I told any number of people the title. As often as not, someone would tell me excitedly about some really obscure, eXXXtreme subculture, usually involving the word “tantric.” Among the charms ascribed to these cultures was the fact that they did things like eat brains, or bite the heads off bats and drink their blood. (Insert cheap Ozzy joke here.)

This is not a friggin’ freak show, people! While a book about such cultural phenomena does hold a profound fascination for this author (no, I’m not being ironic), this particular work is about cultures whose impact has been more widely distributed. And this point goes also to the style and intent of this book. Sure, I want the hippest of the hipsters—you know, the ones with pictures of Antonin Artaud and Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme on their computer monitors—to find value in this book. But my most treasured hope is that it speaks to ordinary people who have been influenced or impacted by “the counterculture”; that it holds some interest for those who argue *against* counterculture; and finally that it is accessible to the curious, who may not even know what the word represents.

In doing this, I have mostly resisted an urge to engage in the sort of scholarly inquisitions, so popular over the last few decades, that put into doubt our common understandings of certain words that I use frequently in this text, such as individuality and liberty. I don’t necessarily reject the value of those discourses, but I’ve deigned them at least impractical for this disquisition. So if your idea of the Fab Four is Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, and Lacan, you may find these proceedings a bit jejune.

Okay, now that some of my readers’ hipster expectations have been appropriately muted, we can proceed. Welcome to the first-ever history of countercultures.

Dan Joy came up with the idea for this book in 1994 in the course of conversations with Timothy Leary, whose later work in particular provided inspiration for key ideas. Dan developed most of the outline and conceptual foundations for this book and contributed about two chapters as well as other crucial prose passages to the final work. Leon Fernandez provided invaluable input on the outline, selection of countercultures, and basic ideas. I also contributed to the outline and articulation of key concepts, taking over full responsibility for the project in 2001 when it was con-

tracted with the publisher. Gracie and Zarkov contributed a few lines and paragraphs to Chapter 1 and Chapter 8, and Dan rejoined the project for the final round of editorial work. I’m responsible for a large majority of the writing and the specific perspectives expressed therein.

So: when the first-person pronoun “I” is used, it refers to me (R.U. Sirius), and when “we” is used, it refers to Joy and myself. Also, when it comes to gender pronouns like “his” or “her,” I like to just mix them up. Sometimes I’ll refer to the generic person in the masculine and sometimes in the feminine. Get over it.

KEN GOFFMAN A.K.A. R. U. SIRIUS

6/23/2003

Part I
THE MAKINGS OF
COUNTERCULTURES

CHAPTER ONE

ABRAHAM AND PROMETHEUS

Mythic Counterculture Rebels

THE MYTHIC COUNTERCULTURES

A new mythology is possible in the Space Age, where we will again have heroes . . . as regards intention towards this Planet.

WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS, 1978

To hell with facts! We need stories!

KEN KESEY, 1987

Myth is as important to counterculturalists as historical fact, and perhaps more poignant. Avant-garde by nature, most countercultures engage the imaginal and the ideal, as well as the real. In his book *Untimely Meditation: On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Human Life* (1874), nineteenth-century Promethean philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche even suggested that we should eschew history in favor of myth. For Nietzsche, myth created feelings of spiritual community. History deadened such feelings.

With a few exceptions (possibly including our current historical moment), countercultures have been inspired, optimistic, one might say mythical historical episodes. Whenever people courageously and passionately engage in rule-challenging behaviors that attempt to liberate humans from oppressive limitations (or limitations *perceived* as being oppressive), excitement, conflict, and scandal—and therefore engaging stories—are sure to follow. And while modernist and postmodern novelists have shown us that stories can be constructed out of the most ordinary lives—indeed out of banality itself—*myths* emerge from heroism, whether victorious or defeated, whether lived or imagined. Sometimes by design, often by accident, countercultures—even such renunciate, contemplationist countercultures as the Taoists, Zen Buddhists, and Transcendentalists (as we shall later see)—produce legendary heroes who sometimes rise to the level of myth.

In Prometheus and Abraham, we have two of the West's most resonantly countercultural myths. Prometheus is pure story—part of the pantheon of Greek gods—while the narrative of the Tribe of Abraham probably has at least some basis in historical fact.

Although I briefly discuss the possible historic Abraham, I am primarily viewing these apocryphal tales as myths, fulfilling their function as two different rebel archetypes whose styles and trials we still find manifested in countercultures today.

PROMETHEUS: THE HACKER GOD

Prometheus stole fire from the gods on behalf of mankind. That's all some youthful hacker outlaws today need know to inspire them to adapt Prometheus as their icon, and to adapt the Greek deity's name for their online monikers.

The actual Greek myth is a bit more complex. In a reductionist nutshell: Prometheus is a Greek god of Olympus, ruled by Zeus. He initiates animal sacrifices. One day during a sacrifice he sasses Zeus. He cuts up a bull and divides it into two parts: one containing the flesh and intestines wrapped up in the skin; and the other consisting of only bones and fat. Prometheus asks Zeus to choose his share; the rest is to be given to man. Zeus picks the bones and fat, making him bitter against Prometheus and

against humankind. Zeus punishes the mortals by withholding from them the gift of fire. Prometheus steals it back. Then Prometheus—who is known to have the gift of foresight—further sasses the great god Zeus by predicting that one of Zeus' children would one day dethrone him, but refusing to say which one. The enraged Zeus punishes Prometheus by binding him in steel chains to a rock in the Caucasus Mountains. There, every day for eternity, an eagle is sent to tear and eat Prometheus' liver. Every night, the god Prometheus' immortal liver renews itself so that he can be tortured again in the next day's light.

This was no mere story to the ancient Greeks. As Carl Kerényi writes in *Prometheus: Archetypal Image of Human Existence*, "This was sacred material. . . . Myth as it exists in its . . . primitive form, is not merely a story but a reality lived." Further, the Greeks did not separate the gods from the humans to the extent that contemporary monotheists separate themselves from their singular deities. As Hesiod wrote, "The gods and mortal men sprang from one source."

Likewise, our understanding of the Prometheus myth springs almost entirely from a single source, the work of the epic storyteller Aeschylus. (Hesiod has had less influence.) While Aeschylus is believed to have written at least four epics about Prometheus, the one that survives intact is *Prometheus Bound*. *Prometheus Bound* tells the story of Prometheus' great suffering, and his arrogant and insubordinate self-assurance in the face of his tortures, but it does not give us his liberation. That was left to Percy Shelley, who wrote *Prometheus Unbound* in the 1810s.

Our young hacker friends have not deceived themselves in seeing Prometheus' theft of fire from the gods as a metaphor for technology. In Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus makes this abundantly clear, saying that he brought humanity architecture—"They knew not how to build brick houses to face the sun, nor work in wood. They lived beneath the earth like swarming ants in sunless caves." And he brought humanity calendars—"They had no certain mark of winter nor of flowery spring nor summer, with its crops, but did all this without intelligence until it was I that showed them—yes, it was I." And he gave them mathematics and writing—"And numbering as well, preeminent of subtle devices, and letter combinations that hold all in memory." And he gave them transportation—"I harnessed to the carriage horses obedient to the rein . . . and carriages

that wander on the sea, the ships sail winged, who else but I invented." And most importantly, he gave them medicine—"Greatest was this: when one of mankind was sick, there was no defense for him—neither healing food nor drink nor unguent; for lack of drugs they wasted, until I showed them blendings of mild simples with which they drive away all kinds of sickness."

While Aeschylus' Prometheus is ever the boastful technological and scientific genius, this type was not smiled upon and richly rewarded by the ancient Greeks as it is today. And while Prometheus has been seen as an inspiration to some counterculturalists and artists since the Romantics lionized him in the nineteenth century, for the Greeks this was a cautionary tale. Hubris, or pride, was their greatest sin, and Prometheus was their greatest sinner. As with many followers of Christianity later on, scientific hubris was seen as the overstepping of boundaries that disturbed the divine order. In fact, the Greeks did not fully develop their technical sciences because of their fear of hubris. As R. J. Zwi Werblowski wrote in *Lucifer and Prometheus*, "for Aeschylus . . . Prometheus is in trespass . . . sinner he is, and not merely the hero of a righteous war of liberation against cruel tyrants, as a certain school would have it." But in the following line, Werblowski reveals just cause for rejecting the Greeks' own view of their mythology and adopting the Promethean stance when he writes, "Since Zeus' order is that of a static cosmos, every human aspiration and effort is a revolt."

LOVING PROMETHEUS

The Greeks' greatest sinner started getting some modern love when the Romantics embraced him at the start of the nineteenth century. Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* got the ball rolling. Shelley completed the missing parts of Aeschylus' tale, liberating the Greek god from his eternal suffering and setting him up as a hero for the post-Enlightenment era. As Theodore Roszak writes, "*Prometheus Unbound* is a song of the heights, a dizzy rhapsody offered to flight and the transcendence of all limits." Indeed, where the Greeks saw hubris, Shelley saw "the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends." If Prometheus is the champion of hu-

mankind against the cruel Greek god Zeus, Shelley uses the myth to unite mortals with God, defining man in *Prometheus Unbound* as "one harmonious soul of many a soul, whose nature is its own divine control."

Soon Shelley's friend, the revolutionary rascal Lord Byron, offered his own tribute to the Greek techno-god, offering the lines "Thy Godlike crime was to be kind,/To render with thy precepts less/The Sum of human wretchedness/And strengthen Man with his own mind." Deeper into the nineteenth century, Nietzsche, Keats, and most of all Goethe joined the Promethean ranks. Through the voice of Prometheus, Goethe expresses the Romantics' exaltation in human experience, their joie de vivre, their lust for life . . . and their revolution against authoritarian gods: "Look down, O Zeus, Upon my world, It *lives*. I have shaped it in my image,/A race like unto me,/to suffer, to weep,/to enjoy and be glad,/and like myself to have no regard of you."

PROMETHEUS AND LUCIFER

Though we are now some four centuries into the Enlightenment, Goethe's use of the Promethean voice to scorn God's authority remains a minority taste. The Promethean view has remained controversial, if not downright unpopular. The archetype that most closely resembles Prometheus in Judeo-Christian mythology is the figure of Lucifer (the angel of light), a.k.a. Satan, and despite the best efforts of Anton LaVey and Marilyn Manson, the Luciferian view is not about to win any elections.

Note the underground, underworld overtones of the Prometheus myth. He suffers his agonies by sunlight. The night heals him. And he is possessed by what Edgar Allan Poe called "the imp of the perverse," the prankster spirit. When he first plays tricks on Zeus, leaving him with the meatless animal gristle, the scene appears without provocation. As Kerényi says, "he is a cheat and a thief. . . . By undertaking to deceive Zeus' mind, Prometheus shows himself to be . . . wanting." He further asserts that Prometheus displays "a certain crookedness of mind, ranging from deceitfulness to inventiveness." Human ambivalence about our own clever aspirations and efforts has created an indelible ideational link between inventiveness and criminality. Nietzsche was moved to embrace the criminality of creativity. In *The Birth of Tragedy* he asserted, "The best and

brightest that man can acquire they must obtain by crime." He goes on to quote Shelley's Prometheus in support. As a champion of man, the Greek god might be seen as representing their version of original sin. Kerényi says, "Prometheus shows himself to be man's double, an eternal image of man's basically imperfect form of being."

Werblowski, in his book *Lucifer and Prometheus*, finds correspondences between the Satan of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the Promethean myth, and the notion of "the cosmogonic jester of primitive peoples." For some cultures, the jester is an acceptable part of the cosmic whole, but in both the Greek pantheon and the Judeo-Christian cosmology he is relegated to the shadows.

For Werblowski, both Prometheus and Milton's Satan appear as rebels against a similar sort of cosmic authority: Prometheus disturbs "the order of Zeus . . . perfect, regulated and static." Milton's Satan, meanwhile, is "a rebel against a rather passive God's immutable decrees, [and he] becomes the symbol of the power-carrier who strains every muscle, nerve and fiber against a supreme and unrelenting, and *ipso facto* cold and hostile fate."

Furthermore, Milton—who despite his rather sympathetic and romantic portrayal of Satan affirmed his Christian faith by also condemning him directly and repeatedly—echoed the Greeks in giving creativity, commerce, and technology to the Prince of Darkness. Werblowski: "the fact that [in *Paradise Lost*] Satan's followers build, dig for gold, make music and philosophize, means that man's total culture is condemned."

Regarding one of Milton's episodes involving warfare between the forces of God and Satan, Werblowski further observes, "The real point of the incident lies in the equation of goodness with nature on the one hand, and of the satanic power-craving and explosive *hubris* of technique and machinery on the other."

And you thought *idle* hands were the Devil's workshop.

THE ANTI-PROMETHEANS VERSUS THE NEW PROMETHEANS

Given the Luciferian echoes of Prometheus, it shouldn't surprise us that conservative theologians abhor the romanticization of this myth. But would you expect enlightened mainstream scholars like Roger Shattuck

and counterculturalists like Ted Roszak to also sound the cry of "get thee behind me, Prometheus!"? If a strong anti-Promethean current among sophisticated thinkers surprises you, you must be momentarily forgetting some of those other gifts of scientific discovery and technological invention—the split atom and the hydrogen bomb, global warming, bio-weaponry, and corporate technocracy.

Roger Shattuck's *Forbidden Knowledge: From Prometheus to Pornography* presents a 342-page argument, one might even call it a screed, in favor of limiting human knowledge and invention. Shattuck finds some literature answerable for man's hubristic follies, including Shelley's Prometheus, Goethe's Faust, Dante's Ulysses, Byron's Don Juan, Cervantes' Don Quixote, and even the good Christian Milton's glamorized Satan in *Paradise Lost*. Shattuck expresses a longing for a different sort of hero. "Since we seem to be so fascinated by human creatures who aspire to exceed their lot and to attain godhead, how shall we ever reconcile ourselves to a countervailing tradition of heroism in humility and quietism, in finding and in accepting our lot? The line that connects Socrates, Buddha, Jesus, St. Francis, Thoreau, Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King."

As you can see, Shattuck throws up an impressive list of alternative thinkers—one might even call it a list of counterculturalists—in opposition to the Promethean impulse. We can't avoid a startling conclusion: there are anti-Promethean and pro-Promethean countercultures. In fact, the division over the Promethean impulse can be used to characterize the main opposition between the major countercultural tendencies of today.

The anti-Promethean counterculturalists include a whole host of familiar types, including: back-to-the-land hippies, introspective followers of Eastern and Eastern-influenced New Age religions, certain types of feminists, certain types of anarchists, and certain types of environmentalists. We could even make the case that the anti-Promethean countercultures share traits with Abraham's counterculture, discussed later in this chapter. They tend to be anti-urban, primitivistic, tribal, and moralistic. At the extreme of this tendency we find the newly influential (at least within the underground) anti-civilization anarchist theorist John Zerzan, who provides ideological inspiration for Seattle's "black-clad anarchists" who famously rioted at the World Trade Organization conference in their town in 1999, inspiring many imitators around the globe in succeeding years.

A somewhat more moderate representative of the anti-Promethean counterculture is Theodore Roszak, the author whose book *The Making of a Counter Culture* put that word into popular circulation in 1969. Roszak—part of a cabal of countercultural critics of technoculture that also includes Jerry Mander, author of *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, and Neil Postman, author of *Amusing Ourselves to Death*—looks to Mary Shelley's 1804 book, *Frankenstein, or The New Prometheus*, for an unambiguously oppositional take on the Promethean legend.

Ironically, Ms. Shelley was married to Percy Shelley, the man who first portrayed Prometheus as a romantic figure. Mary slyly took her husband's obsession with the glory and power of technology and the Promethean spirit and subverted it. She created the persona of Dr. Frankenstein, a mad scientist whose attempt to engineer new human life (think today of biotech, cloning, artificial life, robotics) backfires, creating a monster that brings death and destruction to Dr. Frankenstein's village, and to the doctor himself. Like Roger Shattuck, Roszak believes that the Greeks were correct in fearing the hubristic pursuit of human knowledge and technological development. But Roszak goes even further, seeing the modern world's obsession with scientific and technological advance as a product of a macho, masculine culture. He contends that "Mary [Shelley] was aware of how easily the line can be crossed between Promethean yearnings and macho posturing." Indeed, Prometheus is a severely masculine God. Sounding not a little like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Aeschylus' Prometheus portrays softness and surrender as womanly characteristics to which he will not succumb, saying, "Deem not that I, to win a smile from Jove,/Will spread a maiden smoothness o'er my soul/And importune the foe whom most I hate/With womanish upliftings of the hand."

While Prometheus' strutting machismo may embarrass some of us today, that's not enough to stop a new culture of wired-up technophiles (women included) from identifying with the Promethean spirit. The New Promethean counterculture is a peculiar conglomeration of: computer hackers and other technological experimenters, upbeat neo-hippie electronic music ravers, digital business mavens, and corporate technocrats who still believe in the power of technology to democratize communications and change the world (while making them extremely rich), political libertarians, and visionary artists using new technology to help us see in

different ways. At the extreme of this tendency we find the Extropians, who believe in using technology to give us godlike powers, a notion called transhumanism or posthumanism. Extropians believe that we are on the verge of becoming an immortal, post-biological, spacefaring new species. More popular and diffused are the Promethean countercultural communities that have come together online to steal the fire of music from the gods of the music industry (e.g., Napster and its replacements), and the open source fanatics who believe that all digital code should be shared and used freely. Counterculturalist Robert Anton Wilson spoke for the upcoming wired-up technophile culture back in 1983 when he wrote, "This is not a civilization in collapse but a Prometheus rising!"

COUNTERCULTURE IS PROMETHEAN IN ESSENCE

The technological enthusiasts who make up cyberculture, and the political libertarians, are the ones who specifically fly the Promethean flag. But in a broader sense, the Promethean spirit is the essential countercultural spirit, as defined by this book. As explained in the next chapter, we see countercultures as fostering individual freethinking and knowledge, and an aesthetic of constant change. A careful examination of the anti-Promethean countercultures discussed earlier would not only uncover some of these Promethean qualities within them, but would reveal them as Promethean at the core despite their anti-technological bias.

For instance, most of these countercultures show a strongly humanistic character. Prometheus, who deemed humanity worthy of endless gifts and powers as well as a previously unthinkable degree of independence from the gods, is an ancient embodiment of what today has come to be called humanism. And Prometheus' humanism, although to some eyes reckless and libertine, is humanism nonetheless.

But counterculture—including its putatively anti-Promethean forms—is essentially Promethean in an even more important and fundamental way: all countercultures, apparently anti-Promethean or otherwise, are archetypally Promethean in terms of their relationship with authority. This applies to authority in general as well as to the authorities or gods of a specific counterculture's time and place. As Prometheus went against Zeus and the gods of Greece, so today's anti-technological countercultures refuse

to blindly worship technology, itself one of the great prevailing gods of our era.

Anti-tech, back-to-the land countercultures often advocate the transfer of agriculture and other fundamentals of survival, like sources of energy and water supply, to the individual domicile or small self-sustaining community. In doing so, they reclaim the capacity for autonomous survival by providing for themselves basic necessities that today are almost universally purchased from a vast agro-industrial establishment. In doing so, they withhold power over individual and community life from that establishment and refuse to feed its authoritarian and economic agendas. Thus, even the low-tech solar power sources and collectivist organic gardens of rural, countercultural, supposedly anti-Promethean alternative communities represent, in their own way, a boldly Promethean gesture.

Finally, as long as the philosophic expansiveness of the Enlightenment project continues to be reduced to a mere obligation to endlessly increase production and consumption without regard for quality of experience or environmental distress, the "anti-technological" counterculture will remain an important countervailing force.

ABRAHAM AND THE FIRST DROPOUTS

God said to Abraham, go for yourself from your land,
and from your birthplace, and from your father's house,
to the land that I will show you.

GENESIS 12:1

God said to Abraham kill me a son/. . . man, you must be
putting me on.

BOB DYLAN

While a countercultural rebel iconoclast myth of Abraham comes down to us from the Midrash tales of the second century, Abraham's identity as history's first self-exile, or dropout, is traced all the way back to the Old Testament. In the original Bible, Abraham hears the voice of God and leaves behind his home in Ur in search of spiritual renewal in the land of Canaan. (Later, some Kabbalists interpreted "Canaan" to mean "a place of dy-

namism, tension, or change.") This simple story has been interpreted by many as the primal exile experience.

Even after leaving Ur for their new home in Canaan, the first Jews maintained their dropout/outsider identity. While generous with the herders living there (at least initially), they separated themselves ideologically. In the Old Testament, Abraham declares, "I dwell among you, but I am an alien." Of course, this sense of intentional otherness echoes down the ages, and remains with us today. Indeed, hipster individuals and communities positively revel in it.

The dropout Abraham was the first Jew. At this essential level, his story has generated a religion of exile and dissent.

While Reform Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg was touring to promote his book *Jews: The Essence and Character of a People*, his overriding message was that Judaism is an "eternal countercultural." In his book, Hertzberg declares, "Abraham, the first Jew, is the archetypal Jewish character. As the leader of a small, dissenting minority living precariously on the margins of society, he defines the enduring role of the Jew as the outsider. The recurring themes of Jewish history—otherness, defiance, fragility, and morality—are present in his life."

Drawing from the Bible, Hertzberg paints a picture that would be familiar to some members of the modern hippie Rainbow Tribe. "God tells Abraham to leave his birthplace to go with his wife Sarah to a distant land. There they dwell in tents like Bedouin. . . . They are strangers among the tribes of idol worshippers." But *alienness* doesn't necessarily connote alienation. Hertzberg writes, "A man of immense charity, he opens his tent on all four sides. The hungry and miserable can come to him in a straight line, not wasting a step to look for the entrance." Abraham's open-handed generosity and impatience with unnecessary boundaries (tear down the walls!), turnstiles, and formalities are archetypally countercultural. And Abraham goes even further in practicing voluntary communalism. "In the land of Canaan, where water is the most precious of commodities and herders survive only if their flocks can drink, Abraham digs wells and takes the unprecedented step of making them available to everyone."

Rabbi Michael Lerner, a product of the New Left counterculture of the 1960s, views Abraham as the primal revolutionist. In his book *Jewish Renewal*, he asserts, "Almost four thousand years ago, an idol worshipper

named Abram revolutionized human history by trusting in a Being he could not see. Together with his wife Sarai, he left civilization behind and became a spiritual pioneer. So began Jewish history."

In her book, *Remember My Soul*, Lori Palatnik asserts that God's command to Abraham in Genesis 12:1 to "go . . . from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you" demands some interpretation because "at this point in the Torah, Abraham has already left his land and his birthplace." Palatnik believes that God is asking Abraham "to make a journey not just of the body but of the soul. He is asking him to leave the comfort of the assumptions he holds about the meaning of life." She later refers to this process as "leaving the familiar," an apt metaphor for any countercultural process.

THE HISTORICAL ABRAHAM

With the exception of a shrinking group of religious believers, most historians since 1850 have regarded the story of Abraham as pure myth. Ironically, scientific archaeologists have uncovered increasingly detailed evidence that the Old Testament is, in historian Paul Johnson's terms, a "complex and ambiguous guide to the truth."

The city of Ur was found and excavated by Leonard Woolley in the 1920s, in what is now southern Iraq. Since then, the decipherment of the Sumerian language used on tens of thousands of cuneiform tablets found throughout the region confirms the plausibility of many Genesis stories, including Abraham's. The names Abram (the original spelling of Abraham in the Old Testament), Jacob-el, and Joseph have been found in legal documents from Mesopotamia (between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in present-day Iraq) and Canaan (modern Israel and Jordan) dating from 2100 to 800 B.C.E. More tellingly, the details of translated marriage and real estate contracts match the sorts of agreements and disputations described in the Old Testament stories.

From the archaeological evidence, it is likely that the historical Abraham dropped out of an advanced Sumerian civilization of the third millennium B.C.E. The economy of Sumer was based on barley and emmer wheat, grown using sophisticated engineered irrigation. Like other Sumerian cities, Ur's farms supported a large population inside fortified walls.

These included professional brewers, bakers, and weavers, as well as artisans in wood, stone, ceramics, metal, and jewelry. Within and between the cities, merchants traveled, trading with the Akkadian cities to the north through the Levant to the even older civilization of Egypt as well as with hill-dwelling barbarians to the east.

The tallest structures were the ziggurats, artificial mountains of mud-brick that supported temples whose priests and scribes organized the annual festivals and controlled the distribution of food. These religious icons towered over the city walls. Warrior-kings ruled over all, protecting the cities from barbarian invasions and waging territorial wars with the other city-states, sometimes becoming overlords of several cities. They were seen as agents of the gods. These rigidly stratified urban theocracies were legalistic, disputatious, hierarchical, and bureaucratic.

The religion was polytheistic—rooted in the myths and cults of each city-state's special gods. Each city had a titular deity. Most inhabitants had a specific role within their divine cult. This included all social classes: farmers bearing grain and fruit; weavers and bakers who provisioned the temples; artisans, scribes, priests, and the royal court. Kings had formal cultic duties, even kings of many city-states, who sometimes installed daughters in high priestly offices with large estates, power, and prestige. Political power was organized around the cult and the court.

There is literary evidence of the existence of a distinct subculture during this time, scattered from Sumer through Mesopotamia to Egypt by way of the Levantine coast. These Habiru (a possible root of the word Hebrew) seem to have been a class of outsiders within Middle Eastern civilization. They were apparently urban gypsies, donkey traders, caravan merchants, government employees, mercenary warriors, and unaffiliated families. Abraham was perhaps a founder of such an alternative "unaffiliated" subculture or counterculture.

LISTENING TO GOD

It is postulated that Abraham rebelled against a polytheistic culture by becoming the first monotheist. Today, of course, many counterculturalists reject monotheism, and some embrace polytheism as an alternative. Clearly, different times and situations provoke wildly dissimilar responses. On the

other hand, mere contrariness does not make a counterculture. Wrestling Abraham's presumed history into a countercultural context, we note that he broke away from a culture where all beliefs were dictated by social consensus. In contrast, Abraham's connection to his singular divinity came from listening (literally) to the individual voice in his head, which Abraham interpreted as the voice of God. He courageously ignored his society's ubiquitous consensus reality, and stuck to his individualistic guns. Abraham further proclaimed that access to this direct relationship with the divinity was open to anyone by listening to their own inner voice. Abraham's God was portable rather than fixed, and immediately present rather than distant. The culture of the early Jews was nomadic, tribal, and anti-urban. They were apparently not identified with established political units. Instead, they were mercenaries, troublemakers, slaves, rebels, and stubborn religious visionary fanatics.

The presumptive historical Abraham and his early Jewish tribe manifest some aspects of the counterculture trope: dropping out, or exile from the mainstream society; a direct relationship with the divine without the intercession of icons and idols; and a deeply felt individuality. However, it is impossible to attribute one of the primary characteristics of counterculture—nonauthoritarianism and/or anti-authoritarianism—to the historical Abraham. Abraham's monotheism established a new kind of totalitarianism, a self-declared Patriarchy in which the leader was no longer a divinity himself, but a prophet, a man who could hear the voice of the Divinity. The Jewish cultural identity was established around strict legalistic rules for sex and social behavior, as a portable and permanent way to distinguish themselves from their surrounding cultures.

To find a more purely countercultural Abraham, we return to the realm of myth—the Midrash tales—stories told by rabbis and written down starting in the second century C.E.

THE ICONOCLAST

If your children ever realize how lame you are, they'll slaughter you in your sleep.

FRANK ZAPPA, 1966

The most influential legend surrounding Abraham, taken from Midrash stories written by rabbis in the centuries after the Roman diaspora, sounds like a particularly melodramatic episode from the generational conflicts of the 1960s. It, of course, involves a bratty, self-righteous son who questions his father's tepid sold-out value system and messes with the old man's livelihood. Pops gets so pissed off he turns his son in to the authorities.

Abraham's father, Terah, made a living as a maker of stone icons in polytheistic, idol-worshipping Ur. As a young man, Abraham began doubting the worship of these icons. He started giving his dad a tough time about it. Once, when Dad had left Abe behind to mind the store, Abraham chased away a customer by asking him, "How old are you?" "Fifty years," was the reply. "Woe to such a man!" Abraham exclaimed. "You are fifty years old and would worship a day-old object?" The man became ashamed and left."

One day, while pestering his father about his beliefs, young Abraham asked him "who the God was that had created heaven and earth and the children of men." In response, Terah took him to see twelve great idols and lots of little idols. Terah told Abraham, "Here are they who have made all thou seest on earth, they who have created also me and thee and all men on the earth."

So Abraham went to his mother and asked her to give him some "savory meat" as an offering to his father's gods, to make him "acceptable to them." Abraham took the meat to the icons and saw that "they had no voice, no hearing, no motion, and not one of them stretched forth his hand to eat." Abraham mocked the gods. He made another offering. Then he felt the spirit of God. In the words of the Midrash tale, "he cried out, and said: 'Woe unto my father and his wicked generation, whose hearts are all inclined to vanity, who serve these idols of wood and stone, which cannot eat, nor smell, nor hear, nor speak, which have mouths without speech, eyes without sight, ears without hearing, hands without feeling, and legs without motion!' Abraham then took a hatchet in his hand, and broke all his father's gods, and when he had done breaking them he placed the hatchet in the hand of the biggest god among them all, and he went out."

Even if you're unfamiliar with the story, you can guess the rest. Terah

heard the crashing sounds of sonny boy trashing the family store and ran to him, shouting, "What is this mischief thou hast done to my gods?" Abraham replied: "I set savory meat before them, and when I came nigh unto them, that they might eat, they all stretched out their hands to take of the meat, before the big one had put forth his hand to eat. This one, enraged against them on account of their behavior, took the hatchet and broke them all, and, behold, the hatchet is yet in his hands, as thou mayest see."

In response, Terah proved Abraham's point: "Thou speakest lies unto me! Is there spirit, soul, or power in these gods to do all thou hast told me? Are they not wood and stone? and have I not myself made them? It is thou that didst place the hatchet in the hand of the big god, and thou sayest he smote them all." And Abraham the bratty countercultural son punctured his father's argument with his reply: "How, then, canst thou serve these idols in whom there is no power to do anything? Can these idols in which thou trustest deliver thee? Can they hear thy prayers when thou callest upon them?" So Terah busted his son, turning him in to the king for rehab.

While the biblical Abraham displays a modicum of anti-authoritarian moxie in the Old Testament when he argues with his all-powerful God about his plans for the destruction of Sodom, it is the mythic Abraham of the Midrash tales, an iconoclastic generational rebel, who strikes us as most countercultural.

We all know the history of the 1960s generation gap, but how many of us who were there remember that feeling, arrogant yet undeniable, that we young were passionately alive, infused with raw energy and spirit, while our parents were somewhat deadened? While this observation is outside the realm of ideational countercultural argument, the ineffable sense of superior vitality as a kind of moral good is frequently shared by the young, but it both intensifies and spreads to at least some members of all age groups during periods of countercultural excitement. (Of course, fascist groups get swept up into this kind of primal, atavistic energy as well, so it is clearly not an absolute good.)

Michael Lerner implicitly infuses his insights into Abraham and Terah's ancient generation gap with the spirit of the sixties revolt when he asserts that "Abraham enters history, aware that something is fundamentally wrong, unwilling to accept idolatry. Abraham can sense . . . some

greater potential than . . . the worship of what is—power, beauty, wealth, etc. In breaking the idols he is symbolically trying to break through to Terah, his father, to say: 'This dead matter that is used to justify an oppressive social order is not real, and you and I don't have to remain stuck in it, do we?' The inability of his father to respond, to see the life energy and reality in his son and to say, 'Yes, son, something else is possible,' means that instead he has to see his son as the problem. For Abraham's father to break through social conventions would require a level of emotional, spiritual, and political aliveness that would be overwhelming and threatening." In emphasizing that this is Abraham, the first Jewish man's entrance into history, Lerner also asserts that the Jewish people are imprinted with a kind of rebellious, justice-seeking spirit.

JEWISH RADICALS

Indeed, Jewish dissent arises throughout history. When Alexander the Great conquered the Near East, the Jews protested. When Greek intellectual culture became the *de rigueur* trend in Hellenistic Rome, the Jews refused to go along. Their rebellion against Rome unleashed an Imperial backlash that destroyed the Temple and initiated the great diaspora. During the Roman Empire, when Christianity was declared the state religion, the Jews resisted then and through centuries of persecution. Karl Marx, Franz Kafka, and Sigmund Freud, all Jews, raised theoretical and existential hell in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

After the Holocaust of the twentieth century, when William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac emerged as the main icons of the beat counterculture, it was the Jewish Ginsberg alone who put himself on the line by agitating for radical social change. (In fact, we might consider Ginsberg the father of the hippie/New Left fusion that gave us the word counterculture. After all, it was Ginsberg's bighearted inclusiveness combined with his characteristically Jewish willingness to insist on actual liberty and justice for all that led the way. Consider the other contenders: Ken Kesey, following his obscurantist tendencies, refused leadership, and Timothy Leary always straddled the line between populism and elitism.)

Jewish comedian Lenny Bruce punctured social and political hypocrisies in the early and mid-1960s with such a rapier wit that he was busted ten

times, and hounded by the moral authorities unto death. And those comic absurdist Jewish radicals, Yippies Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, nagged the hippies—refusing to let them retreat into psychedelic spiritual bliss. Instead, they dragged them off to “levitate the Pentagon,” to throw dollar bills onto the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, to battle police in anti-war protest in the streets of Chicago, and to support the campus rebellions and the black militant movement. And finally, the most influential twentieth-century nonconformist Jew, Bob Dylan, has graced us both with his lines of insight and by being possibly the most completely inexplicable person to ever grace the earth.

Rabbi Hertzberg even goes so far as to assert that Jews help spur anti-Semitism by pissing people off with their dissident, questioning intellects. According to Hertzberg, “Jews are critical, subversive.” Hertzberg calls on his fellow Jews to honor and continue this very tradition that has placed them in so much danger across history. Within the legends of the Jewish religion, Rabbi Lerner finds opposition to oppression, and the quest for justice: “Judaism’s claim that God is the Force that . . . assists us in transforming the world . . . [means] we are all required to engage in the struggle to change the status quo. Torah’s conception of God’s kingship tells us . . . that the only real power governing our lives is the Force that makes . . . us leave systems of repression and start over, creating something fundamentally different and new.”

Lerner also compares the moral activism implicit in Judaism favorably to contemplationist schools of spiritual cultivation, declaring, “Judaism places transcendence on the human agenda. Human beings need not be stuck in a world of pain and oppression. We can regain contact with a deeper level of being . . . beings who are created in the image of God, who embody an inherent tendency toward goodness and holiness, toward being ‘embodied spirituality.’ . . . Many other religions had the intuition that something was fundamentally missing from human experience, but then they created ‘spiritual experience’ by pointing to some higher reality in a . . . spiritual world that was divorced from the world of daily life. Judaism insists this split is *not* an ontological necessity.”

Rabbi Lerner lives out his belief in a moral, activist spirituality today by agitating against the militaristic policies of the Israeli government. In

this he is joined by Rabbi Hertzberg, and by a substantial minority of Jews in Israel and around the world who can’t resist the impulse—bequeathed to them from the Abraham of the Midrash tales—to question authority and stand up against injustice.

COUNTERCULTURE MYTH MIRRORS COUNTERCULTURE HISTORY

This chapter has for the most part dealt with myths as apocryphal tales of larger-than-life heroism. But myth is understood on many levels. At least a brief walk-through of today’s predominant approaches to myth is required before the broader implications of counterculture’s presence in myth can be assessed.

Contemporary psychologists, anthropologists, and historians—foremost among them twentieth-century psychoanalyst Carl Jung and world-famous mythographer Joseph Campbell—assign enormous importance to myth. Many scholars view myths as keys to the soul of humanity, as symbolic doorways into our individual and collective deeper nature.

World mythology features certain mythic archetypes that are universal to nearly all human cultures. The countercultural Trickster, for instance, has been blowing the minds of human beings with his quicksilver elusiveness in frequent appearances around the globe since before the dawn of history. Campbell and his legions of followers take such presences in world mythology as indications of basic human qualities that transcend cultural and temporal barriers. In the hands of Jung, Campbell, and others, myth becomes a kind of racial pre- or extra-historical memory, not so much of *what has happened* as of *what we are*.

This viewpoint reads myths as narrative encodings of humanity’s most basic beliefs, drives, aspirations, yearnings, and fears. More simply, myths are the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, about our fundamental nature and the things that are important to us.

This chapter has located symbols of counterculture in the mythic foundations of the two great historical streams from which modern Western civilization has emerged: the Classical and the Judeo-Christian traditions. Here, the roles of Prometheus and Abraham are hardly peripheral,

walk-on parts. Instead, they are central to their respective mythologies. If myth, as so widely held today, tells us about the psychic makeup of humanity, then the towering mythic presences of Abraham and Prometheus, along with the prominence of the Trickster and other countercultural figures in world myth at large, point to the countercultural impulse as an integral element of human nature. Counterculture, myth tells us, is very important indeed.

Some scholars see myth as relevant to virtually every aspect of human existence. Joseph Campbell has famously said: "The latest incarnation of Oedipus, the continued romance of Beauty and the Beast, stands this afternoon on the corner of 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue, waiting for the traffic light to change." Campbell is telling us: as in myth, so in human life.

And as in myth, so in human history. The stories of Prometheus and Abraham mirror the historical reality of counterculture in telling ways. In the myth of Prometheus, the countercultural figure is viewed—at least in the ancient accounts—as an overwhelmingly evil influence on humankind. In the story of Abraham, the countercultural figure's role is profoundly positive; he is the source of a vast legacy embraced as a foundation for living by an entire people. This disparity reflects the oppositional feelings, the fierce enmity and sacrificial loyalty, that historical countercultures evoke in the times and places in which they arise.

More importantly, the tales of Prometheus and Abraham are about beginnings, origins, and sources. Abraham appears as the literal and spiritual progenitor of the great tribe whose story provides the focus for one of world's most important documents. Prometheus, with his spirit of rebellion, innovation, and revolutionary humanism, is cast as the bringer of everything from writing and mathematics to transport and medicine (before all of which, as quoted earlier, human beings "lived beneath the earth . . . in sunless caves"). It is no great stretch to read the Prometheus tale as suggesting that the innovations now associated with the Neolithic Era, and then civilization itself, arose from the countercultural impulse.

The role and prominence of counterculture in the mythic dimension explored by this chapter are mirrored in the historical ground mapped by the rest of this book. The chapters that follow show counterculture as a crucial source of change at the very center stage of history.

OTHER COUNTERCULTURAL MYTHS

Before we step away from pure mythology and into the world of actual historic countercultures, we should mention some other mythological figures who strike us as countercultural. We think of Eve, the first woman, who took a bite of that forbidden Schedule One fruit of all knowledge, setting off the first drug bust. And we think of that other naughty chick Pandora, who casually opened her box one day, setting loose the evils of the world. (Notice how these mythologies like to blame the women!) We think of Jim Morrison's favorite, Dionysius, the oversexed imbibor of wine and hallucinogens who got torn apart by wild groupies. We think of the Sorceress Circe with her magic potions. We think of Goethe's immortality-seeking bad boy Faust. We think of Robin Hood and his merry band of Weathermen. We think of Alfred E. Neuman . . .

CHAPTER TWO

A DIFFERENT TYPE OF HUMAN EXCELLENCE

Defining Counterculture

There is a different type of human excellence . . . a conception of humanity as having its nature bestowed on it for other purposes than merely to be abnegated. . . .

It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth . . . that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation . . . and whatever crushes individuality is despotism, by whatever name it may be called and whether it professes to be enforcing the will of God or the injunctions of men.

JOHN STUART MILL, "OF INDIVIDUALITY"

From one perspective, counterculture appears to be a challenge to the very notion of history. To rebels against tradition, explorers lighting out for new conceptual territories, and (in some cases) advocates of the Eternal Now, history may seem, at best, quaint, and, at worst, the enemy. At the very least, the Western concept of history as a narrative progression primarily defined by big-name leaders, varying social structures

writ large, and the changing boundaries among warring nation-states seems almost explicitly designed to bind us to a mainstream vision of humanity's (very limited) potential. In this context, the historical record conspires to convince us that the dominance of noncountercultural behaviors, like conformism and authoritarianism, defines humanity. We are sometimes tempted to say that those who *remember* history are, in fact, the ones condemned to repeat it.

But as Western culture, and particularly its younger generations, speed toward increasingly ahistoric times, the picture doesn't look pretty. For one thing, short historical memories decontextualize volatile situations in the contemporary world, producing negative results. So we might, for instance, respond to the rage of the colonized (or formerly colonized) with uncomprehending irritation, as if their lack of passivity is a shortcoming in character, an inexplicable rudeness that sometimes reaches the level of violence. Or we (in the U.S.) may simply accept the common wisdom that our nation-state is "the land of the free," without really understanding the rights guaranteed in our Constitution and Bill of Rights and the ways in which they have been both expanded and diminished.

At the level of counterculture, we may find lots of young people influenced by hippie hedonism, but with no real awareness of that movement's deeper philosophic tenets. Even more dangerous, they may consume that movement's sacramental plants and chemicals without adequate practical information about safety, or how to harmoniously integrate their experiences into their daily lives.

This rush toward ahistoricity even deprives some of today's countercultural youth movements of some depth and humanity. Throughout the 1990s, Generation X/technoculture embraced a cult of the new. *Wired* magazine, sounding exactly like Chairman Mao during his brutal sixties Cultural Revolution in China, celebrated rapid technological change as a "typhoon" wiping away all remnants of the past. This rejection of all things past reached its apotheosis in that glorious outburst of countercultural exuberance known as the rave movement. By the mid-1990s, the most devastating putdown in this culture's arsenal was the phrase "That's so five minutes ago."

By ignoring history, even recent history, "cult of the new" counterculturalists deprive themselves of splendid things—like the mind-expanding

wonders of the music of John Cage and Iannis Xenakis, or the intensely countercultural statements made by the Rolling Stones' *Beggars Banquet* or the Sex Pistols' *Never Mind the Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols*, or even Tricky's astounding *Pre-Millennium Tension*, which is now like *sooo* five years ago. Of course, each generation likes to feel that it's invented its own rebel culture, and as this book will illustrate, they're mostly correct. The essential countercultural spirit perpetually reinvents itself in unpredictable ways, outrageous styles, and novel forms. Nevertheless, many twenty-first-century youth counterculturalists could benefit from learning the history of their late-twentieth-century antecedents, and we could all benefit from learning about countercultural movements from the depths of time.

WHAT IS HIP?

I walk forty-seven miles of barbed wire/Use a cobra
snake for a necktie

BO DIDDLEY

Very few people have an exact, handy definition for what counterculture is, but they're pretty certain that they know it when they see it. In fact, when Theodore Roszak popularized the term in his 1969 book, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, we could *literally* see who the people were that fit into his conception. Any male with long hair and possibly a beard, wearing raggedy-assed patched jeans, a bandanna, and maybe a tie-dyed T-shirt was almost certainly a counterculturalist. Any woman with even longer hair, wearing the same thing as the guy, or alternatively a peasant dress, was also probably a counterculturalist . . . in other words, almost everyone in college at that time. These people represented a synthesis of the hippie movement—dedicated to mind-expanding drug experimentation and going with the flow, and the New Left/peace movement—dedicated to challenging authority, ending imperialism and war, and an ill-defined communalism.

From Roszak's perspective, theirs was a revolt against an alienating, mechanized, overly materialistic civilization in favor of a more natural, intuitive, harmonious, and generous way of life. But to others, like Tim Leary and (to a lesser extent) the Yippies and the Diggers, they were

pre-capitulating a world in which technology liberated us from human scarcity and alienating labor, granting us a life of spontaneous, playful self-exploration and, indeed, self-indulgence. Whatever vision (and there were thousands of others) of the baby boomers' counterculture we subscribe to, we can be sure of one thing: Newt Gingrich believes it ruined America.

Of course, cultural characteristics that are first perceived as challenging, novel, and even revolutionary may eventually strike us as stale—a caricature. Today, a long-haired guy is just as likely to be a reactionary redneck, and the hippie countercultural zeitgeist has been supplanted by a broader, more eclectic alternative culture composed of counterculturally inflected subcultures. Punks, avant-garde artists, the hip-hop underground, anti-globalization activists and Black Bloc anarchists, *Wired*-reading technoculturalists and hackers, club culture trendoids, conscious rappers, educated psychedelists, Burning Man, modern primitives with steel implants and piercings dangling from every organ, denizens of the sexual underground, pagans, postmodern academics, funkateers, New Agers, riot grrls, slackers, ravers, natty dreadsters, Zen Buddhists, Gnostics, lonely iconoclasts, Deadheads, poetry slammers, goths, tree huggers, libertines and libertarians—all are sometimes defined (and self-defined) as countercultural.

As if this laundry list of "weirdos" isn't enough to contend with, some traditionalist groups—fundamentalist Christian and orthodox Jewish groups—have started to refer to themselves as countercultures. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines counterculture as "a culture with a lifestyle that is opposed to the prevailing culture," so it's not surprising that groups who are deeply opposed to pluralism, abortion, rationalism, sexual freedom, science, materialistic self-indulgence, free speech, and many other aspects of our culture that are more or less mainstream, would see themselves as countercultural. By this definition, even Islamic jihadists who live in Western lands constitute a counterculture.

"COUNTERCULTURE" IS UP FOR GRABS

While a few similarities can be found between some countercultural elements and these fundamentalist groups, we reject the definition of counterculture as simply any lifestyle that differs from the prevailing culture. Clearly, the definition of counterculture is up for grabs, but we contend

that, whatever their differences, there was a singular mutual intention motivating nearly all who defined themselves in countercultural terms up until the last few years. They were all anti-authoritarian or nonauthoritarian. Our defining vision asserts that the essence of counterculture as a perennial historical phenomenon is characterized by the affirmation of the individual's power to create his own life rather than accepting the dictates of surrounding social authorities and conventions, be they mainstream or subcultural. We further assert that freedom of communication is an essential characteristic of counterculture, since affirmative contact holds the key to liberating each individual's creative power. (Throughout the rest of this book, we will be making declarative statements about the nature of counterculture. We acknowledge that these observations are rooted in our own point of view, and other views are possible. However, qualifying all of our statements with that awareness would become tiresome to both the readers and the writers.)

Cultural phenomena are extremely multiplex entities. This fact presents enormous challenges to any effort to define and make generalizations about cultural movements. These difficulties are described by Roszak in the Preface to *The Making of a Counter Culture*:

I have colleagues in the academy who have come within an ace of convincing me that no such things as "the Romantic Movement" or "the Renaissance" ever existed—not if one gets down to scrutinizing the microscopic phenomena of history. At that level, one tends only to see many different people doing many different things and thinking many different thoughts. . . . It would surely be convenient if these perversely ectoplasmic Zeitgeists were card-carrying movements, with a headquarters, an executive board, and a file of official manifestoes. But of course they aren't. One is therefore forced to take hold of them with a certain trepidation, allowing expectations to slip through the sieve of one's generalizations in great numbers, but hoping always that more that is solid and valuable remains behind than filters away.

The problems Roszak bemoans multiply themselves as we attempt to define not just a single cultural episode, but instead a whole category of historical cultural occurrences.

A cursory glance at the table of contents for this book could easily give rise to confusion regarding the vast range of social phenomena we've defined as countercultural. The countercultures we've chosen are extremely diverse and disparate—for example, it's hard to see an immediate relationship between the Age of Reason, the Sufis, and the Surrealists. Some movements are remembered as primarily spiritual, while others are known for their artistic, political, and philosophical contributions. Some contradict others in certain aspects. The Socratics introduced deductive reasoning while the Dadaists exploded it. The seventeenth-century libertines mocked spirituality while the Sufis pursued it in a sometimes libertine manner.

This sometimes contradictory diversity might lead some readers to conclude that we basically rounded up all the cultural and political movements we found cool or interesting, and called it a history of counterculture. Not true. Counterculture movements, no matter how different they seem from one another, arise from variable combinations of the same principles and values.

COUNTERCULTURE'S DEFINING PRINCIPLES

Humans are multifaceted, perversely unsituatable beings, and countercultural types tend to be among the most difficult to pin down. Nevertheless, there are certain root principles, or meta-values, that distinguish countercultures from mainstream society, as well as from subcultures, religious and ethnic minorities, and noncountercultural dissident groups. The primary characteristics of counterculture are threefold:

- Countercultures assign primacy to individuality at the expense of social conventions and governmental constraints.
- Countercultures challenge authoritarianism in both obvious and subtle forms.
- Countercultures embrace individual and social change.

Individuality is central to counterculture. In some sense, we could have easily called this a history of freethinkers and free thought. Assigning primacy to individuality entails the cultivation, encouragement, and defense of individual self-expression, not only in terms of "freedom of speech" but in regard to belief, personal appearance, sexuality, and all other aspects of living. The countercultural spirit denies only those expressions of individuality that clearly oppress others.

Our vision of counterculture centered on individuality is admittedly fraught with dangers. Many dissidents and counterculturalists have come to associate the word individualism with greed, selfishness, a lack of compassion, and the existential loneliness that comes from rejecting (or being rejected by) community. Countercultural individuality does not embrace mere self-centeredness. Countercultural individuality is deep individuality, shared. It includes people and cultures that follow the Socratic admonition to "know thyself." This distinction brings to mind an interview I (Ken) once read in an underground newspaper with avant-garde filmmaker Kenneth Anger. Commenting on Aleister Crowley's famous phrase "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law," Anger said (I'm paraphrasing) that this doesn't mean you should just do whatever the hell you want. The purpose of the magickal exploration is to find your "true will" through deep, disciplined self-exploration. The seeker must first find out what her will *is*, before doing it.

Despite these qualifiers, our interpretation of counterculture undeniably reads a bit (small l) libertarian. We are not going to discuss here whether the right to infinitely accumulate personal property and wealth is a necessary guarantor of individual liberty or, in fact, inimical to it. But we will assert that just as we reject mere selfishness, we also exclude mere communalism from our definition. Cultures that prevent or discourage individuals from fully exploring and expressing their authentic being—whether through direct coercion or populist peer pressure—can't be considered countercultural. Participation in most quintessential countercultures therefore rarely requires that the individuals do, say, think, or believe anything precisely. All that is demanded is a commitment to the process of stripping away the bondage of both externally enforced and internally inculcated authority so that authentic individuality can blossom.

Another primary characteristic of countercultures—one that flows directly from their individualism—is that they challenge authoritarianism in both its obvious and its subtle forms. Some countercultures might challenge the overt control of individuals by state or religious powers. But all challenge the more subtle authoritarianism exerted by rigid belief systems, widely accepted conventions, inflexible aesthetic paradigms, and both spoken and unspoken taboos.

The broad compass of authoritarian phenomena that countercultures challenge is suggested by the continuum of New World countercultural movements beginning with the American democratic uprising and proceeding through New England Transcendentalism to the Lost Generation literary experiment. The first of these episodes threw off the authority of the British Empire over its colonies. The Transcendentalists liberated individual spirituality from the authority of organized religion. And the romantics of the Lost Generation challenged the tyranny of syntax over thought, overturning literary conventions in search of a natural language of the mind.

Counterculture's anti-authoritarian humanism is sometimes asserted through outright rebellion and revolution. But unlike most revolutionists, the revolutionary counterculturalist doesn't seek to establish an alternative authoritarian regime in place of the old, but rather to move toward ever-increasing freedom and democratic empowerment for the greatest number of people.

Some counterculturalist groups and individuals are self-identified as anarchists. Today, anarchy is generally associated with violent, chaotic situations, periods when—in the absence of authority—people engage in destructive, "lawless" activities that make it difficult, or impossible, for most folks to obtain necessities for living. When we say, for instance, "Iraq is in a state of anarchy," we know that this is not a good thing. The common belief is that an anarchist is a person who advocates "no government." This is generally true, but the phrase "no governor" is more exact, since there may be agreed-upon rules (pref-

erably by consensus) and ways of enforcing those rules when absolutely necessary.

Anarchists believe that people can best live and organize their lives without hierarchy or coercion. There are dozens of different theories about how this ideal should be realized and what form it should take. Anarchism epitomizes nonauthoritarian political philosophy. The question that remains is whether it is practicable, particularly among large populations. Many anti-authoritarians believe that idealistic attempts to practice pure anarchy on a large scale would prove disastrous and only lead to a mass demand for renewed, strong, authoritarian governance. Most would try to severely limit hierarchy and coercion through vastly expanded democratic and civil libertarian means.

Another primary characteristic of all countercultural episodes is an enthusiasm for personal and social change. This embrace may be formulated quite abstractly, as in Taoist philosopher Lao-tzu's insight that change is the only constant, or the ancient Greek Heraclitus' similar proclamation that "everything changes; nothing remains." In Taoist counterculture, this wisdom was associated with an anarchistic but ultimately passive politics. Other counterculturalists have opted to embody the principle of change in concrete, large-scale social action.

On the individual level, counterculturalists demonstrate changeability: a fluid, chameleon-like process of perpetual transformation in personal identity, interests, and pursuits. Counterculturalists passionately perform what Nietzsche called "transvaluation"—a philosophy and a way of life that involve continual experimentation with changing value systems, perceptions, and beliefs as an end in itself.

Here, activist countercultures like sixties radicalism and passive countercultures like Taoism find some common ground. Just as many well-known sixties counterculturalists progressed through an astonishing series of permutations in style, aesthetics, politics, and philosophy over a few short years, the most celebrated exemplars of Taoism and Zen have traditionally been inscrutable to others because of their unpredictable and contradictory behavior from moment to moment, day to day, and year to year.

The countercultural embrace of constant change is sometimes confused with trendiness or the acceptance of *any* change. Particularly today,

whatever activity is au courant in media and youthful culture (which extends almost into old age) may be described as "hip"—joining the Marines, racing cars in the streets, engaging in intimacy contests on national TV, or following around the rock band Phish. At the risk of being obvious, some changes, like a change from democracy to dictatorship, or from a libertine to a martial culture, are clearly not countercultural in nature.

Naturally, all primary countercultural principles are expressed within parameters that are shaped by the historical moment. Specific historical countercultures represent the underlying directives of counterculture through aspiration and direction, but the animation of these principles in the world is limited by human imperfection. Indeed, the very human contradictions and imperfections found within these historic episodes provide this narrative with opportunities for irreverent criticism, hopefully giving it more of an authentic countercultural character than a mere exercise in cheerleading—or a dry recitation of facts—would have provided.

NEARLY UNIVERSAL FEATURES OF COUNTERCULTURE

Other characteristics manifested by most of the countercultures in this book arise from the fundamental defining principles we just covered. These nearly universal features of counterculture are:

- Breakthroughs and radical innovations in art, science, spirituality, philosophy, and living.
- Diversity.
- Authentic, open communication and profound interpersonal contact. Also, generosity and the democratic sharing of tools.
- Persecution by mainstream culture of contemporaneous subcultures.
- Exile or dropping out.

Countercultures are transgressive, avant-garde movements. The countercultural embrace of change and experimentation inevitably results in pushing beyond accepted views and aesthetics. The most outstanding examples

of countercultural discovery and invention resulting from this impulse—taken together—form one of the major narrative lines in this book. We are looking at boundary transgressions that change history.

The innovations might be political, spiritual, philosophical, artistic, or indeed difficult to pigeonhole. Examples extend from the formation of the Socratic method at the foundations of Western thought to the aesthetic accomplishments arising from Sufism (the verse of Rumi, for instance—currently the world's best-selling poet), and to the democratic ideals that receive universal lip service across the planet today.

If a seeming counterculture looks like a conformist monoculture, it is probably either a genuine counterculture struggling with mass popularization, or a subculture. Countercultures display an exceptional diversity. In contrast, subcultures are usually defined by a kind of alternative or minority conformism.

On the other hand, any gathering into a self-defined cultural group is going to be motivated by *some* commonality, even if it's a gathering of people who—like Groucho Marx—wouldn't want to join any group that would have them as a member. Also, particularly during adolescence and early adulthood, there tends to be a groping after identity. Genuine non-conformists may still feel some need to flaunt the styles and badges of some flavor of contemporary alternativeness. At the other extreme, some counterculturalists are clearly identifiable by their absolute refusal to acknowledge that they're countercultural at all. Why would they choose to so fit in? They are *such* counterculturalists! Anyway, the distinction between subculture and counterculture can be subtle and subject to debate.

Open communication—the free exchange of art and thought between like minds—is often an important element in spawning countercultural communities. Intellectual communication is key to the formation of countercultures. When one counterculturalist dares to divulge his or her heretical notions to a sympathetic ear, a link is created that might become the first in a chain of countercultural community.

The value that counterculturalists place on interpersonal communication is reflected in Sufi Caliph Ali Ben Ali's declaration "A subtle conversation—Ah! That is the true Garden of Eden!" And Ralph Waldo

Emerson said he'd walk a hundred miles through a snowstorm for one good conversation.

Intimate emotional communication—the practice of profound soul baring—is as important as intellectual communication in most of these communities. Recall how the tender courage to bare one's deepest secrets was at the core of the beat movement, and not just in the public, published confessionals of Ginsberg, Kerouac, Diane di Prima, and others. Before their works received wide circulation, the beats spent hundreds of nights talking intimately with each other until dawn.

The beat movement, of course, did emerge from its private hipster intimacy and into the glaring media spotlight. Most countercultural eruptions were, indeed, propelled by the creative use of whatever media or public fora were available. Socrates acquired his students by holding forth in the public gymnasias and markets of Athens. The troubadours spread a new concept of love throughout Europe by traveling and singing songs. There would have been no American Revolution without unflagging pamphleteering. Picasso bent the world's visual perception forever through the medium of the canvas. And the 1960s might have been a firecracker instead of a fusion bomb if not for the sublime sonic subversion etched into the grooves of mass-marketed vinyl records.

Most counterculturalists believe in unqualified liberty to communicate the contents of their minds and imaginations. It's not surprising, then, that countercultures are usually subjected to some level of persecution. When a counterculture is born, a society finds foreigners in its midst. Breaking taboos, violating norms, challenging sacrosanct ideas: the anti-authoritarian spirit inherent in counterculture potentially threatens any established order. Suppression frequently follows.

Types of persecution range from official campaigns of mass obliteration by state authorities to social ostracism and the rejection of the countercultural individual by his peers and family. The degree to which a given counterculture was or is persecuted depends significantly on the extent to which that movement engages in open social activism, and how widely it broadcasts its messages.

When persecution fails to stamp out an active counterculture, the dominant culture tends to assimilate it, subtly weakening, distorting, or sometimes inverting its memes, robbing them of their subversive power.

Establishment forces integrate countercultural phraseology into their own propaganda, while economic powers reduce countercultural art and aesthetics to a mass-marketed commodity. Theodore Roszak writes in *The Making of a Counter Culture*, "it is the cultural experimentation of the young that often runs the worst risks of commercial verminization—and so of having the force of its dissent dissipated." New Left philosopher Herbert Marcuse called this process co-optation.

On the other hand, even the most commercialized aspects of the countercultural meme were profoundly subversive to the totalitarian Eastern bloc states that fell at the end of the 1980s. And even in the relatively open corporate democracies, co-optation may yet backfire. Has the commercialization of anti-authoritarian irreverence through music, comedy, children's animation, and so many other media given bad attitude to an even more widespread and tougher counterculture among many of today's young, as manifested by Gen X skepticism, open source culture, raving, and the anti-globalization movement? And can the countercultural spirit survive war fever in a nation under attack by an invisible enemy? These questions remain unanswered.

Dropping out is one frequent countercultural response to these difficulties. Even when not forced into exile, countercultures often seek greater freedom to explore and live according to their values by separating themselves from the mainstream. This secession can involve geographic isolation, or it can occur by more subtle methods.

Like the American Transcendentalists before them, many members of the sixties youth counterculture took the geographic route by establishing experimental communes in remote rural areas. The American writers and artists of the Lost Generation chose complete exile, expatriating to the more sophisticated territories of Paris and other European locales.

Other counterculturalists dropped out of the mainstream while continuing to live in its midst. The beats separated themselves from America's hyper-conformist fifties society through distinctive dialect, unusual modes of dress, and a refusal to participate in the corporate rat race even at the cost of poverty. (Some may sneer that the major beat figures eventually became financially comfortable as the result of their writings and lectures. However, Allen Ginsberg was the only one who was ever in any danger of having a genuinely high freelance income, and he gave most of his money

away.) But most beats remained in the cities instead of heading for the hills. Similarly, punk squats, urban "hippie" communes, and illegal warehouse takeovers by ravers have carved out "temporary autonomous zones"—places and moments of self-selected liberty from the rule of law—in the heart of mainstream power.

Generosity is another important and nearly universal feature of counterculture. Abraham opened up his tents to feed the poor. The Zen bodhisattva lives a life of service, without succumbing to the self-righteousness of the charitable. Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound generated support for boundary-defying artists in early-twentieth-century Paris. Countercultures tend to value humanity over property, and many love nothing as much as giving stuff away for free. Other countercultures express their generosity through the Promethean impulse to democratically share technological innovation and discovery, ideas, visions, and artwork. The famous hacker slogan "Information wants to be free" is very much a core countercultural concept.

THE PERSONALITIES OF COUNTERCULTURISTS

You see this one-eyed midget shouting the word "Now."

BOB DYLAN

Counterculturalists tend to be jokers, bohemians, and libertines. These qualities subvert serious analyses, but we shouldn't diminish the importance of these stylistic undercurrents. The antic behaviors and easy sensuality found in countercultures across time are, in some ways, the special ingredients that make many countercultures attractive.

Pranksters, cosmic jesters, yarn-spinning riddlers, and defiant mockers of all that's pompous populate many of our stories. Countercultural playfulness represents the nonauthoritarian refusal to take oneself, any ideology, or any code of righteousness too seriously.

Among the Socratics, we recall the philosophically pointed pranks that Diogenes played on Plato's Academy. Humor was an instrument for transmitting profound wisdom in the teaching tales of Taoism, Sufism, and Zen. The stories from all these traditions similarly rely on existential, mind-twisting punch lines to alter the listener's perceptions.

Turning the Boston Harbor into a giant cup of tea to mock British rule was both an act of radical civil disobedience and wry irony on the part of eighteenth-century American revolutionary counterculturalists. In the 1960s, humor was at the heart of the radical activism of Abbie Hoffman's Yippies. The Yippies drove the authorities nuts, attempting to "levitate the Pentagon," bringing a pig into the streets of Chicago as their 1968 presidential candidate, throwing dollar bills from the top floor of the New York Stock Exchange, and performing other political acts of absurdity too numerous to list. Ken Kesey's band of Merry Pranksters took many young Americans into a raucous and sublimely silly LSD wonderland. And in the late 1960s, the world's most popular performers, the Beatles, released scads of impish songs riddled with psychedelic in-jokes and double entendres. Today, playful ravers dress like children attending a birthday party in some science-fiction future, wearing flashing lights, iridescent accessories, and sucking on the glow-in-the-dark pacifiers strung around their necks.

Persecution failed to suppress the sixties counterculturalists' irreverent fun. The defendants in the Chicago Seven trial turned the proceedings into an outrageous comedy play—even as their freedom was on the line. Timothy Leary, repeatedly taken into custody by the authorities, always flashed a wild grin for the media cameras. The famous picture of a protester placing a flower in the barrel of a soldier's rifle stands as an archetypal lighthearted response to grim authority.

For some otherwise jaded postmodern citizens—who have long since digested absolute freedom of expression, and the death of both ideology and (the conventional monotheistic) God—it is only the hedonism of some of our counterculturalists that still disturbs. Honesty compels us to admit that libertine lifestyles tend to produce ambiguous results. Nineteenth-century philosopher Søren Kierkegaard engaged in a disquisition that tried to show that a pleasure-oriented lifestyle is unsustainable. The great boho decadent Oscar Wilde expressed his own ambiguities in his classic *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, conservatives have whined—and not without cause—about some of the more sordid results of mass bohemianism.

Countercultural liberties can open pathways to well-being that aren't recognized by mainstream culture—but can also result in a reckless disregard for self and others. The freedom to self-cultivate in new ways and the

freedom to self-destruct through socially unacceptable channels were both evident in sixties Haight-Ashbury. While throngs of Haightsters were taking up yoga, vegetarianism, and the careful, thoughtful use of mind-manifesting plants and chemicals for self-discovery—all practices the American mainstream had barely even heard of—equal numbers were falling prey to heroin, methamphetamine, and sexually transmitted diseases—issues equally foreign to middle-class culture. The liberty to explore alternative ways of living manifested in a complex blend of opposing tendencies. Some junkies became yogis; some yogis became junkies; and others sat piously in the lotus posture injecting speedballs into their veins. Even some who practiced newfound methods for self-discovery and well-being did so in a destructive manner. Vegetarians starved themselves of protein. Meditators and acidheads let themselves be brainwashed into corrupt or psychotic cults. Spiritual seekers embraced various permutations of the new mysticism so self-righteously that they became rigid, oppressive "White Light Nazis."

Whether following libertine countercultural impulses—in comparison to more self-disciplined paths—is desirable is ultimately a personal, existential question. Should intensity of experience be privileged over health and longevity? Jack Kerouac famously wrote, "the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn." Can the road of excess truly lead to the palace of wisdom or—as in the case of Jerry Garcia and other psychedelic veterans who ultimately pitched their tents in the land of Oblivia—vice versa?

COUNTERCULTURE AND DRUGS IN PERSPECTIVE

Drug use, of course, is the great bugaboo, the contentious issue that lurks in any discussion of contemporary counterculture. What surprises here, perhaps, is the extent to which drug use is *not* central to this exploration (at least not until we get into the twentieth century). Still, mind-affecting plants and chemicals do pop up across countercultural history, so it is necessary to give a perspective on how they fit into the countercultural picture.

In counterculture since the beats, so-called hard drugs—stimulants

and narcotics like speed, heroin, and cocaine—have occasionally fostered fruitful creative frenzy (some beat poetry) or provided a context for narratives of hilarious morbidity and artful gloom (William Burroughs). These drugs have been used with enjoyment and apparent impunity by some. But because of the syndromes of dissolution so often connected with their long-term use, such substances have generally undermined the project of embodying the countercultural impulse in effective action and sustainable modes of living. Counterculture by definition strives toward freedom, while drug addiction is a kind of slavery. In this sense, addictive drug use can ultimately be assessed as anathema to counterculture despite its widespread presence in recent countercultural episodes.

There is a vast history regarding the use of psychedelic (mind-manifesting) plants like psilocybin, peyote, and marijuana to obtain spiritual and religious visions and shamanic healing powers, allowing individuals and groups access to the numinous realm without the intercession of any religious authority. This history is widely disregarded within the mainstream culture, but readers can learn all they need to know simply by reading Huston Smith's *Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Entheogenic Plants and Chemicals*.

More to the point of this particular narrative, altered states of consciousness can sometimes help people conceive alternative truths or open them up to multiple perspectives. In *High Frontiers* magazine, Bruce Eisner and Peter Stafford described the use of various mind-altering drugs as being "like changing the perceptual filters on your camera to give you a variety of pictures of reality." Psychedelics like LSD, mescaline, and later MDMA (or Ecstasy), while certainly presenting some hazards, have fueled the countercultural drive by illuminating utopian visions, inspiring artistic departures, and exposing consensus reality as a buffoon emperor with clay feet and minimal clothing. Even the dark side of the psychedelic experience has made its contribution, infusing the desire for radical change with electric urgency by rendering the horrors of modern life in the vivid, pulsing close-up images of a trip focused on harsh negative realities.

Within these contexts, the use of certain plants and drugs, particularly but not necessarily the psychedelics, is presumed to be understood as an indicator of a particularly unrestrained example of counterculturalness. At the same time, let's stipulate that this is not always the case for all individu-

als and cultures, historically or currently. Even the relatively drug-saturated countercultures of recent decades have given place to counterculturalists who had nothing to do with drugs. For example, adherents of the France-centered Situationist movement—a pivotal influence on much of the sixties youth counterculture—pointedly eschewed drugs. Similarly, the influential early-eighties "straight edge" element of hard-core punk rock provided a powerful anti-drug voice, although its members usually evinced an appropriately countercultural tolerance toward drug users themselves.

At its best—again mostly, but not exclusively, with the psychedelics—counterculture drug exploration goes beyond the usual chemical quest for recreation, relief, or oblivion. Instead, it becomes a manifestation of counterculture's great perennial embrace of new ideas, technologies, experiences, and modes of being. It is from this context that works like Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, Daniel Pinchbeck's *Breaking Open the Head*, and the classic Beatles song "Tomorrow Never Knows" have arisen, evincing the same quality of greatness that so often appears when the countercultural impulse is followed with passion and courage.

IS COUNTERCULTURE COUNTER ANYMORE?

Western and global culture today is a confusion of values. But who can deny that—within the chaotic complexity of this New World Disorder—ever more individuals have increased individual freedom to nonconform to conventions and to communicate their own eccentric ideas? Before the popularization of the Internet and the easy availability of other types of communications technology, most Western civilians didn't have convenient means for expressing themselves, or for distributing the results. Today, while free speech and thought, questioning authority, constant change, sexual liberty, and most other aspects of counterculturalness are not quite majority tastes, these liberties *are* permitted and available to a tremendous number of global citizens, if not the majority. Perhaps counterculture is no longer counter.

On the other hand, we continue to experience backlashes against liberty. Cultural conservatives are particularly up in arms about the progress counterculture has made in softening popular attachments to rigid, absolutist belief structures. The conservatives feel this "moral relativism" is re-

sponsible for an ethical vacuum. They assert that people in a mass society need precise dictates and codes to live by—preferably decreed by religious authority and enforced by the fear of a judgmental, punishing God. They see the lack of a highly defined, inflexible social ideology as responsible for social anomie and decadence, drug abuse, sexual abuse, gangstaism, and the general rudeness extant in Western culture today. They blame the 1960s. While we could list a number of other factors that are equally to blame for these troubling and troubled behaviors that concern everyone who wants to live in peace and prosperity, not just culture conservatives, we won't deny that liberty plays a role in all this "chaos."

Despite the apparent embrace of the Enlightenment doctrine of individual liberty in the eighteenth century, most people since have lived in societies and communities that imposed fairly well-defined social conventions and offered them productive lifelong roles. As the conventions, roles, communities, and families that have sustained stable conformist identities crumble under the strain of whirlwind technological development, global cultural interpenetration, and individual liberty, many—maybe even most—postmodern citizens find themselves thrown for a loss. The Taoist idea of flowing with constant change, the scientific method of experimentally seeking knowledge rather than arriving at certainty, the Surrealist's gift for turning chaos into art and "meaningless meaning"—these ways of seeing and being in the world are not yet understood by most people living in the (relatively) free lands. And even when they're understood intellectually, it's not easy to truly live free.

The true countercultural path is a difficult one. It's doubtful whether a majority will be happy living without some sort of externally dictated belief system anytime soon. Freedom from certitude and rigid behavioral codes will undoubtedly continue to provoke confusion, angst, and destructive behavior in many. And at a mass level, in post-9/11 America, the whole project of spreading, and expanding, the boundaries of nonconformism and autonomy has been vastly complexified. Perhaps the best that counterculture can hope for is to persevere, although another view sees opportunities for radical shifts within the turbulence. In either case, surf's up!

{ Part II } ACROSS THE SPAN OF TIMES AND PLACES