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## The social and (counter)cultural 1960s in the USA, transatlantically

### George McKay

The movement was a loose coalition, and alliances often defined it. Students, clergy, intellectuals often marched first, and later they were joined by many others, from ecologists to hippies to women's liberationists.... [W]hen cultural activists in Ann Arbor, Michigan, met [in 1969] to discuss drugs in the city representatives appeared from the White Panthers, Black Berets, God's Children Motorcycle Club, the Sunnygoode Street Commune, and Congolian Maulers, a 'commune of art, music, and general freaks'.

Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties* (1995, xi)

Hippies ... constituted themselves as walking critiques of bureaucratic rationality.... By the late 1960s 'freakified' youth were exploring new aspects of self-hood which they had never previously thought existed. Indulgence in drug experiences, sex, communal activities, be-ins, sit-ins, demonstrations, riots, busts, trips with no destination in particular, not only gave subculture members a set of common experiences, but also opened up vast new capacities of self-hood for exploration.

Daniel A. Foss and Ralph W. Larkin (1976, 47-50)

In this chapter I want to look at the counterculture of the 1960s, primarily at the American phenomenon, with specific reference to political, social and cultural questions. I am conscious that these are not so easily distinguished—that, in fact, for many involved in the movement, it was a project precisely to blur or merge these categories. I hope to illustrate and interrogate some of those connections and tensions. More widely, of course, the 1960s were a time of contestation, activism, experimentation, energy, and I set the context for this. A good deal has been written about that mythicised and hyperbolic decade (if decade is was it was) and I—with my own attitudinal subcultural baggage of having been a 1970s punk—am wary of myself contributing to its pervasive nostalgising. George Lipsitz has written that 'the enduring hold of the 1960s on the imagination of the present has been pernicious', while Andy Bennett, following Lawrence Grossberg, writes of 'how 1960s nostalgia airbrushes out of youth cultural history the strident political statements of punk rockers and rap artists' (both quoted in Bennett 2004, 51). At the same time, though, a danger of *not* adequately historicising the period is that we end up being careless with our own radical cultural history—post-1960s, for instance—history which, as I have pointed out elsewhere, 'is not even always that old' (source?). While Peter Stansill and David Zane Mairowitz may be correct in their description of events 'between 1965 and 1970 [are] clearly not a "Movement", although full of interior motion', it is *not* the case that '[a]ll that remains is the ephemera' (1971, 13). Much of my own work over the years has been concerned with the social possibilities and political limitations of what might be perceived of as radical culture—in music, ways of living,

youth and other social movements, protest campaigns, for instance. Such phenomena are *always present*, usually as more than simply utopian traces, residual strands or apparently ephemeral artefacts. What Michael Heale has called ‘the decade’s schizoid reputation’ seems markedly persistent (Heale 2001, 8).

I go on to consider ways in which the US model of countercultural practice was exported and embraced particularly in Britain, and at some of the political and theoretical questions of this cultural process of Americanisation (if that is what it was) during what was also a time of profound criticism or condemnation of US exported military activity in the form of the Vietnam War (early 1960s-1973).

### **Protest and counterculture in the 1960s**

Civil rights, women’s rights, gay rights—it’s all wrong.  
Gil Scott Heron, ‘B movie’ (1981)

Gil Scott Heron’s classic protest song against Reaganism and the new right in the United States captures the shifting ground of political retrospection. In fact what Susan Faludi subsequently identified, with specific reference to feminism, as the ‘backlash’ against the liberatory movements of the 1960s, as well as the ‘culture wars’ of the 1990s, are themselves symptoms of the continuing need to reference and dispute the liberatory claims of the period. (It is notable that a ‘white *backlash*’ against black civil rights successes had been talked about by President Lyndon Johnson as long back as 1964: Anderson 1995, 132.)

In February 1960 four young black college students sat at the whites-only lunch counter in Woolworth’s store in Greensboro, North Carolina, and, when refused service, remained sitting there for the remainder of the afternoon. They returned the following day with thirty colleagues, the number growing daily, and including some white students, through the week. In this way, argues Jack Newfield, ‘The New Radicalism began with a request for a cup of coffee’ (1966, 212). There had been important anti-racist actions and campaigns prior to this—most famously perhaps that of Rosa Parks, refusing to give up her bus seat to a white passenger, leading to the Montgomery bus boycott which contributed to desegregation. But, as Terry Anderson puts it, Greensboro in February 1960 ‘marked a decisive break with earlier civil rights demonstrations.... The sit-ins ignited a younger generation of blacks to become activists, and more important, they stimulated some southern and many northern whites to participate in something they began calling “the movement”’ (1995, 45). The Freedom Rides of May and June 1961 saw groups of mostly younger white and black civil rights activists challenging the segregated transport system of the South (where bus station facilities remained segregated despite the Supreme Court’s 1960 declaration against such segregation). Television footage and reports of white violence, beatings and bombings, even a ‘hate bus’ organised in response to the Freedom Riders by the American Nazi Party (Heale 2001, 115), were broadcast around America and the globe. One black student, Cleveland Sellers, recalled the impact of television in his household: ‘the lounge would be so quiet you could hear a rat pissing on cotton.... My identification with the demonstrating students was so thorough that I would flinch every time one of the whites taunted them. On nights when I saw pictures of students being beaten and dragged through the streets by their

hair, I would leave the lounge in a rage' (quoted in Anderson 1995, 48-49). From such sit-ins, direct action, confrontation, voter registration campaigns, sustained in the face of murderous violence—and mediated through television news reporting, since 'TV was now a powerful propaganda tool for those wanting progressive social change' (J. Fred Macdonald, quoted in Robinson 1997, 145)—first the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964 (outlawing segregation) and the Voting Rights Act (guaranteeing African-American enfranchisement) the following year. According to Heale, '[i]n a remarkably few years they had destroyed the foundations of a caste system than had lasted for generations' (2001, 121). But non-violent civil disobedience was not the tactic of all African-Americans, since blacks did not, in Malcolm X's phrase, 'bleed nonviolently' (quoted in Anderson 1995, 153). Further black radicalism was articulated once more following such constitutional victories, which were viewed with suspicion as assimilationist—as Stokely Carmichael put it in 1966: 'Integration is a subterfuge for the maintenance of white supremacy' (quoted in Heale 2001, 122). With the rise of the multi-faceted Black Power movement, cultural nationalism achieved some prominence as an effort to 'liberate blacks psychologically by giving them a positive sense of identity that included African art forms and dress, Afro hairstyles, and even learning Swahili' (Newman 2004, 126). In the slogan of the times, black was beautiful. Though even this is complex: in *Mercy, Mercy Me* James C. Hall reminds us that some African-American cultural expressions of the 1960s were 'unconventionally conservative and not simplistically optimistic,... [even as they] remained involved in the liberatory "unbinding of energies"' (2001, 30).

April 1967 saw Muhammad Ali refusing to be drafted into the US military, and many civil rights organisations sought to draw the connection between the Vietnam War and 'the struggle of the world's nonwhite peoples to free themselves from white oppression' (Newman 2004, 123). For the US government the war was about defeating or at least containing the international spread of communism during the Cold War. But in Cedric J. Robinson's view, race was the central global dynamic of social struggle during this time:

While the official world war contestation, the Cold War, has been taken to have subsumed all other conflicts, it is now possible to cast the competition between the two imperial hegemonies, the United States and the Soviet Union, as a historical sidebar to the struggles to obtain or vanquish racial domination. (1997, 134)

In the early 1960s a gradual escalation of American military presence intended to stop South Vietnam from falling to communism took place. By 1963 there were around 16,000 military advisers there, and the following year a US navy destroyer was attacked by North Vietnamese forces in the Tonkin Gulf. 1965 saw the newly re-elected Johnson administration, in spite of its popular pre-election position citing moderation and talking of 'peace', massively increasing the mobilisation of troops and military activity in Vietnam. The President declared: 'If we don't stop the Reds in South Vietnam ... next week they will be in San Francisco' (quoted in Anderson 1995, 120)—unaware perhaps that other things were happening in San Francisco. Operation Rolling Thunder saw US bombing and combat action in North Vietnam. By 1968, over half a million US combat troops were in Vietnam, and, in Terry H. Anderson's view, the Vietnam War became 'the engine of the sixties' (1995, 135). The existing small peace movement was now energised by social movement activists,

in particular by leftist students on campus and by sections of the civil rights movement. An early mobilisation of gendered politics was also visible with anti-war campaign groups organised by women like Mothers for Peace, whose best known slogan read 'War is not Healthy for Children and Other Living Things'. (Though for ways in which representations of 'the Vietnam War and its veterans became the springboard for a general remasculinization of American culture' through the 1970s and 1980s see of course Jeffords 1989: 169.) National marches, international campaigning, teach-ins on campus, draft card- and flag-burning rituals, a growing exodus of US youth to, for instance, Canada or Europe to escape military call-up—all and more were testament to the critical impact of the war on American society internally and globally. But at first '[t]he countercultural forces that seeped onto college campuses in 1965 and flooded them by 1967 seemed largely beside the point to most antiwar protesters' (Farber 1992, 10). In fact, subsequent to this, 'a militant, politicised counterculture' would emerge in some small form, as David Farber notes: 'In New York between 1967 and 1972, the Yippies, the Crazies, and the Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers, all advocated what was called "armed love"... In the words of the Motherfuckers: "We defy law and order with our bricks, bottles, garbage, long hair, filth, obscenity, drugs, games, guns, bikes, fire, fun and fucking"' (1992, 19).

In 1970, a week after the first environmental campaigning Earth Day, President Nixon announced the invasion of Cambodia—using the phrase 'This is not an invasion of Cambodia' (quoted in Anderson 1995, 349)—which would lead to a resurgence of anti-war protest, such as led to the killings of Kent State University students during a 1970 demonstration, or the 1971 May Day Tribe's direct action aimed at closing down the operation of federal government in Washington. Here '[t]he use of mass, non-violent civil disobedience against what many perceived to be the illegitimate policy of an unresponsive government resulted in the largest mass arrest in American history' (Hopkins 1992, 72). The Vietnam War was not only 'the engine' of the decade, in Anderson's phrase, its significance has resonated subsequently in the international perception of the United States. For Heale, the war is defining of the 1960s, and it also reaches far beyond that period: '[i]t was a decade when the United States was bitterly humiliated in the jungles of South-east Asia, when the vision generated by the Second World War that the "American Century" had dawned was brutally punctured, bequeathing a lasting suspicion of the wisdom of the United States imposing its will in distant lands' (Heale 2001, 7)

Much of the political energy for social change derived from the 'new generation/with a new explanation' sung of by Scott Mackenzie. American youth, and, as noted, in particular students, played a key role in protest. For Heale, student activism can even contribute to the periodisation of the American decade:

the Sixties could begin in February 1960 with four black students sitting at a whites-only lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, and demanding to be served, an incident that helped to spark the civil rights crusade, and end in May 1970 with the fatal shooting of four white students at a demonstration at Ohio's Kent State University. (2001, 4-5)

Groups like Students for a Democratic Society or the Free Speech Movement emerged on campus through the early 1960s. SDS's *Port Huron Statement* emphasised young people's 'unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction,

self-understanding' (quoted in Heale 2001, 25). Student protests attacked anything from the Vietnam War draft to the essential width of opening dormitory doors when a friend of the opposite sex was visiting a campus hall of residence. As with the European student revolt, the entire issue of universities acting *in loco parentis* was identified as a symptom of the continuing infantilisation of young people by the authorities. Yet there was dialogic opposition to these developments: an organisation like Young Americans for Freedom explicitly opposed the student-centred activism that seemed to be dominating US campus life. YAF was sponsored by the likes of John Wayne and Ronald Reagan, and members attacked everything liberal from President Kennedy and the Peace Corps to, in the words of one, the 'ludicrous array of bearded University of Chicago beatniks, self-righteous and militant pacifists and solemn-toned members of the corn-and-hog country intelligentsia' (quoted in Anderson 1995, 109).

Within the youthful counterculture, new socio-cultural gatherings were used to foster movement identity. These took on a variety of experimental forms, angled variously towards hedonistic experience or lifestyle choice, political statement or avant-garde expression, though again with significant blurring and merging. Some were avowedly nomadic, such as the Beat mentality that tapped into the hobo tradition, and the related Merry Pranksters travellers, others were settled, such as the explosion of communes and intentional communities, particularly in rural America. Among the most visual though were the various be-ins, happenings, festivals of the time. At the Human Be-In in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco in January 1967, the first major 'gathering of the tribes', intended to bring together the Berkeley antiwar campaigners with the Haight Ashbury community, in what underground magazine *Oracle* called 'a union of love and activism', 'the people themselves were the main event' (Anderson 1995, 172). Nine months later—at the end of the Summer of Love, as the Psychedelic Shop was closing down—a ceremony and procession were held, black-bordered invitations available to all. 'Funeral notice. Hippie. In the Haight Ashbury District of this city, Hippie, devoted son of Mass Media. Friends are invited to attend services beginning at sunrise, October 6, 1967, at Buena Vista Park' (in von Hoffman 1968, 238-239). The coffin reportedly contained several beards, some strings of beads and two kilograms of marijuana. But the next year a less self-centred gathering took place: the yippies at the Chicago Democratic Party convention were charged with 'disturbing the peace' for their anti-authoritarian protests which included attempting to nominate a pig (called Pigasus) for President. The yippie was defined by Abbie Hoffman as 'a political hippie. A flower child who's been busted' (quoted in Anderson 1995, 217), though the yippie political agenda included a blank demand with the words, 'you can fill in what you want' (quoted in Anderson 1995, 219). An absurdist response to an absurdist situation, perhaps, a spectacle of semi-targeted irony and celebration against a backdrop of the Tet offensive, demands to 'bomb 'em back to the stone age' (General Curtis LeMay), and the recent destabilising assassinations. In more avant-garde circles, artists were interrogating the boundaries between cultural forms and audience expectations, between participants and observers, at multi-media events called 'happenings'. In *The New Bohemia*, John Gruen defines the happening:

usually it consists of an environment, created or selected by an artist, in, on, around which certain skeletally planned events are made to take place. This environment may range from the indoors or outdoors of the city in which the

participants live, to the beach, the woods, a highway, or a mountain of discarded rubber tyres. *The audience becomes the cast.* (Gruen 1990, 144; emphasis added)

The first major rock festival of the counterculture was the west coast's Monterey Pop Festival of June 1967, central to the narrative and space of the Summer of Love. According to Anderson, festival-goers

came in peasant dresses, in bell bottoms, leather vests, in colours: mellow yellow, panama red, moby grape, deacon blue, acapulco gold. [LSD chemist Augustus] Owsley [Stanley III] supplied a new batch of LSD called Monterey Purple, dubbed Purple Haze, and the bands merged the San Francisco sounds with American pop, rock, blues, soul, folk-rock, and the British Invasion. (1995, 174)

Two summers later, what one contemporary called 'the counter-culture's great white Bacchanalia—Woodstock' (quoted in Whiteley 2004, 19) saw the African-American guitarist and ex-military serviceman Jimi Hendrix, playing his distorted, defamiliarising version of 'The star spangled banner', which, in Sheila Whiteley's view, is 'considered by so many to be the most complex and powerful work of American art to deal with the Vietnam War and its effects on successive generations of the American psyche' (2004, 24). Pop festival culture was a significant American export, one that had some origins in the outdoors jazz festivals of the 1950s. The links between festival culture and nomadic lifestyle are strong, not least in that one of the origins of British festival tradition lies in its connection of traveller culture and traveller gatherings, whether in the form of seasonal celebrations or rural markets. Some of this is American Beat-inspired, of course—going on the road, Jack Kerouac-style, or piling into a converted bus, Merry Prankster-style. The revival of local nomadic gatherings has been a common act of the transatlantic counterculture, in which lost folkloric tradition is re-presented as contemporary festival. According to Nigel Fountain, '1969 was the year that rock festivals took off in Britain' (1988, 76)—and he cites the two Hyde Park free concerts by Blind Faith in June and the Rolling Stones in July, along with Bob Dylan at the Isle of Wight in August as constituting 'the summer of festivals' (Fountain 1988, 90). These events in Britain signal the start of a new mass(-ish) movement; the same year in the States Woodstock (August) and Altamont (December) seemed with hindsight to signal the end of not just the decade, but the sense of the decade, the idea of the sixties. The death of the sixties at the Altamont Rolling Stones concert is a commonplace observation, though the transatlantic journeying of festival (via films of key US festivals, like *Jazz on A Summer's Day*, *Monterey Pop*, and *Woodstock*, in part) does not fit this chronology. Arthur Marwick's melancholic comment in *The Sixties* that Altamont 'seemed to signal the end of the magic of rock, particularly British rock, and of love-in pop concerts' can be qualified (see McKay 2000). What festivals also do though is evidence the sheer power and desire of *music* within the counterculture. FM radio DJ Dave Hermann looked back through the 1960s from the early 1970s:

If the music hadn't happened, nothing would be happening.... The mode of the music changed; it changed in the 1950s, and the walls of the city are shaking. And there would be no women's lib; there would be no Panthers, no

Lords, no civil rights movement—no nothing—if we were still listening to Patti Page records. (quoted in Sarlin 1973, 198)

KPMX in San Francisco was ‘the first FM stereo station that played psychedelic rock’ in 1967, and during the summer of love the top five albums sold in America included the Beatles, Rolling Stones, the Doors, Jefferson Airplane—even if the counterculture was in fact numerically small (only between two and three per cent of US students considered themselves ‘activists’ at the height of the 1960s, while ‘considerably less than 0.1 per cent of the total American population’ were part of the hippie counterculture), its soundtrack was appealing, fashionable, and very popular (Anderson 1995, 173, xi; Marwick 1998, 480).

Many in the counterculture aimed to become ‘cosmonauts of inner space’—in terms of the interior landscape of narcotic experience (Alexander Trocchi’s term, as used by William Burroughs: quoted in Hewison 1986 102). One essential ingredient of the US counterculture was ‘LSD, and everything associated with it’ (Marwick 1998, 482)—rock music and associated light shows, psychedelic art and posters, narcotic gatherings such as the Trips Festivals and the Acid Tests, the possibility of ‘dropping out’ having had one’s ‘mind blown’ by the psychoactive experience of LSD. In the views of some, acid was the personal tool for social revolution, for some it was the path to personal enlightenment. New self-hoods of inner cosmonauts could turn solipsistic too, though: in West Germany in the 1960s, one of the leaders of Kommune I had declared: ‘I don’t care about Vietnam, I care about my orgasm’ (quoted in Becker 1977, 56). More radically perhaps, Ken Kesey had starkly laid out the Merry Pranksters’ acid view of anti-war campaigning at a Berkeley teach-in in 1965, where he directly compared the marching of military and protester alike: ‘You’re not gonna stop this war with this rally, by marching ... look at the war and turn your backs and say ... Fuck it’ (quoted in Farber 1992, 9). A heady *IT* editorial from March 1967 in London picked up this permissive and ambivalently collective/individualistic spirit, though with an insistence on its ‘positive’ and ‘creative’ use, as well as a blatant nod towards the consumerism of new fashion and music (it also clearly expresses the ambition of *IT* to be a voice for the British underground).

we have reached a stage at which it is now possible to talk about a ‘we’ despite the multi-direction and anti-uniformity of our movement.... It is essentially an inner-directed movement—a new way of looking at things.... [T]he search for pleasure/orgasm covers every field of human activity, from sex, art and inner space, to architecture, the abolition of money, outer space and beyond.... [It is] post/anti-political—this is not a movement of protest but one of celebration.... The weapons are love and creativity—wild new clothes, fashions, strange new sounds. (quoted in Hewison 1986, 125)

In Timothy Leary’s view, ‘[t]here are three groups who are bringing about the great revolution of the new age.... They are the DOPE DEALERS, the ROCK MUSICIANS, and the UNDERGROUND ARTISTS AND WRITERS’ (quoted in Armstrong 1981, 56). The alternative media of the 1960s was pivotal in presenting and developing its ideas. The first issue of perhaps the first main underground press publication, *Berkeley Barb*, was produced in order to ensure sympathetic coverage for an anti-war demonstration in 1965 (Armstrong 1981, 32). Founder Max Scherr ‘saw



the *Barb* as a propaganda vehicle and organizing tool fully as much as he did a newspaper of record' (Armstrong 1981, 46). Old media forms were revisited—notably, comics were claimed for the children of the revolution, or 'comix', 'both in contra-distinction to their straight counterparts and to denote their "x-rated" content' (Sabin 1993, 36). One of the first and best-known was Robert Crumb's *Zap*, from Los Angeles in 1967, which also featured the work of artists involved in the psychedelic poster scene. The alternative media moved with the counterculture's campaigns: *The Bond* (1967) was 'the first underground GI paper', even distributed in Vietnam (Armstrong 1981, 112)—though note the counterview of David Huxley here, that '[d]espite the fact that the very fabric of the underground was anti-establishment, anti-violence, mainly pro-drug and thus implicitly opposed to the war, there is minimal reaction to it in its comics' (1988, 107). When the women's movement gathered force it was accompanied by new publications like *off our backs* and the comic *It Ain't Me, Babe* (both 1970). In Britain the leading underground press were the magazines *International Times* (1966) and *Oz* (1967), which were part of a significant flourishing of alternative, community and regional publications. In fact, the *Directory of British Alternative Periodicals 1965-74* contains 1, 256 entries, from *Aardvark* to *Zoar* (Hewison 1986, 95). Nor, in spite of the potentially prohibitive start-up and technology costs, were the new media of the time excluded from the counterculture's attention—as the Greenpeace activist says below, 'We had studied Marshall McLuhan'. Underground film-makers, video activism from groups like Videofreex, guerrilla television, as well as the extension of community radio and listener-sponsored stations into the shortlived underground radio broadcasters were evidence of innovation within the organisation, production, distribution and topics of the the alternative media (see Armstrong 1981, ch.3, and Boyle 1997 on the politics of 'narrowcasting' and 'technoradicalism').

Liberatory movements around gender and sexuality were vital in maintaining the decade's momentum. A week after the Democratic Party and yippie convention in Chicago in 1968, a group of around one hundred feminist activists protested against the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City. Their action included a 'freedom trash can' for depositing the enslaving accoutrements of patriarchally-defined female beauty—such as hair curlers, false eyelashes, girdles, and of course bras. They offered their own direct response to the question that had opened Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, 'Is this all?', but they were pushing in a more critical direction than the by now established groups like the National Organisation for Women. Control over the body was integral to the new women's movement, as one classic text, from Boston Women's Health Collective in 1970, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, eponymously articulated. But equal rights and social opportunities were profoundly important too, and the very process of increasing understanding women's and men's roles and positions was prioritised with the development of consciousness-raising groups across all states. Within the Women's Liberation Movement, as the slogan went, the personal was political. Taking inspiration from the civil rights movement's successful emphasis on equality, from critiques of the masculine violence of the Vietnam War, as well as from the liberatory impulses of the counterculture, feminist groups sprang up across the country. Mary King and Casey Hayden wrote the influential 'a kind of memo' in 1965, originally distributed by post to other women in 'the peace and freedom movement' (and reprinted in *Liberation* in 1966):

Having learned from the movement to think radically about the personal work and abilities of people whose role in society has gone unchallenged before, a lot of women in the movement have begun to apply those lessons to their own relationships with men. Each of us probably has her own story of the various results. (quoted in Armstrong 1981, 227)

Things moved slowly here, at least: 'Woman as Nigger' wrote Gayle Rubin in 1969—as if to confirm the interpretation, in Milwaukee, women had recently been refused service at a lunch counter needed for busier, more active and important male diners (Anderson 1995, 316-317). The subalternity of black women was articulated as victimisation 'by the twin immoralities of Jim Crow and Jane Crow' (quoted in Anderson 1995, 341). Women were also quickly to become critical of many of the men in activist and countercultural circles, who were slow or reluctant to realise the implications of feminist articulations of power. Until the women's movement and gay liberation the counterculture's practice of sexual liberation and the rhetoric of free love had usually been a hetero-patriarchally defined. At one of the leading underground press publications, *the Los Angeles Free Press*, 'as the news pages in the front of the paper filled up with accounts of fights for artistic freedom, the back pages filled up with the "swingers"' classified ads for which the paper became notorious' (Armstrong 1981, 52). Nicholas von Hoffman's journalistic outsider's account of Haight-Ashbury in SF in 1967, *We Are the People Our Parents Warned us Against*, had observed:

Hip or straight, the essential feminine role is intractably the same: the old ladies of the Haight doing the cooking, the sewing, and the house cleaning like the young matrons in the suburbs. (1968, 184)

Though there had been semi-secret organisations for gays and lesbians, like the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Libitis, 1969 was a pivotal year for the public mobilisation of gay activism in the US, with Stonewall. Drawing strength from the liberatory movements some were involved in, gay men and then some women fought back against police harassment and violence following a raid on a well-known gay venue, the Stonewall Inn in New York. At this time homosexuality was illegal across the US, and even within the liberatory movement some, such as Black Panthers, were denouncing it too. But for gay men Stonewall was a turning point, leading to the formation of groups like the Gay Liberation Front, and, swiftly, to celebratory public spectacles like gay street dances. These 'invisible men, invisible women' were rejecting that status. Jonathan Katz continues: 'we were politicised, body and soul. In one quick, bright flash we experienced a secular revelation: we too were among America's mistreated' (quoted in Anderson 1995, 318). As an illustration of the cross-networking of movement, as well as of colliding constructions of masculinity, one subsequent gay liberation anti-war slogan which managed to demystify homosexual activity, criticise the US military's attitude to gays, *and* be an anti-war statement was 'Suck cock and beat the draft!' (quoted in Stansill and Mairowitz 1971, 199).

The first Earth Day (April 22, 1970) signalled the popular arrival of environmental consciousness in north America, as 20 million people were actively involved in campaigning for the environment on that one day. Building on student protest networks, much of Earth Day 1970's activities occurred in schools and

colleges. Ironically, Earth Day publicity graphics regularly employed striking images of the globe taken from US space ships, the living planet enshrined in darkness intended to show the fragility and of the earth, as well as the necessity of a holistic approach towards its environmental treatment. (One of the most popular countercultural publications of the time was the *Whole Earth Catalog*.) Here the product of leading-edge NASA technology is employed to further ideological positions often framed in anti-industrial or countermovement terms. While the 1960s did indeed 'end ... with a walk on the moon' (Heale 2001, 1), it was as much to do with the gaze back to earth. Rik Scarce traces some of the strands of activity that contributed to the rise in eco-awareness, which had some origin in the publication of Rachael Carson's environmental classic *Silent Spring* in 1962: 'The 1960s and early 1970s saw the development of the precursor of the radical environmental movement, the "lifestyle" version of environmentalism. These back-to-the-land advocates possessed a strong ecological consciousness. By living simply they were making a political statement' (1990, 25). The establishment of 'people's parks' in urban areas became an important early aspect of the environmental reclamation of social and cultural space, as articulated by one Seattle hippie: 'A park is for living things, squirrels, children, growing things, turned-on things, people, love, food, lush, green colours, laughter, kites, music, God, the smell of life' (quoted in DiCanio 1998, 96). Students at the University of California had first sought to transform a vacant plot owned by the university at Berkeley into such a People's Park, though its violent ending belied its early pastoral ambitions. The micro-perspective articulated within the feminist movement—'the personal is political'—was also being heard within the dynamic of environmentalism—'think local, act global'. The direct action environmental campaign organisation Greenpeace has its origins during this period, too. In 1969 activists in Canada—including some Vietnam War 'draft-dodgers' from the US—protested against American nuclear weapons testing off the Alaskan coast. The plan was to sail a ship to obstruct the explosion—tactics attempted previously by Quaker anti-nuclear activists and used successfully by a succession of Greenpeace ships in later years. What the embryonic Greenpeace group understood was the importance of media coverage for actions—25% of the crew on the first Greenpeace ship were journalists. As Robert Hunter recalls, in *The Greenpeace Chronicle*:

We saw it as a media war. We had studied Marshall McLuhan.... The idea was to hit the establishment press, the underground press, and the airwaves all at once.... Whereas the Quakers had been content to try to 'bear witness', Greenpeace would try to make *everybody* bear witness—through news dispatches, voice reports, press releases, columns, and, of course, photographs. (quoted in McKay 1998, 10)

Of course, it does need to be emphasised that, for a period frequently characterised (retrospectively) by a rhetoric of 'love and peace' accompanying a constructive agenda of social change, there were extraordinarily persistent and powerful manifestations of violence at all levels of society throughout the 1960s. Most dominant was the state's military actions in Vietnam, broadcast nightly in the latter period into US homes via television news, and impacting compellingly in the domestic sphere also in the very act of the draft (selective military call-up, extended from 1965 on) itself, which hit African-American families disproportionately. But there were also shocking political assassinations—President Kennedy (1963), Malcolm X (1965), American Nazi leader George Lincoln Rockwell (1967), Martin

Luther King (1968), presidential candidate Robert Kennedy (1968). There is an obvious but still compelling irony in the fact that, while the US government was fighting an increasingly desperate and destructive war in Vietnam, at home President Lyndon Johnson was appointing a Commission on Civil Disorders (1967) and the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence (1968: see Heale 2001, 90). There was too murderous racial terror by white supremacists in the American South, 'summer riots' in black urban quarters from 1965 on, the fascination and notoriety of Charles Manson and the Family murders in Hollywood, the formation of internal 'terrorist' groupings like the Weathermen, the killing of student protestors on campus by national guardsmen and state troopers at Kent State and Jackson State Universities. In response to continued student protest at Berkeley, California state governor Ronald Reagan was all out of patience with American youth: 'If it takes a bloodbath, let's get it over with. No more appeasement' (quoted in Anderson 1995, 327). Elsewhere, several US anti-war protestors self-immolated. Even artists and pop festivals were not removed from the experience of violence: Valerie Solanas, writer of *The SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) Manifesto*, shot Andy Warhol in 1968, while Hell's Angels security indulged in an infamous murderous spree at the Altamont pop festival the following year. The eschatological imperative articulated severally by the Doors was resonant and atmospheric. Readings of a "'destructive generation",... naïve, utopian and self-dramatising, indulging in fantasies that promoted violence and offered little of a constructive nature' (Heale 2001, 2) became dominant in the authorities' articulations, as well as in the perceptions of the so-called 'silent majority'. Within the international generation too, the countercultural interrogation of limits was being seen in terms of its excesses. Richard Neville, in a 1970 editorial in London's *OZ* magazine, identified 'the oppressive chain of events which has propelled us from dropped-out euphoric gregariousness to the contemporary gungslinging gang bang. [For "Movement sophists", i]t's a logical hop from Kent State to the trendy genocide of, "to kill a policeman is a sacred act" ([Timothy] Leary)' (quoted in Stansill and Mairowitz 1971, 258). According to Terry Anderson, [a]t home and abroad, America was at war' (1995, 169). *Newsweek* declared 1967 to be—not the summer of love, but the 'summer of discontent', while *Time* magazine wondered whether 1969 would be 'Guerrilla Summer' (Anderson 1995, 170, 325).

### **Theorising the transatlantic 1960s**

What Anderson has called the US movement's 'geography of activism' (1995, xii) also had an international dimension. Arthur Marwick goes so far as to suggest that '[i]n some ways the hippies were the most international of all the phenomena associated with the sixties' (1998, 480-1). Harry Shapiro maps things as he saw them then:

The Beatles also helped to put London on the psychedelic map and there were many attempts to re-create Haight Ashbury in W10 and NW6. For the *Berkeley Barb* and the *Oracle* read *International Times* and *Oz*; the Roundhouse, UFO and Middle Earth for the Fillmore and the Avalon Ballroom; Ally Pally for the Be-In; Pink Floyd, Soft Machine and Cream for the Dead, Airplane and Quicksilver. Cream and Hendrix straddled both continents.... (Shapiro 1988, 146)

Shapiro implies that the British counterculture is the imitative one, the secondary 're-creation', which is also how George Melly saw it during the Summer of Love: 'San Francisco became the capital of British pop, and British pop became in consequence provincial' (1970, 107). Interestingly, at least one American perspective reverses the transatlantic pop cultural influence. In *Festival! The Book of American Music Celebrations*, *Rolling Stone* writer Jerry Hopkins describes the burgeoning scene in Haight Ashbury in 1965 as follows: 'San Francisco became known as "America's Liverpool"' (Hopkins *et al* 1970, 22). One of the first rural communes in California was named after a Beatles song, Strawberry Fields. Such small details as these suggest that cultural exchange is a complex process.

Nevertheless, many in Britain and across Europe recognised, and were attracted by, a special energy emanating from the US. In the words of rock music manager Peter Jenner:

There was this spirit, this idea that there should be some sort of linkage with America.... America was much more exciting than it is now—because you couldn't get there easily.... I don't think that makes the English underground an *ersatz* culture, though. It was inspired by the West Coast but it was very, very English. (quoted in Green 1988, 61)

The post-World War II 'European lament' about the irresistible rise of American modernity 'masked a generational conflict, the parental fear of losing control over children and adolescents' as well as 'a general discomfort with the technological advance, urban sophistication, and physical mobility' (quoted in Campbell *et al* 2004, 13). After all, one of the Berkeley students' Free Speech Movement slogans was 'You can't trust anyone over 30'. This 'conflict' around ideas of the youthful presence of things American, new and modern and their incipient threat to older ways, could be clearly seen in Richard Hoggart's influential *The Uses of Literacy* when he describes British 'juke-box boys' whose 'clothes, ... hair-styles ... facial expressions all indicate [they] are living ... in a myth-world compounded of a few simple elements which they take to be those of American life' (*ibid.*). What we might understand as the 'Americanisation' of Britain is here inextricably bound up with discourses of youth, newness, and modernity signifying danger as well as promise.

In the 1950s the attractions of American pop culture were seen then in rock and roll, but also in the foundational jazz festivals held at Beaulieu in Hampshire from 1956-61, from which British pop festival culture sprang (see McKay 2000, McKay 2005), as well as in the swift embrace of US Pop Art by younger British artists. For the Scot Eduardo Paolozzi,

American magazines represented a catalogue of an exotic society, bountiful and generous, where the event of selling tinned pears was transformed into multi-coloured dreams, where sensuality and virility combined to form, in our view, an art far more subtle and fulfilling than the orthodox choice of either the Tate Gallery or the Royal Academy. (quoted in Philo 2004, 285)

Fear of the United States was evident in some of the utterances of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (established in 1958 in response to American hydrogen bomb

tests), and even in some of the communist-influenced British folk revival of the 1950s' policy line advocating English folk song by English singers. As folk singer and organiser Ewan MacColl expressed it: 'we should be pursuing some kind of national identity, not just becoming an arm of American cultural imperialism' (quoted in Denselow 1990, 26). Such ambivalences in culture and performance were expressed in the 1960s too: simply the title of Peter Brooks' collaborative anti-Vietnam War play of 1966 captured Britain's implicated position: *US*.

It appears that the Vietnam War was indeed pivotal, even in Britain. In the view of New Left publisher Robin Blackburn, 'the leading edge of what was happening [in the counterculture] was in the United States. In the first place, the Vietnam War, however much one might demonstrate against it here, was theirs' (quoted in Green 1988, 62). Such a transatlantic gaze, while critically acknowledging the hegemonic authority of the US during the Cold War, could be at the expense of a wider European sensibility, a point recognised by art critic Jonathan Meades: 'The English underground seemed to be almost totally preoccupied with the American avant-garde, which was very formless and unrigorous compared with the French avant-garde of that time.... I always felt that there was a terrific, not exactly antipathy towards mainland Europe among my contemporaries, but a kind of studied indifference' (quoted in Green 1988, 62). (Another 'new world' than the USA would supply Britain's counterculture with personalities, energy and attitude, as Australians like Richard Neville and Germaine Greer testified.) At the same time, there would be many important European influences on the British counterculture and the avant-garde alike. These had a bewildering range: the spectacle and cheek of the Dutch Provos from 1965 on, Situationism and the rhetoric of *les évènements* from students and workers in Paris in 1968, the conscious effort from some anti-nuclear activists to work outside the Cold War binary via the establishment of the organisation END (European Nuclear Disarmament)—or, at the other end of the radical spectrum, even some influence on the founding of an indigenous British 'terrorist' group like the Angry Brigade in pan-European actions and organisation (see Anon. 1978, 13-15).

Yet across Europe too American popular culture was understood and embraced as offering a fresh, democratic alternative, an experience echoed by filmmaker Wim Wenders as he explains the pull of American pop culture for young Germans.

In the early Fifties or even the Sixties, it was American culture. In other words, the need to forget twenty years created a hole, and people tried to cover this ... by assimilating American culture.... But the fact that US imperialism was so effective over here was highly favoured by the Germans' own difficulties with their past. One way of forgetting it, and one way of regression, was to accept the American imperialism. (quoted in Campbell *et al* 2004, 32)

Europeans have often constructed a complex metanarrative weaving between individualism, freedom and self-fulfilment at one extreme, and at the other extreme violence, expendability and oppression. As Wenders puts it, 'AMERICA, / always means two things: / a country, geographically, the USA, / and a concept of this country, its ideal' (quoted in Campbell *et al* 2004, 7). For the counterculture, more so perhaps than for simply the New Left in Britain in general—because the

counterculture was so tied up with the American liberatory models of youth and culture, and their sonic equivalents in rock music—America was the place where it was at, even while Amerika was engaged simultaneously in an imperial adventure of destruction. In Elizabeth Nelson's view, rock, festivals, head shops and the other paraphernalia of the alternative scene of the time in fact 'reflected a new kind of consumerism':

Indeed, it could be argued that many of those 'in' the counter-culture were there chiefly as consumers, spectators more than participants.... And ironically for the British counter-culture, which was trying to reject what it saw as straight society's acceptance of the 'American way of life'—including American consumerism—it became imbued itself to a large extent with what might be termed the 'American way of the alternative future'. (Nelson 1989, 99)

But some powerful liberatory ideologies and practices exported from the USA would not be so easily dismissed. For example, the civil rights movement spoke loudly to many involved in organising against racism directed at recent generations of black migrants from the Caribbean as well as African ex-colonies—the Bristol Bus Boycott campaign of 1963 is one small clear example of engaged transatlantic exchange around black protest, for instance. The Civil Rights Association was established in Northern Ireland in 1967, drawing on American experiences and tactics, in order to push the challenge to historic social and religious discrimination in the province. As Brian Dooley has shown, 'civil rights activists in Northern Ireland borrowed slogans from black American protestors, called themselves "white negroes",... the American civil rights movement ... proved an important guide for the northern Irish activists' (1998, 1, 4). The women's movement in Britain took a significant impetus from feminist activism in the US, as Michelene Wandor elaborates: 'British feminism certainly came from American origins. Consciousness-raising certainly came from America, although that also had links from things which came from Marxism, from Maoism, the "speaking bitterness" in China.... There must also be some connection with the whole American encounter/psychotherapy movement' (quoted in Green 1988, 403). In significant ways like these—and think also of radical environmentalism, gay rights, disability activism, to name but three—the American counterculture of the 1960s, important enough at home in contributing to social change, has also had an influential and lasting impact on at least hemispheric and possibly global practices, discourses and styles of liberation.

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