

Reflexivity, social transformation, and counter culture

Abstract

This paper attempts to identify how reflexivity works within the local rationalities of social movement milieux that, it is argued, represent an important source of the development of reflexivity in contemporary lifeworlds. In interviews in the Dublin counter culture, reflexivity appears above all as the institutionalisation of autonomy, the creation of new social forms for self-determined purposes.

A starting point is strategies of distancing from the taken-for-granted assumptions of individuals' lifeworld backgrounds, as well as participation in "mediated subcultures" enabling the use of knowledge of other lifeworlds to gain perspective. The flourishing of experiments and projects within the space thus opened up depends on a habitus foregrounding creativity rather than repetition. This is emphasised in everyday life by the value placed on development of the self, by the elaboration of purely verbal projects, by a fascination with form and "mind games", and by a delight in creative technical and practical activity.

This also implies a structure of feeling that emphasises tolerance for different obsessions and orientations, a lack of identification with individual projects, organisations, or even the lifeworld itself, and thus a sense of the lifeworld as a provisional and open-ended project, valued primarily insofar as it is reflexive and creative rather than repetitive and "stagnant". Even its "stagnant" side, however, can be related to the active demands of a reflexive orientation to everyday life that privileges choice, creativity and explicit decisions and actions, and undermines or rejects the use of routine as an organising strategy for everyday action.

At the same time, the apparent individualism of many of its activities created hides the thoroughly social genesis of these different "technologies of the self", in which cultural resources are mobilised in new social contexts to sustain and develop reflexivity. The key role of intellectual activity in the (re-)thinking and (re-)organising of social life then connects this lifeworld to the more explicit political and cultural challenges that arise from it.

In conclusion, the paper suggests the possibility of radicalising the concept of reflexivity beyond the reflexive *consumption* of social relations to their reflexive *production*. It argues that the stakes at play, within disorganised capitalism, are precisely those of the *meaning* of concepts such as "autonomy" and "reflexivity" within the opposing formations of the New Right and the counter-cultural left.

Reflexivity, social transformation, and counter culture

Introduction: the varieties of reflexivity (1)

Contemporary social thought deploys the concept and "figure of thought" of reflexivity in a wide variety of often unclarified meanings. This paper attempts to examine what reflexivity appears to mean in practice within one particular, "counter cultural" lifeworld. To explain its relevance, I want to start by examining two ways in particular in which social phenomena can be described as reflexive.

Reflexivity as universal human condition. This points to a micro-social condition of monitoring one's own actions, enabling the maintenance (sometimes the transformation) of social relations. This is a very old position in social thought; it is implicit in Weber's emphasis on the meaning of action, as well as in Freud's analysis of the superego as in a sense the internalisation of other people's perspectives on our action. Mead's symbolic interactionism and Goffman's work develop the sense of distancing from and monitoring of the social self. More recent work in ethnomethodology and the philosophy of language has refined these positions, and works such as Giddens (1993) and Habermas (1984) canonise this reflexive condition as fundamental to any social activity.

Reflexivity as specifically modern phenomenon. At the same time, critical modernists (from Marx and Weber) claim that modernity sets free the potential of reflexivity in historically specific ways. In particular, "society" becomes both the (legitimate) subject and the (thinkable) object of rational (systematic and explicit) intervention. Reflexivity in this sense, then, is a (specifically modern) macro-social activity of intervention into "historicity" (the self-production of society), enabling in particular the transformation (sometimes the maintenance) of social relations. The institutions of modernity, in particular those of capitalism and the state, then represent the institutionalisation of reflexivity (Giddens 1990), however partial and restricted (Habermas 1987). In a sense, then, reflexivity in modernity can be identified with "social movements from above", and their "colonisation of the lifeworld".

Social movements and the roots of lifeworld reflexivity

Yet there is also a reflexivity from below, and of course social movements from below have themselves represented important interventions into society, as well as developing major bodies of theoretical knowledge of society. They have also been reflexive in other senses, if we consider the characteristic importance of organisational issues, theoretical disputes and (self-)education within social movements.

In a paper to last year's conference, Paul Bagguley (1996) elaborated an interesting analysis of the relationship between reflexivity and social movements. If I understand him correctly, he argued that Giddens' concept of self-reflexivity, a reflexive approach to one's own activity, applies "to those who are relatively high in a hierarchy of power", such as senior managers restructuring a company (1996: 11). Now while self-reflexivity may of course be restricted by direct domination - he considers "the example of the working class" - it is less clear how far this is true for the *marginalised* within the capitalist world-system, notably the "decommodified" (Offe 1985).

It is also unclear that the example refers to *self*-reflexivity. It might, if the acting "self" were the company, and not the senior managers. Or, perhaps, if managerial or professional staff were restructuring, not the activities of the firm as a whole, but the way in which they work and communicate together. This would then not be a reflexivity of individual selves, or of a company, but rather the operations of a reflexive lifeworld, at least to a certain extent (one can be sure that profit and power would not be placed in question). The closest real-life example I can think of is the restructuring of higher education in the late 1960s and the 1970s.

Such a *lifeworld* reflexivity has itself been attributed to social movements by a number of theorists; and this is the area I want to explore. More specifically, I want to examine the possibility that reflexivity as an aspect of habitus or local rationality rather than as a property of the social totality or the isolated individual has specific sources within the social movement milieu I am describing as counter cultures (Cox forthcoming). (2)

Ten years ago, Lash and Urry identified a relationship between the "radical-democratic ethos [...] shared by the various new social movements", the "destructured habitus" of the new middle classes and receptivity to postmodernist culture (1987: 285 - 300). More recently, Lash has used the concept of a "reflexive community" to describe, among other things, the core of the ecological movement. He writes:

"These communities are reflexive in that: first, one is not born or 'thrown', but 'throws oneself' into them; second, they may be widely stretched over 'abstract' space, and also perhaps over time; third, they consciously pose themselves the problem of their own creation, and constant re-invention far more than do traditional communities; fourth, their 'tools' and products tend to be not material ones but abstract and cultural." (Lash 1994: 161)

Similarly, German research into "movement milieux" brings out the development of an "alternative" lifeworld, within which

"To the manifold strivings for autonomy of the younger generation correspond for example extended demands for self-realisation at work, hedonistic leisure practices or new models of division of roles between partners. Noticeable is also their greater self-reflexivity, which enables conscious distancings from the 'incorporated' schemas of the habitus [of their parents' generation]." (Vester et al. 1993: 204).

Looking at the counter culture

The concept of counter culture

In a paper to the 1996 conference, I argued for the need for a concept of counter cultures that brings contemporary social movements together with their broader lifeworld context. Such counter cultures have their own local rationalities, and are not exhausted by the instrumental rationalities of organisation or commodification that may develop within them (Cox 1996). I am researching in particular a Dublin lifeworld, formed *inter alia* in London squats, Dublin crashpads, a college occupation and anti-nuclear and ecological organisations, which in turn forms a context for a variety of alternative "political" and "cultural" projects. The "local rationalities" of this lifeworld stress in particular *reflexivity*, which, I will argue, appears as a means of institutionalising and extending *autonomy*.(3)

Local rationality: autonomy as self-development

Last year I made a fairly simple case for the appearance of a logic of autonomy in this counter culture as explicitly prioritised against the sorts of instrumental rationality (in terms of political organisation and economic interests) that the "social movement" literature tends to ascribe to these settings. Here I want to sharpen the contrast (4). Instrumental rationality, it could be said, takes in a sense the self and its goal for granted, and asks what is the most effective means of getting from A to B. Possessive individualism, even in its hedonistic forms, takes a similar approach. The *counter cultural* logic of autonomy, however, starts from a concept of self-development, within which the self is seen as open-ended; as something to be

constructed or transformed. Thus participants make comments along the following lines:

"Mick is ambitious within himself, it's himself that he wants to develop, not a career or any of that kind of stuff." (5)

Another participant speaks of

"People who do all kinds of odd and extremely innovative things, an awful lot of people whose top priority is sorting their head out, or whose top priority is something along the lines of enlightenment."

The main theme here is that of moving away from the instrumental approach of seeking the best available employment towards an explorative approach to one's own life. This explorative sense is underlined by the relatively weak articulation of the nature of the alternatives and how to get there: this is not simply choosing an alternative strategy to achieve pre-existing goals. Rather, goals are something to be revised along the way.

The similarity of this approach to the reflexive concept of the modernist "project of the self", and its *dissimilarity* from the romantic position normally imputed to these lifeworlds (which would imply a sense of a "true" self pre-existing social conventions (6)), is clear. There is a fairly straightforward reason for this: if one is *not* identifying with a fixed self (whether that be the given self of instrumentalism or the "true" self of romanticism), but rather treating the self as something to develop, this is itself a reflexive attitude. One distances oneself from "the self" in order to change it or observe it changing. Or, as Angela McRobbie puts it,

"Different, youthful, subjectivities ... require and find in youth cultural forms strong symbolic structures through which 'who you are', 'who you want to be' and 'who you want to go out with' can be explored, not in any finalised way, but as an ongoing and reflective social process." (1994: 192).

Reflexivity in the counter culture

The counter cultural project of autonomy, then, is a reflexive one; and for its survival it demands an active reflexivity, in the sense of the creation of meanings and practices which defend the "free space" necessary for the project, enable this exploration, and develop the projects of the self as they move from the theoretical into the practical. This is then of course immediately political, in the sense of raising questions of power and control.

This area of my research is still very much "in progress", so what I want to do here is simply indicate what seems to me a logical progression in terms of the development of this reflexivity, and illustrate it as well as I can from my research material.

Strategies of distancing

A logical prerequisite for any developed form of reflexivity is a certain measure of distancing from the "normal" and "taken-for-granted" assumptions of existing social and cultural relations. At its most basic, this is expressed in an attitude of wanting to find another path:

"People [in the Dublin suburbs] seemed to be content with just kind of shambling along, and into secondary school and out the other side, into a job, and not losing touch with their friends in the pub every night of the weekend, but that wasn't enough for me. I was looking for something other and massively more, something to quench a deeper thirst for life. Like zombies, those people."

This distancing operates in relation to the normal assumptions of people's class backgrounds:

"Even before I went to college I went 'I want to do a sort of liberal arts thing that isn't going to qualify me for one thing, so I can't just be pushed into doing a HDip [teaching qualification]', and a lot of people said 'Oh, so you're going to be a teacher'. I said, 'No, I don't want to be a teacher.' I just wanted to leave Dublin for a while, do a lot of travelling, I'm grand."

Most participants failed in one way or another to take the instrumental attitude to education demanded by conventional Irish assumptions about its role in providing secure employment. Similarly, many avoided the "obvious" strategy of taking the available opportunities in e.g. computers, translation or the music business. While this distancing from class assumptions is very general, there is also an ethnic distancing for a number of participants:

"There are things you know, but they still have to be right in front of you to be obvious, like I always knew that the entire world wasn't white, Irish, all the rest of it, you know that all these other cultures exist, but it's when you actually meet them that it's different, because they live their whole life in a totally different perspective to you, which is great."

Lastly, there is a distancing (for women at least) in relation to dominant gender assumptions:

"You know, sometimes I wish 'Why'm I not like my sister?', you know? [laughs] Why do I make life so hard for myself? Why don't I just want a normal job, and a husband, and two kids, and a house, and two cars?"

[LC: Well, why?]

"I don't know why, I just don't. [laughs] I just find it immensely boring."

As this last comment indicates, these are real choices that have to be made, and continually remade, within individuals' lives ("Why do I make life so hard for myself?"); but they are also made in relation to an alternative, counter cultural habitus ("I just find it immensely boring"). Distancing is not an easy exercise; and it depends crucially on the availability of alternative rationalities within which it makes personal and emotional sense. This very often also requires a physical distancing:

"People go [to San Francisco] from all over the world. Usually people looking for something, or people who are too weird for the small

town that they live in. I mean, people come from Ohio, the Midwest, and from places where they're just too freaky for where they live, or they can't handle how racist where they are is. A lot of people say they couldn't deal with how racist it is."

Along with the usual forms of Irish emigration, this lifeworld also includes a number of people who have emigrated *to Ireland* (from Italy in particular), as well as a number of people who have returned from significant periods of time in the counter cultures of e.g. London, Paris or Berlin. A returnee comments:

"So after I got back from there, I ended up in college, which was like being right back in secondary school again, which was about as far removed from where I'd been as I could have got at the time. So I wasn't very well acculturated, I kind of disacculturated myself somehow from all that kind of thing, I didn't relate to it very well. I'd lost all fear of loss of social prestige or position, all the subtle motivations for the middle-class Dublin life, they're all based on social position, standing and material comfort. All those kind of values I kind of shed [abroad]."

Thus the reflexive (re-)creation of self often entails deliberate acts of distancing from one's lifeworld background.

Other cultural possibilities

One important element in making this distancing possible is participation in "mediated subcultures" which relativise the here-and-now by making present other cultural possibilities. These are rarely seen as something to be imitated verbatim; rather, they are used as a tool for opening up a sense of possibility with regard to one's own life - in other words, to enable reflexivity. Thus two participants describe the lifeworld in strikingly similar terms:

"the fact that [those involved] are very well read and are involved in, *interested* in most things."

and:

"a whole bunch of people who were interested in the same kind of thing I was interested in, which is, I wouldn't say it was overtly self-development, but at least interest in or awareness of self-knowledge and education."

These are not just individual attributes, but relate to a shared habitus of (literally) reading other ways of life as a means of gaining distance from one's own background and of creating new possibilities:

"They've taken on an awful lot of influences from popular culture and literature."

[LC: But they've selected them.]

"They've chosen the nice bits and thrown away the bits they don't like. It's I think not entirely insignificant that there's a large library of

material that virtually everybody in that group has read [...] like *Fear and Loathing*, and what you said about that book about the [New] Travellers (7), which has been snapped up like gold dust."

Another participant shows this as linked to lifeworld practices of circulating relevant books:

"People kept throwing books at me, which was quite good too. I read a lot that summer [...] Things like *The Great Shark Hunt*, *Generation of Swine*, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (8), a whole pile of Kerouac books, Carlos Castaneda, *LSD and the American Dream* (9) [...] So I just picked out the ones I liked [...] Bob lent me a whole pile of books [...], and I just picked out the ones I liked the look of."

The main interests, then include other ways of life, whether contemporary, semi-mythical or historical. Thus the American counter culture of the Sixties is critically examined as a sort of map of the territory:

"So then they'd started, you know, they started exploring alternatives, and as always happens with that a lot of people just spent a lot of time doing a lot of drugs, wandering round, getting fucked up, and trying to be enlightened. And of course a lot of them weren't enlightened, a lot of them ended up doing heroin, but a couple were, so it was well worth trying."

A similarly critical approach is shown by another participant:

"I read occult books voraciously for a couple of years, and whilst I never put very much of that into practice, holding back I suppose, not wanting to rush into anything, but also there was sensations of there being something missing. It was like vouchers, all these different self-development systems, they promise great things, but there was very little evidence of people actually having achieved anything with it. I suppose I was looking for the tracks of fellow travellers who'd gone before."

Other ways of life, then, are not imitated but rather used as a means of setting provisional goals, for personal development and for lifeworld mobility. Thus one participant uses the American Sixties as a reference point for finding a reflexive lifeworld:

"I suppose I had this idea in my head of coming across a kind of Merry Frankster-ish bunch of people who were interested in bouncing off each other as much as they could, rather than going to the pub."

Thus there is a move from the second-hand bookshop to practical physical exploration of other ways of life:

"I was interested in the occult at the time, I was interested in neo-paganism, and I wanted to meet people who were into that kind of stuff, also buskers, musicians. I was interested in what people were doing in Dublin who weren't in college. You know, people who were

just sitting in their flats, painting or writing. I think the way I looked at it at the time was, I wanted to know bohemians."

Once again, though, the point of mobility between lifeworlds is not to identify with a new lifeworld, but rather to use the variety of different rationalities as a building block for the construction of one's own life:

"What I wanted to do ideally was be able to wander round and travel anywhere and deal with whatever I came across. That was it, more or less, just meet people from everywhere, I suppose get as many perspectives as possible, that's what I really wanted. Reality tunnels, I think Robert Anton Wilson said."

This quote neatly encapsulates the relationship between the mediated subculture, the practical activity and the reflexive intention of gaining different perspectives. The net effect is to open up a sense of possibility, which can then be translated into action:

"I might think, 'Oh, I'd really like to, say, learn guitar and busk my way round the world', but if I had never seen anybody do it I wouldn't do that. I mean, I know people who've done it, and I know people who've gone to India, so I go 'OK, it's perfectly feasible to just go to India and stay there for six months.' And that was really good. And when you meet one person like that you start meeting more and more of them, and when you find people who've spent years wandering round the globe, and you go, 'Yeah, I do want to do that, and yeah, they can do it. It's perfectly feasible.' And it's a perfectly viable alternative to having an excellent career."

A reflexive habitus: experiment, creativity and form

Reflexivity, then, involves a certain distancing from customary expectations and a greater awareness of alternative possibilities. It also involves, if it is taken to its logical conclusion, making some use of these: rather than reproducing existing social relations (albeit with an "ironic" awareness of their contingency), experimenting with alternatives.

I don't want to get into the nature of these alternatives in detail here. In this particular lifeworld, they appear in particular as a series of projects and experiments. To list some examples, in no particular order:

- * Political projects, such as anarchist and green groups, street theatre, student politics, direct action, etc.;
- * Experimentation with living forms, in particular shared houses, squats and "crashpads";
- * Economic experiments, such as coops, alternative bookshops, LETS systems, etc.;
- * Experimentation with sexual relationships, including bisexual, open and multiple relationships;
- * Experimentation with drugs, in particular hash, acid and mushrooms;
- * Cultural experiments, such as alternative music, board and roleplaying games, Rainbow Gatherings, pagan and occultist rituals and groups, etc.

Some of these projects are relatively successful, for a variety of internal and external reasons; others are stillborn or die rapidly. I am interested here in the cultural habitus, in the sense of a general orientation to the world, that enables this experimentation, that makes it possible to "try out" the implications of reflexivity.

The best way of summarising this seems to be in terms of a general valuation of creativity and "makeability". A starting point for this is of course the logic of autonomy I have referred to earlier, where the focus is not on instrumental action to get the best results in predefined terms, but where the self is itself seen as a kind of project:

"It comes back to this idea that the way in which people perceive ambition as *not* a material ambition, which again links back to the ideas about people's property and that. While they have fuck all of it, I don't think that is entirely responsible for their attitude. The development is sort of personal development, it's not material development. So the idea of going away to make money isn't really, you're not going to impress anybody, really. 'Oh wow, he's earning fuckloads of money, good for him, so what?' "

Thus reflexivity neatly links back to the logic of autonomy as self-development: the creative and experimental attitude applies to the self as much as to the external world. I will come back to some of the implications of this later.

One way in which this habitus appears is in a fascination with form. This is of course a very visible feature of contemporary social movements, where the effort devoted to formulating and implementing an organisational form will often exceed the effort devoted to its ostensible purpose. Alberto Melucci, for example, has written that

"The *self-reflective form of action* is another specific feature of the emerging collective phenomena. Action is a message sent to the rest of society, which speaks through its own forms and with a high degree of self-reflexivity. Organisational forms, patterns of interpersonal relationships and decision-making processes are themselves meaningful signs addressed to the society as a whole. But they are also a goal in themselves: actors consciously practice in the present the objective they pursue." (1995: 113 - 114)

Here I am interested in how this reflexive focus on forms operates in people's lives when they are *not* actively creating something new. One manifestation is the constant creation of purely verbal projects - the extensive development of elaborate schemes which are never intended to be acted upon. The enjoyment is again simply in the playing with form and ideas. A typical example:

"Bob had this plan, where you know he wanted to do this, set up a retirement fund, basically, which would pay for a retirement home for old druggies [laughter], free, like, to all of the people we know basically, for your dope-heads, you know, and, who'd like to be wrecked off their heads for their latter days, when they can't move any more, you know, and they're bedridden, so [laughter] I think if Martin makes a million he'll probably build that you know."

Another participant describes this attitude as follows:

"[I liked] anything that would just stimulate your brain a little. I mean, even if you just sit down and plan something completely bizarre, plan it from start to finish, even if you never do it, if you plan it flawlessly, it's like Bob used to do. Bob would plan something through flawlessly, and it would never happen. And then he'd plan

something else flawlessly. And after you knew him for a while you'd think 'Well, it doesn't matter that he doesn't do it, cause that's not what he wants, he gets a kick out of just planning it.'

Something similar is expressed in the enjoyment of formalistic "mind games" - the interest in things such as the nature of consciousness and artificial intelligence, theoretical physics and mathematics, the more elaborate brand of conspiracy theory and alternative reality books and the psychological "mind games" of e.g. Zen and Sufi stories.

"What I was interested in was ideas. [...] And I was reading about a lot of different ways of viewing the world, the different ways of viewing the inside of your own head."

Another participant said:

"I was going a little crazy one afternoon and wrote a long, very rambling email to somebody and got a mail back, 'Oh, I see you're pretending you're mad just in case people realise that if you don't pretend you're mad, you might actually be mad!' [laughter] Yeah, there is an element of that. There's certainly an awful lot of mind games go on, but everybody does it for fun."

A final symbolisation of this valuation of creativity is the fascination with elegant and baroque technical solutions to what are very often non-problems. If play is a means of flexing particular kinds of muscles, this is another way of maintaining a creative orientation to the world. An off the cuff discussion sparked off by the interview microphone falling down:

"Mick'd probably build something [...] Can you, can you get into the attic and drill a hole and [laughter] Boom mike from three empty yoghurt cartons [laughter] A man who builds heart-lung machines from empty yoghurt cartons."

This "techie trip" is an attitude of play and appreciation rather than of immediate usefulness:

"With me it's just a fascination with anything clever. Somebody comes up with a solution to a problem that is clever, I will admire it."

Clever solutions and creative play with forms: these are modes of leisure of a reflexive lifeworld.

Tolerance and lack of commitment

A corollary of this experimental and playful attitude is a combination of tolerance and lack of commitment. The world is seen as in a sense a series of not entirely binding projects and attempts at "getting things together", with a generalised expectation that different people will be "into" different projects at different times. Tolerance of these different experiments is thus a natural virtue, as one participant observes:

"I think the fact that these people have the laid-back attitude of allowing people to do their own thing is a mechanism which allows very strong personalities and very strong individuals to be able to interact with each other without stomping on each other's toes, and the sorts of ambitions that those people have, and the way in which they allow that ambition to be fulfilled, doesn't involve getting a group of people to centre round you."

This attitude enables not just coexistence with other people's reflexive projects, but also appreciation of them and drawing on them:

"Magnus had all kinds of odd obsessions, but he was also very into some things and he was right about some things too."

Related to this tolerance of each other's experiments is a refusal of commitment to them:

"Most people I know don't want to be committed to anything. Or anybody, because they're so desperate to get their lives together, get whatever it is that they want to do together that that takes up an awful lot of time, so they don't want to compromise that by being stuck in one place or one job or with one person or in one country."

In other words, "getting it together" - creative and reflexive activity - is potentially threatened by too great a degree of commitment to any specific project. The breadth of areas that this applies to in the comment just quoted is echoed by another participant:

"It wasn't a sort of a group with any specific aim, like. Except having fun, and being yourself, or doing your own thing, or whatever you wanna call it [...] At the moment I don't think it amounts to very much except [laughs] an excuse for doing exactly what you want, when you want, not caring about anybody else."

[LC: Does it get in the way of other people?]

"No, I wouldn't put it that way, as getting in the way of other people, but you don't put yourself out. I mean, I'm not saying that nobody ever does, you know what I mean, but you don't, they're, like I mean, people that can be and are very nice and help and this kind of thing, you know, but I think all this thing about doing your own thing loads of times was basically 'I don't want to commit myself to anything' " It's used very much for breaking up with somebody. You wanna be free."

[LC: And you don't think that was sincere?]

"It probably was at the time. I'm sure it was. I mean, I've used it myself."

I will return to the difficulties caused by this attitude later. For the moment, I want to point to the logical conclusion of this: it is normal for participants to see the counter culture as something that is ultimately provisional and external. Rather

than re-identifying with the new lifeworld, the reflexive attitude is maintained. As one participant comments:

"It's kind of paradoxical to want to be part of a group and at the same time not yet part of the group. To want to create a comfortable subset or define its boundary or something."

The lifeworld, then, is legitimated by its contribution to reflexive projects, and if it moves towards becoming "taken-for-granted" in its turn it needs to be ditched, and for the same reason it was initially entered. Thus it is always an open-ended exercise: too tight an articulation would defeat the purpose. The fascination with experimentation and the double-edged tolerance and refusal of commitment are ways of structuring interaction within this "free space", the skills of living together in a particular way (10). This may be formalised at times in particular institutions, but exists primarily as a way of doing things, a common "structure of feeling" geared towards reflexivity.

The paradox is underlined by the fact that virtually all participants have spent considerable periods of time outside Ireland. One participant says of his decision to emigrate:

"The advantage of [being abroad] is you're not stuck in a certain context. You can't say 'I can't do this, because everybody who knows me knows, and I'm not the sort of person who does this.'"

And another:

"[The difference new people make is] new influences, new ideas. If I can be excused using a sort of Americanism cliché personal development, in the sense that my interaction with these people, whilst it is completely wrong to suppose that I can't get anything more out of interacting with these people, I had got caught in a rut, where my relationship with them was such that something had to change before I could get more out of my interaction with these people. That something needed to be other people bringing new attitudes, new ideas, fresh outlook on old ideas, anything, into it, would have possibly changed that and sort of got me out of that rut."

Thus if life-world reflexivity and self-reflexivity are blocked, "creativity" turns to "stagnation". But I want to argue that there are also other reasons why "creativity" is likely to generate "stagnation".

The paradoxes of everyday reflexivity

Lifeworld reflexivity implies that all activity, not only work processes or political organisation, require clear reasons and articulate decisions. Giddens (1994) has recently explored the pathological effects of the impact of reflexivity "from outside" on lifeworld contexts in the generation of compulsive and obsessional activity. What I am researching here, however, is a lifeworld where the demand for reflexivity comes very much "from within".

It is something of a sociological commonplace (e.g. Berger and Luckmann 1967) that routine, convention, tradition, ritual and so on are enabling mechanisms: they enable the regular production of action without much need for prior thought and discussion, they enable a sedimentation of "how-to-do-it" knowledge and skill, and

so on. For the same reason, of course, they privilege means rather than ends, exclude the operation of reason, reinforce local power structures, and prevent the exploration of new possibilities. Yet consider the implications of this critique. If a reflexive orientation to the lifeworld demands a focus on ends and the elaboration and coordination of reasons for action, democratic agreement on the forms of activity, and the exploration of all the possibilities that can be imagined or read about by the educated and computer-literate in western societies in the 1990s, this makes activity of any kind an extremely demanding business. The interest in other ways of life and other ways of thinking about the world, the fascination with form and technique, the interest in talking about impossible projects and so on then acquire another, immediately practical meaning, as ways of discovering problems in play and talk rather than in action and conflict. As one participant puts it:

"It does help you if you've got a slight idea about something but it's vague, and you're really not that sure, and then you'll be sitting in a room with somebody who'll be talking about it and you'll go 'Yeah, that's it, that's exactly what I was looking for. Where is that?' Or 'What book was that in?' And they can tell you. [...] From that point of view, yeah. If you find somebody who's already done what it is that you're about to do you can get a lot of advice from them. You can get some pitfalls, as well. It's like 'I did this for ten years, and it's not worth it. Try something else instead.' "

At the same time, the stakes are very high in contexts where neither the nature of the self, nor its goals, can be taken for granted, and people are prepared to deliberately disqualify themselves from conventional employment, to live on the streets abroad, to emigrate to another hemisphere and so on. Where reflexivity widens the range of actual options to include all *possible* choices, with no fixed yardstick to evaluate these possibilities and their consequences, choice becomes difficult, if not impossible. Choosing itself becomes an almost impossibly high barrier:

"If you do have that amount of choice, if you sit down, like for instance, at the moment I'm in completely the ideal situation, because [...] I've got no ties whatsoever, I don't have to be back in Dublin for anything, I don't have to come back for a course, I don't have to come back for a job, I've got a job where I don't have a contract. I could leave tomorrow [...] my only limitations are money, that's the only thing. There's nothing else. Which is great. But it also means 'Oh no, what should I do next?' Cause if you can do anything at all, it's difficult to narrow it down."

Or, as another participant says,

"I could get a job now, if I decided to, that I want [a professional job]. That's what I mean about getting it together [...]"

[LC: So what would the kind of job be that you want?]

"Well, if I knew the kind of job I wanted, Laurence! [laughs]"

Given the costs of reflexive action, then, it is hardly surprising that life in this counter culture alternates between bursts of enthusiastic activity and new projects

which do fit the bill of reflexive creativity, and lengthy stretches of "null-space", of talk and play, of understructured inactivity. EP Thompson (1993) argued that an alternation of intensive activity and relative inactivity was normal prior to the imposition of industrial labour discipline; its reflexive variant, however, carries with it an alternation between elation and depression that was presumably foreign to the annual agricultural cycle. One factor behind the emigration of many participants was precisely a desire to redress the balance between this "stagnation" and the "creativity" that they sought:

"The people who have come back have all changed quite a lot as a result of their experiences. More than anything else, I think they've got themselves together quite a lot [...] They're much more together, they get jobs, they hold them down, and they get their act together. And that has a significant influence."

This is also true even of those who have remained, in that they have made use of external structuration to keep the possibility of creative activity open:

"He now has himself, at the moment he's still officially temporarily employed by [a removals firm], which he has said himself is doing him an absolute world of good in that there is a degree of externally imposed discipline which has a knock-on effect in that he's able to achieve whatever the hell he wants to do, he values his spare time, he uses it efficiently, he gets things done, whereas previously he had so much bloody time to do anything he achieved nothing."

For those who do overcome the barriers of action on a regular rather than sporadic basis, this is achieved at a very high cost, that of forcing themselves into action, choice and commitment by placing themselves under extreme moral pressure. The levels of burnout among such activists are then very high, since the amount that needs doing is effectively infinite once reflexivity is applied to one's political persona, and because reflexive modes of organising are not just extremely labour-intensive but also extremely emotional, since they place one's own personal project continually in question and depend on self-exploitation and the mining of this very insecurity (Cox 1997).

The social technologies of the self

Reflexivity, then, is not easy to live with. It might be impossible to maintain without the social creation and deployment of "technologies of the self" which enable its institutionalisation at the heart of the lifeworld. In this section I want to examine some elements of this. One is a straightforward sharing of interests in activities that can enable an exploration, not just of form, but also of interaction and inner experience:

"A lot of them have a background in either computers or roleplaying games, fantasy novels, science fiction, music, they all play guitar, and they listen to the same kind of music, maybe books as well."

Thus for example:

"Music is definitely a very strong, it's a binding force among everybody. Those that don't actually play themselves are certainly into

hearing it [...] So the fact that certain people are musicians after a fashion and others aren't isn't exclusive. The music thing is not exclusive to those that do actually perform."

So music is used to structure interaction, and in specific forms: the emphasis is on "sessions" of creation, improvisation and interactivity. Such sessions are themselves a form of reflexive interaction, but they are also organised around a particular type of music:

"It was a lot of the kind of music I liked, I mean, there's a lot of sort of ballady stuff and folk stuff, and then there was your kind of John Martyn, Tom Waite, that kind of thing [...] But that is always all part of it, I mean, the music is very much part of it."

In other words, the type of music involved - apart from technically lending itself to impromptu sessions - is relatively verbal, often quasi-literary, music, focussed primarily on exploring the subtleties and uncertainties of personal interaction and inner experience.

Something similar appears in the case of drug use: the drugs preferred are themselves suited to a reflexive approach to interaction and to the self, and they are taken with very specific orientations:

"The people over there do smoke, as much as people over here [in Dublin], and yet the attitude and the lifestyle is quite different. They are still a very tolerant group of people, but the attitude is quite different, so I would definitely refute the idea that the use of drugs is a significant factor for the way in which these people behave."

Or again:

"Other people [in London] would go on doing acid and going to raves, and sort of going out into the city at night, but I tended to do it on my own, all night and watch the dawn. And I continued on going into myself until I kind of got to the point of ego death and rebirth."

Contextualising reflexive practices

These apparently isolating activities in fact imply a whole social context. In each case a social body of knowledge is entailed: chords for songs are exchanged, and shared books and "folk science" discussions orient expectations and techniques in drug use. Music is created in sessions, and drugs are often if not always taken together. Similarly, books are borrowed, tapes copied, and drugs circulated through the network. All of this depends on a very specific mode of lifeworld organisation:

"There's a very laid back attitude to property. People are not particularly possessive or protective of what is their property, you know, people borrow things from, there's an awful lot of kipple that transfers and ends up in various flats. It's not uncommon to arrive in somebody's flat, 'Oh, can I have a look through your tapes?' - 'Yeah, sure, go for it.' - 'Oh fuck, that's mine, where'd you get that?' - 'I dunno, oh, take it back.' - 'Oh yeah, well haven't seen that in years'. You know, people don't get wound up about it, they just 'Ah shit, I haven't seen that, I was wondering where it went' "

In other words, the technologies of the self depend on specific local rationalities, as another participant stresses:

"The only philosophy I thought that was behind all that group of people was, you know this thing, 'What goes around comes around', you know, the idea of like, at a simple level, somebody bums a cigarette off you, you bum a cigarette off somebody else? This kind of thing, at a really low level, but it's true, what goes around comes around. You do things for people, the idea is, instead of, I was brought up with a favours system, you know, I do this for you therefore you have to do this for me. Somebody gives you a Christmas present, you're morally obliged to give them one, this kind of thing, whereas I just liked that, you know, that people would do things for other people for no apparent reason. It's like, I have something that I don't need. You need it, take it."

Such local rationalities are created in appropriate contexts. Thus one participant comments of a college occupation that it set

"a framework of the way in which the social interactions that that particular group of people have subsequently continued to use: a lot of music, people sitting round playing music, talking, often about trivia, but there have often been, you know, *good* serious discussions as well".

These "*good* serious discussions" are of course fundamental technologies for the institutionalisation of a reflexive attitude towards the self and the lifeworld, and more indirect forms are possible. Another participant in the same occupation says:

"I got into tarot cards and palmreading and stuff like that, you know just kind of basic psychology sessions, like sitting down and just kind of trying to sort each other's problems out, that kind of thing."

There may be limits to the effectiveness of such interaction, as one participant comments:

"Well, ultimately you have to do it yourself. You know, people can sit you down and say 'you're this sort of person and that means this is what you should be doing'. You'll say 'yeah, yeah, I know, you're absolutely right' but till you get to that point you're still not going to do it. But yeah, people can help people. To a certain extent. You can say, you can help them along."

Yet the net effect of this cooperation with each other's projects of autonomy is a reflexive lifeworld built on strong personal links:

"I think it was like a support group. It was one of the closest groups of people I ever came across. I hadn't come across groups of people who knew each other that well and were that close, which was really nice. Knew everything about each other, had been through lots together."

These socially organised practices, then, enable an apparently individualistic mode of life to continue its separate existence rather than submerge back into the mainstream. There seems to be a close relationship between individuals' continued

involvement in such practices and the networks that sustain them, and their continued development of personal and lifeworld reflexivity.

Reflexive lifeworlds and intellectual activity

Clearly, the kinds of interaction I have described depend partly on access to culturally valuable resources (obscure books and music, drugs, tarot cards and so on). They also depend, naturally, on developing appropriate means for communication and organisation within a very transient population and a city of a million people. Most importantly, perhaps, they rely on the creation and sharing of skills and knowledge:

"I think it was like a mutual support group, cause if you are a certain kind of person and you meet other kinds of people like you, you go 'Great, there are other people in the world like me' and you can discuss the things together and come to conclusions that you mightn't have otherwise, and somebody will know something you don't, and you'll know something they don't, and you can exchange information and stuff."

The intellectual organisation of social movement milieux is discussed in similar terms by Eyerman and Jamison:

"A social movement is not one organisation or one special interest group. It is more like a cognitive territory, a new conceptual space that is filled by a dynamic interaction between different groups and organisations [...] It is precisely in the creation, articulation, formulation of new thoughts and ideas - new knowledge - that a social movement defines itself in society." (1991: 55)

Hilary Wainwright's discussion emphasises the reflexive nature of such activity:

"The extraordinary political energy of [the late sixties] demonstrated in a concentrated way the power that people potentially have to dissolve constraining structures which in 'normal life' they passively reproduce. It encouraged a reliance on self-organisation and direct action, and with this a pooling of their own knowledge, extension of it by direct contact with potential allies with different vantage points, rather than acceptance of an acknowledged authority." (Wainwright 1995: 75)

This grassroots intellectual activity of rethinking and reorganising everyday life links, as she writes for the women's movement, "transformation of self and transformation of social structures" (1995: 79). In her argument, it forms a fundamental resource for social change.

Conclusion: radicalising reflexivity

From this point, it becomes possible to criticise the limited nature of contemporary notions of reflexivity. If the reflexive attitude has a general value as a presupposition of communicative action, yet it is deformed in the normal run of things by the colonisation of the lifeworld by the agencies of capital and power (Habermas 1984, 1987). Thus we arrive at a situation where social relations are commonly

"consumed" reflexively, but "produced" unreflexively. In other words, there is a diversity of "negotiated" readings, which in another perspective is a *precondition* for effective cultural hegemony - the ability of the dominated to find their own value in the cultural construction of their own domination (Gramsci 1991: 12 - 14). The counter culture then offers the possibility of a radicalisation of this notion of reflexivity, within which we do not simply monitor "how we are doing" or adopt various attitudes towards our own action, but rather (attempt to) change the way in which we construct our selves, our actions and our lifeworlds.

Within the cultural politics of post-1968 western states, the challenge to the previous "taken-for-granted" modes of cultural domination has led to a "reflexive" shift which makes "business as usual" possible once again, now with an ironic air, or perhaps a conventionalist legitimisation. If Touraine (1981) is right that the struggle between social actors is what constructs the stakes of "historicity", then there has been a shift from a "hegemony of closure" (within which the centrality of the conflict between the dominant "old right" and the subordinate "old left" enabled a marginalisation of other actors) to what can provisionally be defined as a "hegemony of openness" (in which the conflict between the dominant forces of disorganised capitalism and those of the subordinate "new left", or the counter culture, over the question of *just how far* openness and reflexivity are to be taken, defines the new stakes at issue, and marginalises other forces). This in turn creates the conditions of plausibility of post-structuralism and post-modernism.

In other words, one of the key issues at stake in contemporary conflicts is precisely over the meanings of reflexivity and autonomy, and over whether they can form part of a new hegemony containing social conflict or whether they can be radicalised to the point of rupture. The conflicting meanings that can be attributed to "individuality" (as possessive individualism or self-development), to "distance" (as an instrumental orientation of exploitation and domination (Williams 1985) or a reflexive strategy of not taking socially-defined goals for granted) and to "change" (as modernisation and rationalisation imposed from above or as the micro-politics of social transformation from below) are then key stakes of the politics of hegemony and counter-hegemony.

George McKay, in his important new book (1996), asks at several points why the Thatcher and Major regimes have adopted such a brutal strategy to destroy the free festival scene, the New Traveller lifestyle, rave culture and so on, and points out the paradox that these groups are among the most "enterprising" representatives of "personal initiative" and "individual freedom". Perhaps this paper offers a pointer to the answer.

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Footnotes

- (1) I want to thank the participants for the interviews this paper is based on, and Hilary Tovey and Anna Mazzoldi for their comments on earlier drafts.
- (2) This might already be suggested by the two examples of lifeworld reflexivity given above: that associated with 1968 and that associated with "New Age" management strategies, however hideous the latter's reading of reflexivity.
- (3) On a related note, Michael Taylor has argued that the "secular family commune" is unique among communities "in the degree to which community and autonomy are *together* valued, sought after, and in some instances successfully achieved in practice [...] [T]here is a more tentative acceptance of organisational forms and codes of behaviour, which are submitted to more critical evaluation and are modified by processes of mutual negotiation in which all participate as friends. To be sure, these features of the secular family communes are ideals; but many communes have gone a long way towards realising them in practice. They are all conducive to the achievement of autonomy." (1982: 160 - 164)
- (4) I am indebted in particular to Bronislaw Szerszynski for his comments on the 1996 paper.
- (5) In this and subsequent quotes names have been changed to protect the innocent.
- (6) This was Berger, Berger and Kellner's interpretation of the counter culture: "The implicit anthropology in all of this is quite clear: Underneath the constraining structures of individuality and rationality lies the healing reality of our 'natural' being, an *ens realissimum*, which is the object of a quasi-soteriological quest." (1974: 182). This is not the position taken by most participants, who are familiar with the romantic rhetoric of much Sixties literature, but largely fail to adopt it for themselves.
- (7) Thompson 1972 and Earle et al. 1994.
- (8) Thompson 1980, Thompson 1988, Wolfe 1969.
- (9) Stevens 1989.
- (10) I have developed one form of this argument in Cox (forthcoming); other approaches can be found in Bey (1991) and McKay (1996). The phrase "free space" is quite widely used, particularly in the context of anarchist projects and of squats or occupations.