Towards a sociology of counter cultures?

Abstract

Conventional accounts of "new social movements", "the Sixties", green parties, "the alternative economy", and some contemporary subcultures often accept the existence of connections between some at least of these developments, but without making the attempt to analyse them as parts of a single historical process or as aspects of a more complex social formation. It may be possible to overcome the (theoretical, methodological, disciplinary) isolation of these subjects from one another in terms of a concept of counter culture which attempts to locate them within the total life-worlds of the participants.

This means treating counter cultures as historically developed complexes of institutions and practices, structures of meaning, forms of consciousness and modes of organisation of everyday life. This also makes it possible to distinguish between networks which are deeply involved in this counter cultural totality, and those which are essentially oriented towards dominant institutions and structures but which are receptive to isolated counter cultural practices or meanings. The argument is illustrated in relation to developments in (West) Germany since the 1960s.

A possible approach to the historical and social-structural specificities of the genesis of counter cultures is in terms of the opening up of "free spaces", in a variety of contexts where the determining effects of power and of the work process on ideas and practices are particularly weak. It is argued that this approach represents a greater closeness to the lived experience of those who become involved in counter cultures than traditional explanations of "new social movements" in terms of class of origin or class of destination. This situation offers unusual scope for the working-out of alternative logics of (socio-cultural) process: in contemporary contexts these emphasise above all a "new language" of reflexivity and autonomy. This relates to the central role of skills and knowledge in the making of the counter culture.

These internal developments, however, lead to conflict, on sociopolitical and / or sociocultural lines, with dominant institutions. Counter cultures are then not simply coherent sets of practices or oppositional subcultures, but represent a sustained challenge over the directions of societal self-production, and are themselves structured by this conflict. The concept of counter culture thus bears some analogies to the Marxian concept of "class for itself" and to the work of EP Thompson and Raymond Williams on class culture. It is then possible to discuss both "political" and "cultural" aspects of the challenge, without arbitrarily privileging either.

The conclusion identifies some possible issues for research on counter cultures in the Irish context, and discusses some of the implications of this analysis.

Towards a sociology of counter cultures?

"Would it be reasonable to suppose that the civil rights movement, the counterculture, and the New Left of the early and mid-sixties were the soil for the growth of feminism and gay liberation in the latter half of the decade, for environmentalism and later ecologism in the early seventies, for the persisting communitarian and localist

movements in both decades that nourished the anti-nuclear, peace, and citizen activism of more recent times - each forming an aspect of a common development with shared roots and expressive of richer phases in the definition and struggle for freedom? We have not tried to interpret the sixties and seventies as a whole, as a rich continuum that has brought out in ever greater fullness the potentiality for freedom that is latent in our era with all its varied and rich articulations. In any case, each such articulation - be it feminist or peace-oriented, countercultural or environmental, communitarian or localist - remains vibrantly structured in the other and exists as part of a whole...."

(Bookchin 1986: 45 - 46).

This paper is a working up of the general argument underlying my PhD research, as a means of assimilating some earlier fieldwork in Germany and clearing some theoretical ground for fieldwork in Ireland. It argues for the usefulness of a particular concept of what I am calling, for lack of a better phrase, "the" counter culture. The first thing I want to do is to say what I'm talking about and try to show, in relation to the German situation, how it relates to more conventional concepts such as the "new social movements" concept. Then I want to try to develop a theoretical account of how we might understand the development of a counter culture within some form of Western Marxist perspective. Lastly, I want to offer a few ideas as to what this account might mean in the Irish context.

In search of the counter culture

I'm using the term "counter culture" as a general concept to connect things like the student revolts of the Sixties (Gitlin 1987, Fraser et al. 1988), the sociocultural contestation of the same period (Reich 1971, Musgrove 1974), contemporary "social movements" (Cohen 1985, Melucci 1989), the development of an "alternative economy" involving alternative forms of the division of labour and the production of alternative goods and services (Huber 1980, GeMUT 1988), the growth of green and alternative parties (Müller-Rommel 1989, Richardson and Rootes 1995), the appearance of new "values" and "lifestyle milieus" (Inglehart 1990, Vester et al. 1993) and phenomena such as communal living (Berger 1981, Pepper 1991), neo-paganism (Adler 1986, Shan 1995), the Rainbow Gathering / "New Traveller" scenes (Lowe and Shaw 1993, Guide Crew 1994) and so on. These categories are conventionally isolated from one another and typically appropriated by different disciplines as objects of study [1]; in other words, their appearance as separate problem areas may be misleading.

I want to explore what a more holistic perspective might have to offer here. In place of this dominant tendency to *dividere et imperare*, I want to argue that the counter culture can be thought of as a connected totality of meanings and practices, which can be shown to have a certain degree of coherence and continuity, at least across the "core" regions of the world, from the mid-1960s to the present. In other words, I think these developments do not just share a common historical and social context. They are directly interconnected in a number of ways: as different stages in individual life history or institutional development, as different foci for the mobilisation of the same networks, through cooperation and conflict in shared

contexts, and through common modes of communication, organisation and action [2].

This initial approach, though, doesn't necessarily add up to a conceptual distinction between the counter culture and other "partial cultures" within contemporary capitalism which might be described in similar terms. I think an initial handle on this difference can be found in EP Thompson's analysis of "class-for-itself" as a structuration of meanings and practices in response to a shared experience of conflict (Thompson 1963: 9-10; cf. Marx 1967: 88 - 91). The argument would be that the counter culture is not just a coherent set of practices, not just an oppositional "subculture", but represents a sustained challenge to "historicity", in other words to the direction of social self-production (Touraine 1981: 26). I will try and develop some of this analysis later; for the moment I want to start with the claim that there is a coherent problem area to be analysed, or that there are common elements which make such an analysis possible.

Counter culture in West Germany

What these claims mean in practice can be seen by looking at the case of the former West Germany, where the counter culture was (and is) relatively visible, relatively coherent, and relatively continuous. Now there is a substantial level of agreement within the literature that what I am taking to be different elements of the counter culture are interrelated, but this is never thought through: it is in effect taken for granted as given experience. Thus many authors give a historical account of the pathways between "1968" through the development of alternative ways of life, the alternative economy and the "new social movements" to the formation of *die Grünen* (Burns and van der Will 1988; see also Mez 1987; Baier et al. 1988; Markovits and Gorski 1993). This can also be seen, in a life-history or journalistic perspective, as a path followed by individuals (Mosler 1988; Cohn-Bendit 1987; Horx 1985, 1989). Raschke argues that "the new social movements" have to be treated as a single, albeit heterogenous, whole, including the peace, ecology, women's and alternative economy movements (1985: 74, 111).

It is then possible to speak, as Huber (1980) does, of an "alternative movement" which stretches from local environmental initiatives via alternative lifestyles and the "new spiritualism" through to the undogmatic left. Working within a support organisation for alternative projects *[Netzwerk Selbsthilfe]* and from directories of these projects, he estimates directly "political" activity at only 18% of the total number of projects, including community activism; 70% of the projects were "services" such as bookshops, magazines, "socio-cultural centres", alternative cafés, educational and welfare projects, and so on; the remaining 12% was agricultural or craft production (Huber 1980: 10, 28; see Weinberger 1984 for a similar cataloguing of the "scene" and Stattführer 1981 for a "directory" perspective). These apparently diverse activities are visibly related by the relative hegemony of "new left" ideas across the movement; by the unusually narrow social base of the German movement (Franklin and Rüdig 1991; Weinberger 1984: 129 - 130; Bürklin 1987; Raschke 1991: 52 - 61); by the concentration into alternative quartiers in the major cities and "alternative scenes" in even small towns (Geiling 1990; Statistisches Landesamt Hamburg 1991: 45; Raschke 1991: 56; Vester 1993: 123 - 182); and by the statistical correlation between the Green vote, participation in the "new social movements", "postmaterialist values", and so on (Watts 1987: 62; Inglehart 1990: 280 - 1; Franklin and Rüdig 1991: 16 - 17; Raschke 1991: 120; Weinberger 1984: 89).

(To anticipate slightly, if the interrelationships of this West German counter culture are relatively visible by comparison with those of, for example, Britain or the US, this has to do with its own felt character as a predominantly political challenge to

the established order, within which cultural challenges are in effect subsumed, whereas the elements of cultural contestation tend to subsume the political in the Anglo-American contexts [3].)

I spent 1990 - 91 researching the counter culture in Hamburg, taking particular notice of the Green party and of the alternative media, but also coming into contact with events like a peace camp during the second Gulf War, an agricultural producers-consumers coop, an occupied cinema, a support organisation for alternative socio-cultural activity, and so on. Now the "them and us" feeling - also emphasised in conflicts over the meaning of "them" and the meaning of "us" - was certainly far more pronounced than it is in Ireland. But the experience of moving through an interrelated complex of institutions, practices and networks, the experience of liberated or at least contested territory (in Hamburg, streets with occupied buildings, political posters in windows, shops arranging petrol-sharing lifts, people hanging out in strange clothing, to take simply what is immediately visible), and the experience of constantly running up against the same old enemies of power and money - that, I think, is a more general experience; and I'll say something a bit more theoretical about that in a while.

These different phenomena - "1968", "new social movements", "the alternative economy", "green politics" and so on - can then be seen not as a series of isolated developments but as aspects of a single process: the growth of counter cultures in the sense of distinct complexes of meanings and practices which challenge those of the dominant culture. For the moment, all I want to do is establish the initial plausibility of this description as a means of developing an "ideal type" of counter culture (Weber 1984: 21 - 22 etc.) which can help to make developments in other contexts clearer and more understandable.

Networks, milieux, counter cultures

My contention, then, is that these historical, organisational, statistical and geographical relationships, and this common experience and "structure of feeling" (Williams 1981: 156 - 165) can be captured with something a bit more sociological than the ultimately instrumentalist reductionisms of the "new social movements" literature, for example (Cox 1995).

On the level of ontology, there are already some starting-points available. Alberto Melucci (1989) has observed that social movements are effectively temporary mobilisations from more continuous "networks", commenting that "collective action is nourished by the daily production of alternative frameworks of meaning" and that "the potential for resistance ... is located in the molecular experience of the individuals or groups who practice the alternative meanings of everyday life" (1989: 70 - 71). In a similar vein, a group of Hannover researchers have examined the organisation of alternative milieus as a source of "new social movement" activity, bringing together the local history of such milieus with accounts of the transformation of habitus within them and relating this to changing social structure [4]. Both of these approaches, however, reproduce an *a priori* distinction between private lifestyles and public action, which I think is actively misleading if we want to understand the formation of counter cultures.

Instead, what needs doing is to replace those forms of visible public activity within these lived contexts, and here the notion of "networks" can be a very useful heuristic device for capturing the interrelation of given meanings and practices within a particular context of interaction. What this would then mean is that the counter culture consists, not of formal institutions, but rather of the interactions between individuals who are often affiliated to multiple institutions or to none; these interactions take place - networks are mobilised - around "events" of different kinds occurring in what are traditionally thought of as different fields.

In a relatively simple context this might mean, for example, that the same links would be activated in organising direct action, sharing psychoactive drugs, or in bringing out a magazine. In other contexts the interactions are naturally more complex and more "disembedded" (Giddens 1990). The essential point, however, is that counter cultures are not characterised by mass membership or cadre organisations, or by the kind of closed, face-to-face groups posited by classical ethnographic research. In essence, this means that counter cultures cannot be identified with any of their individual elements; they are constituted by relationships which are activated in a variety of different contexts. In place of the abstraction of any one of these contexts as defining, what has to be done is to examine the actual articulation of meanings and practices within these networks or this intersubjectivity [5].

This concept of counter cultures as constituted by networks is "weak" by comparison with a focus on "groups", whether by that we mean small, face-to-face subcultures or the more organised and intentional activity normally examined as "new social movements"; it is "strong", however, by comparison with perspectives which focus primarily on textual artefacts rather than on the creative meanings and practices (which include the creative reception of such artefacts) in everyday life.

Such a concept can be related to German research into "lifestyles". Hradil's acount (1987: 127 - 132, 167 - 169) identifies, on the basis of shared experiences and orientations, both a "left-alternative milieu", which clearly relates closely to the counter culture, and a "hedonistic milieu" which shares some of the orientations of the former - towards self-realisation and creativity, for example - but which attempts to realise them at an individual level only, excluding any positive valuing of participation or commitment to social change. This then presents itself as a contrast between a prioritisation of "immaterial values" versus an absence of value orientations, and between an emphasis on freedom, justice and commitment versus an emphasis on consumption, prestige and enjoyment. (Cf. also Kleining and Krotz 1986, Burns and van der Will 1988: 273 [6].).

Translating this "life-world" analysis into the categories of networks, practices and meanings suggests a useful distinction between "alternative" networks, in other words those interactions that are primarily structured around counter cultural practices and meanings, and "hedonist" networks, which are primarily structured around dominant practices and meanings, but make selective "imports" from the counter culture. In these latter contexts, what we have are, for example, more traditional friendship groups, more clearly restricted to activities of leisure and consumption, but who extend this to include, for example, recreational drug use, "alternative" music or even certain forms of political activity (such as occupations) which offer fairly direct forms of self-realisation.

The concept of counter culture, then, is a relatively "loose and large" one, which firstly aims to disentangle the common elements of a heterogenous mixture of forms of activity articulated in many different local versions and then to make distinctions between the ("alternative" or "hedonist") contexts within which this activity takes place. Practices are elaborated primarily within the "alternative" milieux, in contexts which are already strongly counter cultural, but they then appear in all kinds of contexts, particularly in this "hedonist" mix of alternative and dominant feelings and action, or, at a further remove, a "NIMBY" appropriation of specific meanings but not the more general ideologies of contestation. There is then an active process of reception, selection and diffusion to the wider culture in which (to anticipate slightly) conflicts over hegemony are worked out.

Sources of the counter culture

This ontological discussion is a precondition for an explanatory account, but it does not in itself explain anything about how or why the counter culture has developed, or what kinds of meaning and practice are articulated in these networks. I want to come at this problem by asking where these networks have come from. I have argued elsewhere that the "new social movements" literature has been unsuccessful in identifying the "social basis" of these movements (Cox 1995); in effect, the most empirically accurate accounts available are either simply descriptive (Raschke 1985: 416 - 417) or *ad hoc* (Offe 1985: 833 - 834, 850 - 853), and in any case appear to work only for the narrow class basis of the West German context (cf. Franklin and Rüdig 1991).

These explanatory strategies have, however, another difficulty, which is that much counter cultural recruitment, by common consent, comes from groups which are only partially susceptible to conventional sociological class analysis in terms of their own occupation (students, the unemployed, housewives) or in terms of their background (because of high levels of upward or downward mobility): in fact, a number of approaches have emphasised precisely the "marginality" of those involved (Berger, Berger and Kellner 1974: 192 - 204 etc.; Raschke 1985: 416 - 417; Offe 1985; Bürklin 1987). In a more Marxian perspective, most if not all of this recruitment is from the working class in the sense of those who do not own the means of production (Wilde 1990: 61 - 69, cf. also Bagguley 1992); but this is then such a large group that it is not particularly helpful in explaining differential participation.

What I think is needed is a more direct approach, which focusses on the characteristic experiences to which counter cultural meanings and practices could be said to be responses. In place of a reductionist mode of analysis, where "class-for-itself" is seen as a mechanical effect of "class-in-itself" - or the reverse, where class position is in effect read off from (imputed) class consciousness (Eder 1985) - we need to treat both experience and response as problematic (Thompson 1963, 1993). One element of this is then an examination of the lived experience of people at the time they become involved in counter cultural networks. If we do this, I think we will find two common elements.

Free spaces

Firstly, there are what can be described as "free spaces", situations of a relative weakening of determination by the logics of power and economics: these are by and large not individuals who are fully involved in the central relations of power and accumulation, whether from above or from below. I am not arguing that these processes cease to matter, but rather that if we are to understand determination as "setting limits, exerting pressures" (Williams 1980: 31 - 32), we may admit that these limits may be narrower or wider and the pressures stronger or weaker. In a historical perspective, it can be said that these limits have been unusually wide in the post-war period within some social groups in the core countries, in particular because of the compromise between capital and labour represented by the welfare state and its associated institutions and by the changing structure of economic activity following from that or attempting to bypass it [7].

In these contexts, two categories in particular are crucial. One, fairly obvious category consists of people within sectors of the education system which are not directly geared towards the work process: people in secondary or third-level education outside the vocational and professional sectors; people in limbo between school and college or repeating school-leaving exams; in countries such as Germany or Italy, people on civilian service as an alternative to conscription. A second category, however, consists of people who are not in the education system but whose lives are very weakly structured by work relations. This may mean

unemployment; it may mean a form of employment which does not impose strong discipline or constraints on lifestyle (in Dublin, for example, this can mean anything from computer programming to dishwashing to making music). The crucial fact is not that people are materially well-off, but that they are not subjected to continuous work discipline or effective anticipatory socialisation. New Travellers, unemployed hippies, or people in peace camps and occupations are not privileged in the usual sense of the word, but their lives are experiences of deprivation and conflict with authority rather than of the more normal forms of exploitation and direct domination.

Initially, the contrast between this second group and more conventional images of economic marginality can be described in terms of a high level of interaction and a high degree of practical, organising and ideological skills. This then has to be referred back a further stage, as with the first group, to a contradiction between an experience of core processes and an experience of marginalisation: two developments which clearly form a single process at a societal level, but which are experienced as separate in their impact on the life-world. This is then the second common element: determination is not simply weaker but also contradictory [8]. This contradiction between participation and marginalisation can be seen in a couple of obvious examples. One common source of counter cultural activity is the conflict experienced by those who come from marginalised backgrounds - the working class, ethnic minorities, or women - into core institutions such as universities. An alternative route is that travelled by people from the culturally marginalised sections of powerful groups - from religious minorities, intellectual or political backgrounds, for example. (See Müller 1990 for a comparison of counter cultural habiti in their relation to working-class or middle-class backgrounds.) In the Republic, key contradictions of this kind seem to include autodidactic, hence unorthodox, religious backgrounds, and radical, hence marginalised, nationalist backgrounds.

I am not arguing for equivalence, or balance, here; I am suggesting simply that there is a shared experience of contradiction between marginalisation of some kinds and involvement of other kinds in core processes; a contradiction whose effects are experienced as some kind of freedom, felt as worth defending and which allows something new to develop [9].

Logics of communicative rationality?

Within these free spaces, then, what might in one perspective be described as the "logics of socio-cultural process" [10] or alternatively as a historically specific form of "communicative rationality" (Habermas 1981) find room to develop. This necessarily involves a combination of the reuse of already available meanings and practices, the creation of new ones, and their selective importation from elsewhere. What is more important (and what a confusion between "text" and reception blocks our vision of) is that these speak a "new language" (Marx 1954: 12); that their content, in other words, cannot be reduced to the specific forms that are created, reused or imported. This new language, I think, is one of *autonomy* and *reflexivity. Autonomy,* in this context, is most visibly the defence and expansion of "free spaces" (whether political, cultural, personal or psychological). One of its most important effects is in the emphasis on "difference" and against the practice of "speaking for" others which, pushed to its limits, generates the "anti-hegemony" of identity politics (cf. Sawicki 1991: 45 - 46 etc.) and contrasts sharply with the dominant modes of organisation of the workers' movement. In other words, if autonomy is a central element of the new language, it will be visible not only as a shared structure of feeling, but also, or in different contexts, as a refusal of definition [11].

Reflexivity, in the sense of action on action (Melucci) or intervention into group and societal self-production (Touraine) is then very often geared towards this autonomy. The two come together most notably in the treatment of organisation as an end in itself, as opposed to more instrumental approaches, and the attempts to institutionalise "autonomy" in formal (green parties) or informal (Rainbow Tribe, "net culture" (Hauben 1993)) modes of organisation [12]. (See Sulkunen 1992 for an alternative approach to both autonomy and reflexivity.)

This mode of communicative rationality, in which reflexive operations (theoretical or practical) serve to increase autonomy (internal and external) quite naturally collides with, and threatens, the instrumental rationalities of power and economics. Thus the internal organisation and development of "free spaces" - or the social articulation of alternative communicative rationality - forms a challenge to the "historicity" of the social totality; this challenge can then be reused by other groups in other contexts, to serve more basic goals of resistance to direct exploitation and domination.

A whole way of struggle

In other words, the development of the counter culture from experience to response is not a simple matter of the unimpeded working-out of communicative rationalisation; it is, from the moment that autonomy is asserted against the imperatives of instrumental logics, or that reflexivity questions an organisation of priorities to fit in with these logics, a matter of conflict. From "a whole way of life", in other words, we have to move to "a whole way of struggle" (cf. Williams 1981: 134 - 136; Hall 1989: 61). While this precludes an analysis of "culture" in isolation, it does not imply a reversion to political reductionism structured around the priority of instrumental rationality (Cox 1995); rather, it implies an attentiveness to the societal totality, and the peculiar situation of a "life-world" which is explicitly challenging the instrumental logics of power and economics, not simply defending itself against them, *pace* Habermas [13].

The contemporary counter culture can then be understood as the outcome of the defeat of the political and cultural challenges of the 1960s, and the transformation of what Gramcsi described as a "war of movement" into a "war of position" (Gramsci 1971: 239). In other words, from the frontal attack on the "legitimate order" represented by the political challenge associated with "1968" and the cultural challenge associated with "1967", there has been a proliferation of challenges, not simply within "civil society" but within the "soft fringes" of the state - welfare state institutions, the parliamentary system, local government, and so on. The history, both of the "war of movement" in different contexts, and of the subsequent "war of position", is central to the formation and development of the counter culture [14], whether as directly confrontational skills (the direct action paradigm), supportive and infrastructural skills (the underground press), or ideological skills of identity maintenance [15].

Within this history, there is a decisive interaction between political and cultural forms of contestation. This is itself to a great extent an effect of the history of conflict, and in particular of the "war of movement" and its aftermath. In West Germany, the political emphasis of the 1960s was such as to effectively subordinate the cultural challenges, which were themselves often not autonomous but, like the early communes, offshoots of the political movement. At the same time the "old Left" was so weak that the counter culture effectively became, and is commonly described as, simply *"die Linke"* - "the Left". The West German counter culture, then, has always been articulated around the project of a political challenge to the state.

By contrast, the sociocultural revolt of the sixties was considerably longer-lasting in Britain or the States than the political challenge of "1968". Traditional party-

building perspectives have become increasingly pointless, and there has been a fragmenting move towards single-issue and "identity" politics. What has been far more important is the cultural challenge, which remains creative today in developments such as neo-paganism, the Rainbow Gatherings, New Travellers, new psychoactive drugs scenes or even some quasi-anarchist Net milieux. This is then articulated around challenges to the dominant symbolic order (cf. Buckner 1971). At the same time, this is only a difference of emphasis; all it means is that the battle-lines in different contexts are drawn around different issues. There is always scope for the transformation of politics into culture, whether as cultural commodity or, more positively, as the everyday practice of alternative modes of social organisation. But there is also always scope for the politicisation of culture: even such apparently die-hard "culturalist" practices as Rainbow Gatherings, neo-paganism, dope-smoking or New Travellers have generated political activities of one kind and another (often in the form of direct challenges to the use of state power against them). In other words, political conflict and cultural contestation form a spectrum; both contribute to the creation of networks - and the development of skills -which can be mobilised for multiple purposes. Ultimately, this is a tension within such networks, not an ontological difference, as implied by the academic reification of different moments in this process [16].

Whether political or cultural conflict - or strategies of withdrawal - are predominant in a particular place at a particular time, the central social formation and the ultimate source of these activities is neither political organisations nor the production of cultural artefacts, but the way in which these networks structure daily life: culture in the anthropological sense, including alternative forms of economic production and reproduction, means of communication, modes of organisation and the forms of consciousness involved in all of this, as well as what are more visibly forms of political or cultural contestation. This "common way of struggle", of course, is also a struggle for survival in the face of economic and social marginalisation and what we might call (from our own, safer, situations) "low-intensity" state intervention, for example the British attack on New Travellers or the rave culture (Pudephott 1995, Saunders 1995), currently being exported to the Republic, workplace drugs testing in the States or *Berufsverbote* in Germany. The counter culture, described in more reified terms, can then be described metaphorically as a sedimentation both of the contestation and of withdrawal and the struggle for survival: this sedimentation means the making available of meanings and practices for further praxis, as well as the formation of networks which can then organise around new sites of conflict or explore new forms of reproduction [17].

Conclusion: Irish rainbows

How far can this help an understanding of the counter culture in the Republic? I think a starting point has to be the relative lack of continuity and coherence within Ireland, but the persistence of interaction with relevant continuities elsewhere. In other words, the counter cultural elements of the political and cultural conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s do not seem to have remained visibly present as something readily available - counter cultural networks, skills, meanings, practices, and so on - for further conflict. Undoubtedly that history is there, but it is submerged, not immediately present for subsequent generations. The result appears - at least at this stage of the work - to be that each new generation is created in a form of bricolage, rather than as the kind of reworking which has been possible where, as in West Germany, there has been an available repertoire of meanings and practices, a known history, and a broad environment of counter cultural institutions.

However, the massive circulation of migration and return migration, as well as immigration from external counter cultural contexts and exposure to the "disembedding" mechanisms of the Anglo-American media, mean that this bricolage can operate to a certain extent as an appropriation of counter culture from other areas of the world-economy [18], as well as (naturally) the reworking of elements of locally subordinate culture.

A classic example of our situation could be taken from the development of Rainbow Gatherings in Ireland. As a practice this is clearly imported from the States, and then from British and European centres [19]. Yet people from Galway and Dublin made it to the 1994 European Gathering in Slovenia, on the basis of fax and Internet communications; and an Irish Rainbow-oriented magazine *(Tuar Ceatha)* has been in existence now for seven issues.

The summer gatherings in Ireland (Hill 1995) have at times been more successful at attracting people from abroad than at mobilising within Ireland; yet last year's Rainbow directory (Guide Crew 1994), and the success of this year's gathering, clearly documents the response the idea has found among the young Irish. Rainbow activists report eighteen hill-top fires lit this Bealtaine, as opposed to five or six last year (Tuar Ceatha 6: 15 - 17, Tuar Ceatha 7: 18; see also Thompson 1996). It then also has to be stressed, however, that meanings and practices are being modified to meet Irish needs: thus, for example, there is a shift from the classic libertarianism of much of the American movement to a stronger emphasis on "Celtic" identity [20]: these are of course both possible meanings of "autonomy".

The importation of this particular institution then has to be seen within a context of temporary Irish migration abroad and of the presence of counter cultural immigration in the west of Ireland in particular (see MacBain 1995), both that from the 1970s and the more recent "refugee" movements of New Travellers leaving an increasingly hostile British state (Earle et al. 1994: 40, 156). The "disembedding" effect of contemporary communications media is of course also relevant. The development of "free spaces" in Ireland is then closely related to the contradictions between core and peripheral processes of economy (EU-funded education, mass unemployment) and culture (communications media, youth migration, counter cultural immigration). What in one perspective is the marginality or exceptional status of Ireland is in another perspective (once we cease taking "society" to mean "nation-state") a characteristic and almost prototypical set of relations within contemporary capitalism.

Lastly, what is the significance of the counter culture? Rather than repeat familiar arguments about the significance of 1968, "new social movements" or green parties in terms of a purely instrumental logic, I would prefer to stress that by seeing these developments as part of a single process we can both clarify what is at stake and also free ourselves from fixation on a single subject. I would point in particular to one element of the counter culture which is less generally mentioned: its significance for the global balance of power. As a movement between the core and the margins, it represents what we could call the defection of "traditional intellectuals" from the centre and towards oppositional positions, as well as the formation of a new organic intelligentsia; and it has to be remembered that intellectual activity, for Gramsci, involves both theoretical articulation and practical organisation. This then seems to me a movement to be taken seriously. What is happening is not a simple "disorganisation", but a reorganisation of the way opposition to the dominant forces in society is structured and articulated [21].

At this point the complexities of "post-hierarchical politics" (Boyne 1990) become most visible. The difficulty in forming lasting alliances between contemporary movements, or between the different constituencies of the dominated and exploited, is not just a matter of the divergences and oppositions of interest which are undoubtedly present. It is too easy to forget that the workers' movement, and working class culture, are themselves constructions which appear far more

homogenous in ideological retrospect than in practice (Thompson 1963). What made the "old left" seem less internally divided than the new was its successful creation of hegemony - of the organisation of consent. A central difficulty in organisation on the left at the present time is then precisely the principled refusal of hegemony and the assertion of autonomy as a value in itself. At present, this counter cultural paradox admits of no easy resolution. If any resolution can be found, it is likely to lie in the development of non-authoritarian forms of (counter-) hegemony, around a shared emancipatory project. Such a project could be grounded in the practices and meanings of the counter culture (see Wainwright 1994 for a related argument). The question of whether such an "emancipatory hegemony" is possible, however, is not just a theoretical, but above all a practical, question.

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Footnotes

1. More recent - or more recently visible - developments such as neo-paganism and New Travellers do not seem to have been fully colonised by academic disciplines, but no doubt this is in progress. In the case of neo-paganism, some of the more interesting "outsider" discussions are the work of archaeologists and mediaeval historians (Piggott 1974: 112 - 157, Hutton 1991: 284 - 341) and of journalists (Adler 1986), as well as theologians (Leech 1973: 87 - 114). The "market gap" for sociological research in this area, in other words, has not yet been filled. At the same time, participants in these contexts are beginning to voice their own point of view against that of "experts": Earle et al. (1994) place the statement "This is not an academic book or a research study" on the front cover.

2. Initial attempts at making sense of the counter culture in these terms can be found in Buckner (1971) and Berger, Berger and Kellner (1974); from within the counter culture, some of this perspective is implied by alternative directories such as Guide à la France des Luttes (Jaubert et al 1974), Alternative England and Wales (Saunders 1975), Stattführer Hamburg, (Stattführer 1981), or (perhaps) Alternative Ireland Directory (Boyd 1993). Huber (1980) represents an attempt at thinking through the implications of precisely this "directory definition" of the counter culture as a collection of organisations.

3. Here, and elsewhere in this paper, I am using "political" as a shorthand for the state-oriented and organisationally-minded perspectives of much of the "new social movements" literature. It will be obvious that "cultural" contestation - in other words, that which focusses primarily on symbols and meanings - is also political in the broader sense of having to do with relations of power. The slippage between this general, and necessary, emphasis on power and conflict as key elements of social relationships, on the one hand, and the restriction of analysis to organisations oriented

towards conflict with or control of the state, on the other, is highly problematic.

4. See especially the interim reports written for the German journal for new social movement research (Clemens 1990, Hermann 1990, Geiling 1990, Müller 1990). The final publication (Vester et al. 1993) adds relatively little to this in terms of the analysis of new milieux.

5. I take this to be defensible in terms of Habermas's (1987: 294 - 326) response to the structuralist and post-structuralist "death of the subject" in terms of a paradigm of intersubjectivity, as well as McRobbie's (1994) effectively realist version of postmodernism.

6. A "technocratic-liberal" milieu (10%) shares some goals with these two milieux, but stands at a greater distance to both (Hradil 1987: 130 - 131, 169). The multi-level model developed by Vester et al (1993) identifies both the "alternative" and "hedonist" milieus, along with a "new workers" milieu, as key supports for both a "socially integrative" and a "radical democratic" political orientation. These "critical-committed" groups are characterised i.a. by an emphasis on skills, self-realisation and democratisation (of the polity and of the workplace), by support for women's and immigrants' rights; by unconventional political activity; and by high levels of support for the Greens (1993: 49 - 51, 353).

7. Inglehart's (1990) arguments about the development of "postmaterial" needs once material needs have been satisfied then appears as a psychologising misreading of this situation.

8. Melucci (1989) has made a similar argument, but only in relation to the "new middle class".

9. This discussion of "core processes" and marginalisation is only intended to be adequate for its immediate purpose; the literature on "organisation" (Lash and Urry 1987, Therborn 1995) does not seem to me to really cover the problems involved. An effective account would necessarily have to include a theorisation of the relationship between hegemony and the forms of cultural production and consumption relevant to these groups. Wagner (1994) may come somewhat closer to what is needed.

10. This slightly "black-box" concept is based both on Thompson's (1977: 110 etc.) idea of the "logics of process" and Williams' (1977: 186 - 193 etc.) argument about the varying degrees of relative autonomy of cultural institutions. Habermas (1981: 176, 180) quotes Weber's description of cultural rationalisation as a realisation of "the internal and autonomous logic" of value spheres and asks "whether there is not a formal stock of universal structures of consciousness expressed in the cultural value spheres that develop, according to their own logics, under the abstract standards of truth, normative rightness, and authenticity". What needs to be held together, however, is the resulting of a "logic of process" (of arguably general significance) from a rather different (and much more contingent) logic: this in a sense is the central theme of the Protestant Ethic (Weber 1958). Communicative rationalisation, in other words, would always be rationalisation of historically given material, or from a specific starting point.

The openness of the concept as used here is deliberate; in any empirical situation this will appear as to some extent determined by the broader context of class and gender relations and by the structuration of cultural difference. This determination, however, can only be predicted in relation to specific articulations of these relationships: the lack of a strongly formed working class culture in Adenauer's Germany, the restructuration of gender

relations in contemporary Ireland, or the "ethnicisation" of British and American society.

11. This has important methodological consequences if, as Gerhard Kleining has argued, we can take a "shared negative" or a structuring dichotomy as a common element in analysis (Kleining 1982: 239; Cox 1994: 26 - 27).

12. These two emphases certainly have a wider impact; however, I think it can be argued that they are most relevant within contemporary capitalism, and particularly within the counter culture, which is then a central source for the spread of this structure of feeling.

13. This is of course paradoxical, in that to a certain extent the development of political and economic activity within the given totality implies a move down precisely these instrumental paths. This is not, however, a problem which can be resolved by theoretical fiat; it is one which is worked out to a large extent practically, in the attempts at "grass-roots democracy", cooperative economic organisation, and so on; as well as in the extent to which given networks compromise in practice with given administrative and economic structures.

14. The various stages of conflict in West Germany, for example, form so many stages of development of the counter culture: the initial political contestation of 1966 - 69; the development of "new social movements" from the early 1970s; the parallel history of far left organisations, state repression and terrorism cultminating in 1977; the formation of the Greens and the peace movement from 1979; and a period of searching for new forms and experimenting with new approaches from 1989 to the present.

15. To hijack Gramscian terminology, these represent directive and theoretical (organising and theoretical) modes of intellectual activity. The role of theoretical intellectuals is emphasised in Eyerman and Jamison's (1991) account. Wainwright's (1994) perspective brings out the organising elements to a greater degree, as well as shifting the terms of discussion away from the focus on (individual) "intellectuals" to the more general analysis of intellectual activity.

16. The coming together of "political" and "cultural" emphases in the British counter culture, in opposition to the Criminal Justice Bill and in anti-roads campaigns, has recently underlined this point very neatly.

17. A key element in all of this is the wealth of skills generated - or rediscovered - within the counter culture. The conflict with dominant institutions of course consists to a large degree of skilled work in the organisation of practices and meanings: organisational work in the usual sense, the ideological skills needed to delegitimise one set of meanings and legitimate another, and the generation of an infrastructure for communication, economic support, education, and so on. The emphasis on reflexivity and autonomy, however, means that skills are also treated as valuable in themselves, independent of any instrumental value, and are often identified directly with independence, self-sufficiency or empowerment. Lastly, there is a high degree of creativity deriving from the experimental nature of counter cultural activity and the reflexive preference for "acting on action". All of this generates skills which not only make the difference between (for example) two different experiences of unemployment, but which often and paradoxically turn out to have a potential market value - as crafts, as therapy, as intellectual production. In Konrad and Szelényi's (1979) terminology, the counter culture can perhaps be seen as an alternative intelligentsia; this is certainly a more satisfactory formulation than Lash and Urry's (1987) "service class".

18. To take just one obvious example, the wholesale importation of institutions from abroad: the Green Party, Earth First!, hunt saboteurs, the Electronic Freedom Foundation, Buddhist groups, etc., are all either "franchise" operations or formed with foreign models explicitly in mind (the Green Party, for example, was formed on the model of European green parties, and holds a kind of franchise through membership of the European Federation of Green Parties and the Green Group in the European Parliament). It should go without saying that these "franchises" are organised in strongly decentralised ways, which typically amount to near-total autonomy of local groups.
19. The centre of activity, as reflected in the Rainbow Guide or the alt.gathering.rainbow newsgroup, is overwhelmingly North American.
20. This shift in emphasis is visible both in Rainbow discussions and in neo-pagan and other "new spirituality" contexts.
21. Ben Seel's work (1995) on the potential for the formation of counter-hegemony in contexts such as British anti-roads protests is of interest here.