

CHAPTER IV
PROBLEMS OF CULTURE-WIDE INNOVATION

There are currently many innovators of the type described here operating quietly within post-modern cultures. But their numbers are not yet large enough to eclipse in importance the great mass of societal members who willingly, "unreflectively" buy the legitimated ideological and material package offered them from earliest socialization. Since this is the case in even the most enlightened populations, in those sectors of the world still in primitive and neo-modern stages, the number of innovators is probably negligible. However, with the growth of education (as opposed to indoctrination) and the concomitantly sophisticated culture which develops in league with it, there will be more and more individuals selectively rejecting those prescriptions for thought and behavior which they find personally objectionable. That this should someday become the norm seems entirely reasonable, unless technological advance is further shackled by capitalist interests, and the continuing fraud of "scarcity" is forced ad nauseum upon the consumer. Whether this development is only "reasonable" or also "reasonable and good" will now be examined from a variety of positions: from that of the individual trying to make the transition from societal member to social actor; from that of the "social system", approached

necessarily in slightly reified form; and from this writer's viewpoint as the product of thinking and reading over some time on what has come to be an exciting and perplexing theoretical area.

The distinction I am making between the societal member and the social actor is of enormous consequence for the persons involved in the actual transition. There are a multitude of dichotomies which might be offered by way of illustrating this crucial series of mental and emotional changes which precede alterations of actual behavior. Of all the possible antipodes, the clearest is the difference between a life of predictable and anxietyless regularity versus an existence which is constantly under the scrutiny of the innovational mind, a life of experimentation, institutional modification and what can become a threatening amount of ambiguity about "selves" in various settings. Recently when I taught a group of undergraduates the rudiments of the theory, many of them balked at this point, not understanding how one could possibly extricate himself from the "web of beliefs" and behaviors which any culture imposes as a matter of course. In order to cross finally this gap in understanding, I used the blackboard and drew in enormous letters the word "EGO", explaining to them that I intended this to be understood in the popular sense, that an individual is "egotistic". Although egocentricity, selfishness and the many related terms are used almost exclusively in this culture with pejorative connotations, it must be understood that the prime qualification for any

innovator is an unshakable belief in the value of his actions and the relative "dys-value" of alternatives. That this behavior, in no great need of consensual validation, requires a resilient and self-reliant ego, is so basic to the theory that it may easily be overlooked, understressed and therefore not appreciated sufficiently.

Robert S. Lynd in Knowledge for What used to much advantage the work of Karen Horney. If I may copy him now, it could help clear the necessity for complete understanding of this idea, that the innovator is "self"-ish, meant etymologically. According to Horney, "Human behavior institutionalizes itself in four paths of attempted escape from anxiety", either by (1) rationalizing anxiety in the Freudian sense of blaming someone else; (2) denying the existence of anxiety; (3) narcoticizing anxiety "by drowning it in hard work, slogans, drink or excitement, or by purchasing a shiny new car"; and (4) avoiding anxiety. If these subterfuges fail, then we utilize four alternatives: (1) "We seek reassurance through affection; (2) submissively seek the cover of identification with some traditional source of authority; (3) have recourse to power-tactics and redoubled aggression; or (4) we may withdraw within ourselves". Although composed in 1937, that description is still quite useful when considering American societal members. It is less useful in the consideration of social actors, as I intend the term. All of the above tactics in the interest of emotional self-preservation and a shot at the American dream of happiness, assume (in the traditional

psychiatric mode) that the individual must "adjust" to the social environment with some success in order to insure a "healthy" self-image and to gain contentment. I counter this conservative bias with the thought that "adaptation" is more to the liking of the innovator. In precise terms, the innovator serves no institutions above himself, and, when the conditions are amenable, he will reverse the usual relationship of power and prerogative between himself and the sanctioned social processes. Institutions are ways of getting certain necessary jobs done by the supposedly efficient organization of behavior. The innovator in almost all cases has in mind redefinitions of those "ways" to suit his particular and (to the degree possible) unique socio-historical position and personality. When an individual steps outside the positively sanctioned mental constructs of his culture, then steps back in long enough to announce the bankruptcy and incorrectness of its major institutions, he is implying, to put it mildly, that his perception of the inadequacy (as a function of his knowledge and experience) is better than the perceptions of anyone else. "Better" in this case means the doing of something with minimum irrationality built into the process.

What is being emphasized here is the undeniably high regard in which the innovator holds himself, at least when the process of innovation itself is at stake. There can be no subtle disclaimers or qualifications associated with a newly proposed life-style, invention or other type innovation.

(The innovator's proposed contribution must of course be susceptible to objective assessment; for his "high regard" for self is based on a willingness to view himself and his work in terms of accuracy and feasible applicability. He is more than a free-wheeling eccentric.) To those societal members of tender sensibilities, the self-assertiveness and downright brashness for which innovators historically are known will largely nullify his effect upon them. This is where the advocate (in LaPiere's terms) serves his indispensable purpose, making palatable for the unenlightened what in its raw form very often approaches treason, vulgarity and the acme of bad taste. The innovator whose target is a distorted structure of social relations, is by definition "bad taste" personified. (However, at least in some instances, the innovator is forced to serve as his own advocate when no-one else is available for the unenviable task.) So, by extension, if a societal member decides however gradually to move into the position of social actor, the first and most important step is the development of a powerful ego (which has little to do with egotism). To quote Saul Alinsky on this point, keeping in mind however his tangential usefulness as a model of all innovators since his area is exclusively collective action, he writes under "Ego" in Rules for Radicals:

Throughout these desired qualities is interwoven a strong ego, one we might describe as monumental in terms of solidity. ...Ego is unreserved confidence in one's ability to do what he believes must be done. (112)

Although this has the religious quality one would expect from a "crusading" organizer, it nonetheless underscores my point.

Movement leaders, however, must incorporate into their self-as-leader a heavily nonrational component with which to "stir" the masses, etc., which would be diminished or nonexistent in many other types of innovators.

As in many things, the development of such a durable self-image is much easier discussed than implemented. It is a common tenet in most schools of psychology and psychiatry that our personality or its important components are well developed at an early age. Some of the transactional theorists now speculate that the "Adult" may be firmly ensconced by the age of 10 months (!), while other writers suggest prenatal influences on personality (113). Connected with this belief is the correlate that personality is very difficult to change significantly after childhood, the basic capabilities of the individual being somewhat immutable, that later socialization will affect only the tip of the iceberg. While for the sake of polemics, I could argue exactly the opposite tack, I will instead embrace the "middle way". It would seem that some of our basic characteristics go unchanged throughout major situational and maturational variation. But there is still enough crucial "material" left beyond those relatively minor areas to facilitate the development and operation of an innovator through resocialization of whatever method. (This assumes the exclusion of that very uncommon childhood, one in which a wide range and diversity of stimuli were presented as "normal" from the earliest point in the development of personality, e.g., progeny of artist-intellectuals whose

home(s) is often filled with obviously innovational types.) This does not so much dodge the issue as give credence to both views, the overly psychologistic and the overly sociologicistic, neither of which alone satisfactorily explain human behavior.

But beyond "inherent" limitations and the further lacunae created by early socialization, there remains the monumental problem of convincing the societal member that much of what he has viewed as given is only as given as he is reticent in questioning it, in not viewing it historically and in not thinking of its givenness in relativistic terms. When and if the member crosses the conceptual barrier between "personal problems" and "public issues" (Mills), that moment can signal the birth of his action-centered existence. With a highly personal understanding of the fact that men create their society, the societal member begins the shift from passive congruence to active incongruence (to modify LaPiere), and the possibility of his becoming an apostle of change is heightened.

Besides this initial perception of the possibility of social change through personal effort, there remain other key necessities to the development of the innovator. He must have extended periods of leisure time in which to work on plans, literally or mentally, other time in which to test his hypotheses (in many cases a process taking years), and to varying degrees, he might require the assistance of significant others (often other innovators, a source of

scarce, new ideas). It becomes obvious why this theory does not apply to premodern cultures in which the necessities of life still take center stage in the allocation of energy. The idea of "post-modern" culture holding within it the seeds for intense creativity stems from this rudimentary fact, that the hungry, tired and worried man does not sit idly for hours and reflect or ponder over "problems", either personal, aesthetic or social, which only he or a few others consider problematic to begin with. But the fallacious assumption that affluence is not only necessary but also sufficient for creativity is too often made. Mentioned much earlier was the high incidence of paradox concerning innovators. This is another: their richest field of possible endeavor is in post-ascetic culture, but that same culture has to date succeeded in producing "the lonely (uncreative) crowd" along with much parlor talk about "creativity", as in the case of the missus matching the blue wall-to-wall with the yellow drapes. A culture of Michelangelos we are not. However, to reshape society into more rational and satisfying patterns requires a different sort of creativity than reshaping marble into the "Pieta", so all is not lost.* With the ever increasing complexity of culture, the ideas necessary for far-reaching, significant change become proportionately less magnificent in scope or intensity without losing their effectiveness.

* To proceed dialectically, I do not embrace the "technophobic" view, e.g. Ellul's Technological Society, although as the poetry of individualistic protest against absurd rationalization, such books have uses.

The invention of the cog was a footnote to the wheel, and certainly easier, less grand, less intense an application of intelligence. But the effect over time has certainly been as great for the "footnote" as for the original statement of genius.

The societal member moving towards an active life of change must temporarily forego the standardized "positive reinforcement" dished out by the culture at various levels for more or less conforming behavior. The aforementioned ego-strength is indispensable of course, but more than that there must be a healthy conception of self which transcends the most basic of socially concocted needs: for approval. Harry Stack Sullivan defined schizophrenia as the holding of a world-view which required or made possible for its holder no "consensual validation" from one's peers and associates. For at least a brief time, while working in the white-heat of "rationality", the innovator will be subject not only to a lack of warmth and companionship (if his innovation is genuinely radical) but also to the inverse, dislike and suspicion. The social dialectic, between the conformity necessary to the maintenance of a social order, and nonconformity every bit as necessary for the generation of radical perception and action, is the central problem for the innovator. If the transactional analysts are even close in their assessment of how the personality operates, we see that the prohibitive, parent-centered nature of social control practically assures the death or diminution of child-produced excitement, and

the correlated adult-controlled innovation, which grows from an unhampered enthusiasm for the new. There has never been a culture which championed innovation, any more than there has ever been a war fought in the interests of kindness. But the post-modern scenario unintentionally does make possible more innovation at more levels than any previous culture, IF those who would experiment with the untried can extricate themselves sufficiently from the socially-constructed needs which typify the societal member. To further complicate the matter, there is this issue: if the innovator is not directly impeded by his peers, he must remember to allow them the privilege of bestowing their approval upon his work. This does not actually gratify the innovator very much - his gratification is mostly self-generated when and if he is successful - but this kind of behavior does keep open possible lines of action to the outside world, something critical for the acceptance of the new formulation.

Given the nature of higher education at some of the best schools, along with an increasingly relativistic orientation permeating the entire culture, the production of innovating minds should reach "record levels" unless the post-modern situation suddenly and irrevocably regresses. And from all indicators, that is unlikely, even given the temporary shortages, real or contrived. With organized religion, the Protestant Ethic, traditional family structure, community, the almost monarchical absolutism of central governments all on the wane throughout the more sophisticated ranks of

the culture, it becomes at least more possible for some societal members (e.g. a New York male of Jewish background whose father is a professor of sociology, mother a social worker, who attends Columbia, etc.) to enter the role of actor, that is, when compared with the heroic energy and cunning which had to be utilized by would-be innovators in previous times. Frederick Douglass might serve as an example of the latter case. The cry of conservatives, that times are too easy and in the old days one really had to work, etc., is the happy announcement to the innovator that his machinations will be allowed, perhaps encouraged, in a period of relaxed absolutes. Affluence it seems has brought more than the Edsel or the Raper Bahn of Hamburg. It has given the favored areas of civilization something no culture has provided before: room for thoughts and feelings which differ from the prevailing modes.

What amazes me is how few disenchanting societal members are aware of this fluidity and how even fewer do something creative with it, although the education-marriage-children syndrome does succeed in curtailing activities of potential innovators (a facet of "traditional existence" which historically has served the status quo quite well). Hopefully one important role of education in the future will be in instructing students that obedience is no longer the dominant cultural motif, that increasing rewards, emotional and otherwise, make innovation an appealing activity.

While there remain other relatively minor hurdles

before the individual who seeks a life of diversity (relative, that is, to the gigantic hindrances just detailed), I will not pursue them at this juncture.

I made the point above that no society has yet been constructed so as to maximize opportunities for individually inspired alterations of its structures, processes and/or values. Also I stated that the current culture of the advanced areas of the world more closely approaches this optimum situation than any to date. For analytical purposes, let us imagine the prospects and dilemmas of a society in which "culture-wide innovation" was encouraged. If we begin with conditions much like our own, the immediate problem to surface would be that involved with enforced rationalization, especially along economic lines. The innovators would set out to rid their lives of as much tedium, meaninglessness and regulation as they could. This would leave most of industry and many services employeeless. Thus it is clear that a genuinely post-ascetic environment would call for the emancipation of workers from the noxious tasks they now perform, without however destroying an economy capable of producing affluence. Automation comes to mind as a probable partial solution.

To those familiar with the production systems now employed in post-modern culture, it comes as something of a shock to envision a society full of innovators. Under its current organization, post-modern industrialization would have to institute far-reaching changes, for instance in

assembly line format, so that all plants would more resemble the modern beer factory, in which a handful of skilled machinists and several nonskilled button-pushers suffice. Unless this could be done, the economy would regress severely, so much so that the freedoms gained by participants in the culture through individual innovation would be lost in large part due to a general primitivization of life. *

* An entirely different tack is taken by Galbraith in his famous series of books on modern economic arrangements. He and his followers scoff at the supposed difficulty of liberating people from dead-end jobs. According to his understanding of the problem, we are already creating many make-work jobs (the more reactionary component of union ideology) and destroying energy and resources hand over fist in a lame effort to resuscitate the work ethic. Naturally, the ruling "capitalist" interests and financial leaders work together in order to insure illusory, fabricated scarcity, but they have very nearly cooked their own goose.

The problem is no longer to deconsumerize the culture or automate all the plants, but to junk a terribly expensive ideology of work, in order to preserve the ecology, the supply of natural resources and as a fortunate byproduct, to procure the emancipation of make-work laborers. Total recyclibility is technologically feasible, so the necessary conservation of materials could become a built-in part of the economic world. What would have to change is either an ideology which demands constant energy destruction (human and otherwise), or one which retains the work-ethic but skillfully avoids the destruction of irreplaceables. Thus the growth of service industries.

I have not utilized this view (with which of course I have no complaints theoretically or politically) because of Galbraith's uncertain standing among many of the mainstream American economists and other social scientists. No less an "authority" on the nature of work, etc. than Ely Chinoy dismissed this set of assumptions out of hand when I broached the topic in a current seminar, "The Working Class". Also, see for example Paul Samuelson's latest revision (9th, 1973) of his classic text, in which he writes "Galbraith: The Iconoclastic Vision".

Since I claim no expertise in the area of economics, I have adhered (slavishly perhaps) to the generally accepted views (what Galbraith calls the "neoclassical model") rather than those of an innovator: a rather strange turn of events!

But more effective over time would be a redefinition of goods and services, pushed more and more in the direction of the latter as opposed to the consuming culture now in existence. Self or selves would need to be defined not as acquisitive, but more as inquisitive, in search of novel, stimulating, educational and entertaining activities. Three color televisions in one household produce little more than programmed monotony, while consuming vital materials and manpower in their production. The accumulated trappings of those who aspire towards a prestigious existence become comic and grotesque, while the depletion of resources (both mineral and human) continues. In a truly innovational culture, people and not things would become the best toys an adult could have. Boundary expansion would be the by-word.

Two mistaken attempts at change now being instituted with some frequency are the communal living situations practiced by those of the counter-culture, and at the other extreme, the much touted "team-production" system being used in the manufacture of Saabs and other goods. Both of these are incorrect in terms of the innovator's future, the former because it steps back into preindustrial times, depriving its adherents of liberating technological developments and often of stimuli, the other because it suggests that an occupation should be of prime significance in one's life as a source of interpersonal meaning and self-definition. While a job may have strong appeal for the individual, it is fallacious and dangerous to suggest that work for gain should ever be expected

to fulfill any but the smallest portion of the infinite capabilities of men. We arrive then at the prerequisite of liberation: the genuine, not quasi-liberation of laborers (taken broadly) from routinized tedium.

If the economy were set up correctly, it could be operated (to the degree necessary for a deconsumerized culture) so that it required far less time from the workday of any given individual. This is hardly a novel or revolutionary idea; Marcuse for one has been harping on it for decades. But more than just free time is needed in the creation of an innovative society. An entirely recast appreciation for what life is or could be is as necessary, and to my thinking, a much more difficult enterprise. The vision of "liberated" workers finishing their 20 hour work-week, only to rush off to their "second" job seems at this point in history almost an inevitability. If I may quote the media: on a recent newscast from an American Motors plant in Minnesota, two workers discussed the idea of mandatory vs. optional overtime. The first said "The more I work the more useful I am to my family". The second, from a slightly less noble position, said "It's mighty hard to turn down seven and a half dollars an hour". Though a small "sample", I suggest that their understanding of the relationship between work, life and money is consistent with that of most laborers, and not a few professionals. About these ideas - man as object vs. man as subject - both Marx and Sartre have written persuasively. Liberation begins with more leisure,

a less constraining definition of self, and the knowledge and skill necessary to use one's moments to the fullest.

Society would have even more dramatic problems with innovators or social actors than those having to do with modification of work. On the international scene, if other less fortunate nations became pugnacious for whatever reason or lack thereof, it would be difficult to arouse a culture of relativists into anything approaching nationalistic fervor. The whole idea of nationalism is anathema to the innovator since it carries with it countless feudal obligations and demands, many of which have historically served no-one but people like the Krupps. Nationalism is as dead and unappealing today as human sacrifice (with which it bears some resemblance), and as anachronistic as the traditional family or the Catholic church. If post-ascetic culture were accosted by more primitive nations, it would have to generate enthusiasm for resistance among its citizens with purely rational "propaganda", which would bear no resemblance whatever to the tripe usually administered to the masses by the ruling elite. More likely however is that old-style international confrontation will be avoided by the use of the most effective tool yet developed in league with managerial enterprise and big business: co-optation. Why waste resources in subduing aggressive smaller nations when the input of commodities will do the same thing. The power of goods and industrialization has done in part what the Second World War could not, bring relative peace to the world. If big business concerns have

enough money tied up in foreign markets, rest assured they will do as much as they can to preserve international equilibrium, as much as they have done traditionally to encourage imperialistic wars. The multinational empires can operate in no other way.

It will take more than abstract sentiments mouthed at election times to gain the cooperation of a populace most of whom are capable of informed, rational thought. Although this condition is still of the future, the relative disgrace the recent Washington scandals have brought upon the administration now in office compared to other equally heinous but less publicized crimes attributed to former administrations, indicates the increasing sophistication of both the public at large and those who shape public opinion. However, as pointed out in the historical documentation, the skills with which evil-doers manipulate the laws and their enforcement to suit specific interests increase in complexity and effectiveness relative to the advancing skepticism of the public. But the key point here is that in the past, political leaders have had little difficulty in mobilizing public opinion and action on the basis of very flimsy propaganda, thereby bringing to the modern world some of its worst scourges in the name of national security or whatever. This could not happen among the more enlightened groups of post-modern culture today, and it will become increasingly difficult to gain from the traditionally unreflective masses the degree of cooperation elites have come to take for granted. This observation goes

back to the early days of the enlightenment and the birth of liberalism, the tracts of which offered "education" as the panacea for neo-modern ills.

The only catch to that basically accurate view was in not realizing to what degree vested interests determine what is and what is not "educational". The current castration of HEW funding, specifically of most controversial sociological research, is a modern example of an age-old truth about authority: those with it do not care to have it known how badly they abuse it, and the critics without it find it very difficult to speak and be heard without the permission of their targets and adversaries. But in countless subtle ways, including those that are being described as "quasi-legal", damaging information finds itself before the public attention. In short, when Nixon says "cynicism", read "politically informed". As with most features of post-modern culture, there is absolutely no reason to suppose that this brand of awareness should manifest itself less in the future. Although some writers, notably Philip Slater (114) foresee in American culture the possible development of neo-fascist government, with heavy support from the less enlightened and easily threatened lower middle class, I find this position difficult to accept. Even within the traditional bulwark of conservatism, the southern middle classes, there is today surprisingly strong support for some of the catch phrases of the sixties, "Do your own thing", probably most popular of all. The use of these cliches is not an indicator

of a Harrington or Alinsky-styled "radicalization" of the middle class. Yet, without knowing it, the people who espouse these basically atomistic sentiments are making a profound political statement, to the effect that Big Brother a la 1984 would be the ultimate evil, worse even than hippies, communists or college professors. The fact is, praise be to the Enlightenment, that education in the form of schools, travel, the media or otherwise, does have ameliorative effects upon provincial hatreds and prejudice, the stuff out of which nationalism and similar political notions are created.

We see then that the difficulties brought upon the "state" through the increasing sophistication and experimentation of its participants have to do with cohesion, integration and united action. Ever since prefeudal Europe, many men of the West have sought after individual liberty to live their brief spans in the style they chose. The Crusades are best understood as a mass adventure for otherwise unemployed, bored men-of-arms whose usefulness to a rapidly modernizing social structure had diminished. The explorations of the mid-millennium are also expressions of men seeking room and socio-political, emotional space, removed from the incestuous fratricide which had become Europe. Our entire history is one of moving to new ground, and now that all the grounds are known, and until space travel is a commonplace for citizens, the time has come that external exploitation of existence give way to something which has never been allowed to prosper:

interpersonal exploration. More and more of the liberated middle and upper classes (meaning those whose material well-being is assured) have found their acquisitions lacking for life-long fascination, so quite logically they have given up the third home in the mountains for the yearly month-long fling on alien turf, with the intention of learning the folkways of the specific situation, and seeing just how successfully they can adapt to the new scenario.

In more ways than one, the popular book of the 1950's, Nation of Sheep, is showing its age. Social actors are politically wiser, more sensitive to the value of cosmopolitanism and much less easily shackled by neo-feudal restraints. The much discussed move in this culture from proscriptive to prescriptive law will find vehement resistance among the many whose time is too precious to be eaten up by state-designed trivia, whether it be in filling out forms or waiting in lines to fill out forms. Ingenious, quasi-legal methods of circumvention or sabotage are and will be developed in the avoidance or irrationally constructed regulation of thought (e.g. pornography) or action (e.g. marijuana smoking).*

*For a thorough exposition of "rationality" as I am using the term, see Martin Jay's masterful The Dialectical Imagination, his newly famous history of the Frankfurt School. Also of use is Trent Schroyer's Critique of Domination. Of basic interest is Horkheimer's early statement, "Traditional and Critical Theory" (Critical Theory). While I was aware of my debt to Marcuse's conceptions (in all his work), until reading Jay, the congruence of Horkheimer's and Adorno's notions of rationality with Marcuse's (and thus, mine) had escaped me. But for limitations of time, I would rewrite much of this section so as to include the powerful insights of these German philosopher-social scientists.