

Kierkegaard, the revolutionary Christian, ... feels that the present age is a "public" (same as "mass") age. ... he believed that any society formed by emancipated men would quickly deteriorate into a public. Kierkegaard does not imagine that such deformed people could create a community worth caring about: "an association of individuals who are themselves weak is just as disgusting and harmful as the marriage of children." First, the individual has to cease being an integer (a conformist): "only after he acquires an ethical (political) outlook in the face of the whole world can there be any suggestion of really joining together as a community." False consciousness is the basis of corporatism and of mass "culture."

For Kierkegaard, a society that worked would have to be transparent; men would have to be able to look through it to God. For Kierkegaard, personal movement and social development is implied in the progression from a public, to a social, to a sacred existence. This complements the historical movement from sacred to public societies, which has been an important anthropological, sociological, psychological and theological insight in the Western tradition.

But what concerns us here is the conservative definition of the situation. The God-intoxicated conservatives believe that a society which permits its members fully to express the ambiguity of despair and faith while exploring the limits of human association does not need to bother very much about culture in the ordinary use of the term, that is, the artifacts of culture, which they dismiss as commodities. For faith, culture as communion, can dispense with culture as commodity; the signs and symbols of faith are spiritual, ineffable, and faith is at least the inquisitor of change.

The first and final argument for conventional cultural conservatism, which reflects but does not embody such spiritual absolutism, is that it leans toward the existing corporate establishment. This is because it provides better conditions for their sacred

behavior compared to any alternative context. This includes a similarity of social structures, mythologies, and reinterpretation of history.

In our present age cultural conservatism is drawing its energy from its ambivalence and it has gained momentum. It is the foremost mood of both the counterculture and its most principled antagonists, the critical cultural conservatives. It is this split between these two types of conservatism that needs to be understood, if we are to grasp the present dilemma.

The "counterculture" is based on a reaction to our society, both as a lifestyle, and as an amorphous set of institutions. Much of what identifies itself as countercultural or even as "progressive" or "liberal" is defined by this identifying reaction. They tend to define themselves by what they are not, rather than by what their politics are in practice.

The conventional cultural conservatives I am referring to are not reactionaries. They are trying to protect the sacred spaces in which they live against the sometimes brutal demystifications of the counterculture. Simultaneously, they are busy negotiating their survival in one or another hierarchy, the universities, the communications industry, bureaucracies, corporate capitalism, and so on. Their strategy for survival clashes with the assault maintained by the counterculture in the name of its own survival.

What the critics fear is that fascism could be catalyzed by provocative countercultural behavior, leading to the increasing rigidity and repressiveness of the corporatist order in which atmosphere they could no longer prosper, even to the modest degree that they do at present. That fear however is based upon an inadequate definition of fascism, for the danger is greater, more immediate and more complex than what many political liberals or radicals appear to understand.

What cultural conservatives also don't understand is that countercultural conservatives will under pressure of crisis or by aspiration to "success" or power will shift their countercultural identification to being simply a matter of style and commodity: When

their subscription to a countercultural critique becomes disposable, then the default structures and mythologies of fascism will prevail. In the conflicts between cultural conservatism and countercultural conservatism it will be the corporatist structures and mythologies which will rise.

Fascism is grounded in state and corporate capitalism, bureaucratic autonomy, and class collaboration. Its goal is the "integration" of all into the hierarchical system, in part by reducing persons to integers. Racism and sexism may or may not be adopted as techniques, but they are not essential to the fascist process.

That process can be defined as the almost unconscious social movement that occurs when a population that has been regimented by bureaucracies finds distorted affective release, in turn tolerated by the establishment which created the initial need for such expression. The emotions, being captive, become dissociated from significant subjects, become discontinuous pseudo-experiences, and the social system in which they function becomes self-perpetuating. This is characteristic also of people who tend to experience feelings, and then rationalize them within a particular corporate matrix, contrary to those who connect relationships and values to their emotional responses within an open political process.

Fascism is epitomized in the modern fragmented individual, finding a random place in the disciplined mob, prepared to behave under command at one moment and permitted to explode in nihilistic fury the next. The goose step, the time clock, the narrowed logic, the inhuman precisions of Nazi Germany are the converse of the orgiastic behavior of the Nazi brown shirts roaming the streets in search of prey. They were also the converse of the well documented habits of the Nazi leadership (the quasi bohemian aspects of the Nazi movement are well known).

One phenomenon reinforces the other, this structured and unresolved tension characterizes Fascism. In this sense, in all modern state structures rooted in the Western experience, including the

Soviet Union, are totalizing structures and chronically Fascist. There is always and everywhere the danger of a flare-up of nuclear dimensions that might, obliterate everything, as well as the danger of totalizing numbness. Adapting to the corporate structure becomes a sort of political suicide, for the sake of material survival.

The conventional cultural conservative does not realize that, just as they negotiate their survival within the establishment, so too the countercultural conservatives may well be doing the same thing and for the same apparent reason. This reason is to find a small sacred space in which to act out his alternate lifestyle. By abdicating political awareness, they mystify and mythologize the corporate hierarchy as if it were a community.

There is a link between the bureaucratic personality and affective dissociation. That link enables murder and terrorism at a great psychic distance and is necessary for the success of the system no matter the actual proximity of the victim. Countercultural conservatives tend to invest in this process even though it means the destruction of the counterculture's potential to initiate cultural change. Once the confrontation between the corporate order and its apparent opposite occurs, each is sustained by the flow of energy between them. The circuit of energy then accelerates and can be manipulated to keep the system in balance. Thus the cultural conservative has a point in their terror of Fascism, although their expectation of a punitive backlash is faulty.

Their fear and their preferred course of action reinforces the enemy they only sense. For the cultural conservative would like to stay where they are, still able to exercise what seems like reason, still able to believe, still sensitive to the hierarchy of values which for them defines human nature. But they cannot stay where they are. By perceiving the counterculture as a threat to their living space and their values, they can hardly avoid contributing to the repressiveness of corporatism. At the same time they avoid reflecting on the consequences and contradictions of their immediate position. This is the

dilemma of the cultural conservative, and it is also a dilemma for radicals. Their decisions, or lack of them, affect us all. Therefore, one asks of the cultural conservative that they concentrate their fire on the establishment, that they understand their warning against provocation as a form of terrorism, and the acceptance of it is a sign of self-defeat. Let them attack and analyze the corporate structure they know so well and thus help break down its potential link with the counterculture which, they should remember, is not confined to communes and campuses, but is also pursued by bank clerks after hours.

Above all, what the conventional cultural conservative does not understand is that the counterculture is also a conservative movement precisely because it addresses root issues. It represents a form of neo-primitivist striving, proclaiming the sacredness of life, communal forms of society, the aesthetic dimension of human nature, the continuity with nature at large and culture as ritual.

Both the cultural and countercultural conservatives are searching for sacred spaces in which to live, and are trying to recreate culture as communion. If either group, as a consequence of its fear of the other, is captured by the corporate establishment, we will have acute fascism. Whomever is captured as an individual will adopt a form of fascism, controlling and controlled by the fascist structures and myths. Their sacred spaces will turn out to be interstices.

The lessons of history are writ large enough for all types of conservatives to understand. In any event, the task for radicals remains the same: it is to rebuild an authentic politics, not dogmatic, but dialectical.

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Defining Corporatism

Re-Imagining Economics