

INTRODUCTION

Mediated Immediacy

Living in the Now

I started out talking about how to trip, and then I saw that life was a trip.

So now I talk about how to live.

—Stephen Gaskin, *Catalog of Sexual Consciousness*

In 1971, Simon and Schuster published *The Underground Dictionary* by Dr. Eugene E. Landy, a clinical psychologist and lecturer at the University of Southern California. Dedicated “to my people,” the book offered itself as a sort of Rosetta Stone of countercultural slang, fashioning a “much-needed communications bridge between the Establishment and the underground culture” through a detailed inventory of the new vernacular that was rapidly colonizing the popular lexicon of American youth. Most of the entries reflected the technical jargon of drug use and sexual behavior Landy had picked up in his work at a community health center for young people: “Come,” we are told, refers to “male or female ejaculate,” “Main squeeze: wife or girlfriend,” and “Coast” is to “feel the effects of a drug.”¹ The *Dictionary* imparts a glimpse into the complex meanings and emotional styles inscribed in everyday habits of living and communicating, described through clandestine and restrictive words: “Up tight: in a state of extreme tension or anxiety; worried, disturbed; upset”; “Groovy: great, fantastic, joyful, happy”; “Cop out: Find an excuse, usually a phony one, to get out of something or a situation” (192, 93, 57).

But Landy's guide to underground slang is more than just language: it unfolds a contentious landscape in which its users could move and live, mediating the opposing emotional and personal styles that defined the dispositions of "the establishment" and "my people." Indeed, the argot of the drug culture projects a tension between two ways of experiencing the sensual world, and of relating that experience to new modes of self-understanding. The blinkered, unknowing, constraining ways of the establishment are undermined by a subterranean flow of expression and experience—a vernacular for a new hedonism, to be sure, but one fashioned on an ambitious program of ethical self-renewal and a singular commitment to the affirmation of feeling and impulse in daily life: "Float: to be under the influence of drugs"; "Boy: heroin"; "Grip: masturbate"; "Hump: have sexual intercourse"; "Rap: talk compulsively while high on drugs" (39, 80, 93, 107, 159). By giving voice to a flow of sensation that coursed through everyday interactions and conduct, the words of counterculture speech released the speaker into a realm of feeling that transcended the anemic and constraining limits of mainstream American culture.

More accurately, hip jargon relates a moral universe organized around the opposing values of self-constraint and self-release. At one end stands a relation of artificially imposed self-limitation arrived at through the passive acceptance of an institutionalized norm:

Establishment: Those who hold positions of power and authority, such as politicians, police etc.; the dictators of conventional attitudes and values, and those attitudes and values themselves. The Establishment's way of life is regarded as undesirable because of the lack of freedom and hypocrisy. (74–75)

Mister Charlie: White man, boss, White establishment man. He is one who lives in suburbia, usually has a white collar job, two to three children, a station wagon, and a compact car and a white picket fence. He has short hair and puts the American flag outside his house on patriotic holidays. (133)

At the other end lies its opposite: an affirmation of direct personal engagement as an active force in the fashioning of experiences, realized through a release of the self into the flow of natural impulses, desires and the sensuality and experience of everyday life:

Flower: The philosophy of the flower comes from the fact that the flower is among the most natural of all things in nature; it is free, needing nothing more than the earth, air and sunshine to live. It is peaceful and beautiful and lives its beauty freely. (80)

Tell it like it is: Be open, honest, straightforward; hold nothing back because of fear of hurting someone's feelings. (182)

Soul: an awareness and understanding of life, a naturalness of expression, being in contact with the naturalness of life and the environment, understanding yourself and others. (173)

The world that this new vocabulary unfolds is one in which states of conformity and self-regimentation are undermined, with every utterance, by an awareness and insight into the sensuality and meter of the lived moment—a rupture best conjured with these familiar words: “Hip: Aware, knowledgeable, informed, wise, with a comprehension of; in tune with the times”; “Square: person with a conventional and provincial attitude” (176). Between the hip and the square, then, lay a process of personal change, of loosening up, of becoming loose.

The tensions in Landy's book resonated with struggles around identity, lifestyle, and the appropriate means of self-regulation that were, in the late 1960s and on into the 1970s, transforming the American cultural landscape as millions of young (and not so young) people found increasingly creative ways to loosen themselves up. The loosening of the self provided a popular narrative related in numerous ways with subtle variations. The looser self spoke of a new livelihood, excavated from the stony edifice of tradition and the routines of conventional life. The looser life promised to release submerged, primordial energies long held in check—energies that when freed would empower one with a new capacity to act in and on one's own life. Loosening invoked the idea of a more authentic, innocent, and original source of the self and promised a way of living that was more primary and immediate but also more active and creative. Loose, hip people were empowered to make choices over aspects of their lives that squares, unreflective and constrained by habit, took only for granted. Related through metaphors of eruption, epiphany, and release, the loose life dwelled in the textures of daily life and the minutiae of personal experience. It was lived in the immediacy of *the now*—a real life one could really experience. To “be yourself,” to “do what was right for you,” to “let it all hang out” was to release a primordial vitality, to become an artist of oneself and of one's identity and to

assume responsibility and take credit for what one made of oneself through the crafting of a distinctly loose style of life.

Following the counterculture's halcyon days of the late 1960s, versions of this loosening metaphor would prove immensely popular and infinitely adaptable for a variety of social groups and across a range of locales and lifestyles. In millions of American homes, food would become purer, its naturalness less constrained by additives and processed ingredients; clothing would become more sexual and revealing; home decor more authentic and rustic; sex more orgiastic; relationships more earnest and sincere. Young people would increasingly seek authentic experiences in wilderness trips away from the regimented spaces of the city, while a variety of therapeutic programs would help strip away phoniness by putting people in touch with who they really were. Authenticity was increasingly sought in the foods and garments of presumably less uptight, non-Western peoples, while stress was increasingly massaged and exercised from tense joints and tight muscles. Child-rearing practices embraced the "permissiveness" associated with the new child psychology espoused by Benjamin Spock, while loose, formless beanbag chairs flopped onto lush shag carpets and creative natural fabric wall hangings and macramé compositions adorned living room walls. In the bedroom, couples strove to overcome their hang-ups through open marriages and swinger's parties, while at the office ties were loosened or disappeared entirely, top buttons came undone, hair was allowed to hang down to shoulders, mustaches drooped, sideburns crept, chest hairs peeked and first names began to replace formal modes of address. In the wake of the counterculture of the 1960s, throughout the American middle class, anything whose traditional form could be made to yield to a more impulsive vitality would be worked over and reinvented in a looser way.

Landy's book provides a springboard into the questions that define the parameters of this study: how and why did the loosening motif, as a countercultural pattern of interpersonal style and emotional self-management, migrate from the countercultural fringe to the cultural mainstream? How did the loosening metaphor bridge the distance between Landy's drug center and the citadels of middle-class culture and identity, and why were middle-class people so ready to accept this message, so willing to incorporate the new discourse of loosening into the fabrics of their daily lives? By way of an introduction, I will address these questions in turn, starting with the how, and moving on to the more subtle and provocative question of why this migration occurred.

In the chapters that follow, the diffusion of the loosening motif will be sought

in volumes of lifestyle literature—what I term the countercultural lifestyle print culture of the 1970s. While originating in hippie networks and enclaves, these books and magazines rose to national celebrity, disseminating hippie lifestyle themes into the homes and habits of the American middle classes.² In the early 1970s, as the youth movement turned its focus from mass mobilization and radical politics to more innocuous lifestyle issues, themes of self-loosening acquired a specifically prescriptive tone applied to a range of lifestyle practices, propagated in volumes of magazines, books, and catalogs, all vaguely countercultural in spirit. As the fires of the 1960s cooled, a small publishing genre rose to prominence in the American book market: books on food, gardening, home construction, ecology, health, spirituality, and relationships, often produced by small offbeat presses on the West Coast, without large distribution deals or production budgets, amateurish and rough in their production quality, brandishing advice on such matters as food preparation, the construction of dwellings, home provisioning, sexuality, collective living, athletics and health, recycling, solar and wind power, exercise, massage, ecology, cycling, jogging, crafts, meditation and spirituality, and hair and clothing. What started as a national network of countercultural presses, bookstores, authors, and critics developed, by the early 1970s, into a powerful presence on the American book market.³ From a hub of West Coast presses concentrated in the Bay Area, several distinctly Californian titles rocketed to the height of national sales. Beginning with the success of the *Whole Earth Catalog* (an ad hoc collection of product reviews, commentaries, and ecological screeds gathered from hundreds of experimental lifestyle lists and back-to-the-landers) by the mid-1970s the book market was inundated with titles like *What Color Is Your Parachute*, *Living on the Earth*, *Rainbook*, *The Moosewood Cookbook*, *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, *The Massage Book*, *Domebook*, *Be Here Now*, *The Tassajara Bread Book*, and many others.⁴ Digby Diehl, book editor for the *Los Angeles Times*, attributed the success of the new Western presses to their engagement with tangible problems of daily life: “Indian lore, Esalen-type therapeutics, ecological alarm, the occult explosion, sex experiments, the counterculture, and various forms of the New Life itself are what readers nationwide are buying.”⁵ The New Life he described was a loose life lived in the immediate, tangible, and real domain of stripped-down everyday needs and authentic experiences, though it was a life that demanded, curiously, the mediation of an instructional and pedagogical discourse the new lifestyle publishers were only too ready to supply.

Indeed, it was through this New Life and the ceaseless demands for self-

loosening it imposed that the counterculture of the 1960s left its most profound imprint on the culture of the American middle class. To participate in the new lifestyle, one had to loosen oneself into the world by overcoming the technological drive to instrumental mastery of nature. One had to loosen oneself into the company of others through honest, open communications, and loosen oneself into one's own body through immersion in the sensuality of the self and an embrace of corporeal experience. Through diet or sexual habits, through daily displays of empathy, or through the way one exercised and cultivated one's body, loosening meant becoming an active chooser of a more authentic self. To be loose was to be mobile in a shifting world, to free oneself of the constraining baggage of tradition, and to sail out across the sea of unmediated experience even as one traveled with one's favored companion, the lifestyle adviser whose prescriptions were always available in the latest journal, book, or magazine on the New Life. In short, to be loose was to choose oneself, and the ultimate truth of that choice lay not in what one chose but in the mere fact of being a chooser—a mobile, flexible and self-responsible self, unconstrained by tradition and collective obligation.

A reflection on the impact of countercultural lifestyle print culture begins to answer the *how* question posed earlier: lifestyle books, largely published on the West Coast, provided a powerful medium for the popularization of a new ethic of the self—a loosening discourse on identity and everyday life. Answering the *why* question, concerning the specific needs and purposes of middle-class people to which the loosening lifestyle responded, is a complicated task requiring a more general overview of the theoretical and historical underpinnings of this study.

Loosening Up

This book attempts to capture a broad trajectory of social and historical change in a thin slice of popular cultural history. The style of life described in West Coast lifestyle literature and crystallized in the jargon of Landy's hippies provides evidence of the changing ways people have, in the name of becoming more modern, fashioned and sustained new modes of self-identity. This study considers profound changes that have occurred in recent years as the basis for selfhood has shifted from the collective and customary forms proper to a traditional society to the individualistic and inventive forms we know today. An old axiom of the sociological tradition tells the story: where in traditional soci-

eties individuals were embedded in relatively stable social networks in which questions of self-identity were resolved by fixed cultural and institutional authorities, in today's shaky and changing world we find ourselves compelled to answer those questions on our own through daily improvisations and choices in style of life.⁶ Where once the moral guidance embodied by religion and the state, or the sense of affiliation derived from class and community membership, was enough to tell each of us who we were, what we should do, and why our lives were meaningful, today such answers are more often gleaned from individual accomplishments in our careers, our relationships, and in the way we choose to live. Indeed, it is the dissemination of choice in everyday practices (an accomplishment often attributed to our developed culture of consumption) that has so profoundly undermined the stability and permanence proffered by a traditional worldview.⁷

This shift is at the center of a pattern of transformation we associate with modern social and cultural change generally. With the onset of mercantilist trade in early modern Europe, for example, traditional social hierarchies, ordered according to what Arthur Lovejoy termed the "great chain of being" (a unity reinforced by theological certainties) crumpled under the circulation of capital and commodities, a modernizing transformation that substituted the tactile materiality of everyday things for the lofty authority of the cosmic order as an index of prestige and social status.⁸ The way one lived in a traditional order was strictly regulated by one's place in this metaphysically stabilized cosmology: to choose a way of life inconsistent with one's social station was tantamount to sin, not just a breach of a personal ethics of well-being but a rejection of the divine plan for man and the world. But with the demise of a social universe undergirded by such a religiously sanctioned worldview and stable system of social caste, the profane, secular world of everyday practices and things emerged as a field of symbolic contest and status competition among highly mobile classes. Today, it is argued, individual choice is enshrined in every facet of identity and selfhood, or, to use the current sociological vernacular, identity has become a reflexive project expressing the individual's capacity to act back on itself with a constitutive force through choices made from an array of equally valid lifestyle options.⁹

In a more contemporary frame, the undermining of tradition and the dissemination of lifestyle choice derives from recent changes in the structure of the modern economy and in the social and personal fabric of everyday life

more generally. The uprooting of the industrially based capitalism of the postwar period and the adoption of fluid, flexible, and highly mediated regimes of economic life has brought about the displacement of production and work by consumption, leisure, and lifestyle as a basis for an individual sense of self.¹⁰ Consumption and lifestyle have emerged in recent decades as central to the way people imagine themselves to be agents of their own lives and authors of their own reflexive identities—a turn that has insinuated new forms of flexibility, fragmentation, and fluidity into the very fibers of self-identity. Such lives are no longer tests of character or expressions of devotion to long-term goals requiring the control of impulse and postponement of gratification: they are ongoing projects of the person's own doing expressed in myriad tastes, preferences, and consumer choices, mediated by the phantasmagoria of lifestyle imagery.¹¹ Consumer lifestyles are feats of self-improvisation in which tradition and collective norms appear not as moral signposts (or what David Reisman called a “psychological gyroscope”)¹² pointing the way to virtue, but as remnants of an obsolete mode of self-constraint, an obstacle to be overcome in the fashioning of a more expressive identity. Moreover, in the choppy waters of contemporary life where social bonds are thin, work is flexible, and change comes as quickly as the next fashion cycle, each of us must break free of collective traditions and their cumbersome obligations in order to better surf the waves of perpetual chaos, rolling with the punches of a world in flux. Loosening of the self for the middle classes of the 1970s was part of a reorganization of identity for the conditions of a nascent late modernity, or postmodernity: a reflexive project of self-identity undertaken with the support and guidance of a host of mediators and specialists.¹³

In short, this reconfiguration of the priorities of work and leisure in the postwar period can be read as a moment within a broader dynamic of social change that has operated within Western societies for a very long time—a dynamic of modernity (in a phase variously designated with adjectives and prefixes such as *late*, *liquid*, *reflexive*, or *post-*) in which the constraints of tradition are severed in the name of the expressive freedoms of the individual. Landy's hippies, as novel as they may have believed themselves to be, shared more than they realized with the moderns of previous times, just as we, citizens of advanced, twenty-first-century, late modern societies, share more than we realize with them.¹⁴

None of this, however, tells us why the loosening motif was so welcomed

into the homes and lives of middle-class people. Such broad-brush economic and structural considerations, while supplying us with overarching explanations of change on a massive scale, tempt us to read historical events as simple deterministic effects of these changing economic currents. The loosening of the self, it will be argued here, must be grasped on a smaller scale, in the thin cultural slices in which people encountered it in their everyday lives. The modernity of every age is, as Marshall Berman reminds us, a deeply subjective response to the transformations in which one finds oneself immersed.¹⁵ In the case of the peculiar modernity that confronted the American middle classes of the 1970s, the loosening of the self reflected an effort to confront the displacements of modern social change by inscribing this experience within a narrative of unfolding identity. Loosening was a story of personal change designed to allay anxieties resulting from the increasing flexibility of identity and social life: it unfolded a small but intact moral universe in which the undercutting of the traditional foundations of identity and selfhood could be tolerated, even enjoyed, given specific meaning, transformed into a narrative of self-growth and realization told against the backdrop of traumatic twists and turns in the social fabric. What Anthony Giddens calls ontological insecurity, the sense of existential meaninglessness that shadows the construction of identity in modern societies, was resolved, however tenuously, in the project of becoming loose as a narrative of changing selfhood—a reflexive storying of the self.¹⁶

In this regard, the how and the why questions posed earlier come together in an explanation for the popularity of the loose life: lifestyle publications, as essentially storytelling vehicles, provided the ideal medium both for the transmission of a lifestyle ethic from an underground fringe to the middle-class mainstream, and for the shaping of traumatic change into the purposeful narrative of self-loosening. These lifestyle publications related narrative accounts of a transformed self—loosened, made more real, and opened to a new realm of experience, but not blown away entirely in the maelstrom of modern social and cultural flux. The aim of this book is to capture the many ways in which, for readers of these lifestyle tracts as well as for their authors (hippies, freaks, autodidacts, inventors, and other self-styled entrepreneurs of the New Life), style of life became a story of self-loosening in which the constraints of tradition would be pried open in order that a fuller, more real, less mediated life might emerge, and in which new forms of personal and social uprootedness could be experienced as intentional, purposeful, and meaningful change. In this sense,

the present study concerns not just metalevel historical processes and micro-level cultural phenomena, but the interaction of the two in books, texts, and lifestyle advice imparted by mediators of self-identity.

In the lifestyle print culture of the 1970s, the allegorical lesson of self-loosening was related in numberless ways and in many varied combinations: to be loose was to be modern, and to be modern was to tell oneself a story of self-loosening, of a mediated and supervised relaxation of self-control and an acquired talent for the immersion of oneself in bodily sensations, impulses, and the inevitable flow of daily events. The loose lifestyle called upon readers to embrace this modernity in dozens of small yet significant ways: to set aside social inhibitions and express oneself without restraint in groups and relationships; to release oneself from the artificial prohibition on communion with nature enforced by technological civilization and to find oneself in oneness with the earth and its natural products; to release one's body from the protocols of self-presentation by letting one's hair grow or one's jeans wear through, or to cut through sexual mores and pursue one's desires. Indeed, the challenge of properly loosening oneself presented a task of tremendous technical skill and calculation: one had to work on oneself, monitor and supervise the growth of one's new sensibilities, tease out hidden blockages and bottlenecks that prevented one from freely choosing and being who one really was. Diehl's *New Life* was lived in an immediate relation to the experience of the everyday, but this immediacy was at the same time mediated at every step.

The contradiction between intuition and calculation, or immersion in experiences and the choice and commitment one made to immersion as a general way of life, would provide an active and curious dynamic within the countercultural lifestyle movement of the early 1970s, particularly as this dynamic was adopted by a wider segment of the middle class and later still absorbed into the mainstream culture of consumption.¹⁷ As we shall see, this contradiction was reproduced even in the very media through which it was disseminated. Caught in an awkward role as mediators of lived immediacy, the strain of this contradiction gave this literature its distinct character: a roguish refusal of the authority of the traditional expert manual with its objective tone of detached scientific knowledge shaped an intimate and informal mode of advice. Amateurish typographic and formal qualities betrayed the grassroots economic and professional networks from which these books emerged, and the ad hoc production methods by which they were produced testified to a desire to evade

the text-as-usual distance from the object conveyed in traditional lifestyle and other literary publications.¹⁸ In this sense, they were loose books relating advice on the loose life in the voice of loose expertise—a discourse in transition from uptight conventions of publication and instruction to livelier, more expressive, and experiential advisory texts. Indeed, the reflexive mode of identity to which these publications spoke was more than advised in the words and pictures that filled their pages: it was tangibly practiced in the binding, the printing, and the layouts that characterized the immediacy and tangibility to which they spoke.

Thus, what is proposed here is a study that brings together a broad-brush theory of modern social change with a detailed rendering of a thin slice of cultural life. While broad-brush analyses and totalizing before/after explanations of social change necessarily entail generalizations and reductions that threaten to stifle more than they reveal, it is hoped that a dialectic of empirical and theoretical work will illuminate such processes within the experienced horizons of everyday social and personal life. Indeed, such explanations often prove unwieldy in the analysis of daily experiences, skipping over the varieties of experience that belong to specific groups and specific locales, while falsely elevating the experiences of one group to a more general status as typical of an epoch. With this problem in mind, it should be stated unequivocally that the loosening of the self, as it is considered here, was an experience particular to one group within the larger mix of American society—a white middle class in which heteronormative and patriarchal sexual and gender norms prevailed.¹⁹ The modernity in question is their modernity, and the anxieties and dreams it evoked were the dreams particular to this group, even as they passed themselves off as much more than that. As Barbara Ehrenreich has pointed out, this group has no proper name, owing to its own presumption of universality and value neutrality, and its enduring, if invisible hegemony as purveyors of America's mainstream. To speak of the postwar middle classes, variously known as the professional-managerial class, the new class, the professional middle class or simply the middle class, is to address this condition of a false universality of values: "Nameless and camouflaged by a culture in which it both stars and writes the scripts," Ehrenreich writes, "this class plays an overweening role in defining 'America': its moods, political direction, and moral tone."²⁰ Owing to the hegemonic position the middle class has enjoyed and continues to enjoy on the American cultural scene, this group has succeeded in establishing its anxieties and concerns, its modernities and its projects of identity as *the* experi-

ence of a time, the backdrop to that of all others. Indeed, while this hegemony cannot be denied, the false naturalization of its own claim to universality can be interrogated and read in the context of the historical predicament within which it developed. As will be discussed in chapter 1, the loosening of the self operated not only in the spaces of middle-class life, but in a set of interactions and appropriations that occurred along the boundaries separating the middle classes from its various others: African Americans, women, gays and lesbians, Asians, and the working class.

But there is another thread woven into this inquiry that serves a separate, though related purpose. The story of the loosening of the self is read here as part of a wider inquiry into the conditions of the present: a genealogy of the flexible and fluid identities so often described in recent scholarship on contemporary cultural change.²¹ It will be argued that the lifestyle movements of the 1960s and 1970s contributed significantly to a pattern of cultural change that has produced identity as a highly autonomous, individual accomplishment, mediated by consumer markets and the lifestyle offerings they naturalize as the inevitable frameworks for the choice of self. Identity today is understood as a project undertaken by an enterprising self who cultivates personal autonomy as a career and personal asset in a world mediated by markets and exchange relations.²² Indeed, careful explanation is provided of the specific continuities between countercultural lifestyle discourses and leading developments in the consumer cultures of the present. Modes of personal autonomy, ways of choosing oneself and making oneself loose, were integrated gradually into the warp and woof of an expanding culture of consumption—at the expense, I argue, of the power these choices hold to excite the imagination and deal reliably with a world of change. This cooptation (to use a rather heavy-handed term) has had the ultimate result of destroying the meaning these lifestyles once held for their practitioners: morphing from lifestyle discourses to prepackaged lifestyle commodities, lifestyles lose their storytelling quality as biographical narratives and shared fictions, fragmenting into isolated actions of purchase and private consumption, most notoriously in the lifestyle brands that came to prominence in the 1980s. The ultimate aim of this study lies, then, with this project of a historical genealogy (albeit one of a rather truncated scope): by better understanding the genesis of the modes of self-understanding we take today to be natural, by tracing them to the specific groups and media through which they were developed and by reconstructing the specific historical horizons against

which they were shaped, we position ourselves to better grasp what is missing in our heavily mediated identities and possibly to intervene in and transform them today, to grasp their plasticity in the present, to maximize their potentials and turn them to new and better purposes. In that sense, the aims of this book are quite optimistic: by better understanding the modernities of the past and by seeing with clarity the lineage we share with them, we read our own predicament for the instability and flux, the opportunity and openness it affords.

However, if the intention of a genealogical study is to upset the present by revealing its roots in the past, the imprint of the loose lifestyle on contemporary culture is not always so easy to spot. At first blush, all evidence of the adventure of the loosening lifestyle has either been intentionally disavowed or is preserved only in its most trivial aspects—gestures of rebellion and defiance that, recent studies have revealed, are now innocuous features of everyday capitalism.²³ In the 1980s, as Americans struggled to return the genie loosed by the counterculture back into the bottle of self-discipline and “traditional values,” the loosening metaphor would wane in its power to inspire lifestyle adventures, or to draw around itself a discourse of advice and exhortation, while rebellion would become an increasingly common staple of everyday consumption and even corporate leadership.²⁴ As calls for discipline resonated across public debates from educational policy to government spending, a new tautness was imposed upon the loose life, particularly among the middle-class segment so seduced by the counterculture—the young urban professionals whose lifestyle habits were to leave such an indelible imprint on American consumer culture. Yet in more subtle ways, salient features of the countercultural experiment would be incorporated into the fabric of a new culture of the self. Beyond the most obvious postures of rebellion and defiance (Thomas Frank has written extensively on an unholy alliance between beats, hippies, and rebels and the high-flying corporate magnates of the new economy, inspiring others to question the entire legacy of the 1960s on the remarkably narrow grounds of a critique of adolescent iconoclasm as a political position) the lifestyle experiments of the counterculture fused itself into the fabric of contemporary everyday life. In the yuppie lifestyles of the 1980s, new modes of self-regimentation and control would replace the spirited impulsiveness associated with its historical forbearer, the yuppie, but the relation of self to self would remain, acquiring new form and greater purchase on the practice of identity in daily life. Time spent hanging loose or being oneself would be tethered to the tight scheduling of the weekly planner;

therapeutic exercise, once a vehicle of self-exploration, would be praised for its power to enhance productivity, and trips to the gym would tighten up muscles for ever more Herculean feats of decompression from the strains of work.²⁵ As bell-bottoms and scruffy hair gave way to tapered pants and the mullet (with its controlled reconciliation of a presentable front and unruly back), forms of lifestyle premised on the drawing in of slack were incorporated into a new configuration of the work regime and woven into new patterns of self-identity associated with an economy of rapid growth and change and a consumer culture of increasingly nuanced meaning and ephemeral form.

Even as yuppies shed the outward markings of looseness, they preserved the essentially reflexive character that defined the loose lifestyle of the 1970s, refining it and disseminating it as a general feature of identity and everyday life throughout the American middle class, retooling it for the demands of an increasingly flexible economic and social order.²⁶ The demand that one live reflexively, that one take responsibility for one's life as the product of one's own artistry, and that one work on oneself to enhance one's authenticity through daily lifestyle choices survived and even prospered during the cultural reforms of the Reagan period, and its purported aim to "roll back" the progressive gains of the 1960s. A countercultural emphasis on expressive self-realization and personal autonomy found an unlikely resonance with neoliberal visions of self-responsibility and enterprise, understood as an ethic of personal accountability and flexibility—values that were enshrined in a thousand yuppie habits from the athletic club to the stock market, and in a conservative contempt for all forms of collectivity from the welfare state to organized labor, as limiting to the full attainment of self-authenticity through achieved self-reliance.²⁷ Indeed, while the outward forms of looseness have been stripped away, the essential structure of a self-choosing self has remained, transferred from loosely affiliated countercultural lifestyle sages to the halls of department stores, the pages of lifestyle magazines and punchy taglines like "Just Do It."

Identity as a reflexive choice of style of life has been mediated, perhaps since the early 1980s, by a transformed mass market possessing powers of nuance and empathy specifically appropriated from the counterculture of the 1970s. Today, in a culture of consumption whose penetration of daily life is enhanced by new technologies of media, consumer research, and marketing, these mediating discourses are looser for their appropriation of countercultural discourse on lifestyle—capable of speaking in more authentic, intimate tones to more

precise market niches and more defined personal needs, and of soothing more effectively the personal anxieties resulting from a world fraught with risk and uncertainty.²⁸ Incorporated into the lexicon of a more sensitive and humanistic culture of consumption, appeals to self-renewal through lifestyle were drained of any semblance of cultural opposition they possessed as a loosening metaphor, their ideology watered down for less radical audiences and their overall form retooled for a more flexible economy of shallow commitments and deep, but routinely tolerated, ontological insecurity. But more importantly, discourses of self-loosening were flattened out and made trivial as they were transposed from the collective project of a shared community of discourse to the solitary endeavor of the lone shopper. Where loosening, I will argue, was essentially a story or set of stories one told to others and to oneself about one's own development and transformation through daily lifestyle choices, yuppie lifestyles and those that followed lacked such a quality of reciprocity and interlocution, referring instead to private projects of identity providing only an uneasy reconciliation of the problems of the contemporary self. Where loosening up was, as the following chapters will argue, a collective practice involving advice and a shared (if partially imagined) community—what I will call, drawing on the later writings of Michel Foucault, a practice of caring—the reflexive lifestyles of the 1980s and beyond related only bloodless, solipsistic versions of this lifestyle discourse, highly individualistic and narrowly schematic feats crafted into a self-interested, calculating economic individualism that flushed nicely with the neoliberal ideologies of free markets, a radically diminished civil society and only sparse investment in the promise of self-transformation in a shared future.

Today, even as the ethical injunction to loosen up has lost its capacity to invigorate moral discourse, shades of its former meaning surface in unlikely places. The loose critique of the square, for example (of his obsessive workplace rigidity and his timidity in the marketplace), continues to inform a work ethic premised on flexibility and impermanence, and all manners of leisure continue to invoke the value of breaking convention to go with one's feelings, particularly in the activity of impulse buying. Yet looseness, associated with the counter-culture of the 1960s, draws popular rebuke, particularly in the discourse of the political right where "permissiveness" remains a standard rhetorical bludgeon. Four months after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 sent the nation into a spasm of recrimination and giddy patriotism, George W. Bush painted

the national mood as one of vigorous moral renewal premised on a lasting and final renunciation of the legacy of the 1960s: “For too long our culture has said, ‘If it feels good, do it.’ Now America is embracing a new ethic and a new creed: ‘Let’s roll.’” However one chooses to judge the impact of the lifestyle experiments of the 1970s, it is clear that its central premise was rapidly and lastingly absorbed into the fabric of American society and continues to inform our sense of selfhood and integrity, even from the highest of public offices. In a 2004 Oval Office interview, President Bush, with unwitting yet unmistakable hippie elocution, stressed his wish that the American people “understand where I’m coming from . . . I’m a war president.”²⁹

The 1960s

The account related here is one that places the counterculture of the 1960s in an unfamiliar perspective. Beyond celebratory accounts of reverie, expressiveness, radical politics and the euphoric momentum of social change, the emphasis here is on the inner capacities for control and decontrol developed in this movement. Against the hedonistic legacy of the 1960s, the focus here is on the simultaneity of internalized control and release, or a controlled story of practiced release, implied by the countercultural lifestyle ethic. Such a focus distinguishes this analysis from more typical histories of the counterculture, even those with ambitious sociological and theoretical goals, which have tended to consider only the immersive, expressive, and sensual aspects, sometimes lumped together under the heading of the Dionysian more generally. More important than the capacity to break down barriers and release new feelings are the specific talents developed for the maintenance of such states of release—talents of self-regulation and self-examination, techniques for the crafting of experiences into biographical identities centered on the loosening of the self.

Inquiries into the moral world of hippies and counterculturals are not new: hippies first showed up on the sociologist’s radar as objects of a sociology of deviance approach, or a comparative sociology of religious beliefs. Throughout the 1970s, communes and ashrams were subjected to ethnographic interpretations for the “deviant lifestyles” they practiced, or for the moral standpoints they appeared to endorse, as represented in Steve Tipton’s *Getting Saved from the Sixties*, or Robert Bellah’s studies of contemporary religious belief. Others have taken a social movements perspective on the political history of the counterculture and the New Left, tracing the political trajectory of the counterculture

from its inception at Port Huron to its crest in the riots of 1968 and on to its dissolution in the Nixon years, as evidenced by Todd Gitlin's *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. More recent studies have sought to link the counterculture with contemporary trends in consumer culture, most notably Thomas Frank's *Conquest of Cool*. Though these works have provided valuable contributions from which the present investigation draws, they largely tend to make the mistake of glossing over the distinct and conflicting agendas within the counterculture itself—differences that came to the fore in a break (often related conveniently to the interval between the two decades) between the fiery militancy of the 1960s and the mellower lifestyle concerns of the 1970s. From 1968 to 1970, between the demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago and the first Earth Day, the popular notion of the hippie broadened to include a new set of associations: to the roles of civic firebrand, vagabond, swinger, and LSD mystic were added pastoralist, domestic technician, farmer, technologist, and specialist in the new arts of authentic living.

To loosen oneself in the counterculture of the 1970s was not only to rupture the discipline imposed by the square world but also to evolve beyond the politics and activism of the New Left itself (widely perceived after Nixon's electoral victories and other setbacks as just another form of uptightness). It was to evolve into a form of revolution that was more personal, practical, and immediate, a revolution played out in the practice of everyday life. The concealed continuity between the tight and the loose that is the object of this book developed in that moment where the counterculture of the 1970s assumed a new program and a new priority: the revolution was not something to be fought for, but something to be relaxed into, lived and experienced in the moment. Moreover, as distinct from the explosive lifestyles of hippies in Haight-Ashbury or the high-flying drug cultures of the 1960s, living the revolution did not signal a dissolution of the boundaries of the self in music or psychedelic experiences but provided a coordinated set of living techniques centered on a thematically unified philosophy of life, related in a new advisory discourse on the practicing of a looser and more authentic way of living. Indeed, educated, mediated release would become a technique of self-control, and as such would provide the basis for a new reflexive project of the self.

But there is another sense in which the approach of this book differs from other commonly accepted views on the legacy of the counterculture. In addition to the very different meanings we get from the counterculture of the 1960s

and 1970s, there is the question of the specific media through which exhortations of the Dionysian were related. The 1960s counterculture typically evokes the immersive cultures of visuality and sound, and the decentering effects of a carnivalesque culture: psychedelic light shows, colorful fashions, shocking films, Day-Glo face painting, and loud, loud music. The “new sensibility” of the 1960s, as Susan Sontag famously described it, was a reverie of the senses whose proper element was the plastic arts (sculpture, painting, performance) over and against the intellectualism of the old discursive traditions of literature and interpretation.³⁰ The counterculture itself was a liminal experience, described by Bernice Martin for its ecstatic and transcendent properties that eluded and subverted the traditional categories of institutional life, work, and leisure.³¹ Yet if we turn from the light shows and rock concerts to the prescriptive lifestyle texts that became increasingly prominent in the 1970s, a new perspective opens on a culture typically defined by hedonism and irrationalism, by immersive visuals, booming music, and sartorial excess. In hippie books, magazines, and lifestyle publications, the Dionysian explosion of pleasure, sensuality, and enriched consciousness was brought into relation with a host of techniques and procedures whose focus was control and self-regulation, and it was in the form of such a lifestyle discourse, I will argue, that the influence of the counterculture penetrated the lifestyles of the middle classes. Combining a concern with the shifts that occurred between the 1960s and the 1970s from an explosive movement for social change and personal liberation to the more sedate experiments with lifestyle and personal authenticity, with a consideration of the specific modes of ethical discourse related in a lifestyle print culture, we discover that 1960s Dionysianism developed an unexpected alliance with its own Apollonian counterpart: a technique of self-control and self-regulation in which liberation was sketched out as a calculated lifestyle project.

We find that, by the 1970s, for millions of middle-class Americans who had, in their own ways, internalized and routinized the reverie of the 1960s and applied it to a radical renovation of their everyday ways of life, the new sensibility operated within a dynamic of release and constraint: the explosive qualities first celebrated in Haight-Ashbury and in the culture of LSD were soon linked to doctrines of personal growth and techniques of living and experiencing in which eruptions of immediacy and lived experience were transformed into a regular and regulated mode of life. Jimi Hendrix’s query “Are you experienced?” once an invitation to step outside oneself into a vertiginous realm of sensation

and feeling laced with fear of fragmentation, came to refer to experiences of a much tamer sort—the experience of safety in getting to know oneself through weekends in the woods and jogs on the beach. Loosening, as an ethic and a technique of daily life, provided the overarching metaphor through which the liminality of the new sensibility was tethered to more fundamental needs for regularity, predictability, and ontological security. This tension between the sensual and the discursive, between lived experiences and the efforts of lifestyle specialists to both extend and expand that sensuality through rational techniques, animates the ethic of loosening and the literatures that defined it. As the new sensibility was crafted and shaped into durable ways of living for the new middle classes of the 1970s, the sensuality of the present was transmuted from an immersive experience to a technique of controlled self-release, and ultimately a structuring principle in the organization of time, routines, and a sustained sense of biographical and social identity.

Indeed, a spate of recent books has sought to puncture the myth of the hedonistic 1960s and to trace the links between the supposed carnival of the counterculture and the bacchanal of contemporary consumption patterns. Thomas Frank's study was important in this respect for revealing the buried links between advertising and the counterculture, and the ultimate consequence of the counterculture in broadening the repertoire of consumer identities to include more rebellious postures—gestures of defiance that in no way pose any serious challenge to the economies of consumption themselves. Indeed, the approach of this book agrees with Frank's premise that the 1960s counterculture can be read as the progenitor of contemporary forms of consumption. But the links between contemporary lifestyle consumption and the innovations of the counterculture are far more difficult to trace than Frank acknowledges. To equate the counterculture with rebelliousness *per se*, and to conclude that contemporary forms of individualistic lifestyle are derivatives of this oppositional stance is to ignore complexity on both sides and to gloss over the process of incorporation by which countercultural lifestyles were retailored for a new economic and cultural configuration. The posture of rebellion and the sensuality of the new sensibility represent only some—and not the most important or lasting—features of the counterculture's legacies for the American popular cultural scene. More important, I will argue, is the fundamental relation to the self as an object of manipulation and choice in the practice of daily life. Such a self-choosing self was developed in the counterculture, exported widely to other groups, and

ultimately codified in standardized repertoires of consumption. By emphasizing the introspective 1970s over and against the riotous 1960s, and by taking on the printed word and the written exhortation as against the seductive image and cacophonous sound, the present study describes the fact of reflexivity itself, and the manner in which attention to self is ingrained into the attitudes and identities of people in their everyday lives, as an enduring inheritance of the counterculture.

Plan of This Book

In the pages that follow, the countercultural lifestyle print culture of the 1970s will be read in a holistic manner that takes in all facets of this culture, both material and symbolic. Against the backdrop of a broad historical sketch of the 1970s, and framed by a discussion of the status of expert discourse on matters of lifestyle and identity, dozens of countercultural publications will be considered (though a few will be selected for careful review) in a manner that takes into account all their qualities both as narrative texts and also as material things whose unique formats and design features often tell stories as valuable as the written messages they convey. On a broader institutional level, the social and economic networks through which these publications were produced and distributed to readers within restricted countercultural circles and to wider national audiences will enter in as part of the overall account. All the elements that compose this lifestyle discourse as a print culture, in the widest sense, will figure into the present study: employing Robert Darnton's and Daniel Roche's concept of the "communications circuit," all facets of production, distribution, and reception of printed matters will contribute to this analysis.³² If countercultural lifestyle discourse espoused a loosening of the control mechanisms imposed on the self, then the microeconomic infrastructure through which this discourse was produced and disseminated, and the very publications as material objects themselves, also functioned as symbols of this lifestyle ethic. The lifestyle print culture's way of producing goods and doing business was analogous with, and served as a metaphor for, the content of its lifestyle message, a fact that is emblazoned on the surface of each of its products in the form of rough layout and amateurish (if more "real") production qualities.

In this regard, this is a study of lifestyle discourse and lifestyle mediation, as over and against one of lifestyle practice. A selected emphasis will fall, therefore, on the texts themselves, as narratives of self-transformation and prescriptive

texts on the development of the self through specific choices made in everyday life. A rounded approach more faithful to traditions of ethnography and cultural studies might include a greater emphasis on the ground-level reception of these texts and the extent to which they informed real practices. While such ends are worthy in themselves, for the sake of the economy of my argument I have chosen to stress the prescriptive dimensions of lifestyle as an object of advice, and the narrative content in which a discourse of lifestyle as a set of ethical and normative concerns is spelled out. As much as this is a book about lifestyles, it is also a book about books about lifestyles—about the texts and discourses that inscribed styles of life with specific ethical purposes.

In what follows, heroic accounts of achieved unconstraint will be interpreted in stories of personal loosening and the print artifacts through which they were related—a loosening of self-control that pointed toward a new style of life and a new way of construing identity. The plan of this book will pursue the study of these loosening discourses according to an agenda that first establishes a theoretical and historical framework then moves on to a series of interpretive, descriptive cases. In part 1, “Middle Class in the Maelstrom,” three chapters provide a general understanding of the scope of the historical predicament in which a discourse of lifestyle emerged, of the freedoms and anxieties to which it was addressed, and of the specific modes of expertise and the distinct media through which it operated. In chapter 1, “Of Swingers and Organization Men,” the fundamental problem of lifestyle is discussed as a personal mediation of the transformations of late modernity as experienced through the erosion of middle-class cultural authority. Calling principally on David Harvey’s thesis on the post-Fordist turn, Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of cultural capital, and Anthony Giddens’s treatments of lifestyle as a feature of late modernity, the case is made for a study of loosening as a specific response to a crisis in middle-class self-understandings in the 1970s and the increasing conditions of individualization in American culture. A consideration of some classic formulations of the changing patterns of self-constraint and self-release provided by American sociologists maps out the shifting conditions that produced a broader openness to experience and an embrace of lifestyle in the early 1970s, leading up to an appropriation and codification of lifestyle as a mainstream mode of consumption in the 1980s. Significantly, as pointed out earlier, this occurred through a pattern of appropriation, emulation, and cooptation of the expressive styles practiced by other groups and other identity movements, principally African Americans

and Black Power groups but also women, Asian, Native American, and other ethnic groups.

In chapter 2, “Experts Unbound,” the problem of loosening is applied to the more specific conditions of expert discourse and to the changing status of lifestyle expertise through its incorporation of experiential knowledge, particularly for counterculturals. Recalling the expansion of the service sector and particularly the growing fields of health and human services in the 1970s, the case is made here that the changing status of expert discourse enabled a unique mode of exhortation and advice on the topic of lifestyle, one that was capable of instilling daily life choices with ethical and personal significance. In short, newly sensitized loose experts advised on the proper form of the loose lifestyle. Moreover, as popular attitudes toward mass consumption became increasingly skeptical, such empathic modes of address were appropriated into new marketing discourses, espousing a new sensitivity to the values and lifestyles of consumers. In chapter 3, “Book as Tool,” the evolving status of the lifestyle expert is traced to the emergence of a countercultural print culture. This emerging publishing category is examined in relation to the changing American book market of the 1970s, and the growing popular interest in small, grassroots publishers, principally based on the West Coast. Clashes between advocates of this emerging market and the loose lifestyle message it embodied and the guardians of the more traditional (uptight) American book trade based in the larger eastern houses are read as expressions of a tension between expressive and repressive, or loose and tight, cultural styles. Throughout, the ethic of looseness is examined as a broadly applied metaphor in this literature, governing everything from the business practices in the loose network of California publishers to the rough, informal techniques of printers and typesetters.

Part 2, “Caring Texts,” undertakes a concerted interpretive study of countercultural lifestyle print discourse and of the loosening metaphor divided into three broadly distinct areas: ecology and nature; home, business, and interpersonal life; and self and the body. In each of these chapters, a set of lifestyle concerns provides a framework in which loosening is related through a distinct metaphor of attained unconstraint, or mediated immediacy. Loosening is described through a binary construction contrasting vitality, immediacy, and expressiveness with convention, remoteness, and self-constraint. Chapter 4, “Being One,” examines how becoming loose involves freeing oneself of the technological constraints that separate the civilized self from nature. In eco-

logically inspired lifestyle publications, one releases oneself into the wholeness of the earth through a way of living that is authentic and in touch with the cyclical flows of large ecological systems and the inclusive natural processes that integrate the planet. Several ecological journals are discussed, including *Rainbook* and the *Whole Earth Catalog*, which variously describe a style of life premised on a freer, more intimate relationship with nature, contrasted with the exploitive mentality of industrial society. In chapter 5, “Loving Each Other,” the task of loosening is discovered in the injunction to release oneself into the other in the pursuit of trust. Here lifestyle involves learning to let go of egoistic pretenses and immersing oneself in spontaneous and unconstrained social communion and group membership. Trust, as a learned attitude toward social life, is here mediated through a discourse on collectivity and sharing, often defined in opposition to the competitive and instrumental relations of the straight world. Beginning with an investigation of the new sexual ethics of the 1970s (typified by the *Catalog of Sexual Consciousness*), books on communal life (*Celery Wine, Communities*), and geodesic dome construction (*Domebook, Shelter*) describe the loosening of the individual as an intrinsically social problem, involving the affirmation of the self in collective everyday life. The chapter closes with a reflection on the incorporation of loosening into business practices through a study of one countercultural business network (*Briarpatch Book*). Chapter 6, “Letting It All Hang Out,” shows how loosening comes to refer to a rejection of the instrumentalized body of mainstream media, and the release of the self into a deepened, more natural sense of embodiment. In the literature on “body work,” myriad techniques of relaxation and alternative fitness offered training in the immersion of the mind into the meter and sensuality of a rhetorically deepened body—a goal set in contrast to the regimes of competitive sport and military discipline, which seek only to subordinate the body to the demands of the rational will. Loose forms of embodiment are described in a classic compendium of feminist body work techniques called *Getting Clear*, in several collections on massage and Roling, and in a new discourse on jogging and athletics, in which competition itself is redefined as an inward practice of personal identity. This configuration of the athlete, originally the product of countercultural discourse on fitness, ultimately becomes seminal to new forms of lifestyle consumption in the 1980s.

Finally, some clarification of the historical perspective underlying this study is in order. If the line of argumentation presented here smacks of a very old and

worn-out story, one that holds up the radical cultural products of the 1960s in order to measure their cooptation by the mass market, I assure the reader that, in what follows, the loosening discourses of the 1970s lifestyle movement will not be celebrated in any romantic sense. While I approach my topic with all the respect a researcher owes to his subjects and subject matter, I make it no secret that, by and large, I am neither a defender nor a critic of this project, at least not on the terms it claimed for itself. The solutions counterculturals delivered lacked historical durability for good reasons: their optimism depended on an ill-considered humanism that was sophomoric at best, sentimental and baseless at worst. The cultural pluralism they espoused banked on a false universalism that did not adequately interrogate its own hegemonic role as a white, largely male, largely heterosexual middle-class value system. This is no nostalgic treatise on lost good old days, much less a call to pick up and carry on where others have left off. But neither is this an occasion for derisive laughter, or a politically motivated critique. The empathy that guides this project stems from the imperatives of interpretive research itself, from the willingness to let texts tell their own stories, from the requirement that all stories have to be read against the backdrop of the histories and processes they mediate, and from the responsibilities that come with being a dutiful listener. The loosening of the self expressed an adventure with the modernity of its (and our) time, and what follows is an effort to read these lifestyle adventures as expressions of the deeper logic of a modernity we share across the gulf of several decades—a modernity that holds out exciting possibilities for the reshaping of selfhood, even as it grapples to adapt new forms of identity to the strains of cultural and social change. From a genealogical standpoint, understanding the intensity and conviction (and perhaps hubris) of countercultural lifestyles as part of a shared modernity allows us to view with fresh eyes the dynamics of our own time, and to perceive the present as a moment within a common arc of historical change—as part of an ongoing modernity, and as therefore available to creative reworking in the present. For that reason I have strained to tie together these lifestyle adventures with the discourses and lifestyles we know today. A history of the lifestyle movements of the 1970s is an important part of the history of ourselves, and of the dilemmas and opportunities we face as citizens of late modernity. This investigation is directed toward the goal of realizing, through historical excavation, the modernity within our own present.