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ROCK AS EXPERIENCE

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Devon Powers, *Writing the Record: The Village Voice and the Birth of Rock Criticism* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013)

Phil Ford, *Dig: Sound and Music in Hip Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Michael J. Kramer, *The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

Experience is the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment which, when it is carried to the full, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication.

John Dewey, 1934

Ah, but are you experienced?
Have you ever been experienced?
Not necessarily stoned, but beautiful . . .

Jimi Hendrix, 1967

Readers dismayed by the appearance of a review essay on hipsters, hippies, and rock music in the pages of *Modern Intellectual History* should take a deep breath (you may inhale) and consider the following passage from John Dewey's 1934 *Art as Experience*:

Any idea that ignores the necessary role of intelligence in production of works of art is based upon identification of thinking with use of one special kind of material, verbal signs and words. To think effectively in terms of relations of qualities is as severe a demand upon thought as to think in terms of symbols, verbal and mathematical. Indeed, since words are equally manipulated in mechanical ways, the production of a work of genuine art probably demands more intelligence than does most of the so-called thinking that goes on among those who pride themselves on being "intellectuals."[1]

[1] John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York, 1979; first published 1934), 46.

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It's impossible to know what Dewey would have thought had he lived beyond his ninety-two years and confronted the rock music and counterculture of the 1960s and early 1970s. Would he have found "intelligence" at work in "acid rock" or hippie culture? Or would he have reacted as rock critic Greil Marcus did in the famous opening line of his review of Bob Dylan's 1970 *Self Portrait* album: "What is this shit?"[2] I'd like to think he'd have given the music a listen, if not at the Fillmore then perhaps on his home stereo. After all, Dewey had this to say about music: "Music, having sound as its medium, thus necessarily expresses in a concentrated way the shocks and instabilities, the conflicts and resolutions, that are the dramatic changes enacted upon the more enduring background of nature and human life."[3] If any music expressed the shocks, instabilities, and conflicts of its day—and did so "in a concentrated way"—it was rock 'n' roll. In fact, sonic culture had a privileged place in Dewey's aesthetics as an expression of the emotional life of individuals and communities. "Generically speaking, what is *seen* stirs emotion indirectly, through interpretation and allied idea. Sound agitates directly, as a commotion of the organism itself."[4] A philosopher who refused to sever sensory experience from cognition might well have considered whether somewhere in the commotion of rock culture there was also thinking. The question for historians committed to that proposition today is how and where to locate thinking in all the feedback.

There are few models for how to go about answering that question. The pragmatism revival that began in the late 1980s has given short shrift to *Art as Experience*, arguably Dewey's most radical book. With the notable exception of Richard Schusterman, pragmatist philosophers have devoted little time to the aesthetics of popular music and performance. US intellectual historians often struggle with expressive culture beyond "verbal signs and words." There are few who approach the standard set by Carl Schorske, who could do it all: ideas, literature, art, and music. Neil Harris, Richard Cándida Smith, and Robert Genter are the rare historians working today who are equally comfortable with ideas and visual art. The late Michael Kammen blazed a trail for them. George Cotkin's study of the "new sensibility" of the 1950s and 1960s, *Feast of Excess* (2015), gives close attention to musicians as well as to writers and artists, with chapters on John Cage, Jerry Lee Lewis, Bob Dylan, and John Coltrane. Literary critics such as Christopher Ricks are naturally drawn to Dylan, whose lyrics now enjoy the kind of reverential parsing New Critics once gave John Donne's sonnets, and to storytellers such as Woody Guthrie and Bruce Springsteen who

[2] Greil Marcus, "Self Portrait No. 25," *Rolling Stone*, 8 June 1970, available at www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/self-portrait-19700608.

[3] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, p. 236.

[4] Ibid., 237, original emphasis.

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have mined the American civil religion for their lyrics. The original American studies impulse to examine the confluence of political ideas, literature, religion, art, and popular culture in the making of American myths might have made that field a site for inquiry into the intellectual history of rock 'n' roll, but that project is dead and buried. Music critic Greil Marcus, who holds a BA in American studies from Berkeley, may be the last heir to that tradition. His *Mystery Train* (1975) and *Invisible Republic* (1997) are books that "believe in America," as Leo Marx described the original American studies impulse, though in Marcus's case it's the "old, weird America" of the *Basement Tapes* Dylan recorded with the Band. Believing in America—weird, old, or otherwise—is now an embarrassment for most academics, perhaps especially American studies faculty. The study of intellectual culture—a field that generated many of the questions Marcus takes seriously—is one he would likely miss if he were to pursue an American studies major at most universities today. Meanwhile, the cultural-studies project of the 1990s lurches on, zombie-like, even as many of its heirs acknowledge the limitations of a reductionist view of culture as a "contested terrain" for conflicts over race, class, and gender. The idea of art as a delivery system for politics pure and simple remains an article of faith in such quarters.

Elements of another approach may be found in Kenneth Burke's *Counter-Statement* (1931), his early effort to articulate an aesthetic alternative to formalism and the economism prevalent in 1930s left-wing literary criticism. Burke was concerned with literature, not music, but literature understood as communication, symbolic action, rhetoric, and performance. Literary art for Burke was an intervention in a historically constituted "situation" that included audience expectation and response. "An art may be of value purely through preventing a society from becoming too assertively, too hopelessly, itself," Burke believed, but it performed that role in "the 'margin of overlap' between the writer's experience and the reader's."[5] The interpretive challenge was to give equal weight to the complexity of form and the material conditions of the "situations" in which that form was enacted and understood. "The symbol faces two ways," Burke explained.[6]

Where did thinking as such figure in Burke's aesthetics? Burke rejected the search for "truth" in art: truth for him was akin to "revelation," whether religious or scientific in origin, but not art. Nor was the artist's intention to communicate some "statement of fact" sufficient for understanding the ideational dimension of aesthetic experience. Rather, thinking resided in the "framing of . . .

5 Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (Berkeley, 1968; first published 1931), 105, 78.

6 Ibid., 61.

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revelation in ritual," which is to say the whole complex of artistic conventions and audience expectations, of urgent social and cultural concerns, individual need and innovation that summoned artistic interventions in specific situations.[7] "The 'thoughts' of a writer," Burke explained, "are the non-paraphrasable aspects of his work, the revelation and ritual in fusion."[8]

Revelation and ritual are useful categories for understanding the thinking at work in the rock culture of the 1960s and 1970s, when audiences looked to mostly white, mostly male, rock icons as prophets flinging open the Gates of Eden and the counterculture became self-conscious in creating its own rituals. One can go further, taking Burke as inspiration. The "thought" of rock culture involved formal innovation in situations shaped by a unique constellation of ideas, institutions, and politics: the changing dynamics of voice and performance that followed on new technologies of amplification, recording, and radio transmission; the dissemination of a "mass culture" critique from modernist intellectuals to hipsters and then a constituency whose consciousness was shaped by mass media; the utopian aspirations unleashed by the joining of cultural and political radicalism; the availability of new drugs (whether LSD or the Pill); a niche market of consumer goods aimed at the young under the banner of "hip capitalism"; the US war in Indochina, fought with rock and soul accompaniment; social movements and political conflicts that opened up new realms of human experience for debate; and much else besides. It may be hard to imagine thinking at work in Pete Townsend's ritual destruction of his guitar, James Brown's splits, and the endless noodling of the Grateful Dead that entranced druggy audiences, but thinking there was. There is even thinking to discover in Iggy Pop's "I Wanna Be Your Dog," Patti Smith's profanity-laced cover of "My Generation," and the Ramones' "Beat on the Brat." At least it's an idea worth considering before returning to Heidegger.

* * *

The history of music criticism is an obvious way of approaching the "thinking" of rock culture. Marcus, Ellen Willis, James Miller (an intellectual historian as well as a rock critic), Jane Scott, Lester Bangs, and other pioneers of the genre still await the kind of attention John Gennari gave jazz critics in *Blowin' Hot and Cold* (2006). Devon Powers's *Writing the Record* takes on a piece of that story by examining the careers of Richard Goldstein and Robert Christgau, the lead rock critics at the *Village Voice* during the 1960s and 1970s. Goldstein and Christgau

7 Ibid., 168.

8 Ibid., 169.

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imagined themselves "foot soldiers" in a movement that found revelation and revolutionary promise in the mass-produced sounds of the cultural industry (20). They wrote in the tradition of Romantic criticism the Beats inherited from Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Whitman and then made available to a postwar audience, searching for revelatory experience in the rock blaring from car radios and cheap hi-fis. Christgau's recent memoir, *Going into the City* (2015), cites his debt to Coleridge's reflection on Wordsworth's role in the *Lyrical Ballads*: "'awakening the mind's attention' by 'imparting the charm of novelty to the things of the every day.'"[9] Lou Reed put it this way, singing about "Jenny" in "Rock 'n' Roll":

One fine mornin', she puts on a New York station
And she couldn't believe what she heard at all
She started dancin' to that fine-fine music
You know, her life was saved by rock 'n' roll
Yeah baby, rock 'n' roll.

The *Voice* critics articulated a critical stance that Goldstein called "pop aestheticism," aligning themselves with pop artists, Pauline Kael, Susan Sontag, and Tom Wolfe as exponents of the new sensibility of the 1960s (67). They were enthusiasts of 1960s pop culture but unable to free themselves entirely from the terms of postwar mass-culture critique. Each struggled to balance critical judgment with a participatory stance, all the while haunted by their implication in the creation of a new market of young consumers.

The *Voice* served as an ideal laboratory for such criticism—and Greenwich Village a perfect "situation" for writerly interventions in the countercultural scene. Launched in 1955 by Dan Wolf with financial support from Norman Mailer and Ed Fancher, the new weekly showcased a freewheeling journalism in keeping with the neighborhood's libertarian ethos. An avant-garde jazz sensibility in its music columns quickly gave way to a new kind of writing prompted by the folk music revival in Washington Square Park and—above all—the release of Dylan's debut album in 1962. J. R. Goddard, the *Voice*'s chief reporter on the folk revival gushed, "Dylan is blessed with a gift of style—individual, dynamic STYLE!" (40). The new music demanded a new critical style that was personal, impressionistic, and attuned to a sensibility shared by musicians, fans, and critics alike. Powers notes the immediate "shift toward writing about music using individual observation, taste, and advocacy, rather than standards of proficiency and musical execution . . . Dylan in this sense was an opportunity to crystallize

[9] Robert Christgau, *Going into the City: Portrait of a Critic as a Young Man* (New York, 2015), 66.

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folk fans as a taste community" (40). By the time the Beatles landed in New York in February 1964, the *Voice* was ready.

Richard Goldstein's "Pop Eye" column debuted in 1966, and he spent the next two years wrestling with the political contradictions of the innovative rock movement Dylan and the British Invasion had spawned. To its enthusiasts, mid-1960s "rock" had transcended the commercial, formulaic nature of early "rock 'n' roll," adding symphonic orchestration, Eastern instruments and scoring, and synthesizers to the two guitars, bass, and drums of the early bands. Three-minute singles gave way to longer songs propelled by guitar and drum solos, with lyrics addressing new themes inspired by drugs, the turmoil in the streets, and utopian visions. The music's roots in country and rockabilly became ever harder to hear, though British musicians reworked country blues and R & B classics that middle-class American audiences had never heard before. Indeed, "rock" was a whiter, more upscale genre than its predecessor, and the emergence of "album-oriented" rock stations on the FM band contributed to the resegregation of popular music by the end of the decade. Goldstein struggled to make sense of the movement's significance. Was rock a "revolutionary" force? Was the "underground" hippie scene a folk community for a generation raised in the age of mechanical production? Or was rock simply another consumer product "hyped" by record-company flacks?

By late 1967 Goldstein's initial enthusiasm gave way to an ever more cynical view of rock culture and the music industry. He famously panned the Beatles' 1967 *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in the *New York Times* (the review itself evidence of rock's new legitimacy as a musical form). "In substituting the studio conservatory for an audience," he wrote of the Beatles, "they have ceased being folk artists, and the change is what makes their new album a monologue" (91). The Summer of Love's Monterey Pop Festival represented the ascendancy of "the business and p.r. men" who came to "watch, to mix, and to sample the merchandise" (92). Obsessed with "authenticity," fearful of the movement's "co-optation," Goldstein declared that rock "needs a shit-detector" more than a critic (93). By decade's end he had abandoned both callings.

Goldstein's successor at the *Voice* was Robert Christgau, who made a running joke of his minor celebrity status as the "Dean of American Rock Critics" and openly fretted over his paradoxical position as enthusiast of a dissident subculture and cog in the music industry's publicity machine. The "Rock & Roll" column he began writing in 1969 spun off a "Consumer's Guide" with mini reviews and letter grades for albums that became indispensable reading for fans of "underground" rock and then punk and new wave. He was ambivalent from the start about rock as a revolutionary force: perhaps it only amounted to a "revolution in style" (98). But he rocked on as champion of Bruce Springsteen and the Clash in the 1970s and a good deal of hip-hop and "world music" after that. Unfortunately, Powers

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finds Christgau's writing of interest solely as a self-conscious reflection on his own role as a critic, which she sets in the context of the rise of identity politics and the fragmentation of the pop subculture. We learn absolutely nothing from her book about Christgau's taste or judgments aside from his admission years later that he and other white critics had completely missed the significance of James Brown. (Not quite like missing the Beatles, but close.) Otherwise Powers makes no mention of how Christgau evaluated specific albums, musicians, or performances.

Instead the "Dean of American Rock Critics" serves Powers as an opportunity to recycle familiar tropes about the myopia of white-male universalism and its eclipse by a pluralistic postmodern sensibility. The result is passages like the following:

> What white rock critics could rightly consider as their domain connects to the dance that was occurring at the moment between the modern and the postmodern, the specific and the general, where the desire for universal narratives and all-encompassing categories remain even as the possibility for these things was rapidly diminishing. (109)

If only Powers had given Sly and the Family Stone's "Dance to the Music" a listen instead of learning that dreary dance or had taken Ellen Willis's sparkling 1967 essay on Dylan—still the best piece of writing on the man and his significance—as her model.[10] There is, in any case, a good more to be said about the rock critic as intellectual than Powers's musing that an "essentialized Christgau" practiced a "strategic essentialism" (121). Readers unfamiliar with the writing that Christgau and contemporaries produced will get no sense of why their criticism generated such passion among its readers, or why Patti Smith still believes the early 1970s "was a time when the vocation of a music journalist could be an elevated pursuit" (125).

* * *

Phil Ford's fascinating and highly original *Dig* approaches music and ideas with subtlety and deep learning. Ford may not know *Counter-Statement* but he shares Burke's spirit: his book is all about the hip and hippie crossroads where ritual and revelation meet. Hipness is, in his view, "an aesthetic and sensibility" that originated in the experience of dandified African American men in the 1930s jazz scene and rippled outward into a white intellectual and literary subculture via the Beats, Anatole Broyard, Norman Mailer, and jazz enthusiasts before becoming a mass counterculture of middle-class hippies in the 1960s (20). A scholar of

[10] Ellen Willis, "Dylan," in *The Essential Willis*, ed. Nona Willis Aronowitz (Minneapolis, 2014), 20–35.

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popular music immersed in literary theory and cultural studies—he can slip into the insular, knowing jargon of those fields for pages—Ford displays a sure grasp of mid-century intellectual history as well as the history of musical composition and performance. The strength of *Dig* lies in its interweaving of those histories, with music and voice serving musicians and writers "in but not of" a disenchanted world. "Music is the royal road to hip," Ford explains, but music as sonic pathway to a "somewhere" beyond the "nowhere" inhabited by straights (6). Before hip became hippie, it was a distinctly anti-utopian stance. There may have been little ground for hope, but at least the hipster knew the score (and heard the music behind the score). "If hipness was a crusade," Ford writes, "it was one on behalf of raw human subjectivity experienced directly and without the inhibiting artifices of society; sound was the vector of energy on which that subjectivity was borne" (85). As Diane di Prima put it, "we all thought *experience was good. Any experience*" (quoted at 19, di Prima's emphasis).

Hip was a stance, not an ideology, but it resonated with mid-century anxiety about the deadening effects of "mass culture" and the rush to nuclear war. While most New York intellectuals slogged from Marxism to liberal "realism" and high modernism, the hip white intelligentsia reveled in bebop style and looked for new political and intellectual resources. They believed, with Lewis Mumford, Dwight Macdonald, and the editors of *Liberation* magazine, that nuclear weapons represented the triumph of reason as unreason, putting the lie to the old left's faith in progress. Rationalism had ended up as rationalization for madness, generating abstractions that deadened Americans' capacity to experience life as it really was. That was the hipsters' situation, to use Burke's language, and a hip sensibility was their intervention in that situation. "We were post-Stalin," Gary Snyder recalled. "For us, in our energy of the fifties, early Buddhism, Laozi, Gandhi, Thoreau, Kropotkin, and Zen were all one teaching" (Snyder quoted at 29). A Zen anarcho-pacifism became the preferred mode, promising access to the "suchness" of unmediated experience and the transcendence of self in a small community of friends.

White hipsters desperately wanted to "dig" bebop. They heard in the "ironic doubleness of perspective" in Charlie Parker's solo on "Ornithology" (1946) an "awareness of the interplay between referent and its abstraction"—between improvisation and song structure—that undermined the literalism of straights (122). Parker's solo was the musical equivalent of a Zen *koan* for the white fans James Baldwin called "the Suzuki rhythm boys" (quoted at 27). It opened up a "somewhere" of imagination, irony, and spiritual presence in the American "nowhere," which had the ultimate "nowhere" of white racism as its core. Ford quotes LeRoi Jones on the appeal of bebop musicians for white bohemians:

> The Negro jazz musician of the forties was *weird*. And the myth of this weirdness, this alienation, was sufficiently important to white America for it to re-create the myth in a

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term that connoted not merely Negroes as the aliens but a *general* alienation in which even white men could be included. (53, Jones's emphasis)

The ur-text of the white hipster myth of African American "weirdness" is of course Norman Mailer's infamous 1957 essay "The White Negro," which Ford makes the centerpiece of his argument. Ford knows all the reasons critics from Baldwin onward have denounced Mailer's "unignorable and intolerable" manifesto for its racial primitivism and minstrelsy. What he offers in his virtuoso reading of the essay is something different. Tracing the evolution of the manuscript from an early draft to publication, Ford reconstructs Mailer's shift from a Freudo-Marxist reboot of the old radicalism to a literary style "made not merely to describe but to enact" a revolution in consciousness (162). Mailer sought to transcend mere words, to turn literature into performance, to make text swing. Hipness—hipness-as-blackness—meant living in the ironic nuances of signifying speech, not the rote language of squares. Mailer's typology of "The Hip and the Square" laid out the alternatives: the square will "listen for the meaning of the words and obey no other meaning" while the hipster knows "to listen to the sound of the voice and take one's meaning from there" (164).

The centrality of feminist-baiter Mailer in *Dig* implicitly raises the question whether women could be hip. That's not a question Ford addresses, and female hip as a subculture of its own is absent from the book. Of course there were and are women hipsters, and plenty of female hippies too. If Nina Simone, Diane di Prima, Judith Malina, Yoko Ono, Janis Joplin, Patti Smith, and Cate Blanchett don't belong in that club, no one does. Still, navigating the straight world as a hip woman presented specific challenges and required a distinct skill set Mailer and company didn't have to master. Women hipsters' "nowhere" was to a large extent a man's world, and slipping through the cracks of that world to "somewhere" meant negotiating a different set of visual and verbal codes that men demanded of "their" women. The "hippie chicks" of the 1960s were expected to bake bread, tie-dye T-shirts and be sexually available to young men who presumed to make all the decisions about everything. For their part, hip and hippie men often indulged in the great American tradition of blaming mothers, "momism," wives, and Huck's Aunt Polly for smothering male individualism in a soul-killing conformity. Dylan's early "John Brown" (1962) characteristically blamed mom for sending her boy off to war. John's mother bragged to the neighbors "about her son, with his uniform and gun," until he returned home, maimed and unrecognizable, to drop his medals into her hand. Dylan's most famous song, "Like a Rolling Stone" (1965), aimed a bazooka of spite at a party girl who had to learn the hard way that her fashionable life "really wasn't where it's at."

Dylan's "Ballad of a Thin Man," released the same year as "Rolling Stone," carried on the Parker–Mailer tradition, but with a "nowhere" man as its target.

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The song starts with a piano part stolen from Ray Charles's "I Believe to My Soul" and then stages a confrontation between the singer and the clueless "Mister Jones." Ford zeroes in on the "catch of laughter" in Dylan's "try" ("tra-hay so hard") that taunts the straight man trying "so *hard*" to understand the world of freaks and hipsters. Mister Jones will "tra-hay" and always fail and not even understand the terms of his failure. It's the "alloy of word and vocal gesture" in Dylan's performance that puts the nail in the coffin of square consciousness (148). (When I saw Dylan perform a few years ago, he ended his set growling loud in his old bluesman's voice: "And you know something is happening here, but you don't know what it is. *Doooo* you, Mister Jones?" Another nail in the coffin.)

"Ballad of a Thin Man" was an anthem that reached a mass audience Parker and even Mailer never did. The evolution from hipster to hippies was in some respects a popularization of the hip stance, though Ford notes a crucial difference. Cold War hipsters were avant-garde elitists who shared much of the high-modernist critique of mass culture. Hippie culture, on the other hand, "was marked by a paradoxical co-existence of its underlying elitism and a new populist ideology" (130). The myth of a "generation gap" obscured that paradox, but the counterculture's obsession with "authenticity" and its fear of "co-optation" betrayed the legacy of early hipsters' angst and alienation. The Dylan who went electric in 1965, trading his Woody Guthrie costume for the trappings of pop stardom, was more a 1950s hipster than his admirers recognized. His steadfast "refusal to be known"—as Willis brilliantly put it—was hip, not hippie.[11]

Thankfully Ford has no interest in carrying on the tired debate about cooptation versus resistance that even now informs much work in cultural history and cultural studies. He comes across on the page as himself somewhat of an old-fashioned "hep cat." Ford knows the score, even sees the limits of the tradition he has recovered, but still wants to slip between the abstractions of straight society and scholarship alike into meaningful experience. *Dig* is not another smug deflation of mid-century seriousness. A concluding chapter on John Benson Brooks's deeply strange jazz/pop/found-sound fusion album *Avant Slant* (1968) culminates in a moving meditation on musical practice. According to Ford, Brooks sought nothing less than a magical initiation into the fullness of the everyday. His album's sound and sensibility made the "Old, Weird America" of the *Basement Tapes* seem like Andy Griffith's Mayberry R.F.D. *Avant Slant*'s commercial failure does not lessen its achievement for Ford as an experiment in the activation of private consciousness. After Brooks the last and final step is to relinquish the dream of creating an audience for art, to give up the idea of an oppositional culture of any kind, and with it the struggle against

[11] Ibid., p. 21.

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abstraction and co-optation that empowered so many hip experiments. The logic of hipness as a stance leads Ford away from art-making in public, as he joins Wordsworth, Carlyle, Ruskin and Cage—the lineage of George J. Leonard's *Into the Light of Things* (1994)—who jettisoned the art object in pursuit of spiritualized aesthetic experience. The royal road of hip is music, and that road takes Ford to private musical practice. "Practice will not give us a new, radical, unco-optable subculture," he writes; "it merely gives us back our own lives" (224). The search for a transcendent "somewhere" gives way to affirmation of the here and now, to delight in the spaces of play and freedom our little lives allow. "To discover these spaces for ourselves," he concludes, "without also having to shoulder the illusions and follies of the hip sensibility, is the great task that hip culture still leaves to us" (226).

* * *

Ford's personal odyssey stops only briefly at the counterculture, and his dismissal of its rhetoric of cooptation and authenticity suggests an impatience with historians and critics who have given the Age of Aquarius pride of place in their accounts of mid-century cultural dissent. He is interested in hip, less so in hippies. It's not hard to see why. Many of the movement's most prominent figures recall Iron Butterfly's 1968 "In A Gadda da Vida" more than they do "Ornithology." With Jerry Rubin's pronouncement that "[o]ur generation is in rebellion against abstract intellectualism and critical thinking," the hip rejection of abstraction devolved into mindlessness.[12] (A revolution against critical thinking was an easy win for the Yippie leader.) Historian Michael Kramer knows there was more to the counterculture than that, however. His *Republic of Rock* draws on the intellectual history of citizenship and theoretical debates about the public sphere to recast rock culture as an inquiry into civic possibility in an age of "hip capitalism" and "hip militarism." The book is not a history of rock music per se, but an investigation of rock-as-experience in San Francisco and South Vietnam that raises important questions about the cultural foundations of civic democracy.

Kramer carefully reconstructs the formation of the San Francisco rock counterculture, beginning with the infamous "Acid Tests" staged by Ken Kesey and his tribe of Merry Pranksters in 1964 and 1965. With the assistance of Jerry Garcia and his band the Warlocks (later the Grateful Dead), Kesey and the Pranksters created the rock equivalents of the "Happenings" that John Cage and Allan Kaprow had staged in the late 1950s. Strobe lights, tape loops, and amplified

[12] Rubin quoted in W. J. Rorabaugh, *American Hippies* (New York, 2015), 113.

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performance of free-form songs driven by long guitar solos all heightened the disorienting effects of LSD for participants. By 1966 the Fillmore Auditorium had become the most popular site for what one participant called a "social jam session" (46). A light-show artist at the Fillmore recalled the "communal resonance of partaking and joining together [that] occurred between individuals of many kinds: merchants, artists, bikers, office workers, and students" (47). Like the original Acid Tests such concerts deployed new technologies—whether chemical or electronic—for altering mood, consciousness, and physical sensation. Kramer claims that "their ultimate goal was not technocratic," though a skeptic might think otherwise of the manipulation of participants' consciousness; "it was to discover an unprecedented democratic equality through collective inquiry" (49).

The Acid Tests and Fillmore concerts no doubt prompted an exploration of personal identity, as the assault of sound, light, and hallucinogens seemed to obliterate the boundaries between self and others. Kramer argues that they also enabled inquiry into the possibilities for citizenship in a Cold War society that had developed ever more sophisticated mechanisms of technological and bureaucratic control. Pranksters wore the flag and waved it as they drove their psychedelic bus across the country; flyers advertising the early Acid Tests deployed the iconic Uncle Sam of Army recruitment posters; and Kesey himself joined in a 1965 antiwar rally at Berkeley, blew his harmonica, and called on protesters to "look at the war, and turn your backs and say ... Fuck it" (quoted at 57). Kesey's appearance may not rank as one of the great moments in musical performance or political oratory (Sonny Terry and Mario Savio had nothing to fear from the lead Prankster); his antic radicalism nonetheless became the lingua franca of the Bay Area's burgeoning hippie community. Organizers of the Human Be-In/Gathering of the Tribes" at Golden Gate Park in January 1967 distributed a "Prophecy of a Declaration of Independence" that declared,

> We hold these truths to be self-evident ... that all is equal, that the creation endows us with certain alienable rights, that among these are: the freedom of the body, the pursuit of joy, and the expansion of consciousness, and that to secure these rights, we the citizens of the earth declare our love and compassion for all conflicting hate-carrying men and women of the world. (64–5)

The conflicts between hippies and New Leftists are familiar to veterans of that era and a mainstay of the historical literature, although Doug Rossinow's *Politics of Authenticity* (1998) remains a powerful reminder of the existentialist and religious quest that animated both political and cultural radicals in the 1960s. The Yippies and the White Panther Party were among several groups trying to square the circle, as it were. Ford's *Dig* reproduces the inside front cover illustration of the "Berkeley Liberation Program," which hit the streets of Berkeley in the aftermath of the battle over People's Park in 1969 demanding a "soulful socialism." Mao's

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"Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom" ran below an image of a marijuana stalk and a corona of Mao heads (116–17). More often than not, however, hippie heads had little use for hardcore Mao heads. Anarcho-pornographer Ed Sanders published a vitriolic attack: "authoritarian assholes, bureaucratic bumfucks, Marxist mothers, we're going to have a revolution in spite of you triplicated, mimeod, left-of-center Jesuits, so help me Kropotkin" (quoted at 114).

Kramer takes a different approach to the politics of the counterculture, setting aside the animosities between the two camps to consider how rock produced a "counterpublic sphere" within the confines of a wartime society saturated with consumerist values. Rock "generated a radically pluralistic spirit of democratic belonging that merged a kaleidoscopic sense of individuality with a polyglot ideal of togetherness" and ultimately "fostered an efflorescence of civic engagement" and new ideas of citizenship (20, 22). His claim that the Pranksters sought to "remake the meaning and practice of American citizenship" establishes the template for his discussion of other episodes in the San Francisco counterculture (31). Kramer examines a 1968 strike at KMPX-FM, a pioneer of "progressive rock" radio, and the debacle of a Wild West Festival planned a year later that collapsed in the face of protests from the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the Haight Commune, the International Werewolf Conspiracy, and other groups outraged at the exploitation of "underground" music by promoters and city officials. The politics of such conflicts could be murky, as one expects when werewolves take to the barricades. Challenges to "hip capitalism" came from individuals embedded in the very institutions profiting from the new music, blurring class distinctions between managers and workers at KMPX and between music promoters and proprietors of record stores and "head shops."

Hip capitalism weathered the storm and flourished as a niche youth market. Its political and cultural contradictions nonetheless generated a rhetoric that Kramer insists on characterizing as the language of citizenship, though he provides plenty of support for an alternative reading. The Mime Troupe demanded that the Wild West Festival be free to all and that artists share in the rewards of the music industry, yet its manifesto for a "CHANGE IN LIFESTYLE!!!!!!!!!!" suggests a protest against market imperatives made in the name of personal style and private pleasures. The hippie mimes announced "OUR POLITICS IS HOW WE LIVE!", a conflation of lifestyle and political action that contemporary conservative evangelicals would happily endorse (119).

Democratic civic engagement resists that conflation even as it aspires to a common life forged in contentious debate and collective action. A commitment to citizenship requires participation in decisions about matters of public concern with people who in many cases don't live how we live. The civic as such—and citizenship as such—barely figures in the language of the people Kramer discusses, for whom such words might well have evoked the rhetoric of 1950s

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civics textbooks, with their heavy-handed emphasis on civic responsibility (not participation), national service (especially in the military), and respect for authority. What one finds in much of the evidence Kramer has uncovered is rather the language of romantic anticapitalism, stressing mutuality, community, spirituality, and love against the claims of commerce and the wartime state. Protecting the tribe, the commune, the small group, and authentic lifestyle is a different matter than civic engagement, and while the two are not incompatible the strains and affinities between the two approaches to collective action demand more careful scrutiny than they receive here. So does the tension between prophetic and democratic leadership, a distinction elided by Kesey and rock impresarios who rewired the consciousness of the young. Celebrity culture had much the same effect in promoting male guitar heroes with a cultlike following. Democratic accountability was not one of the counterculture's strengths.

Kramer is on firmer ground in identifying the "hope for communion" on both sides of the Wild West Festival controversy, a phrase that evokes more precisely than "citizenship" the yearning for meaning and fellowship that animated the counterculture (99). When such people entered into the political realm, they often did so in a spirit of "anti-politics," taking up the banner of values imperiled by power. Kramer invokes Vaclav Havel's reflections on the Czech Communist regime's trial and arrest of the Plastic Peoples of the Universe rock band in the 1970s as an opening to a "parallel polis" that made people aware of a realm of artistic freedom and happiness deserving of protections (229). But the difference between mid-century hip capitalism in the US and the un-hip late Stalinism of post-1968 Czechoslovakia is crucial. As Joan Holden wrote in *Ramparts* in the aftermath of the Wild West Festival protests, "You could probably start a revolution with rock music—if you could find someone to outlaw it" (quoted at 124).

War exerted a pressure on rock culture as close to outright censorship as anything Americans experienced in the 1960s. The Woodstock festival reverberated with antiwar protests, as red diaper baby Country Joe McDonald led the crowd in mocking the John Wayne warrior ethos in his "Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to Die-Rag." Jimi Hendrix inserted the roar of aerial bombing into his performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner." Then there was the rock beat pounding in Vietnam itself, a story Kramer tells in the stunning second section of his book. Much as war has inspired powerful critiques from generations of romantic–radical intellectuals in the US—think of Thoreau, Bourne, and Macdonald—the slaughter in Indochina made the "anti-politics" of the rock counterculture in Vietnam both tougher and more inclusive than its San Francisco counterpart. War is the health of romantic antistatism, even when wah-wah pedals are involved. Rock allowed draftees to express their fury at the lies of politicians and generals, provided a space to acknowledge emotional pain in a landscape of

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male bravura, and on occasion let them join Vietnamese rockers in pursuit of hippie humanism.

Rock was the soundtrack for Vietnam, as journalist Michael Herr observed many years ago.[13] Contrary to the storyline of the Robin Williams film "Good Morning Vietnam," DJs were free to play rock on the Armed Forces Radio Network, and the military sponsored rock performances for the troops. The unmonitored "bullshit band" of unused radio frequencies permitted circulation of rock songs and "pirate" shows. "Hip militarism" may have comforted GIs or stoked their anger before heading to combat. (Decades later the Air Force used "Rock the Casbah" by the left-wing punk band the Clash to gin up bomber pilots in Operation Desert Storm.) Yet the most popular rock musician among GIs in Vietnam was Hendrix, a black veteran-turned-hippie who served as "a kind of public intellectual for the counterculture." Hendrix's music took a chainsaw to the official gabble about "light at the end of the tunnel." His guitar solos screamed out the sounds of carpet bombings, search-and-destroy missions, and the agony of victims, while his singing evoked the confusion of draftees dropped into a civil war. Hendrix's "Machine Gun" and cover of Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower"—the only two songs to receive close readings in Kramer's book—provided a "feeling-experiment, an uncertain inquiry into the meaning" of war that fans understood as a political critique (146). Before performing "Machine Gun" at a Bay Area concert, Hendrix dedicated the song to the "soldiers fighting in Berkeley—you know what soldiers I'm talking about—and oh yeah, the soldiers fighting in Vietnam too" (147).

Hendrix was the rock hero of the "Woodstock Transnational," as Kramer calls the counterculture that stretched across the globe by the decade's end, but in South Vietnam Hendrix faced some competition from the Con Bà Cu (CBC) band, a group of Vietnamese family members who played covers of US rock songs at clubs and festivals (198). CBC was the most explicitly countercultural band on the Vietnamese scene: its members wore hippie clothes, worshipped John Lennon, and preached a gospel of love reminiscent of Haight–Ashbury in 1967. Two CBC musicians came to be known as the John and Yoko of Vietnam. The group won over a mixed fan base of GIs and Vietnamese civilians despite the suspicion of the South Vietnamese regime and the open hostility of the Viet Cong and its sympathizers—not to mention the vicious anti-Asian racism pervasive among American troops. Lead singer Phan Loan urged GIs preparing to leave "the 'Nam" to "take with you the understanding that someday, somehow, we must all come together as brothers and sisters bound together in the name of humanity to bring forth a peace universal to all" (quoted at 209). CBC members were not naive

[13] Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York, 1977).

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about the rock culture they helped create, however, or the US military presence that sustained it. "The United States must be the greatest paradox in the history of the world," Loan commented. "It puts out the best conceivable sounds in its music and the worst conceivable sounds in its weapons" (quoted at 207).

Weapons carried the day, of course, and the band fled the country before the fall of Saigon. Years of exile followed that included a protracted stay in a Tibetan monastery in India and eventually resettlement in the US. CBC is based today in Houston and plays 1960s classics to audiences with a heavy presence of Vietnam vets. The band's music may not have inspired citizenship so much as the fellow feeling among strangers that makes citizenship imaginable. One word for such fellow feeling is solidarity; the CBC band called it love.

And with a love like that, you know you should be glad.

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