"You Are Your Own Alternative": Performance, Pleasure, and the American Counterculture, 1965-1975

Mark Joseph Abraham

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Abstract

"You Are Your Own Alternative" examines influential countercultural groups in the 1960s and 1970s. In opposition to historians who dismiss the politics of the counterculture and blame the counterculture for contributing to the collapse of social movement activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, this dissertation highlights the intensely political and productive aspects of the counterculture. With case studies that focus on the Los Angeles Freaks, the San Francisco Diggers, the New York Yippies, and the lesbian feminists of Olivia Records, "You Are Your Own Alternative" demonstrates that the counterculture offered powerful political and performative challenges in this period. Countercultural activists valorized free expressions of sexuality; outlandishly adorned bodies; complex music; theatrical celebrations of community; and free access to collective resources like food, clothing, and health care. They staged participatory performance-based protests intended to seduce passersby into experiencing new paradigms of human interaction and expression. In joining in to act out, countercultural activists argued, new converts would discover, through performance and pleasure, their authentic selves.

But while "You are Your Own Alternative" emphatically argues that each of the four countercultural groups it examines was radical, progressive, political, and thoughtful about the way it conceptualized the dominant order and the performance-based methods of activism that could be used to resist that order, it also critiques these countercultural groups for the limitations of their vision; for their problematic politics of race, class, gender, and sexuality; and for their failure to move beyond narrowly advocating for what I call "alternative norms," which countercultural leaders suggested were simultaneously authentic and universal. The result is a set of arguments that casts new light on the counterculture and the changing nature of political protest and cultural resistance in the post-1960s era.

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Table of Contents

Introduction: "The Free Part of Each of Us"[1]

On 15 February 1969, the New York countercultural group Women's International Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH) staged its Bridal Un-Fair protest during a bridal fair held at Madison Square Garden.[2] In a 1968 manifesto, this "coven," which included Robin Morgan, Jo Freeman, Judith Duffett, Naomi Jaffe, Florika, and Peggy Dobbin, described WITCH as "an all-women Everything. It's theater, revolution, magic, terror, joy." The manifesto depicts witches as "nonconformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary":

> Witches…bowed to no man, being the living remnants of the oldest culture of all ... before the … Imperialist Phallic Society took over and began to destroy nature and human society.

WITCH summed up these ideas with a simple assertion: a witch was "the free part of each of us," a revolutionary impulse that "lives and laughs in every woman." In practice and language, WITCH played with classic witch iconography—hats, brooms, and hexes—but at heart the group asserted that a woman's true identity was joyous, pleasurable, and sisterly.[3]

WITCH described the Bridal Un-Fair as a hex. Through cultural performance and creative expression, WITCH asked women attending the fair to consider the emphasis the dominant order placed on a subordinate role for women in marriage and on the notion that women were allowed an "identity only as an appendage to a man." While not necessarily anti-marriage or anti-male, the Bridal Un-Fair celebrated the "unmarried girl" who was "considered a freak—a lesbian, or a castrating career girl, a fallen woman, a bitch, 'unnatural,' a frustrated old maid, sick."

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[1] WITCH, "New York Covens," reproduced in *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 539-540.

[2] See Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 97-98; Eva S. Moscowitz, *In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self-Fulfillment* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 211; Debra Michals, "From 'Consciousness Expansion' to 'Consciousness Raising': Feminism and the Countercultural Politics of the Self," in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 55; Stephen Voyce, *Poetic Community: Avant-Garde Activism and Cold War Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 178.

[3] WITCH, "New York Covens," 539-540.

According to WITCH, the reality was the opposite: "the bride is alone." American middle-class culture encouraged "vulnerable young girls to be dutiful, uncomplaining … brand-conscious consumers." Its imperatives, which WITCH labeled "empty Hollywood-Madison Avenue dreams," suppressed women's natural impulses for laughter and solidarity. What the dominant order labeled "unnatural" was, in fact, a natural, authentic identity for women.[4]

The protest was organized under the slogan "Confront the Whore-makers." The women of WITCH entered the fair wearing veils—some black and some fashioned out of dollar bills—and chanted "Here come the slaves / Off to their graves." As a culmination to the performance, WITCH released white mice on the bridal fair showroom floor, causing a stir among the women in attendance. Historian Alice Echols calls the protest "disastrous." Debra Michals, also a historian, suggests that it was organized with "absent-minded insensitivity." Participant Karla Jay later recalled that the protest was "antiwoman," though she was "thrilled by the boldness of the action." Even Morgan, the performance's architect, later reflected that it was poorly planned, alienating women who were not already young, hip, and Leftist: "we were dumb with style."[5]

Despite these criticisms, was the Bridal Un-Fair really and entirely unsuccessful? WITCH had formed within New York Radical Women (NYRW) in 1968; by early 1969, as the Bridal Un-Fair was being planned, NYRW's radical feminists, led by Shulamith Firestone and Ellen Willis, were splitting from the larger group to form the Redstockings, at least in part over disagreements with Morgan and WITCH.[6] Prior to the formation of WITCH, Morgan had been a Yippie; after leaving the male-led countercultural group due to sexism, she had drawn upon her experiences with countercultural ideologies and practices to help organize the NYRW's 1968

[4] WITCH, "Confront the Whoremakers at the Bridal Fair," reproduced in *Sisterhood*, 543-546.

[5] Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 98; Michals, "'Consciousness Expansion,'" 55; Karla Jay, *Tales of the Lavendar Menace: A Memoir of Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 38-39; Morgan, *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Random House, 1978), 72.

[6] Jane Addams, "Factionalism Lives," *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*, Feb. 1969, 10.

protest at the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City. Radical feminist critics of Morgan and WITCH argued that the goal of feminism should be to force men to give up their economic privilege; it was not the responsibility of women to change themselves or each other (or to label other women "whore" or "slave").[7] Historians of radical feminism like Echols have echoed this critique: that the "female counterculture" focused on "personal rather than social transformation." According to Echols, the choice to attack a cultural target was a choice to ignore economic divisions, class structure, and male supremacy.[8] In designing their ideology, however, WITCH activists certainly saw value in attacking culture and they did not see that goal as mutually exclusive with the goals of radical feminism and anticapitalist critique. In fact, WITCH operated comfortably within the mission statement of the NYRW, which claimed,

> We take as our source the hitherto unrecognized culture of women, a culture which from long experience of oppression developed an intense appreciation for life, a sensitivity to unspoken thoughts and … a powerful knowledge of human needs and feelings.

The purpose of the Bridal Un-Fair reflected quite directly this mission statement.[9]

My point here is not to definitively refute the reservations that the Redstockings had about the Bridal Un-Fair. Rather, it is to resituate the Bridal Un-Fair alongside a series of performative actions produced by a broader American counterculture. This counterculture was populated by a diverse and often fragmented group of activists who, in parallel, engaged in the construction of an effective and durable method of performance-based protest that targeted the primary social ill they believed plagued the United States of the 1960s and 1970s. In the words of Digger countercultural activist Peter Coyote, this ill was not "capitalism" or "Communism": "The problem was *culture*." Countercultural activists believed that making authentic "needs and

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[7] For example, see Carol Hanisch, "What Can Be Learned: A Critique of the Miss America Protest," in *Voices from Women's Liberation*, ed. Leslie Tanner (New York: Signet, 1970), 133-134.

[8] Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 5.

[9] New York Radical Women, "Principles," reproduced in *Sisterhood*, 520.

feelings" apparent for members of their countercultural public through performance was a critical process: effective communal political, social, and economic revolution could not occur without true individual liberation. These activists invited their countercultural publics, in everyday and extraordinary contexts, to, in the words of freak countercultural activists Miss Pamela and Cynderella, "Do what you want to do, because it's going to be too late soon."[10]

As WITCH's costumes suggest, countercultural activists saw their bodies as potent sites of resistance. According to freak fashion designer and countercultural activist Szou, "the minute they look at me, I convince them that I'm for real and I'm happy and they would love to be this way." Countercultural activist Jerry Rubin, a leader of the Yippies, agreed with Szou's sentiments when discussing the long hair worn by many countercultural men:

> Long hair polarizes every scene.… Everyone is forced to become an actor, and that's revolutionary in a society of passive consumers.… Our hair tells people where we stand on Vietnam.… We're living TV commercials for the revolution. We're walking picket signs.

Countercultural activists saw their embodied styles as critical components of revolutionary activism against a middle-class culture that denied diverse and creative expression.[11] Countercultural activism was therefore markedly different from the picket-based protests of the Old Left and the student activist groups of the New Left.[12]

The counterculture also argued against the New Left's embrace of Marxism in the late 1960s. For Rubin, Marxist interpretations of revolution seemed irrelevant: "Kids … post-1950s live in a world of supermarkets, color TV commercials, guerrilla war, international media,

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[10] Peter Coyote, interview by Robert Greenfield, in Bill Graham and Greenfield, *Bill Graham Presents: My Life Inside Rock and Out* (New York: De Capo Press, 1992), 186; Miss Pamela [Pamela Des Barres] and Cynderella [Cynthia Cale-Binion], interview by Unknown, "A GTO is an Average," *IT*, 18 June 1970, 4.

[11] Szou [Sueanne C. Shaffer], interview by Alan Whicker, in "Love Generation," *Whicker's World*, BBC, aired 9 Sept. 1967; Jerry Rubin, *Do It!: Scenarios of the Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 94-95.

[12] Countercultural activists believed that socially sanctioned protests tacitly accepted the attrition they believed characterized the relationship between moderate liberals and radical progressives. This formulation, though its intent was pejorative, anticipated what historians Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle would later describe as the New Deal order. See "Introduction," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930–1980*, ed. Fraser and Gerstle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), ix-xxiv.

psychedelics, rock 'n' roll, and moon walks." Pivoting off these ideas and capturing the excitement of possibility associated with new technological advances, new forms of cultural media, and new political and social uncertainty in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Rubin gleefully asserted, "For us *nothing is impossible.*" Rubin echoed the claim made by many countercultural activists between 1965 and 1975: "We create the revolution by *living* it."[13]

Other countercultural activists offered similar proscriptions. Frank Zappa of the freaks argued that true liberation and autonomy from the dominant order could only be achieved when a radical chose to "freak out" against constricting social etiquette and institutional imperatives. Peter Berg of the Diggers declared that an activist should "create the condition you describe" through "life-acting." Meg Christian of the Olivia Collective claimed that radical lesbian feminists should see themselves as "actresses" and "plays." Countercultural activists tied revolution and liberation to performance and action and linked individual autonomy with a willingness to expose one's personal desires in public and experience forms of pleasure that were suppressed by the dominant order—what Christian called "the hive" and Zappa called "plastic people." Breaking free from "the hive" meant experiencing pleasure. As Rubin argued, "Long hair is the beginning of our liberation from … sexual oppression." As Christian sang, liberation meant experiencing "the passions I've never known." Praxis hinged on the immediacy of action and experience. According to Rubin, "Revolution is not what you believe, what organization you belong to, or who you vote for—it's what you do all day, how you live." For these activists—and they *were* activists—the personal was political and the political was personal.[14]

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[13] Rubin, *Do It!*, 90-91, 113.

[14] Frank Zappa, liner notes, Mothers of Invention, *Freak Out!*, Verve/MGM V6/5005-2, 1966, 33⅓ rpm; Peter Berg, "Trip Without A Ticket," reproduced in *The Realist*, Aug. 1968, 3; Meg Christian, "Hello Hooray," *I Know You Know*, Olivia Records LF902, 1974, 33⅓ rpm; Christian, "The Hive," *I Know You Know*; Mothers of Invention, "Plastic People," *Absolutely Free*, Verve/MGM V-5013, 1967, 33⅓ rpm; Rubin, *Do It!*, 96; Christian, "Valentine Song," *I Know You Know*; Rubin, *Do It!*, 115.

Mapping the Politics of the Counterculture

"You are Your Own Alternative" offers a sustained account and critique of the performance-based strategies of resistance that were adopted by a set of influential countercultural groups of political activists between 1965 and 1975, highlighting these groups' intensely political and productive contributions to radical activism in this period. In focusing on these groups and identifying them as key actors within the "counterculture," I am suggesting a more precise definition of the counterculture than the one used by many other scholars and accepted by many people. "Counterculture" is often used far more broadly, as it was in 1968 when historian Theodore Roszak coined the term to encompass New Left radicals, sexual revolutionaries, LSD advocates, music fans, and hippies, along with groups like those studied in this dissertation.[15] The countercultural activists examined in the chapters that follow, however, would have balked at being lumped in or conflated with such a diverse set of individuals and groups.[16] For these activists, the counterculture was more specific and more radical, and not just a license to recreationally enjoy sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. Sex and rock music were, in fact, political. Drug use was often repudiated altogether. For example, freak Vito Paulekas argued that "discussions about taking LSD in order to make a special kind of person" disturbed him. Neither was the counterculture part of the New Left, which Zappa dismissed as a "beginner's carnival type of revolution" and Morgan accused of being as "blind as the System itself."[17]

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[15] Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

[16] While I generally think that historian Eric Zolov's assertion about the Mexican counterculture that the choice to embrace rock music and other countercultural trappings in the 1960s was "never neutral" also applies to the American counterculture, broadly defined, for reasons of clarity I have chosen to accept the more narrow definition as made by the countercultural activists studied in this dissertation. See *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 11.

[17] Vito Paulekas, interviewed in *Mondo Hollywood*, directed by Robert Carl Cohen (1968; Radical Films, 2005), DVD; Zappa, appearance at the University of Southern California's Festival of the Arts, quoted in John Lannan, "Frank Zappa," *SoCal*, 3 Mar. 1969, 4; Morgan, "Goodbye to All That," *Rat: Subterranean News*, 6 Feb. 1970, reproduced in *Going Too Far*, 123.

For this analysis, I have chosen to examine four countercultural groups: the freaks of Los Angeles, the Diggers of San Francisco, the Yippies of New York, and the Olivia Collective of Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles. I have defined "counterculture" as the members of these four groups did, at least tacitly: as local, community-based groups that emphasized culture as the primary site of radical dissent and viewed pleasure as the primary weapon against the imperatives of the dominant order. These groups were not the only ones that we might label "countercultural"; many others took root in the United States beginning in the mid-1960s.[18] The choice to examine these four groups is based partly on source material; partly on the fact that each developed a distinct, coherent, influential, and revealing ideology; and partly to allow the dissertation to examine changes in the counterculture over the course of a full decade.

"You are Your Own Alternative" argues that we need to take these countercultural activists seriously, on their own terms and from a variety of critical perspectives other than those generated by the New Left. The activists involved with the freaks, Diggers, Yippies, and Olivia engaged in the creation of several parallel ideologies and practices that situated revolutionary potential in the conscious choice to live life in a fashion that stymied the imperatives of the dominant order. They valorized creative expression, active revolution, and the subversion of middle-class cultural tropes. They repudiated the entrenched power of middle-class identity and culture. Their primary goal, in the recollection of Yippie Judy Albert, was "to rebel theatrically, to think outside the box, and to reach for the impossible"; to not "act like a trained seal," but rather to "to dig down and be honest." Honesty meant creative expression. According to freak Miss Christine, most people were "too plain, too simple." Countercultural activists asserted their

[18] For example: New York City's Bread and Puppet Theater (formed 1962-1963), Mississippi's Free Southern Theater (formed 1963), California's Merry Pranksters (formed 1964), California's El Teatro Campensino (formed 1965), the Black Arts Movement (formed 1965), Vietnam Veterans Against the War (formed 1967), New York City's Gay Activist Alliance (formed 1969), and Los Angeles' Chicano ASCO (formed in 1972).

own legitimacy as political beings through self-styled difference from those whom they labeled "straight": men often wore long hair and both men and women wore outlandish clothing. Clothing was an outward expression of inner desire. Pleasure—expressed through easily iterated slogans like "do it," "freak out," and "free"—was the most crucial weapon an activist could wield against the imperatives of a dominant order that, at every turn, attempted to suppress and deny the impulses and desires of individuals.[19]

Performance and pleasure were key, these activists argued, to individual and communal liberation from the imperatives of the dominant order. To start with, pleasure and performance were fun. As one contemporary observer argued, "The whole trouble with the New Left is that they're terribly intellectual and they're no fun." In a period marked by violent militarism, urban riots, police curfews, and political brutality, the notion that fun could be an alternative to the tactics of the New Left held real power. As Rubin argued, "Theoretical bullshit, boring meetings…. Who's going to give his life to a movement with that kind of come-on?"[20] Embracing "fun" and performing pleasure also required an important change in mindset that rejected structure and hierarchy. Albert later recalled her initial trouble with the idea:

> I couldn't really grasp the essence of ironic Yippie politics. What blocked me was my tendency to take everything literally; a survival mechanism, I've come to believe, left over from growing up in a Communist Party family…. highly political and very serious.

Of course, it would be disingenuous to suggest that Old and New Left activists never had fun; the important distinction here is that countercultural activists advocated for a politics of pleasure as a central component of their dissent. What could be more radical, they asked, than performing

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[19] Judy Albert, interview by Jonah Raskin, "Interview / Jonah Raskin: Judy Gumbo Albert, Yippie Girl," The Rag Blog, 17 Apr. 2012, http://www.theragblog.com/interview-jonah-raskin-judy-gumbo-albert-yippie-girl/; Miss Christine [Christine Frka], "Freak Fashion," *AUM*, Apr. 1969, 30.

[20] Peg Harman, interview by Naomi Feigelson, in *The Underground Revolution: Hippies, Yippies, and Others* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1970), 155; Rubin, *Do It!*, 115.

pleasure, in public, in a society that denied it?[21]

Countercultural activists asked this question out loud, in public, in order to capture the imaginations of their local, regional, and national communities. Their hope was that other people would join their performances. According to Digger Judy Goldhaft,

> What we did is we picked a certain amount of props and a certain amount of structure without demanding anything of anybody, and let people use whatever they wanted to do, to do whatever they wanted with the stuff, including take it.

As passersby participated in countercultural performances, they joined countercultural activists in creating new paradigms of human interaction based on shared countercultural identities. Countercultural performances were therefore conceptualized as eye-catching events that celebrated spontaneity and exciting displays of authentic feelings. As the Olivia Collective's Jennifer Woodul argued, "We should act from our … creativity and energy…. What we create, we control." The veneer of spontaneity, no matter how planned these performances often were, was important: Miss Pamela and Cynderella argued that doing was better than thinking, because thinking about inequality made them "depressed." Moreover, countercultural activists believed that their alternative style of life, based as it was on spontaneous exhalations of repressed desire, could not be rationally explained to a repressed, straight individual. Straight people needed these performative spaces where they could feel safe to express themselves and therefore uncover their "true" desires. In such performances, pleasure was framed not simply as a *want*; it was emphasized as the primary, authentic component of an individual's identity. Uncovering that pleasure was therefore critical to gaining autonomy in one's own life.[22]

As countercultural activists conceptualized it, pleasure resided most immediately in the body

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[21] Albert, "Red Diaper Yippie," Yippie Girl (Blog), n.d., http://yippiegirl.com/judy-gumbo/red_diaper_yippie.html.

[22] Judy Goldhaft, interview by Marty Lee and Eric Noble, "Interview of Peter Berg and Judy Goldhaft," The Digger Archives, 29 Apr. 1982, http://www.diggers.org/oralhistory/pb_jg_0482.htm; Jennifer Woodul, "Olivia Records," in *The New Women's Survival Sourcebook*, ed. Susan Rennie and Kirsten Grimstad (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 177; Des Barres and Cale-Binion, "A GTO is an Average," 5.

and bodies were therefore the most critical elements in performance-based protest. In all of the forms that it took—dance, theater, music, fashion, and sex—performance-based protest focused on the experiences of bodies. Countercultural activists argued that middle-class Americans had forgotten how to feel anything real; their tastes and fantasies were defined by repression. If communities of like-minded countercultural activists could perform their pleasure in public, the mere sight of countercultural bodies acting ecstatically, unpredictably, and enticingly would entrance straight people. Moreover, *if* a straight person could be made to move their body in a fashion that ran counter to the instincts instilled in them by the dominant order, a transcendent moment of clarity might be achieved—what the Diggers called changing one's "frame of reference." There was a circular sense to this. Performers would experience and act out their own autonomy while influencing others—as Olivia artist Cris Williamson put it, they were "the changer and the changed." To achieve this merger of individual and communal liberation, countercultural performances advocated free expressions of sexuality; outlandishly adorned bodies; complex music; theatrical celebrations of community; and free access to collective resources like food, clothing, and health care. Straight people who chose to participate were given the opportunity to interact with other members of their community in new ways and then asked to consider why these alternate forms of interaction and expression were not the norm.[23]

Countercultural activists exploited traditional forms of music, theater, and art to enhance their critiques of the dominant order. The typical structures of rock 'n' roll songs were cut up and rearranged by Zappa's band the Mothers of Invention to emulate the dissolution of the social order: extended sequences of atonal music or percussive solos inspired by avant-garde composers like Igor Stravinsky and Edgar Varèse were inserted at random. Zappa argued that the

[23] Unknown, "Diggers New Game: The Frame," *Berkeley Barb*, 4 Nov. 1966, 1; Cris Williamson, "Waterfall," *The Changer and the Changed*, Olivia Records LF804, 1975, 33⅓ rpm.

band's concerts were conceptualized as "bits of the environment, the sound of your transistor radio burped back at you, a panorama of American life." Both the Mothers of Invention and the artists of Olivia Records sought to refashion the concert experience to include their audience members, though the freaks and Olivia worked at the same problem from different angles. In the printed broadsides of the Diggers' Billy Murcott and the Yippies' Jim Fouratt, language and text were fashioned into mimeographed collages of cut up imagery. In men's and women's fashion, and especially in the creations of freaks like Szou and the GTO's in Los Angeles, the idea of collage was also prominent: clothing was often handmade from vintage finds and deliberately mismatched; high-end, used garments were paired with found objects. Similarly, theatrical performances could happen in the middle of the street, in crowded lobbies, and in public parks. In all cases, the notions of order and convention were subverted in the very structure of the performance. Collage—old meeting new and high meeting low—played a prominent role in how countercultural activists conceptualized their performances and their personal style.[24]

Each of the four groups I have chosen developed clear political agendas. The primary, shared focus of all four critiques was the culture of the dominant order and its attendant imperatives. The real power of that dominant order, these activists argued, lay in a decades-long program to repress pleasure: to silence the individual, authentic desires of Americans and replace them with socially sanctioned desires for a set of interchangeable imperatives. Culture, and specifically white middle-class culture, was seen by these countercultural activists as a placebo that the vast majority of Americans had settled for during the affluent period that followed World War Two. According to Digger Emmett Grogan, "Ours is going to be a revolt against power and against leaders and against property. We want it to be free, autonomous, and classlessly equal!

[24] Zappa, interview by Martin Kasindorf, "Zapping with Zappa," *Newsweek*, 3 June 1968, 91.

All of it!" With this critique, these countercultural groups called into question the primacy of the nuclear family, the fantasy of class mobility, and the emphasis the Great Society placed on the American Dream. The structural revolution called for by the New Left could not transform this order; it was only through the counterculture's performance-based activism that radicals could truly liberate themselves by experiencing true, untainted pleasure, and by discovering their natural and authentic selves.[25]

Countercultural activists argued that the dominant order worked to repress these natural and authentic identities. For the men involved with the freaks, Diggers, and Yippies, much of this critique centered on the way the dominant order had transformed American masculinity in the 1950s. The women involved in these same groups found ways to adapt this critique, which was often ambivalent about the role of women, to their own ends. For the women involved with the Olivia Collective, this critique centered on the way that patriarchal ideologies and practices denied women's pleasure. Because the priorities of the dominant order in the 1950s and early 1960s had been organized around the white middle class, the popular features of that class—suburban homes, the nuclear family, white-collar jobs, private property, and consumer goods—were the focus of the counterculture's ire. Many countercultural activists believed that the revolution was generational: middle-class parents were beyond hope, but their children could be shocked out of their complacency. Their parents' lifestyle was inorganic and inanimate. As freak rock group GTO's put it, "My father's a knob / And my mother's a tube." According to Zappa, "These people have no soul." Pleasure had to be performed, lived, and experienced to resist inorganic, inanimate, and soulless middle-class culture.[26]

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[25] Emmett Grogan, *Ringolevio: A Life Played for Keeps* (New York: Little, Brown, 1972), 451.

[26] GTO's, "T.V. Lives," *Permanent Damage*, Straight STS1059, 1969, 33⅓ rpm; Zappa, interview by Unknown, "Look Out Plastic People The Mothers Have Arrived," reproduced in "Freak Out! The Official News of the Mothers," *Los Angeles Free Press*, 9 Sept. 1966, 10.

The Counterculture in Historiography

In 2013, Yippie activist Nancy Kurshan recalled,

> We were really onto something and reached many more people than we're given credit for. Most Left history is written by people who were in what we considered the "straight Left." They were not fond of us then and they still aren't.

While the counterculture has received more sympathetic treatments in the past fifteen years, Kurshan's interpretation is not unjustified. According to the still dominant narrative of the history of the 1960s (broadly defined), the heroic social movements of the late 1950s and early 1960s, exemplified by civil rights and student activism and the work of SNCC and SDS, were followed by the divisive and destructive rise of radical protest, cultural nationalism, countercultural activism, and identity politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Historians of the counterculture are only just beginning to respond to this narrative by exploring the complexities of countercultural ideology, performance, and aesthetics. "You Are Your Own Alternative" aims to bring together the methods of political, social, and cultural history to add to this response and to more comprehensively contribute to our understanding of the American counterculture.[27]

Before the 1990s, political historians of the 1960s often merely mentioned the counterculture as a colorful footnote to the more important history of student activism and the New Left. Historians Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle refer to this phenomenon as "a canonical, Iliad-like narrative" where the counterculture "is extracted from (and then reinserted within) this rest of 1960s history." This approach was unfortunately aided by the fact that the counterculture can be hard to see: the relationship between the New Left and the counterculture *was* complex and porous, and their aims were often intertwined. Many people participated in both, sequentially or simultaneously. New Left and countercultural activists were

[27] Nancy Kurshan, interview by Jonah Raskin, "Interview / Jonah Raskin: 'Fearless' Yippie Pioneer Nancy Kurshan Battles Prison Behemoth," The Rag Blog, 28 Feb. 2013, http://www.theragblog.com/interview-jonah-raskin-fearless-yippie-pioneer-nancy-kurshan-battles-prison-behemoth/.

predominantly white, male, straight, and middle class; they were the beneficiaries of the Great Society's embrace of the Baby Boom, of the affluent postwar order, and of the increasing primacy of university education. Male participants in both were threatened by conscription for the Vietnam War. New Left and countercultural activists became politicized as the trajectories of social and cultural movements intersected in the 1960s: the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power, the antiwar movement, student activism, and hippie and bohemian culture. The New Left and the counterculture were beset by comprehensive and long-simmering (and necessary) critiques from black, Asian, Latino, Native, female, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and disability-rights activists who attacked the white, straight, male privilege that marked these movements. Members of both were, to various degrees, entranced by the same cultural developments that were often championed within the ranks of the counterculture: the growth of the San Francisco sound; the popularity of recreational drugs like LSD and marijuana; the increasing normalization of bohemian lifestyles, along with the flexible possibilities that such lifestyles offered for grooming and fashion choices; and the proliferation of progressive syndicals that celebrated local scenes and communities. Despite their mutual criticisms, New Left and countercultural activists frequently participated in protests alongside one another. All of this can make it difficult to see the counterculture and distinguish it from the New Left. Additionally, the ad hoc approach that countercultural groups often took to documentation means that they have left far fewer sources for historians to examine. "Hard to see," however, is not the same as "invisible." A careful examination of printed broadsides, record albums, personal interviews, and magazine articles—alongside the memoirs of various countercultural activists—gives us a clear look at the distinct ideologies and practices of various countercultural groups.[28]

[28] Braunstein and Doyle, "Introduction: Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s," in *Imagine Nation*, 7.

Another explanation for the lack of in-depth analysis of the counterculture in pre-1990s histories of the 1960s is the ambivalence that the authors of these histories felt about sexuality and pleasure as important subjects of historical inquiry. For example, Allen J. Matusow, in *The Unraveling of America*, offers a brief and critical overview of the counterculture before noting, "As the decade closed it became clear that drugs, sex, and rock and roll lacked intrinsic moral content." Additionally, these accounts tend to be ambivalent about the emphasis countercultural activists placed on active performance rather than rational debate. For example, Matusow opens an analysis on the intellectual underpinnings of the counterculture by joking that "few hippies read much" and Todd Gitlin, an SDS leader who later became a major chronicler of the 1960s, refers to the counterculture as "anti-political purists." Gitlin ends an account of an episode in which the Diggers interrupted a 1967 SDS meeting in Denton, Michigan, by suggesting that their "farcical" intervention derailed the conference. Gitlin's argument dismisses the criticism posed by the Diggers to SDS—according to Yippie Abbie Hoffman, who was also present, the Diggers challenged SDS activists to "Find out where you are, what you want to do, and go out and do it"—as nothing more than "stagecraft and menace." In Gitlin's view, stagecraft and menace might be powerful—even enviable—qualities, but they were politically empty.[29]

Conclusions like Gitlin's and Matusow's—that the counterculture was merely a casually-politicized segment of hippie culture with no real depth—are founded primarily on the superficial assumption that all radicals and all forms of protest must be comprehensible within the conventional frameworks of political and social history. At best, these accounts present the contributions of the counterculture as a series of interestingly articulated cultural ideas that were well intentioned but ultimately apolitical. At worst, they suggest that the counterculture played a

[29] Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 303, 277; Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987), 208, 228-229; Abbie Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It* (New York: Dial, 1968), 35.

role in the demise of the New Left and the fracturing of the Movement into movements; the pleasures valorized by the counterculture were pleasures that distracted true radicals from the serious business of committed political organizing. Viewed through this lens, the New Left was engaged in serious politics and organizing as the apparent heir to a rich tradition of political organizing and American radical protest. Meanwhile, the counterculture, concerned as it was with embodiment, pleasure, and fun, was nothing more than an offshoot or a subset of the New Left that engaged in subversion for subversion's sake. For example, historian David Steigerwald argues that the counterculture "confused cultural revolution with political change." Even more recently, historians Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin ignore the Diggers while suggesting that the Haight-Ashbury was "a village with no moral center" and argue that the Yippies were "apostles of comic revolution" and that "hardly any" of what they said "was serious." In these accounts, countercultural activists are either rendered invisible or portrayed as nihilistic anti-authoritarians, indulging their own desires at the expense of the broader movement.[30]

While this position softened among political and social historians during the 1990s, as scholars began to highlight some of the positive contributions of the counterculture, many accounts continued to privilege the New Left. Historian Edward P. Morgan, for example, argues, "at its best, the counterculture was a conscious statement of opposition" and that its "rejection of politics was implicitly political," but concludes that ultimately the politics of the counterculture were merely "a politics of style." This "politics of style" had implications for the New Left,

[30] David Steigerwald, *The Sixties and the End of Modern America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 186; Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 159, 233. See also William L. O'Neill, *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960s* (New York: Times Press, 1971); Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS: The Rise and Development of Students for a Democratic Society* (New York: Random House, 1973); W. J. Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War: The 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); David Chalmers, "The Struggled for Social Change in 1960s America: A Bibliographic Essay," *American Studies International* 30, no. 1 (1992): 41-64; Eugene Alonzo Smith III, "With the Counterculture: The Creation, Transmission, and Commercialization of Cultural Alternatives During the 1960s" (Ph.D. diss., Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburg, 2003).

certainly, in that it emphasized the notion that the personal was political, but the consensus of accounts that share Morgan's view is that the counterculture was only political insofar as it raised this notion within earshot of the New Left. Similarly, historian Stewart Burns argues that though the counterculture influenced the New Left and had parallel values and goals, ultimately the latter was the "bona fide social movement" for young activists.[31]

By the late 1990s, increased sympathy for the counterculture began to bloom into an argument that the counterculture was, itself, a political movement. Historian James J. Farrell, for example, argues that the New Left and the counterculture were "yin and yang" and that "for all of its flakiness, the counterculture threatened conventional American culture." But while accounts like Farrell's accept the counterculture's argument that culture was a political force, they still often attempt to understand it in exclusively political or social terms. For the most part, the emphasis the counterculture placed on sexuality, the body, and pleasure is barely remarked upon and certainly not analyzed through the lens of cultural history or the history of genders and sexualities. Instead, these accounts seem to want to constitute the counterculture in terms that historians of the New Left might understand, adopting the language of political and social history to showcase either a specific countercultural group or a cross section of the counterculture—normally a selection of cherry picked examples from Roszak's broad definition of "counterculture"—as political movements for whom culture was a primary preoccupation. These accounts are crucial stepping-stones for historians looking to assess the counterculture on its own terms, but they tend to present the counterculture fairly uncritically, praising its distinctness from

[31] Edward P. Morgan, *The Sixties Experience: Hard Lessons about Modern America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 173–75, 212; Stewart Burns, *Social Movements of the 1960s: Searching for Democracy* (Boston: Twayne, 1990), 91-99. See also Jack Whalen and Richard Flacks, *Beyond the Barricades: The Sixties Generation Grows Up* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Paul Lyons, *New Left, New Right, and the Legacy of the Sixties* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Doug Rossinow, "The New Left in the Counterculture: Hypotheses and Evidence," *Radical History Review* 67 (Winter 1997): 79-120.

the New Left while ignoring its failings as a diverse, progressive, and egalitarian movement.[32]

More recently, historians and scholars in other disciplines have begun to produce a wide range of important, valuable, and inspiring work that examines the counterculture from a variety of angles and methodologies. This work has been critical not only in promoting the counterculture to a place of importance in the historiography but also in capturing more of the diversity of countercultural experiences in the 1960s. Julie Stephens offers the counterculture as evidence of a shift in politics towards postmodernism towards the end of the 1960s. Bradford D. Martin and Susanne Elizabeth Shawyer attempt to place the counterculture in the history of various radical art traditions. Kathryn Kerr Fenn, Tim Hodgdon, and Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo examine gender identities within the counterculture. Jill Katherine Silos focuses on the emphasis that certain countercultural groups placed on public space. Michael J. Kramer argues that the broader counterculture used rock music to grapple with notions of citizenship and democracy.[33] The specific focuses of these accounts, however, while greatly expanding our knowledge of the counterculture on its own terms, have largely left comparative analyses of

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[32] James J. Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties: The Making of Postwar Radicalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 227, 229. See also Michael William Doyle, "The Haight-Ashbury Diggers and the Cultural Politics of Utopia, 1965–1968" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, Ithaca, 1997); David McBride, "On the Fault Line of Mass Culture and Counterculture: A Social History of the Hippie Counterculture in 1960s Los Angeles" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1998); Dominick Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past: The Sixties in American History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Counterculture, Business Culture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). The essays contained in Braunstein and Doyle, *Imagine Nation*, tend to fluctuate between this approach and an attempt to accept the counterculture in terms of cultural politics.

[33] Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Bradford D. Martin, *The Theatre is in the Street: Politics and Performance in Sixties America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); Susanne Elizabeth Shawyer, "Radical Street Theatre and the Yippie Legacy: A Performance History of the Youth International Party, 1967-1968" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Austin, 2008); Kathryn Kerr Fenn, "Daughters of the Revolution, Mothers of the Counterculture: Rock and Roll Groupies in the 1960s" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, Durham, 2002); Tim Hodgdon, *Manhood is the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities, 1965-83* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009); Jill Katherine Silos, "Everybody Get Together: The Sixties Counterculture and Public Space, 1964-1967" (Ph.D. diss., University of New Hampshire, Durham, 2003); Michael J. Kramer, *The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

different countercultural groups and chronological analyses of their place in the history of the 1960s and 1970s unexplored.[34]

"You Are Your Own Alternative" argues that the methodology of cultural history, aided by the work of scholars interested in the ways that class, race, gender, sexuality, and (dis)ability inform and transform how individuals and communities interpret themselves and the worlds around them, allows us to see the American counterculture in more compelling and more revealing ways, in terms of both how countercultural activists practiced dissent and how the techniques they contributed to radical toolkits have been adopted and deployed by activist groups since the mid-1970s. At the same time, comprehending political groups that were obsessed with culture and placing them within their social milieu requires a merger of the techniques of political, social, and cultural historians, drawing upon all of the strands in this historiography to comprehensively grasp the critique of American countercultural activists: it was American culture itself that stunted an individual's freedom, drive, and pleasure. The only way to foment revolution was to attack the claustrophobic, limiting effects that American culture had on human desires, relationships, and identities.

The Context of the Counterculture

The American counterculture emerged in the mid-1960s against a backdrop of direct and indirect inspirations. First, their aesthetic values were influenced by a host of postmodern American and European radical artists, many of whom lived or had lived locally in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York. For example, the use of collage in music, art, and fashion had roots in the

[34] This issue is less true of several monographs on the art of the broader counterculture, though these volumes are far less specific about the meaning of "counterculture." See Christopher Grunenberg and Jonathan Harris, eds., *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis, and Counterculture in the 1960s* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005); Christopher Gair, *The American Counterculture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Elissa Auther and Adam Lerner, eds., *West of Center: Art and the Countercultural Experiment in American, 1965-1977* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

emphasis that Dadaism and surrealism placed on the use of found objects and juxtaposition. Many Dadaists called New York's radical art scene home: this included World War Two refugees like Dadaist Marcel Duchamp and, for a time, his colleague Max Ernst, as well as the homegrown American artists they influenced like Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Surrealist Salvador Dalí had worked in Hollywood in the 1930s and 1940s. Similarly, the language and the sense of narrative deployed by countercultural activists often echoed the approach of Theater of the Absurd playwrights. While the specific connections between these artists and countercultural activists will be explored more thoroughly in the appropriate chapters, directly and indirectly, countercultural artists adapted the shared emphasis that all of these artists placed on performances that intended to make audiences feel uneasy by pushing and pulling against a secure sense of complacency. At the same time, countercultural activists also found inspiration in the humor of comics like Lenny Bruce; in the music of jazz, blues, folk, and rock musicians; and in the work of contemporary choreographers. As their visible and audible styles and aesthetics might have suggested, countercultural activists were inspired by a diverse collage of popular and high culture. This sensibility extended to the way they conceptualized their own bodies as sites of resistance: in drawing on a collage-driven sense of style and fashion, countercultural activists worked to make their own bodies culturally unintelligible by the standards of the dominant order, both to capture the essence of their critique in a visible way and to legitimize their argument that they were, in fact, real. In this sense, they styled themselves as the piece of the collage that "stood out" in Zappa's "panorama of American life."[35]

Second, the counterculture was influenced and inspired by the intellectual work of theorists

[35] Zappa, "Zapping with Zappa," 91. For a broader look at postmodern art in this period, see Sylvia Harrison, *Pop Art and the Origins of Post-Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Pamela M. Lee, *New Games: Postmodernism After Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2012). In analyzing the counterculture's emphasis on the body, much of my thinking is inspired by Rosemarie Garland Thompson, ed., *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

like Herbert Marcuse and Abraham Maslow, who championed many of the same issues that motivated the counterculture. In broad terms, Marcuse's critique of capitalism influenced activists across the New Left. Marcuse also made arguments that more specifically anticipated the counterculture. He claimed that the new technological society had decreased the array of experiences within which individuals might experience pleasure:

> A whole dimension of human activity and passivity has been de-eroticized. The environment from which the individual could obtain pleasure—which he could cathect as gratifying almost as an extended zone of the body—has been rigidly reduced. Consequently, the "universe" of libidinous cathexis is likewise reduced.

The effort of the dominant order—to preoccupy people with inauthentic sexual stimulation—was intended to suppress their critical faculties, which Marcuse called "repressive desublimation." To counteract this repression, Marcuse advocated for an oppositional culture which presented a set of values that ran counter to those of the dominant order: sexual permissiveness, mind-altering drugs, youth culture, and local communities. Though no countercultural activist would have used Marcuse's terminology, the counterculture's notion that the experience of personal pleasure and political autonomy went hand in hand echoed Marcuse's argument. The counterculture tapped into this desire for something different and outside the mainstream by advocating for alternative social behaviors, for the experience of pleasure, and for an interrogation of postwar American values. Similarly, the counterculture, and especially the Yippies—Hoffman had been a student of both Marcuse *and* Maslow—embraced Maslow's notion of self-actualization, as well as his argument that thwarted "love needs" were the basis for most "maladjustment." Directly or indirectly, countercultural activists were inspired by these and similar theories, against the backdrop of the broader sexual revolution, to argue that the performance of pleasure was the only

possible method to reveal that the dominant order was, in Marcuse's words, "a rigged game."[36]

Third, the counterculture emerged in a period when the use of popular culture for political dissent was becoming increasingly mainstream. A popular folk musician like Bob Dylan might be the most famous example of this trend, but the increasing disposable incomes wielded by teenagers and students combined with the popularization of dissent in the 1960s to create demand for records and books from artists and authors with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints. Major U.S. cities like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Francisco were home to radical theater companies, progressive artists, and rock 'n' roll musicians, as well as music venues, coffee houses, and bars where young men and women could experience poetry, music, and other performances. Poets and artists like Allen Ginsberg and Andy Warhol became cultural celebrities, both for their creative output and for their roles in fostering alternative cultures. The templates that these groups—some old, some new—provided for the counterculture were invaluable. At the same time, a broad demand for this type of material created an environment where the more specific and radical goals of the counterculture seemed less off the beaten path than they might have otherwise. As journalist Thomas Frank argues, "the glorious cultural flowering" of the broader youth counterculture "quickly became mainstream itself." The countercultural groups examined in this dissertation were not, perhaps, the focus of corporate businesses and Hollywood tastemakers, but they still benefitted from what Frank calls "hip consumerism." At the same time, they were forced to re-articulate their own politics against what they saw as the co-optation of their subversive politics.[37]

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[36] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), 76; Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50 (1943): 370-396, at 381; Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, 257. See also Moscowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*, who convincingly argues that countercultural ideologies were inspired by contemporary psychology, therapy, and theories of the self.

[37] Frank, *The Conquest of Cool*, 5. See also Liz Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

Fourth, while the counterculture was often critical of the New Left, it was clearly influenced by it, as well as other crucial political and social movements of the period: the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power, the sexual revolution, and later women's liberation, gay liberation, and radical feminism. Whether conceptualizing their ideologies in opposition to or in concert with these other political movements—or responding to criticisms from these other movements—countercultural activists participated actively in contemporary debates surrounding the critique of oppression and injustice; the challenge to dominant society; the celebration of freedom, equality, and liberation; the emphasis on public protest and political action; the scope and meaning of individual and communal politics; the correct way to "perform" protests; and the roles of organizational hierarchies and leadership in radical movements. Countercultural activists were invested in these arguments because they felt their conclusions and resolutions had real stakes, and they advanced their vision of politics not as an alternative to other methods of protest, but as the solution to real political, social, economic, and cultural inequalities.[38]

All of that said, "You are Your Own Alternative" resists the idea that we should understand the counterculture exclusively in a tradition of American radicalism, in a tradition of radical theater, or in a tradition of American anarchism. It does not deny that there are important links and threads that run through the ideology and praxis of countercultural activism, but the

[38] On the New Left, see James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); Gitlin, *The Sixties*; Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War American and the Making of a New Left* (New York: Verso, 1993); John McMillan and Paul Buhle, eds., *The New Left Revisited* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005). On the Civil Rights Movement, see Jacqueline Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History*, 91 (Mar. 2005): 1233-1263. On Black Power, see Peniel E. Joseph, ed., *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006). On women's liberation and radical feminism, see Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*; Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: Free Press, 2003). On gay liberation, see Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp, "Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19 (Fall 1993): 573-578; Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

counterculture, as it existed from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, is as important for its discontinuity with those traditions as it is for the ways it worked to build upon them. New media, new cultural conventions, and new developments in art, theater, and music informed the methods and strategies of the counterculture. Members of various countercultural groups thought critically about these things and assessing the way they put these ideas into practice unveils a rich and radical approach to performance-based dissent.

Exploring the Multiplicity of the Counterculture

The four groups studied in this dissertation function as case studies on how different collections of individuals interpreted a shared set of values and imperatives: a desire to express identity in a fashion that the dominant order might deem nonconformist, a faith in the intertwined nature of pleasure and identity, a belief in the power of performance and experience, and a suspicion of the middle-class culture from which most (but not all) countercultural activists came. These four countercultural groups were urban, coastal, and influential, and they all privileged performance-based protest. Even within this limited set of case studies—one that ignores back-to-the-land collectives, for example—there is multiplicity.

The first chapter looks at the Los Angeles freaks, a group of musicians and dancers that formed in 1965 in West Hollywood. The freaks coalesced around the choreography of sculptor Vito Paulekas and the music of the band Mothers of Invention. The freaks emphasized the role of the body in dance and ecstatic motion—Zappa's "freak out"—as a key factor in experiencing pleasure and autonomy. They advocated that their adherents adopt wild clothing and hairstyles to enhance the public's perception of a group freak out. The freaks were influenced by the Theatre of the Absurd, by a legacy of American fringe artists and composers, and by rock 'n' roll music. Despite some dissension in their ranks, they generally repudiated the use of hallucinogens and

other drugs, arguing that true liberation should be a sober experience. They focused on middle class cultural iconography in their arguments against conformity and the dominant order. The freaks dissolved due to internal frictions and the growing notoriety of the Mothers of Invention as a popular rock 'n' roll band in late 1967.

The second chapter examines the San Francisco Diggers, a street theater group that was formed in 1966 in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. The Diggers were created by a group of San Francisco Mime Troupe players who became disenchanted with Mime Troupe founder R.G. Davis's rigid adherence to traditionally staged performances. The Diggers emphasized the body as a site of revolutionary pleasure. They understood "stage" in unconventional ways, pointing to traffic intersections, public parks, and notable buildings as spaces where individuals could change their "frame of reference" simply by participating in a performance. Their goal was to transform the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood into a countercultural public by asking its residents to behave in ways that subverted constricting municipal conventions. Though they shared the freaks' emphasis on experiencing pleasure in the moment, the Diggers saw pleasure more cerebrally: they argued that music, food, clothing, and public spaces should, as crucial components of the human and communal experience, be free, and worked to confront the expectations of citizens who accepted the primacy of private property to reconsider their relationship to material goods. Digger leaders critiqued the emphasis that fellow denizens of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood placed on hallucinogens and resisted the attempts of local business to commodify the hippie aesthetic. The chapter ends with the dissolution of the Diggers in mid-1968 as the resources of the Haight-Ashbury community became strained due to an influx of runaways and weekend partiers.

The third chapter explores the New York Yippies, a performance-based protest group that formed at the end of 1967 in the Lower East Side. The Yippies worked to expand the influence of the counterculture onto the national stage by exploiting national media's interest in the hippie phenomenon. The Yippies were fascinated by the ability of mass media to report on and transmit images of their performance-based protests to a national audience. They worked to position the counterculture as an alternative to the organizing principles of the New Left. The Yippies were less concerned with the personally transformative aspects of experience that preoccupied the freaks and Diggers; instead, they argued that American youth were already living the revolution by embracing new styles of dress, art, and cultural media. The Yippies celebrated an unambiguous embrace of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. They saw their own role as working to unite young men and women across the country to a common purpose; to do so, they encouraged like-minded radicals to form Yippie chapters in their own cities. This chapter follows the Yippies through their participation in the 1968 National Democratic Party Convention protests.

The fourth chapter examines the Olivia Collective, the lesbian feminist collective that established Olivia Records, one of the first independent music labels, which was formed in 1973 in Washington, D.C. Olivia serves as an example of how a lesbian countercultural group was able to adapt and transform the politics of the 1960s counterculture in the 1970s. The Olivia Collective argued that lesbian identity was suffocated by a dominant order that either denied its existence or punished its expression. For these women, constructing a feminist counterculture—and a feminist economic strategy—was necessary to help women come out, share, and experience pleasure in encouraging spaces. The Olivia Collective conceptualized their records and concerts in much the same way as the countercultural groups that had proceeded them: as performances or experiences in which the audience played a role and as spaces where women

could experience lesbian or women's culture for the first time. These woman-only spaces were meant to celebrate pleasure, desire, and community. This chapter follows the Olivia Collective from their early struggles to defend their "capitalist business" within the lesbian feminist community to their eventual ascendency as one of the primary producers of women's music in the mid-1970s. My inclusion of the Olivia Collective, which is not generally considered in scholarship on the counterculture, reflects my interest in broadening our chronological understanding of the counterculture and also my interest in examining what happened when activists who were marginalized in groups like the freaks, Diggers, and Yippies took up the ideas and practices of the 1960s counterculture. The Olivia Collective is one of several important and illustrative examples of this phenomenon.

Towards a New History of the Counterculture

Popular memory—and especially popular narratives of the late 1960s—has often treated the dawn of 1970 as a dramatic end to the political and cultural tumult of the 1960s. This follows what many historians have called the "rise and fall" or "declension" narrative: the political unrest of the late 1960s was a natural response to the conformity of the 1950s, but after a series of political traumas in 1968, things began to fall apart for the New Left. The counterculture's place in this narrative has shifted over time, but it too is often remembered as an exclusive feature of the late 1960s. This history often features the same beats. After Woodstock seemed to validate the legacy of the Summer of Love in 1969, the brutality of the Hell's Angels towards black audience members at the Altamont concert later that year quickly put a damper on the dream of large, communal music festivals. The New Left had splintered into a number of self-interest groups and in some cases had transformed into violent revolutionaries like the Weather Underground; this fracture was precipitated in part by the influence of the broader

counterculture, as once-motivated activists became entranced by sex, drugs, and rock and roll. As the 1970s dawned, the political, economic, and cultural rationales for New Left and countercultural activism seemed less immediate as mainstream culture became more permissive. John Lennon cut his hair. Richard Nixon was now president. Four students were shot during a protest at Kent State. Not only had the New Left met its apparent demise, but also the conservative, silent majority had reasserted its power. The grand dreams and energies of the 1960s gave way to the "me" decade.[39]

As Carl Boggs argues, this narrative confuses "the collapse of the SDS with the broader legacy of both the New Left and the counterculture rooted in some enduring oppositional processes at work in American society." Elaborating on this notion, historians have begun to offer a more nuanced take on the transition, arguing that while 1968 and 1969 proved to be incredibly eventful years, there are continuities that extend through the 1970s. This, too, applies to the counterculture, and "You are Your Own Alternative" seeks to contribute to this effort to re-periodize the 1960s and 1970s by challenging the narrative of the rise and fall of the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left that dominate histories of the period. Though the brevity of the lifespan of many of these countercultural groups may seem to undermine the argument I have made for their importance, we can see examples of the ideas and strategies of performance-based activism extending well into the 1970s. The Olivia Collective is one example of this continuity and speaks to the centrality of the counterculture in terms of the effects of the 1960s revolutionary spirit on the 1970s and later decades. The radical perspective that the counterculture had on performance and pleasure as lynchpins of the effort to liberate bodies from their imprisonment by the dominant order was refashioned by the Olivia Collective in a process

[39] On the "declension hypothesis," see Rick Perlstein, "Who Owns the Sixties? The Opening of a Scholarly Generation Gap," *Lingua Franca* 6 (May/June 1996): 30-37, at 32.

that extended the promise of radical feminism and lesbianism to women across the country. This effort complicates the predominant view of the 1970s as a decade where the individual was privileged over the community and speaks to the enduring legacy of countercultural performance-based activism.[40]

"You are Your Own Alternative" seeks to clarify this legacy of the counterculture by exploring how the ideas and experiences of countercultural activists who were active at a fertile moment in the history of the American left were able to provide a template for future generations of independent artists and musicians, radical performers, and cultural anarchists. And though the initial wave of the counterculture was limited in its effectiveness due to its lack of diversity, the success of the Olivia Collective demonstrates that, at least when stripped from its white, straight, and male roots, the ideology of the counterculture could be adapted into a valuable tool for all American activists to deploy against the repression of the dominant order.

[40] Carl Boggs, "Rethinking the Sixties Legacy," in *Social Movements: Critiques, Concepts, Case-Studies*, ed. Stanford M. Lyman (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 333. On revisions to this strict interpretation of the chronology of "the sixties" see, for example, Alice Echols, "'We Gotta Get Out of This Place': Notes Toward a Re-Mapping of the Sixties," *Socialist Review* 92 (Spring 1992): 9-33; Gosse and Richard Moser, eds., *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003); Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*; Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making American Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

1: "The Fire in the Heart": The West Hollywood Freaks, 1964-67[1]

On 12 March 1966, Los Angeles rock 'n' roll band Mothers of Invention invited fellow freaks to join them at TTG Recording Studios on the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Highland Avenue. The freaks, a loosely organized radical dance troupe, joined the band to create an improvised piece of music that became the final track on the Mothers of Invention's debut album, *Freak Out!*. Frank Zappa, the band's composer, had an ambitious goal for the album: it would be a freak manifesto, offering a sense of the local freak culture to those who lived beyond the boundaries of Greater Los Angeles. This particular track, "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet," was especially important: if the lyrics of *Freak Out!*'s other songs more explicitly detailed the grievances the freaks had with the United States in the mid-1960s, this recording was designed to capture the vitality and audacity of a freak performance—what freaks called a "freak out"—for a non-local and non-present audience.[2]

Over 200 people crammed into the studio to spend the early morning hours between 2:00 and 5:00 a.m. attempting to capture an authentic freak out on tape. Freak guru and choreographer Vito Paulekas and his protégé Carl Franzoni—lauded as the quintessential freak—were both present. Paulekas, Zappa, and Franzoni had assumed a loose, collective leadership within the freak scene. Musically-trained guests included future Runaways mastermind Kim Fowley; jazz pianist Les McCann; drummer Michael Clarke of the Byrds; blues guitarist Paul Butterfield; blues keyboardist Mac "Dr. John" Rebenack; and Corey Wells and Danny Hutton, soon to front the rock band Three Dog Night. "The Mother's Auxiliary" was rounded out by future British comedy troupe Monty Python member Terry Gilliam, session musicians, local artists, and a large

[1] Mothers of Invention, "Trouble Every Day," *Freak Out!*, Verve/MGM V6/5005-2, 1966, 33⅓ rpm.

[2] See Frank Zappa's liner notes, written in a two-month period between these recording sessions and the album's June release. After a lengthy explanation of freak ideology, Zappa says, "We would like to encourage everyone who HEARS this music to join us." Mothers of Invention, *Freak Out!*.

group of young freaks. Also present was Jeannie Vassoir, voice of the fictional "Suzie Creamcheese," a character Zappa had created as a symbol of the repressed middle-class youth of America, her surname a reference to a bland, white, generic product of the United States.[3]

As the tape rolled, the freaks howled, moaned, cheered, and shouted along to the main riff of Richard Berry's rock 'n' roll song "Louie Louie." This mostly wordless performance offered a freak vision of liberation in the United States in the 1960s to Creamcheese. Zappa saw the character as an essentially American caricature:

> An American perennial virgin type with the sort of white, pleated skirt and perhaps some rolled stockings going down into some loafer shoes and maybe a little sweater with a pin on it.

Creamcheese symbolized the freaks' view of the middle class. A product of 1950s affluence, she was weighed down by the imperatives of the dominant order that were the targets of freak countercultural activism: suburban geographies, workplaces and wages, familial obligations, gendered expectations, and the repression of sexuality and the body. According to a letter attributed to her on the back cover of *Freak Out!*, Creamcheese had been warned by her teachers and friends to fear these "crazy" freaks who wore "beads" and "smelled bad." During the course of "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet," however, Creamcheese gives in to the prodding of her conscience, voiced by Zappa, and joins the freaks in their celebration. Like the plastic monster-shaped toy magnet referenced in the song's title, Creamcheese cannot resist the freaks' magnetic pull; infatuated with their movement and sound, she joins in and discovers, just as Paulekas, Franzoni, and Zappa promised potential converts, that being a freak was liberating.[4] The song presents a story of Creamcheese's unconscious, authentic desires. Acquiescing to the imperatives of the dominant order had stripped Americans of their individuality and creativity.

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[3] On those who participated, see the liner notes for the archival reissue of *Freak Out!*, Zappa, *The Making Of Freak Out! Project/Object An FZ Audio Documentary*, Zappa Records ZR20004, 2006, compact disc.

[4] Mothers of Invention, "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet," *Freak Out!*.

Only the freaks could offer the true liberation—what Zappa termed "social emancipation"—that all "straight" Americans unconsciously desired.[5]

This performance offers us a glimpse of this extraordinary event as well as one of our few looks at freak performance in action. Paulekas, a sculptor, had initially conceived of this performance style after becoming infatuated with the popular beat- and psychedelic-rock 'n' roll of local bands like the Byrds and Love that emerged in Los Angeles in 1964. Attracted to the increasingly complex and freeform approach that these musicians were taking to composition and performance, Paulekas adopted rock as the perfect music for his choreography, called "planned anarchy," which combined elements of the theatre of the absurd, sculptural techniques, and popular approaches to contemporary dance to emphasize bodily expression and free movement as a political method of protest. Dressed in colorful and revealing outfits, the freaks would stream onto the dance floor of a club on the Sunset Strip and dance with expressive, exaggerated movements.[6] Unfortunately, aside from fleeting snippets of videotape, most of the traces that we have of these typical freak outs are broad, generic descriptions from the participants. Consequently, "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" provides our most direct access to what a freak out was like.[7]

Michael Vosse, a writer for the magazine *Teen Set* who attended the recording session, highlights the excitement felt by those who attended this freak out.

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[5] Zappa, interview by Unknown, KBEY-FM Kansas City, MO, 22 Oct. 1971, available as "Suzy Creamcheese (What's Got Into You?)," *The Making of Freak Out!*; Zappa, Mothers of Invention, *Freak Out!*.

[6] On Paulekas's work to support the local rock 'n' roll scene, see Barry Miles, *Zappa: A Biography* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 98-99. On the Los Angeles rock 'n' roll scene in general, see Barney Hoskyns, *Waiting for the Sun: Strange Days, Weird Scenes, and the Sound of Los Angeles* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1999). On "planned anarchy," see Carl Franzoni, interview by David Fricke, liner notes, *The Making Of Freak Out!*.

[7] For generic descriptions of Sunset Boulevard "typical" freak outs, see Miss Pamela [Pamela Des Barres], *I'm with the Band—Confessions of a Groupie* (Chicago: Chicago Review, 1991), 79-81; Franzoni, interview by John Trubee, "Last of the Freaks: The Carl Franzoni Story," *Scram*, 2003, as well as the longer transcription of the full interview, http://www.united-mutations.com/f/franzoni_trubee_int_nov2002.htm.

> It went on for hours and everybody participated—some singing, some moaning, others popping gum into speakers—I don't think there has ever been anything like it!

Vosse's emphasis on the collective participation of the individuals in attendance is reinforced by Zappa's description of the event in *Freak Out!*'s liner notes: "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" is "what freaks sound like when you turn them loose in a recording studio at one o'clock in the morning on $500 worth of rented percussion equipment." Zappa's casual tone here suggests that he simply pushed "record," cued the participants, and let the tape roll—that "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" was essentially a field recording of freak spontaneity.[8]

But even a cursory listen to "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" reveals that Zappa had an artistic vision for the track that was not rooted in preserving the integrity of a spontaneous performance. On the album, "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" is a side-long 12-minute multi-section avant-garde rock/pop track featuring samples of lion growls and coital exhalations, tape loops and edits, and piano alongside the freaks' vocal and percussive contributions, which themselves, even for the untrained ear, are subject to extensive tape manipulations, overdubbing, and editing. Still, to create the sound of this freak out, Zappa harnessed various familiar elements—the distinctive noise of Paulekas's full-bodied exhalations as he taught his dance classes, Franzoni's shouts, the screams and hollers of freaks on the dance floor—to augment his own interest in avant-garde music.[9]

Even if rank-and-file freaks could not be spontaneous in this instance in the same way that they could during a typical Sunset Strip freak out, Zappa's emphasis on spontaneity was a crucial

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[8] Michael Vosse, "Fifty-Four Fab, Boss Questions," *TeenSet*, Dec. 1966, 46; Zappa, liner notes, *Freak Out!*.

[9] On the recording session, see liner notes, *The Making Of Freak Out!*, as well as the additional audio material included with this release that provides unedited portions of some of the sequences. On Zappa's view of the studio as an essential component of composition, see Zappa, with Peter Occhiogrosso, *The Real Frank Zappa Book* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1989), 160-170. On Zappa's interest in the avant-garde, see *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 139-197. On avant-garde music in this period, see David W. Bernstein, ed., *The San Francisco Tape Music Center: 1960s Counterculture and the Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

part of freak ideology, which assumed that collective liberation was predicated upon the political, social, and cultural liberation of the individual. In this sense, the freak out heard during "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" was very typical, at least in the terms that Paulekas, Franzoni, and Zappa defined the "planned anarchy" of a freak out. According to Franzoni, "You plan a situation. Then the 'freak out' comes when one guy does something, you do something else, and another guy over there picks up on that." According to Zappa:

> When any number of freaks gather and express themselves creatively through music and dance, for example, it is generally referred to as a freak out. The participants, already emancipated from our national social slavery, dressed in their most inspired apparel, realize as a group whatever potential they have for free expression.

But if the power of this and other freak outs stemmed from collective action, in the minds of freak leaders it was Franzoni's "situation," a planned concept or artistic impulse, which gave form and substance to that power. Paulekas romanticized this as a process of leadership-by-example: "men of sanity and good will persist and from their insistence will emerge a world of better note." While freak leaders encouraged other freaks to explore "whatever potential they have for free expression," they also assumed that these non-leaders did so only in service to the political, social, and cultural goals of a communal freak cause. Free expression required an organizational device, whether that was Paulekas's choreography or Zappa's composition. Zappa's conceptual use of 200 freaks to exploit the boundaries between rock 'n' roll and the avant-garde marked an important moment of synergy for the freak leaders by confronting head-on the logistics of expressing Paulekas's dance-rooted concept of planned anarchy with audio: if a rock record could not *show* an audience how freak bodies moved, a "spontaneous," communal performance on percussion instruments would let them *hear* it.[10]

[10] Franzoni, liner notes, *The Making Of Freak Out!*; Zappa, liner notes, *Freak Out!*; Paulekas, description for "Tribute to Steve Allen," catalogue, http://ljmichel.com/special/VitoSculpture/pages/.

As the overwhelming sound produced on that evening in March 1966 attests, the central metaphor that drove freak ideology—and made the invitation extended by freak leaders palatable to other freaks—was the body. Zappa's summary of the freak out highlights the clear links that freaks drew between performance and ideology by valorizing bodies as the most potent weapon in a battle against the imperatives of the dominant order. Bodies could be decorated and altered with "inspired apparel" in ways that threatened "outmoded and restricting standards of thinking, dress, and social etiquette." According to a reporter for the *Los Angeles Free Press*, commenting on a freak out in July:

> Vito and his acolytes are here. Elaborate, sometimes nearly psychedelic masks. Bare feet painted with flowers. Colorful clothing (or nearly none at all—but no nudes; the nearest thing was a girl in a G-String and a plastic raincoat). Masks made of flowers glued to faces, glasses covered with butterflies, a hexagonal box collaged with contrasting images of humanism and Vietnam slaughter, faces painted half black and half white, tiaras of feathers, jewels shimmering in the dim light, sequined faces ... leather, foil, paper, leaves and thousands of beautiful and bizarre substances…. Frank Zappa in his suit of flowers. Carl … is wearing what looks like zebra-skinned long johns with a pop art All-American Superman bib.[11]

A freak's altered, threatening body could be moved in ways that "express creatively his relationship to his immediate environment and the social structure as a whole." If performance itself was ideology, freaks assumed, often quite literally, that they could dance their way into "emancipation" from "national social slavery" simply because they threatened social etiquette. In the particular case of "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet," Zappa further tied ideology, performance, and liberation together by employing the song itself as an important conceptual metaphor: the subversion of the traditional body of the quintessential rock cut "Louie Louie" mirrored the freaks' broader strategy to subvert the political, social, and cultural imperatives of the dominant order. Re-conceptualizing an art form like rock music—or fashion, or dance—was, for freak activists, a powerful method of performance-based political protest.

[11] Jerry Hopkins, "GUAMBO Is an Act of Love—Mothers, Happenings, Dancing," *Los Angeles Free Press*, 29 July 1966, 6.

But if "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" was meant to be an expression of radical freak countercultural performance rooted in the process of liberating bodies, physical and metaphorical, it also highlights three critical issues that seem to undercut the message of liberation offered by freak ideology. First, if freak leaders were able to dictate the artistic and political goals of freak ideology and performance, did planned anarchy only lead to planned liberation? Or was the success of freak performance reliant on negotiations between competing communal, individual, and political interests within the freak community? Freak leaders suggested that individual liberation was crucial, but largely promoted a precisely rendered and proscriptive alternative norm.

Second, while the majority of freaks were middle-class, able-bodied, and white, the freaks invoked images of the working-class, of disability, and of racialized bodies in complex and contradictory ways to legitimize their own revolutionary credentials. For example, Zappa associated the name "freak" with one of his favorite films, Tod Browning's 1932 *Freaks*, about sideshow performers.[12] The name, according to Zappa, was a badge of pride—Franzoni noted that straight people already referred to them pejoratively as freaks—but in allying freak identity with an imagined freak body, Zappa appropriated images of disability to manufacture the sense of difference that freaks valorized about their own bodies.[13] Similarly, Zappa's references to "slavery" and "emancipation" highlight troubling assumptions and elisions in freak ideology given the white bodies of the agents and subjects of liberation.

Third, the lyrics of "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" offer us a glimpse into the way the bodies and sexualities of young women were critical to the construction of freak ideology. Zappa, voicing Suzy Creamcheese's conscience, asks her a question at the beginning of the

[12] Zappa, quoted in "Fifty-Four Fab, Boss Questions," 47.
[13] Franzoni, "Last of the Freaks."

track: "what's got into you?" That may seem like the question a concerned straight parent or teacher might ask. But Creamcheese's transformation is a victory her conscience achieves against a backdrop of noise that inescapably sounds like coital exhalations. This suggests that the power of "what freaks sound like" is sexual, and because the emancipation of Suzy Creamcheese from "social slavery" is coerced, Zappa clearly constructs this narrative as one of penetration ("what's got into you"). In situating Creamcheese as a stand-in for the dominant order, the song imagines the passive subject of that order as female. Zappa subtitled one section of the song "Ritual Dance of the Child-Killer," implying that Creamcheese is liberated as her virginity is sacrificed. The "Child-Killer," the active hero of the song, is clearly male. At the level where freak ideology was produced by Zappa, Paulekas, and Franzoni, the freaks' emphasis on bodily "free expression," dance, and sexuality was a thin veil for male dominance and compulsory heterosexuality. Freak women challenged this conceptualization, but in this particular case, the message of liberation extended by "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" is much darker in tone than its joyous sound initially suggests.[14]

"Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" is simply one instance where such paradoxes are evident. As freaks constructed a radical ideology predicated on severing their identities from political, social, and cultural norms, they were confronted with the challenge of finding ways to define those identities outside familiar conventions. Because Paulekas, Franzoni, and Zappa took leading roles as architects of this new identity, they determined which actions and styles were freaky. Freak identity was, in effect, an alternative norm constructed around the white, middle-class, heterosexual, and able male bodies of those who produced it. As a result, freak ideology was radical when it rejected the imperatives of the dominant order, but it was built upon

[14] Mothers of Invention, "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet," *Freak Out!*.

conservative assumptions about racialized, gendered, sexualized, and disabled bodies, often replicating the social structures it sought to subvert.

Freak Geography and Participants

From the first meeting of Zappa and Franzoni at a party in mid-1965, when the two men made a tenuous verbal contract to have Paulekas's dance troupe appear at the Mothers of Invention's concerts, until 1967, when Zappa and the Mothers of Invention left Los Angeles for New York and abandoned the freak movement in the wake of disagreements between Zappa and Franzoni in November 1966, these three men, with no formal organization, were able to use a combination of radical rock 'n' roll music and avant-garde inspired dance to articulate a countercultural ideology that attacked the dominant political, social, and cultural order of the United States. This ideology asked that freaks challenge a host of American institutions and traditions. The freaks railed against the imperatives of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society: the centrality of middle-class affluence, values, and lifestyles to the post-World War II American landscape; the conforming influence of suburban geographies; the racial oppression of minorities; and the repression of sexuality both in dominant culture and for the individual. They challenged the logic of sexual monogamy by participating in open relationships and orgies. In limited ways, they challenged familial gender roles and explored sexuality outside heteronormative conventions. They viewed their styles, sexualities, and bodies as the most important weapons in their battle against the restricting norms of American life in the 1960s. This chapter traces the problems this identity created for the men and women who participated in the Los Angeles freak scene, the various ways it was contested, and the template it created for future countercultural groups.

In April 1965, less than a year prior to the studio sessions for *Freak Out!*, the 24-year-old Zappa was a disillusioned college drop out, a recent divorcee who lived in the recording studio

where he worked, and a struggling composer who had just convinced his band to perform his own compositions, promising to "make us famous." The fame Zappa promised the soon-to-be-christened Mothers—"of Invention" was later added to ease the concerns that record company *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer* had about vulgarity—was predicated on forging a relationship with Paulekas and Franzoni to gain the cache and legitimacy an association with their notorious West Hollywood dance troupe would afford. But this was not simply about self-promotion. In the lifestyle of Paulekas, a 51-year-old bohemian sculptor and choreographer, and Franzoni, a 31-year-old dancer, Zappa found a mirror for his own emerging critique of the dominant order. The three men had much in common. Paulekas and Zappa were both divorced, both were exasperated with the emerging fascination with drugs—particularly LSD—in the United States, and all three men were disinterested in post-secondary education and had run into various troubles with the law. Zappa and Franzoni were Italian, and Paulekas was Lithuanian; all three men came from Catholic families and shared a derisive view of the restraint and repression they perceived in American Protestantism.[15]

Freak leaders harnessed the energies of a variety of individuals. Paulekas was a notorious bohemian popular among the Hollywood elite; he taught private sculpture and art classes for

[15] Very little has been written about the Los Angeles freaks. They are mentioned tangentially in David McBride, "On the Fault Line of Mass Culture and Counterculture: A Social History of the Hippie Counterculture in 1960s Los Angeles" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1998); McBride, "Death City Radicals: The Counterculture and the New Left in 1960s Los Angeles," in *The New Left Revisited*, ed. John McMillian and Paul Buhle (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 115-127; Hammond Guthrie, *AsEverWas: the Memoirs of a Beat Survivor* (London: SAF, 2005); Rachel Lee Rubin, *Well Met: Renaissance Faires and the American Counterculture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 1-79. Most of the work on Zappa and Mothers of Invention also mentions the freaks incidentally. See Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 68-69; Ben Watson, *The Negative Dialectics of Poodle Play* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 33-35; Neil Slaven, *Electric Don Quixote: The Definitive Story of Frank Zappa* (London: Omnibus, 1996), 60-73; Billy James, *Necessity Is… The Early Years of Frank Zappa & the Mothers of Invention* (London: S.A.F., 2001), 24-31; Miles, *Zappa*, 97-115. For other work on Zappa's early career, see Michael Gray, *Mother! Is the Story of Frank Zappa* (London: Proteus, 1985); Kevin Courrier*, Dangerous Kitchen: The Subversive World of Frank Zappa* (Toronto: Entertainment Culture Writing, 2002); Kelly Fisher Lowe, *The Words and Music of Frank Zappa* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006). On Zappa's legal troubles and first marriage, see Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 39-43, 55-60. On Paulekas's first marriage, see *Paulekas v. Paulekas*, 117 Cal.App.2d 73 [Civ. No. 18674. Second Dist., Div. Two. Mar. 27, 1953.] On religion, see Paulekas, description for "Juvenile Delinquency."

various actors, including Jonathon Winters, Mickey Rooney, and Steve Allen, and his consequent wealth was crucial to financing freak activities. Paulekas had married his second wife Sueanne C. Shaffer on 7 July 1961 in San Francisco. "Szou" might have been the model for Suzy Creamcheese: a popular high school student and cheerleader, upon graduation she married Paulekas, who was thirty years her senior. Once the two were installed at their West Hollywood studio, Szou became the architect of the freak fashion aesthetic; her clothing designs, mostly based on refurbished vintage clothing, were central to notions of what a freak looked like.

Los Angeles groupies like Miss Sparky (Linda Sue Parker), Miss Lucy (Offerall), Miss Christine (Frka), Miss Sandra (Leano), Miss Mercy (Fontenot), Miss Cynderella (Cynthia Wells; later Cale-Binion), and Miss Pamela (Miller; later Des Barres) were also crucial to the creation and popularization of this aesthetic, whether by wearing Szou's designs in public or by replicating and expanding upon them with various outfits cobbled together from thrift store purchases. According to Miss Cynderella, "We were all weird in high school. We first got together because of the way we dressed."[16] These groupies also found a benefactor and champion in Zappa, who spoke openly about their lifestyles in his music and in interviews with national publications like *Rolling Stone*. In turn, their notoriety and labor helped the freak scene to grow, often through their relationships with various touring musicians.[17]

Various other women involved with the freaks, including Jeannie Vassoir, Lisa Cohen, and Pamela Zarubica, performed the role of "Suzy Creamcheese" on Mothers of Invention albums and on tour. Zarubica's friend Gail Sloatman, a local groupie and a receptionist at the Whiskey A Go Go club on the Sunset Strip, became Zappa's wife in September 1967. Paulekas's dance troupe was made up of a variety of nameless men and women about whom we know little

[16] Miss Cynderella [Cynthia Cale-Binion], "Freak Fashion," *AUM*, Apr. 1969, 31.

[17] See Burks, Jerry Hopkins, and Paul Nelson, "The Groupies and Other Girls," *Rolling Stone*, 15 Feb. 1969, 11-26.

beyond the fact that Paulekas and Franzoni generally preferred young, attractive dancers. According to Hammond Guthrie,

> Vito held court within a tangle of wildly attractive lithe-bodied acid-bunny proto-groupies, and a smaller group of polymorphic male impresarios known collectively as the Fraternity of Man. The Frat-family and their gossamer clad women, who looked like the psychedelic brides of Dr. Frankincense, sported some of the most colorful clothing this side of the Munchkin Wardrobe from *The Wizard of Oz*.[18]

The members of the Mothers of Invention—in 1965, this included Jimmy Carl Black, Roy Estrada, Ray Collins, and Elliot Ingber—also played a significant role, though the extent to which they adopted freak ideology is debatable. Black, for example, later recalled that he "didn't like" having to wear long hair to fit in with the freaks and that "even in the summertime when it was hot I put a ski hood over my head to hide the hair." Estrada once wrote a letter to the editor of the *Los Angeles Free Press* to clarify that despite Zappa's tendency to use "we" in *his* letters from the band, the ideas present in those letters did not represent Estrada's personal views. Still, the Mothers indulged the freak aesthetic, and according to Estrada, the freaks "fit to the music we were playing." The fashion choices of the Mothers of Invention were integral to the creation of the band's freak aesthetic and their musical abilities were integral to the sound of Zappa's freak compositions. Estrada's Mexican American heritage and Black's Cheyenne heritage were also used by the band to play with notions of race and class.[19]

The freaks congregated and performed in various public and private spaces in Los Angeles, but were centered in West Hollywood and the adjacent Laurel Canyon community. *Freak Out!* highlighted this freak geography; the album was accompanied by an ad for a mail-order map titled "Freak Out Hot Spots!" The map was simultaneously an invitation to potential converts and a warning. While listing all the places interested parties might meet freaks, it was also

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[18] Guthrie, *AsEverWas*, 67.

[19] Jimmy Carl Black, interviewed in *Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention: In the 1960's* (Sexy Intellectuals, 2008), DVD; Roy Estrada, interview by James, *Necessity Is…,* 24, 33; Miles, *Zappa*, 129.

marked with police cars and mushroom clouds in places where the police were most likely to harass youth. The map was given further exposure when reprinted in the *Los Angeles Free Press* in December 1966, accompanying several article-length responses to the increasingly violent tactics employed by the Los Angeles Police Department to break up a series of protests against a municipal curfew for youth, which were held outside the Pandora's Box club.[20]

The map highlights the busy neighborhood of Laurel Canyon as a "Freak Sanctuary." Until 1913 the canyon had remained an unincorporated portion of Los Angeles County. At that point developer Charles Spencer Mann purchased the land, intending to sell off plots to rich, white men interested in building vacation homes. The proximity of the area to Hollywood, however, attracted young actors instead. In the 1940s, Laurel Canyon Boulevard was extended into the San Fernando Valley; the road became a busy thoroughfare that connected the Westside to the Valley. The increased traffic lost the neighborhood some of its isolated quality, but its proximity to West Hollywood, the sizeable homes, and the relatively cheap rent made it ideal for communal living. In 1966, as the freak scene grew, Paulekas increasingly found it inconvenient to house young runaways who wanted to join his dance troupe at his studio; the freaks forged a lasting bond with Laurel Canyon as Franzoni moved from his home at Romaine Street and Spaulding Avenue into an old log cabin. Franzoni took several young freaks with him and stayed there until Zappa took over the cabin in 1968.[21]

The map also detailed West Hollywood and Sunset Boulevard. Vito Clay, Paulekas's studio, was located just below the mouth of Laurel Canyon in West Hollywood at 303 North Laurel Avenue. Labeled "Vito's Studio & store & cult HQ & sanctuary & genetic laboratory which is really the place to see" on the map's list of "Freak Out Hot Spots!", it was both an art studio and

[20] "Freak Out Hot Spots!," Mothers of Invention, *Freak Out!*; *Los Angeles Free Press*, 16 Dec. 1966, 5.

[21] Michael Walker, *Laurel Canyon* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2006), 20-29; Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles: and the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

a store for his wife's clothing. Paulekas often held parties he called love-ins at the studio; dancing and sex were encouraged. He taught dance classes at the nearby Coronet Theatre at 366 North La Cienega Boulevard. The freaks danced and performed at various rock concerts held in a variety of Sunset Boulevard venues: the Whiskey a Go-Go, the Trip, the Troubadour, and Pandora's Box. For lunch, or after dancing, the freaks assembled at a variety of freak-friendly bars and diners: Franzoni cites Ben Frank's on Sunset Boulevard as an early freak hang out. Franzoni notes that Ben Frank's eventually turned the freaks out; the freaks then moved off Sunset to places like Canter's Fairfax Restaurant—described on the map as "the top freako waterhole and social hq" and popularly known as Canter's Deli—and the Blue Grotto on North Fairfax Street. Canter's Deli was also a popular destination for comedian Lenny Bruce and producer Phil Spector and was within walking distance of both Paulekas's studio and the Coronet theatre. Various stores, like the Hollywood Ranch Market on North Vine, serviced the freak community. The freaks—and especially groupies involved in the scene—also hung out at hotels like the Tropicana Motel on Sunset Boulevard, where visiting rock bands often stayed.[22]

The geographical invitation the map implicitly extended to outsiders, coupled with Zappa's "join us" request elsewhere in the liner notes, is interesting: to be a freak, did one simply need to enter this geographic space? "Freak Out Hot Spots!" advised potential freaks that Canter's Deli was "a good place to go as soon as you arrive in town." Canter's Deli was also near the offices of *The Los Angeles Free Press*, a radical paper that shared many of the same politics as the freaks. Zappa's annotations on the back of "Freak Out Hot Spots!" suggested that potential freaks should get a subscription to the *Free Press*, watch out for police raids at Canter's Deli before entering, and steal the restaurant's silverware if they needed pocket money. The ritualized and

[22] "Freak Out Hot Spots!"; Franzoni, "Last of the Freaks"; Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 69.

itemized quality of this process of initiation hints at one way of approaching the free expression paradox in freak identity: the actions on this list either chronicled or created a set of shared experiences for the freaks, and those shared experiences were important in the broader project of defining what freak identity was. Zappa himself had gone through a version of this process. When Franzoni first met Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, he was initially suspicious:

> These very "funky" looking men were there and they had "bobby hats"…. Because they didn't have long hair they were hiding their no hair.

The Mothers of Invention only became freaks, according to Franzoni, because he gave Zappa "so much information." That Zappa had to be trained in freak identity suggests that freaks had to work for credibility, but were asked to do so in pre-defined ways.[23]

The geographic and demographic borders that framed the Los Angeles freak scene in West Hollywood were in part the result of the location of Paulekas's studio, the musical venues on Sunset Boulevard, and Laurel Canyon. But West Hollywood also provided a critically permissible space for the Los Angeles freaks to flourish between 1964 and 1967. Paulekas, who had moved to West Hollywood from San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district in the early 1960s, saw something essential in the community. In a 1965 interview for Robert Carl Cohen's *Mondo Hollywood*, he remarked:

> I think that Hollywood perhaps more than any other city in the United States lends itself toward the so-called variant and the deviant. I mean deviant in the healthy sense. I mean a deviant in terms of departing from the norm and exploring other possibilities and I think I can function more comfortably here than I could function in practically any other city in the United States. I am convinced of that.

Paulekas's contention here is abstract; the point was put more simply by Miss Christine: "This is Hollywood, and Hollywood's Hollywood…but in Ohio, maybe they aren't ready for this. We're trying to spread our philosophy."[24]

[23] "Freak Out Hot Spots!"; Franzoni, "Last of the Freaks."

The idea that West Hollywood specifically and Greater Los Angeles more generally lent themselves to the development of freak counterculture is supported by broader historical analysis of three local political, social, and cultural developments that contributed to the rise of freak counterculture: the geographical and political setting of Greater Los Angeles; the emergence of a bohemian culture in West Hollywood; and the focus of an American consumer industry, one largely based in Los Angeles by the mid-1960s, on teenagers as a profitable demographic.

First, the relationship between city and suburbs in Greater Los Angeles provided the context for freak criticisms of the suburban order. On "Freak Out Hot Spots!" the area surrounding West Hollywood is labeled a "cultural desert," filled with identical images of houses, children, and factories. In the song "Concentration Moon," Zappa refers to suburban communities as concentration camps. The affront presented by suburban living was portrayed by freaks as a weakness of older generations that had accepted as truth the promise of post-World War Two affluence and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. These generations accepted the conforming influence of outdated and repressive pre-World War II middle class and free enterprise values and sacrificed their ability to explore innate human desires and faculties. Zappa presented this idea bluntly to his audience at a concert at the Whiskey A-Go-Go in December 1965: "If your children ever find out how lame you really are, they'll murder you in your sleep." Most teens were not so rash, but many freaks like Des Barres, who had grown up in the suburbs, fled to West Hollywood to escape the imperatives laid down by parents, teachers, and local authorities: "at last I was surrounded by my own kind." As Zappa put it in his song "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," they left to escape being "a loyal plastic robot for a world that doesn't care."[25]

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[24] Paulekas, interviewed in *Mondo Hollywood*, directed by Robert Carl Cohen (1968; Radical Films, 2005), DVD; Miss Christine [Christine Frka], interviewed in Burks, "The Groupies and Other Girls," 16.

[25] Zappa, liner notes, *Freak Out!*; Des Barres, *I'm With the Band*, 15-35, 44; Mothers of Invention, "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," *Absolutely Free*.

This was not simply about teenage rebellion, however. This uncaring "world" not only included parents and teachers but also President Johnson. Both *Freak Out!* and *Absolutely Free* criticized Johnson for turning his back on the nation. In "Plastic People," he is "sick." "Brown Shoes Don't Make It" presents a chilling portrait of suburban dwellers: Americans obsessed with TV dinners, swimming pools, television, and 9-to-5 jobs. In "Hungry Freaks, Daddy," Johnson is told to try and hide his "emptiness" as he wanders through the decay of his Great Society. "Help I'm a Rock" features the Mothers of Invention harmonizing on undulating enunciations of "swimming pool" and the lines, "You're safe, baby / You just cook a TV dinner." Given the direct attacks on Johnson elsewhere, these repeated motifs mocked Johnson's emphasis on "abundance" in his inauguration speech on 4 January 1965. Freaks viewed Johnson's message of the Great Society in cultural terms; his promotion of a specific middle-class suburban affluence was in fact an attempt to breed complacent, apolitical, conforming citizens who, under the threat of surveillance by other "loyal plastic robots," would not question his authority.[26]

The freaks also criticized institutions through the symbolic landscape of the suburbs, believing that the entire structure of suburban life was based around an insidious program by capitalist forces to indoctrinate individuals with faith in the false benefits and false choices of free enterprise. Paulekas argued that the only benefits of a free market were:

> free induction into the army –
> free religious bigotry –
> free racial discrimination –
> free exploitation of the worker by the employer –

[26] Mothers of Invention, "Plastic People" / "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," *Absolutely Free*; Mothers of Invention, "Hungry Freaks, Daddy" / "Help I'm a Rock," *Freak Out!*. See also Zappa, interview by Frank Kofsky (1967), "Frank Zappa Interview," in *Age of Rock: Sounds of the American Cultural Revolution*, ed. Jonathan Reisin (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 254-268. In this interview, Zappa notes that in 1965/66 many of the symbols of capitalism and the conformist society he railed against (notably, swimming pools) were really only comprehensible to citizens of Southern California.

Paulekas and Zappa both argued that the public education system was complicit in this indoctrination; in the liner notes to *Freak Out!*, Zappa chided his audience to "go to the library and educate yourself if you've got any guts." Zappa later mused:

> Most of the stuff that I did between '65 and '69 was directed toward an audience that was accustomed to accepting everything that was handed to them. I mean *completely*. It was amazing: politically, musically, socially—everything. It was my campaign … to do things that would shake people out of that complacency, or that ignorance, and make them question things.

Working against this complacency, the lyrics to "Hungry Freaks, Daddy" portrayed suburban developments in the 1960s as outmoded, decaying, inefficient landscapes that served to chain Americans to humdrum lifestyles and routines: "Mr. America walk on by / your schools that do not teach / Mr. America walk on by / the minds that won't be reached." As Ray Collins sing-mourns "the left-behinds / of the Great Society," it becomes clear that the freaks viewed the results of Johnson's domestic policies as nothing more than the "great mid-western hardware store" or the "supermarket dream." For the freaks, the suburbs represented a holding ground that chained initiative and creativity among straight people, who were alternatively labelled "chrome," "plastic," "robots," and "vegetables"—things that were shiny or attractive, but dense, vacant, mechanical, automated, fake, and brain-dead. Not coincidentally, these pejoratives were also prominent features of the choices offered by a free enterprise economy. Suburban living privileged the purchase of automobiles, of technological gadgets, and choice at the supermarket, but rarely those things that the freaks valorized: critical thought and creative expression.[27]

Greater Los Angeles threw these issues into stark relief, and the political, social, and geographic climate of the city and its environs exacerbated the freak's permissive urban/complacent suburban worldview. The city's sheer sprawl, ranging suburbs and

[27] Paulekas, description for "Free Enterprise"; Zappa, liner notes, *Freak Out!*; Zappa, quoted in Gray, *Mother!*, 50; Mothers of Invention, "Hungry Freaks, Daddy," *Freak Out!*. See also Mothers of Invention, "Who are the Brain Police?" / "Help I'm a Rock," *Freak Out!* and "Plastic People" / "Call any Vegetable" / "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," *Absolutely Free*.

neighbourhoods, and extensive freeway system decentralized and isolated portions of the city from one another, allowing the freaks to more clearly define the boundaries between their community and the suburban communities they demonized. And while the suburbs that surrounded Los Angeles had benefited from the middle class idealism promoted by Johnson, John Kennedy, and Dwight Eisenhower in the previous decade, they had also, by 1965, blossomed into a powerful conservative power base that disagreed with both Johnson and Democratic California governor Edmund Brown on big government anti-poverty and social programs and East Coast-driven economic policies. As the right-wing grassroots networks of the suburbs of Greater Los Angeles and southern California gravitated first towards Barry Goldwater as the Republican candidate for president in the 1964 national election and then towards Ronald Reagan as a gubernatorial candidate for the 1966 state election, they drew their own distinctions between the safe, ordered suburbs where they lived and the city that they perceived to be increasingly liberal and chaotic. From a freak vantage point in West Hollywood, a diverse and urban neighbourhood, the distinction between straight and freak culture was not only one that seemed obvious but also, thanks to the efforts of conservative organizers, it was one that seemed mutually agreed upon. West Hollywood's proximity to these conservative suburbs constantly refuelled a critical distinction between urban permissive liberty and suburban repressive order.[28]

Second, an emerging bohemian culture in West Hollywood, which had a long tradition of providing space for communities and lifestyles deemed subversive by the repressive suburban order, gave the freaks a permissive atmosphere in which to practice and develop their performance-based protest. This permissive atmosphere was the result of several factors. West

[28] On the geography of Los Angeles, see Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). On the conservatism of southern California suburbs and their view of Johnson, see *Lisa McGirr, Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 188-191.

Hollywood remained an unincorporated city administrated by Los Angeles County until 1984. In the 1920s, West Hollywood and West Sunset Boulevard became a popular location for business owners because gambling, which was not legal in the city of Los Angeles, was legal elsewhere in Los Angeles County. Bordered by Laurel Canyon and the Hollywood Hills to the north and Hollywood to the east, West Hollywood's somewhat secluded geography, proximity to Hollywood, and light policing—overseen by the overextended Los Angeles County Police—made it an attractive destination for gambling saloon and strip club owners looking to cater to upscale Hollywood clientele. By the 1950s, however, as Hollywood film production slumped due to the growing popularity of television and as Las Vegas supplanted the Sunset Strip as the upscale tourist destination for gambling and strip clubs, many of the former clubs in West Hollywood fell into disrepair. At the same time, local gay men began to buy working class homes in the area that sloped down from Sunset Boulevard and fixed them up, designating the neighborhood the "Swish Alps." As the gay community grew, the vacated buildings on the Sunset Strip and Santa Monica Boulevard were transformed into bars and shops to service that community: for example, Ciro's on Sunset, which became a popular early destination for the freaks, also held public gay tea dances. As the gay community transformed West Hollywood from a service-based destination to a vibrant community, the rest of West Hollywood's readily available and cheap real estate attracted artists, musicians, fashion designers, and other bohemians, including Paulekas, looking for both studio space and homes. And within this community, the freaks initially exercised a great amount of freedom. They had connections with local artists and musicians through the Coronet Theatre and their attendance at rock concerts, and their homes and Vito's studio were frequently the destination of choice for touring musicians

looking for a good party. They had access to a variety of vintage clothing stores and they could find cheap accommodations. This freedom was crucial to the early growth of the freak scene.[29]

This freedom would begin to be limited, however, in late 1966 and 1967, especially for young freaks. In the wake of the Watts Riot, a six-day protest that occurred in August 1965 in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, heightened anxieties over street violence, racial conflict, and urban distress divided the opinions of West Hollywood business owners, municipal authorities, and suburban parents. The influx of young, white teenagers attracted by the freaks—as well as broader bohemian culture—into West Hollywood raised concerns about the effects that this permissive environment would have on innocent youth. A curfew for teenagers under the age of 18, rarely invoked before the Watts Riots, was employed by the Los Angeles Police Department with increasing regularity throughout the summer of 1966 as an attempt to stem the increasingly visible presence of freaks throughout West Hollywood. As Zappa reflected:

> In 1966 and '67, the L.A.P.D. and the Sheriff's Department went to war with the freaks of Hollywood. Every weekend people were rounded up (with no warrants presented or charges stated) as they walked on Sunset Boulevard, forced into Sheriff's buses, driven downtown, held hostage for the evening, then let go—all because they had LONG HAIR.[30]

It was a battle mediated by several interests. Daytime businesses wanted freaks off the streets, alternately arguing that their presence was bad for customer-relations or mourning the loss of Hollywood's famed elegance in the face of garishly dressed penniless youth. At the same time, however, nightclubs that shared zip codes with these cautious business owners encouraged the freaks to attend their venues without charging a cover fee in the hopes that their colorful dancing would attract the business of more-moneyed clientele: according to Gail Zappa, tourists "came to

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[29] See Moira Rachel Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 33-73; Whitney Strub, "The Clearly Obscene and the Queerly Obscene: Heteronormativity and Obscenity in Cold War Los Angeles," *American Quarterly* 60 (June 2008): 373-398; Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

[30] Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 90. On the curfew, see *Los Angeles Free Press*, 15 July 1966, 5; McBride, "On the Fault Line," 195-200.

see the freaks dance." To further exacerbate this conflict, a dramatic rise in crime in West Hollywood in 1966 gave ammunition to those parties who wanted the freaks evacuated from public spaces in a battle between municipal interests and the rights of the young freaks, other bohemians, and gay men who helped to redesign the landscape and commercial potential of the neighborhood. This increased scrutiny drew the freaks into municipal debates about the rights of individuals in relation to the community. It also gave young freaks a fulcrum for protest. As Pamela Des Barres later recalled, "I felt like I *belonged*, united with a thousand other kids, protesting what THEY were doing to US."[31]

Third, an American consumer industry that looked increasingly to teenagers as a potential market embraced the freaks' fashions, grooming, and aesthetics as a potential template for goods and services aimed at American youth. New fashions, hobbies, and rock 'n' roll records were in demand by youth, and, as historian David McBride has noted, local Los Angeles policymakers and businesses were not blind to the possibilities. McBride cites an economic analysis published in 1966 by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, titled *The Dynamics of the Youth Explosion,* which argued, "San Francisco and Los Angeles enjoy a substantial lead over other cities in terms of per capita consumption by youth." Los Angeles policy- and tastemakers suddenlyfound that their city had a unique ability to take advantage of their "substantial lead" in Baby Boom spending power at the same time that it stood, in the mid-1960s, at the center of fashion and trend production in the United States. Despite concerns that local police, suburban parents, and daytime business owners may have had about the influx of young people into West Hollywood, Hollywood and the record and fashion industries became fascinated with the area. This scrutiny

[31] Gail Zappa, quoted in Walker, *Laurel Canyon*, 31; Des Barres, *I'm With the Band*, 44.

only intensified after some of Szou's clothing designs appeared on Hollywood celebrities like Barbara Hershey and Jane Fonda and in May Company department stores.[32]

Freak fashions and aesthetics, alongside those of hippies throughout Los Angeles, increasingly became visible for young Americans outside of West Hollywood, heightening interest in the freaks as a countercultural group. At the same time, because commercial interests in California were quick to conflate various countercultural activists and groups into a generic, commercial, sellable idea, proud freaks were quick to distinguish their own politics, ideologies, and aesthetics from those of commercially trendy bohemians, hippies, students, and musicians. As a result, freak activists like Zappa and Des Barres railed against the assimilation of hippie culture into the same commodity-based conformist social order that was the target of freak countercultural dissent in the first place. For example, Des Barres later recalled,

> A *hippie* was a sort of unwashed, unkempt kid. A *freak* was someone who put a lot of care and intention into their appearance, wanting to stand out instead of blend in.

Just as police scrutiny and municipal pressure forced the freaks to more carefully articulate their ideology in the context of the community, this increased commercial scrutiny forced freaks to more carefully articulate their aesthetic and political identities.[33]

In the context of these overarching historical trends, freak ideology pitted the emerging power of liberated freak youth against the complacent conformity of their parents. Zappa argued, "We consider ourselves therapeutic workers massaging the brains of people dancing to our music with the lyrics to our songs." He continued, "We consider most people of today, 'Plastics.' They

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[32] Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, *Dynamics of the Youth Explosion* (Los Angeles, 1966), 20-21, 55-56. See McBride, "On the Fault Line," 85. See also Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Counterculture, Business Culture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Liz Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

[33] Des Barres, quoted in Walker, *Laurel Canyon*, 29. For a similar view of this distinction, see Mothers of Invention, "Who Needs the Peace Corps" / "Flower Punk," *We're Only in it for the Money*, Verve/MGM V6-5045, 1967, 33⅓ rpm.

have no respect for the finer things in life, no concern for mankind. This is more than the usual complaint of lack of humanism. These people have no soul." Some audience members balked: "If you do anything to remind them of that outside, and we do, the reaction is negative. They respond to fantasy." But as the freak counterculture grew within the geographical and social space of Los Angeles, their faith in rock 'n' roll, sex, and alternative lifestyles attracted many young men and women who had become disillusioned with their straight suburban lifestyles, with Johnson's idealization of the middle class, and with the callous ways that municipal and police forces dealt with those they deemed subversive. The dominant order repressed all the qualities the freaks valorized: individual expression, creativity, feeling, and perception as exemplified by fashion, bodily expression, dancing, and rock 'n' roll. The freaks responded to this repression by looking to specific intellectual and cultural traditions that would help them reinterpret the body as visible, performative, and liberated.[34]

Freak Influences

Zappa graduated from Antelope Valley High School in Lancaster, California, in 1958. He attended Chaffey Junior College in Alta Loma but dropped out after one semester; in his autobiography he notes that he only attended "for the express purpose of meeting girls" and he "had no interest in higher education."[35] Because the freaks portrayed the public education system as a tool deployed by the dominant order to reinforce and legitimize a specific vision of the United States, freak leaders could make the same distinction between straight and freak epistemologies that they made between straight and freak lifestyles. Freak leaders hinted at an authentic, suppressed history that was obscured beneath the pedagogy of the dominant order, one

[34] Zappa, quoted in Unknown, "Look Out Plastic People The Mothers Have Arrived," reproduced in "Freak Out! The Official News of the Mothers," *Los Angeles Free Press*, 9 Sept. 1966, 10; Zappa, interview by Jef Jaisun, "Ya Madduh!," *Berkeley Barb*, 22 Nov. 1968, 13.

[35] Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 39.

that might liberate the individual who became aware of its existence. Zappa's challenge to his audience—"educate yourself if you've got any guts"—added an air of macho-subversion to this act of self-education. It trumped the education offered by colleges and universities, no matter how left-wing, because it was an act of revolutionary self-validation.[36]

Rather than leave his audience members to flounder in the stacks of their respective public libraries, Zappa helpfully included a veritable syllabus of freak authorities in the liner notes of *Freak Out!* under the heading "These People Have Contributed Materially in Many Ways to Make Our Music What it is." The list is obtuse enough that it is clearly meant as a joke, but even so, in a 1967 interview Zappa explained, "If anybody were to research it, it would probably help them a great deal." This list is less a history than a retroactively imagined cultural foundation for the freaks. Paulekas also contributed to this foundation with his sculptures of jazz musicians and "men of sanity and good will," non-specific heroes who were already challenging the assumptions of the dominant order. The efforts of freak leaders to point to specific individuals as touchstones of liberated identity highlight the paradox of the alternative norm inherent in freak countercultural ideology: this was a proscriptive educational program they offered. It was not a college syllabus, but neither was it truly a form of self-education.[37]

Zappa's list is revealing in the sense that it eschews a clear sense of a coherent ideological viewpoint in favor of emphasizing individuals who had attained some form of outsider status. For example, the list includes Sacco and Vanzetti *and* Leopold and Loeb, the defendants of two famous American murder trials who had little in common beyond their persecution for operating outside the dominant order. Similarly, the inclusion of Spanish artist Salvador Dalí, who had been expelled from the left-leaning surrealist movement in 1934 because he supported Francisco

[36] Zappa, liner notes, *Freak Out!*.
[37] Zappa, "Frank Zappa Interview," 267.

Franco's fascist regime, suggests the list was less about claiming progressive heroes and more about championing artists who were famous for their non-conformity. Delving further into the list reveals similar contradictions: free jazz artists like Eric Dolphy whom Zappa admired are placed alongside science fiction writers and comedian Lenny Bruce with no clear sense of why these artists relate, except for a shared outsider status. This was a status, of course, that had value when translated into a cultural foundation for freak identity.[38]

Zappa's list also betrays ambivalence about his—and by extension the freaks'—relationship to art, culture, and contemporary intellectual currents in the United States. For example, the list includes Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who faced criminal obscenity charges in 1956/57 for publishing Allen Ginsberg's "Howl (for Carl Solomon)," but does not include Ginsberg himself or any of the beat poets. Neither does the list include contemporary radicals and intellectuals like Paul Goodman, Tom Hayden, and Herbert Marcuse. This can partly be explained by the freaks' anti-intellectualism, but still seems odd. The list features selective mentions of Dalí and James Joyce, but the only sustained nod to high culture is Zappa's selection of serial and avant-garde composers he admired. But even here Zappa's expression of an allegiance to high culture is mitigated. Lodged between the science fiction authors and radio jockeys who populate the rest of the list, these composers are seemingly transformed from bookish, formally trained composers to radical outsiders who were challenging the logic and structure of music. In fact, Zappa often compared his favorite, French composer Edgar Varèse, to a mad scientist, suggesting that these composers were less the stuff of high culture than pop culture icons who lived like the characters that populated the horror and science fiction movies that Zappa loved. Zappa's centrifugal

[38] On Sacco and Vanzetti, see McGirr, "The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti: A Global History," *Journal of American History* 93 (Winter 2007): 1085-1115. On Leopold and Loeb, see Paula S. Fass, "Making and Remaking an Event: The Leopold and Loeb Case in American Culture," *Journal of American History* 80 (Dec. 1993): 919-951. On Dalí, see Robin Adèle Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 81.

approach to this cultural legacy functions as a satirical collage of American culture, a notion punctuated by the inclusion of John Wayne, a symbol of many of the attributes of masculinity that were valorized by the dominant order. On this list, Wayne stands out as the freak. And there is aesthetic continuity as well: Wayne is incongruous in that same fashion as the found recordings that Zappa used to punctuate his rock compositions or the vintage clothing that freaks repurposed as part of their new aesthetic style.[39]

In a similar sense, Zappa often presented templates for freak identity through stranger sources, praising a variety of individuals who existed on the periphery of the freak scene. For example, in his autobiography he lauds Crazy Jerry, a speed addict, who was arrested several times for attempting to give himself electric shocks using the electric meters of suburban homes. Zappa also discusses a speed chemist named Wild Bill the Mannequin Fucker and his family, a group of mannequins made up to look like a "perfect" middle-class family, each fitted with rubber prosthetic devices that allowed Wild Bill to have sex with them. Both of these individuals are played for laughs in the autobiography, but their inclusion is not accidental. Each supported the freaks' emphasis on subverting the image of the middle-class, whether through intimations of incest or contact highs from suburban electricity.[40]

Beyond this imagined cultural legacy, there were two main cultural threads that were used by the freaks in formulating their aesthetics and their approach to performance and resistance. The first was the Theatre of the Absurd, a primarily a European movement that was popular in the 1950s and 1960s. The name comes from *The Theatre of the Absurd*, written by English theatre critic Martin Esslin in 1962. This new theater movement was influenced by the avant-garde experimentation of the interwar period. Esslin adapted the term from a 1942 essay by

[39] Zappa, liner notes, *Freak Out!*. On Varèse, see Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 30-34. On the avant-garde, see Paul Griffiths: *Modern Music and After: Directions Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[40] Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 69, 70-72, 79.

French existentialist philosopher Albert Camus, "The Myth of Sisyphus." Camus used the story of Sisyphus to elaborate upon the absurdity of human existence; Esslin pointed out that the primary focus of postwar theatre was to elaborate on similar questions about the meaning of life. In *Absurd Drama* (1965), Esslin characterized these developments as follows:

> The Theatre of the Absurd attacks the comfortable certainties of religious or political orthodoxy. It aims to shock its audience out of complacency, to bring it face to face with the harsh facts of the human situation.… The shedding of easy solutions, of comforting illusions, may be painful, but it leaves behind it a sense of freedom and relief. And that is why, in the last resort, the Theatre of the Absurd does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation.

According to Esslin, the Theatre of the Absurd would allow audiences to give up hope that life had meaning; it was only in abandoning hope that an individual could be liberated from the demands of the dominant political, social, and cultural order. Esslin praised such themes in the works of Samuel Beckett, Bertold Brecht, Eugène Ionesco, and Harold Pinter. Significantly, bodily motion in these works was often exaggerated.[41]

Paulekas's style of movement and the ideology that anchored it was inspired at least in part by the Theatre of the Absurd. Metropolitan centers like New York and Los Angeles felt the influence of these innovative Europeans by the mid-1950s. Brecht had moved to Los Angeles in 1941 in his flight from Nazi Germany; he lived there for six years while actively developing work he had written during his years in exile. The Coronet Theatre, where Paulekas taught his dance classes, performed Brecht's *Galileo Galilei* as its very first production in 1947, and such avant-garde performances, which privileged exaggerated movement and intention rather than realism, would have certainly influenced Paulekas's choreography. Paulekas also seems to have been fond of Samuel Beckett's work; his first son with Szou was named "Godot," a reference to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The supporting blurb for one of his sculptures, "The Freedom

[41] Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 67, 103, 145-149; Esslin, "Introduction," *Absurd Drama* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1965).

Fighters," also supports this connection: his praise of "ex-patriot" Europeans "primarily active in the United States" is almost certainly a reference to these playwrights.[42]

Zappa's interpretation of his own work—"things that would shake people out of that complacency"—is nearly identical to Esslin's summary of the goals of Theatre of the Absurd: "it aims to shock its audience out of complacency." Zappa and Paulekas latched on to the surreal, cathartic, and liberating aspects of the genre while generally ignoring the important function of existentialism and despair. Where European playwrights were reacting to fascism, communism, and the decline of European powers in the postwar period, freaks were reacting to the postwar affluence of America. Where the European playwrights intended to offer freedom from false hope, the freaks pointed to freedom from constraints *as* hope. To put it in Esslin's terms, if the Theatre of the Absurd advised Sisyphus to stop and laugh at the absurdity of pushing a rock up a hill, the freaks invited him to abandon the rock altogether in favor of rock 'n' roll.[43]

The second cultural trend important to freak performance was contemporary dance. The limited information we have on Paulekas's sculptural technique suggests that his choreography was in part influenced by his work with clay. Paulekas was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, to a family of Lithuanian descent; his grandfather trained him in the arts of woodcarving at an early age. Paulekas's cubist sculptures presented mutilated, twisted bodies with ecstatic expressions on their faces. For example, "Free Enterprise" shows two faces eating one another, while "Cinema Arts" shows two bodies contorted together, sinewy arms twisting around one another. Paulekas's love of dance had begun when he took some jazz training and won a dance competition in his youth. By the mid-1960s, his "planned anarchy" was less a series of routines and more a series of movements and poses intended to force his students to shed their inhibitions. Franzoni, who first

[42] Franzoni, "Last of the Freaks"; Paulekas, description for "The Freedom Fighters."
[43] Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 11.

encountered Paulekas while—in his estimation—trapped in a stifling relationship with a woman who was financing his struggling business, remembers that it took him three months of attending the shows in which Paulekas danced before finally giving in: "I started dancing in there, I just let it go." Franzoni's experience is instructive: he notes that in the moment he began to dance, he was able to let go of his financial concerns, his unsatisfactory personal life, and the expectation that he be "a straight businessman." He quickly left his girlfriend and moved to his own apartment in West Hollywood.[44]

Paulekas's choreography adapted the large, exaggerated movement typical of the Theatre of the Absurd and warped it, reflecting the twisted body positions of his sculptures. He was also influenced by rock 'n' roll. In class he would onomatopoeically imitate rock's distinctive double-time counts between 4/4 measures to mimic actual rock drum fills or instrumental breaks. The effect created a constantly shifting sense of movement; he encouraged his dancers to alternate between the prominent and implied rhythms of music or to dance along with whichever instrument they chose. Franzoni reflects on this direction when discussing his work with the Mothers of Invention: "The way we danced, we were illustrating what Frank had in mind with the notes. We were a way of communicating what he was telling you with his guitar." Paulekas also tapped into current trends in the Los Angeles dance scene. Franzoni notes that Paulekas's dance studio at the Coronet theatre was shared with Jerome Robbins, the choreographer for *West Side Story*, who had based his own work on the hyper-athletic masculine style of dancing pioneered by Agnes de Mille in *Rodeo* and *Oklahoma*. Paulekas and Robbins often sat in on each other's classes, and while Franzoni suggests that Paulekas and Robbins were careful not to openly use each other's ideas, he also suggests that they had good rapport. The two

[44] Franzoni, "Last of the Freaks." There are also brief clips of Paulekas's dance class in *Mondo Hollywood*.

choreographers shared an interest in highly aggressive, large movements. The scale and scope of enthusiastic movement also played into the attitude of Paulekas's choreography and, consequently, the broader freak aesthetic. As Des Barres recalls,

> The dancing was always fun. Vito and Karl brought out the lurking lunacy in everyone, so *nothing* was too weird or freaky, and we all tried to outdo each other on the dance floor.

Freaks expressed the ideas borrowed from the Theatre of the Absurd and contemporary dance in anti-intellectual ways, placing value in the freedom and abandon with which an individual chose to move their body. According to an outsider's account:

> Dance-mad teeners come on like inhabitants from the planet Psycho…. They shout, sing, moan, twist themselves into pretzel shapes, jump in the air or shake, rattle and roll on the floor.

Such intellectual threads wove their way into freak performance-based activism, whether through Paulekas's choreography or in the ways his students chose, in each moment of performance and activism, to interpret his direction.[45]

Freak Ideology and Practice

Paulekas's sculptural emphasis on the visual was extended into his daily life. He dressed in eye-catching white bell-bottoms and shaved his facial hair into elaborate goatees. Vito's studio, according to Franzoni, was decorated ostentatiously: "it's painted like if you opened a tomb of the Mayans and this place is painted with little things all over the walls." Des Barres recalls her first meeting with Paulekas:

> We saw Vito reclining on a rose-coloured velvet couch, surrounded by lavishly decorated people of all ages and races who seemed to be paying him homage. He had long, greying, uncombed hair and a ragtag beard that looked like it had been dipped in a bottle of glitter; he was wearing only a lace loincloth, and his chest had been painted like a peacock feather.

This image of unfettered virility and charisma was compounded by the frequent orgies that were held at Vito Clay amidst the ecstatic clay figures that Paulekas produced. Paulekas worked

[45] Franzoni, "Last of the Freaks"; Franzoni, liner notes, *The Making of Freak Out!*; Des Barres, *I'm with the Band*, 79-80; Earl Leaf, "Freakout," *Teen*, Jan. 1967, 41.

deliberately to style himself, his studio, and his lifestyle in ways that bucked the dominant order's logic and propriety.[46]

Paulekas installed Szou in the storefront above the studio. The clothing and designs she sold there were equally essential to freak style and aesthetic. According to Des Barres, Szou's designs were based on vintage 1940s apparel:

> Szou was the forerunner of thrift-store fashion, and there were always plenty of falling-apart velvet dresses and forties teddies available for a pittance. Whatever she got tired of wearing, she put a price tag on. She also concocted her own creations out of doilies and rags, which cost a bit more but were the ultimate in antique chic.

Szou's work became increasingly visible outside of West Hollywood as the freaks grew more notorious. For example, Paulekas and Szou were both invited to appear on *The Steve Allen Show*—Allen was a client of Paulekas—and Szou was able to show off some of her designs. Franzoni also suggests that Szou "started the see-through look" and that department stores would often copy her designs and put them on the rack.[47]

Szou was only the most prominent creator of freak fashion. According to Des Barres, freak women often invested their energies in an amicable competition to see who could design the most outrageous outfits:

> We were all braless. I would have on an old vintage lace tablecloth with ribbons woven through it, feathers in my hair, loads of makeup, sequins stuck all over my face, and spike heels.

One notable prominent feature of Szou-inspired freak women's style was their adoption and refitting of old dresses and coats that would have been worn by middle class women in the 1940s. Applying sequins and feathers to such garments allowed freak women to constantly live the freak subversion of middle class values through what they wore. Freak women had to be innovative. According to an *AUM* spread on the GTO's:

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[46] Franzoni, "Last of the Freaks"; Paulekas, description for "Free Enterprise"; Paulekas, description for "Cinema Arts"; Des Barres, *I'm with the Band*, 49.

[47] Des Barres, *I'm with the Band*, 50; Franzoni, "Last of the Freaks."

> GTO clothes are found in thrift stores, antique stores, and Good Will boutiques, then put together with maximum imagination. Their favorite clothes supplier is the Glass Farmhouse in Los Angeles, where items range from 50¢ to $5.00 (some things are higher) and where the girls found most of the sartorial splendor seen here.

According to the spread, most of the women also sewed their own garments. Their makeup and hairstyles were also conceptualized in a fashion that balked convention and traditional notions of feminine beauty. For example, a couple of the GTO's wore heavy black eye makeup, which according to a *Rolling Stone* article looked, on Miss Mercy "as if it were applied with a canoe paddle." Makeup was used not simply in a conventional sense but also to draw designs like stars and patterns on faces and bodies. Freak women pieced together a variety of hand-sewn, vintage, hand crafted garments and accented their outfits with outrageous makeup to challenge conventional notions of beauty, propriety, and gender.[48]

Freak men generally wore a mish-mash of whatever cheap, used apparel they could find. Freak men's fashion also mattered, however, especially if one intended to have unquestionable legitimacy in the freak scene. According to Mothers of Invention bassist Roy Estrada, upon his first meeting with Franzoni and Paulekas:

> That was the first time we'd seen all freaked-out people. Carl was in his tights with his long beard, and long hair, and long tongue. Vito was with this young girl—I liked it. I said, "Geez. This is too much." … We started letting our hair grow. Frank had heard that's what was going on so we started to let it grow—but not like the Beatles.

Zappa and his band mates had to adopt the freak style to gain legitimacy within the freak scene. While their typical outfits included bell-bottom trousers, stovepipe hats, unkempt hair, and wildly colored and patterned shirts, Franzoni, the unchallenged leader in this subtle macho battle between freak men, wore brightly colored or patterned tights that were legendarily "groin enhancing"—Zappa once noted that Franzoni's testicles looked "bigger than a breadbox"—and a

[48] Des Barres, *Laurel Canyon*, 29; "Freak Fashion," 30-32; Burks, "The Groupies and Other Girls," 16.

cape with a large "F" emblazoned on the back, which was shorthand for Franzoni's self-styled nickname, "Captain Fuck." Franzoni's status within the freak community reinforces the emphasis they placed on style, but also highlights the reality that the freak lifestyle constantly forced individual freaks to confront their own psychological attachment to the social etiquette of the dominant order. The visual style, then, was not simply about subverting the etiquette and propriety of the dominant order; attaining status within the freak scene was based on how far an individual was willing to step outside that etiquette.[49]

The freaks played an essential role in supporting and promoting the local Los Angeles rock 'n' roll scene, supporting the early careers of bands as diverse as the Byrds, Love, the Seeds, and the Mothers of Invention. Their efforts in expanding the scene within West Hollywood also opened up more venues to rock concerts, which in turn helped musicians who became popular in the late 1960s like Buffalo Springfield, Joni Mitchell, and Neil Young. Groupies like Miss Pamela were a critical attraction that West Hollywood held for touring musicians. Paulekas also used his connections in the community to help organize concerts. The first time he did so, he rented out a hall on Melrose Avenue and charged $1.50 (a dollar for the band; 50 cents for Paulekas) for people to come and dance. Franzoni recalls that Paulekas, a vocal opponent of the war in Vietnam, placed homemade anti-war signs all over the walls.[50]

Zappa created a freak brand of rock 'n' roll to complement Paulekas's choreography that was based on a variety of influences. He and Estrada were versed in local Chicano doo-wop. Ray Collins and Jimmy Carl Black were both veterans of R&B groups. The entire band was fond of old blues and newer jazz records. At the same time, the band often made performative choices that challenged the legitimacy of current musical trends. For example, when asked to lip sync a

[49] Estrada, *Necessity is…*, 20-21; Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 80.
[50] Walker, *Laurel Canyon*, 74; Franzoni, "Last of the Freaks."

song for a television appearance, the band gathered a variety of props and each band member performed a single, repeated action that was, according to Zappa, "not necessarily in sync to (or even related to) the lyrics." This refusal to play by the rules dictated by conventional approaches to marketing made the band notorious, but also laid bare the reality that all television appearances by rock bands were carefully calculated performances. Musically, the most obvious contribution the Mothers of Invention made to rock and the freak aesthetic was Zappa's willful embrace of avant-garde composition. Zappa adapted expressive musical techniques like complex timbers, atonal progressions, polyphony, and irregular rhythms into his rock compositions. These techniques were so typical to the band's music that when they released *Cruising with Rueben and the Jets* (1968), a selection of earnest, sincere R&B songs performed straight, Zappa could joke the record was "an ingenious experiment in rock and roll. It's our protest demonstration."[51]

The other component of this freak aesthetic was Zappa's technical experience, which he had honed since 1963 while working at Pal Recording Studio. Zappa was able to experiment extensively with recorded sounds through various kinds of tape manipulation, inspired by the electronic work of Varése and other avant-garde composers. His work in this respect was not so different from the edits Szou made in her clothing shop each day. Just as Szou took apart and reassembled clothing to create a freak fashion aesthetic that actively subverted the aesthetic of the dominant order, Zappa replicated this process for traditional music by warping, cutting, and splicing tape together with a pair of scissors and tape, as well as experimenting with varying playback speeds. Zappa's aesthetic also mirrored Paulekas's union of the high culture ideas of the Theatre of the Absurd with the popular culture of musical and rock 'n' roll choreography by exploiting presumed incongruities between disparate styles of music. For example, he would

[51] See Zappa, "Edgard Varèse: The Idol of My Youth," *Stereo Review*, June 1971, 61-62; Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 27-34, 80; Zappa, "Ya Madduh!," 13.

often place brief atonal etudes between rock guitar riffs or have his band members perform various motifs by composer Igor Stravinsky over R&B songs.[52]

The primary technique of the freak aesthetic was collage: breaking apart structures and reforming disparate components into something new. Posters, art, fashion, album covers, and music reflected this approach to design. Freaks dismissed the boundaries between high and low culture and blurred the lines between parody and pastiche. In "Groupies and Other Girls," the authors recall the GTO's making jokes about their personalities:

> "I'm the Mae West of 1968," said Mercy. Then, "No, I'm the Theda Bara." Sandra says, "I'm the Italian widow of the group." Someone else says: "I'm the bull dyke of the group."

We will return to the homophobia of that last comment in a moment, but even here freaks made conscious decisions to pair disparate identities with each other, focusing on the juxtaposition of American culture and cultural icons with minorities and other symbols of outsider status. A picture of Bara, a famous silent film star, also appeared on the collage produced for the cover of the third Mothers of Invention album, *We're Only in it for the Money* (1968). The artwork was a parody of the cover of the Beatle's *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) and featured members of the Mothers, Jimi Hendrix, and cutouts of famous people like Bara and Lyndon Johnson surrounded by science fiction and horror monsters, dismembered mannequins and Barbie dolls, rotting vegetables spelling out the name "Mothers," and Lee Harvey Oswald. Freaks worked hard to visualize this contradiction in their everyday lives through the ways they dressed their bodies and styled themselves. The bodies of freak men and women gave form to the plea extended to their potential countercultural public by freak leaders like Franzoni:

> Come out and join us. We need you; we need each other…. When are we going to stand up together with a clear mind and … do something about this screwed up would we live in?

[52] Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 45-56. See Mothers of Invention, "I Ain't Got No Heart" / "You're Probably Wondering Why I'm Here," *Freak Out!* and "Status Back Baby," *Absolutely Free*.

Even off the dance floor, freaks worked to give a visual style to the feelings of budding countercultural activism across the country. Their bodies were an invitation.[53]

The Freak Alternative Norm

This invitation, however, was not as broad as it initially seemed. The alternative norm promoted by freak leaders was just that: an alternative norm, not an alternative to norms. Freaks may have promoted individual expression, freedom, and liberation, but they effectively privileged specific modes of resistance, rebellion, and transgression, which meant that they paradoxically produced normative ways of being anti-normative. The freak alternative norm was also based on conservative assumptions about class, race, gender, sexuality, and ability, which made it alienating to women and minority groups.

Freaks were obsessed with class, both in terms of the middle-class values they critiqued and the ways they sought to express their own identity. Male freaks felt that the breadwinner role expected of middle-class men—pejoratively termed "bow-tie daddies"—chained them to an institutional structure that did not permit individuality or creative expression and therefore left them enervated. In songs like "Bow-Tie Daddy," "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," and "America Drinks," straight men with white-collar jobs were portrayed as heavy drinkers who sought to shut out the world around them. Jobs—especially positions of authority—were frequently jeered in Mothers of Invention songs. "Call Any Vegetable" mocks those traveling to work "on the train" as vegetables. "Help I'm a Rock" compares the titular object to the job of a policeman and the mayor. Jobs transformed male workers into inanimate objects. Franzoni, who had transformed himself from a failed businessman at the mercy of the economic structure of the United States into a lauded member of the freak scene, was seen to embody the style of freak

[53] Burks, "The Groupies and Other Girls," 17; Cal Schenkel, cover, Mothers of Invention, *We're Only in it for the Money*; Franzoni, "A 'Mother' Against LSD," *Los Angeles Free Press*, 7 Oct. 1966, 16.

masculinity advocated by the freak alternative norm: his identity was brash, irreverent, sexual, and liberated at least in part *because* he had given up his middle-class aspirations and steady job. Franzoni's transformation was so complete, in fact, that Zappa joked that his new identity had the power to subvert middle-class order simply through his presence: "He is freaky down to his toenails. Someday he will live next door to you and your lawn will die." Freak men, alternatively, wielded great power as creative activists—enough that they could prove the middle-class was an artifice that would wilt in the presence of authentic creative expression.[54]

Freaks also attacked middle-class notions of the family, pointing to the mistake inherent in attempting to contain authentic creative impulses in a nuclear unit. In "Let's Make the Water Turn Black," Zappa wraps together suburban ennui and parental preoccupation to present a chilling picture of middle-class life: brothers Ronnie and Kenny, unencumbered by parental supervision but unengaged by their bland neighborhood, collect "boogers" and insects in jars and burning warts. "Bow-Tie Daddy" tells the story of an overworked father attempting to control his teenage daughter. "Mom and Dad" features worn-out parents too drunk to properly parent their daughter, who ends up being shot by the cops. In "Uncle Bernie's Farm," parents are presented as dolls: the "mommy" will "do anything but cry," while the "daddy" hands out dollar bills instead of actual emotion. And Zappa's most extreme portrayal of parenthood, "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," ends with a municipal politician fantasizing about having sex with his 13-year-old daughter "on the White House lawn." Two narratives clearly emerge in these portraits. First, the freaks explained behaviors that the middle-class deemed "erratic" as attempts to express authentic desires. Collecting boogers might seem childish, but suburban landscapes offered no

[54] Mothers of Invention, "Bow-Tie Daddy," *We're Only in it for the Money*; Mothers of Invention, "Brown Shoes Don't Make It" / "America Drinks" / "Call Any Vegetable," *Absolutely Free*; Mothers of Invention, "Help I'm a Rock," *Freak Out!*; Zappa, liner notes, *Freak Out!*. On period notions of the breadwinner, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families and the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic, 1989).

other outlet for creative expression. Acting out against their parent's rules was evidence that children understood, as their parents did not, that middle-class life was a lie. Second, freaks asserted that within middle-class culture parents and children became nothing more than objects to one another. With parents stifled at work and children stifled at home, the middle-class pressures of wage earning, familial obligations, and suburban life destroyed the ability of Americans to creatively engage their spouses or children. At its worst, the inability of fathers to freely express their desires forced them to fantasize about their own daughters.[55]

Despite these criticisms, freaks rarely acknowledged the class privilege that allowed them to rebel in the ways they did. Paulekas and Franzoni had been born into laboring families, but both now enjoyed a life of middle-class bohemian excess thanks to Paulekas's earnings as an art instructor to the Hollywood elite. Both seemed to see their life as an escape from the oppressed life that the dominant order laid out for the working class, and while Paulekas occasionally used language that resembled Marxist analysis—for example, in his description of the sculpture "Free Enterprise," he discusses the "exploitation of the worker by the employer"—both men neglected discussions of class as a constraint on the ability of working-class and poor people to freak out. Zappa's background resembled that of the majority of the freaks: suburban transplants from middle-class families, they adopted freak identity in an attempt to transcend their class identity.[56]

Freaks obscured the paradox of this attempted "transcendence" in their argument that culture (not class inequality) was the central problem in American society. Still, the freaks often exploited images of the working class to punctuate a point. In some cases, as in "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," Zappa had the band adopt a stereotypical New York/New Jersey working class

[55] Mothers of Invention, "Let's Make the Water Turn Black" / "Bow-Tie Daddy" / "Mom and Dad," *We're Only in it for the Money*; Mothers of Invention, "Uncle Bernie's Farm" / "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," *Absolutely Free*.
[56] Franzoni, "Last of the Freaks"; Paulekas, description for "Free Enterprise"; Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, 13-27.

accent to sing the lines "Be a jerk / And go to work!" Working-class Americans devoted their labor to the same "world that doesn't care" as the middle class, but Zappa did not distinguish between the social situations of these classes; to labor within the dominant order was, simply, to be a jerk. In other cases, freaks suggested that there were allegiances between their own assumed marginalization from the middle class and the economic marginalization faced by working-class Americans in their day-to-day lives. In "Trouble Every Day," for example, Zappa muses on the fruits of the Great Society and its effects on workers:

> There ain't no Great Society / And the law refuses to see / If all that you can ever be / Is just a lousy janitor / Unless your uncle owns a store / You know that five in every four / Just won't amount to nothing' more / Gonna watch the rats go across the floor / And make up songs about being poor

We might accept Zappa's take on economic oppression in the 1960s at face value—that all Americans were victims of the same structural inequities. At the same time, Zappa clearly lumped himself in with the victims of the Great Society, suggesting that there were parallels between working-class identity and his own freak identity, despite his middle-class background. In short, freaks deployed images of the working class in contradictory ways: at times the working class was used as a reference point for freak identity, while at other times the working class was a target of the same criticisms that freaks levied at the middle class, with little acknowledgment or recognition of the fact that the ability of working-class people to commit to the lifestyle advocated by the freaks may have been limited by financial realities.[57]

The freaks also exploited images of disability in conceptualizing their identity. The adoption of freak visual signifiers—wild clothing, rebellious attitude, and long hair for the men—was a requirement in order to have legitimacy within the freak scene. The equation of this chosen style to imagined "freak" bodies, however—through the names that freaks adopted like "freak,"

[57] Mothers of Invention, "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," *Absolutely Free*; Mothers of Invention, "Trouble Every Day," *Freak Out!*.

"hungry freak," "the united mutations," and "other people," as well as Zappa's frequent references to monster movies, mad scientists, and the movie *Freak*—was insensitive given that most freaks were able-bodied and could claim able-bodied privilege at will. Meanwhile, songs like "What's the Ugliest Part of Your Body?" argued that it was the middle class who led "ugly" lives because of their dulled minds; freak bodies were, in contrast, beautiful. These associations underline another paradox of the freak alternative norm. Consider Paulekas's claim that freaks were "deviant in the healthy sense" and more powerful for it. Disability was invoked by able-bodied freaks in an attempt to make their argument that freak bodies were legitimately different from straight bodies, at the same time that the ideal freak body was clearly able-bodied, even more so than the straight bodies that freaks dismissed as "vegetables," "robots," and plastic.[58]

Freaks often invoked race in a similarly paradoxical fashion. For example, one of Paulekas's sculptures, titled "And Then There Was Light," depicts three black jazz musicians. The accompanying blurb romanticizes the musicians' "devotion to the truth of expression" as "a rare manifestation in a field of widespread prostitution throughout other art media." This wording suggests that these musicians embodied the kind of expression that Paulekas himself sought through dance. Of course, there are racist assumptions embedded in this notion, hinting at the stereotypical notion that black bodies are naturally more expressive than white bodies. And because Paulekas's words also highlight the freaks' belief that they were tapping in to a natural, authentic form of expression, the implicit suggestion is that only white artists had lost this authentic form of expression, and so the freaks were, like these black musicians, engaged in a revolution against the white middle class. Of course, the vast majority of freaks were white and

[58] Zappa, liner notes, *Freak Out!*; Mothers of Invention, "Mother People" / "What's the Ugliest Part of Your Body?," *We're Only in it for the Money*; Paulekas, *Mondo Hollywood*. For more on the appropriation of disability, see Rosemarie Garland Thompson, ed., *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

the freak alternative norm was presented as white, so in many respects the freak counterculture was alienating to African Americans, as well as to other potential freaks of color. Mothers of Invention members Estrada and Black created potential links between the freaks and the Los Angeles Chicano and Native communities, certainly, but both of them remained ambivalent about freak ideology. Black, for example, noted that for a long time he did not "understand" *Freak Out!*. An audio drop of Black introducing himself as "the Indian of the group" was often inserted at random between the band's songs, as if he were a novelty—though clearly this was a joke he was in on. Estrada's recollections of this period in the band's career often seem bemused and noncommittal: "We'd just delve into elements of what was happening at the time." If Paulekas invoked race to legitimize freak "difference"—while ignoring the day-to-day reality of African, Latino, Asian, and Native Americans who lived with racial prejudice on an ongoing basis—his argument was not clearly mirrored or corroborated in the experience and opinions of freaks (or freak-adjacent musicians) of color.[59]

Zappa took this problematic approach to race even further in the song "Trouble Every Day." Transfixed to the television during the Watts Riots, Zappa penned the song to condemn the actions of the police and the obsessive media coverage of the event. But Zappa also argues that individuals should attempt to transcend race:

> All that mass stupidity / That seems to grow more every day / Each time you hear some nitwit say / He wants to go and do you in / Because the color of your skin / Just don't appeal to him / No matter if it's black or white / Because he's out for blood tonight

[59] Paulekas, description for "And Then There Was Light"; Black, interviewed in *Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention*; Estrada, *Necessity Is…*, 24-25. For more on class, race, and social inequality in the period, see Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). On similar appropriations of black identity within the New Left, see Yohuru Williams, *Black Politics/White Power: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Black Panthers in New Haven* (St. James, NY: Brandywine, 2000); Peniel E. Joseph, "Black Studies, Student Activism, and the Black Power Movement," in *Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, ed. Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 251-278.

Zappa annotated the song with these words: "my feelings about racial unrest in general." His characterization of the Riots refused to validate black anger, frustration, or resistance, instead arguing that "stupidity" motivated every party involved. Even when Zappa says, "Hey, you know something people? I'm not black but there's a whole lots a times I wish I could say I'm not white" during an instrumental breakdown, his statement seems to be less about embarrassment at the actions of white municipal authorities than it is about denying the importance of race as a motivational component of an individual's identity. Zappa's proscription comes elsewhere in the song: he sings that "The fire in the street / Ain't like the fire in the heart." It was freaks who possessed "the fire in the heart." In other words, the anger of black protesters who took to the streets during the Watts riot was less legitimate than the anger of freak activists. As with class and disability, freaks sought to legitimize the "truth" of their form of "expression" by invoking images of black artists at the same time that they dismissed racial identity as a powerful or valid motivation for revolutionary activism.[60]

The freak alternative norm also played with traditional notions about gender, sexuality, and family. Zappa often skewered familial obligations with off-kilter love songs where love stood in for commitment, relationship, and marriage; these were, of course, nothing more than the frivolous preoccupations of the middle class. The relationships Zappa attacked were also wide-ranging. Several songs dealt with teenage courtship. The love song "Go Cry on Somebody Else's Shoulder" is described in *Freak Out!*'s liner notes as "very greasy." The audience is told, "You should not listen to it. You should wear it in your hair." Over the bridge, Estrada relates a tragic tale of high school rings and heartbreak at the root beer stand. During the coda he sings, "I don't understand what it is, baby. I had my car reupholstered. I had my hair processed." Love and

[60] Mothers of Invention, "Trouble Every Day," *Freak Out!*. On the Watts riots, see Jeanne Theoharis, "'Alabama on Avalon': Rethinking the Watts Uprising and the Character of Black Protest in Los Angeles," in *Black Power Movement*, 27-54.

dating are, in this portrait, extensions of the plastic, consumer society of the suburbs. "Wowie Zowie" extends this idea: with each iteration of the line "Wowie zowie / Baby you're so fine," Estrada offers evidence of just how "fine" the subject of the song is: he does not care if "you shave your legs," if you "brush your teeth," or if "your dad's the heat." In both songs, Zappa presents love as a fatuous exercise and courtship rituals as facile double distractions, both from the individual liberty valorized by the freaks and from the real purpose of dating. That purpose was revealed in songs like "Duke of Prunes," where a young man tells his date that "The love I have for you / Will grow and grow and grow." In at least one live performance of the otherwise charming "You Didn't Try to Call Me," Collins made that purpose even more bluntly clear: "All I want to do is get in your pants!"[61]

If sex was the sole authentic reason that Americans dated and married, Zappa was even more critical of what marriage was like. His criticism started with the assertion that love itself was a rationalization. *Freak Out!*'s second track, "I Ain't Got No Heart," described by Zappa as a "summary of my feelings on social-sexual relationships," features Collins singing, "I sit and laugh at fools in love / There ain't no such thing as love / No angels singing up above today." Later, Collins screams, "Why should I be stuck with you? / It's just not what I want to do!" "Go Cry On Somebody Else's Shoulder" expands this resistance to ball-and-chain relationships by having Collins croon, "I sure don't need you now." "Now," presumably, that he's a freak. In part, Zappa's own recent divorce likely informed his view of marriage, but it is also critical to examine the constant associations he made between love and consumer items like hygiene products, high school rings, and root beer. Married couples exchanged Zappa's facile accoutrements of teenage dating for suburban homes, corporate jobs, and swimming pools. They

[61] Mothers of Invention, "Go Cry on Somebody Else's Shoulder" / "Wowie Zowie," *Freak Out!*; Mothers of Invention, "Duke of Prunes," *Absolutely Free*; Mothers of Invention, "You Didn't Try to Call Me (Fillmore Auditorium, 25 June 1966)," *The Making of Freak Out!*.

also increasingly became chained to a social structure that denied their creative faculties. Love, then, was simply more evidence of the "plastic" and "chrome" that permeated suburban communities. The chilling song "Who Are the Brain Police?" heightens Zappa's indictment of this lifestyle; in the song, plastic and chrome, the symbols of American free enterprise but also of the men and women who allow themselves to be distracted by consumer culture, are melting. This creatively void lifestyle allows the brain police, a shadowy authority representing the political, social, and cultural institutions of the United States, a much easier time to survey and suppress the population. Love was not just "plastic," then; it was an extension of the insipid forces that sought to keep American citizens in check.[62]

In constructing freak identity in opposition to this view of familial obligations, freaks sometimes or partially acknowledged that real love could exist. In a 1967 interview Zappa was asked, "Can you love in a society that only teaches hate?" He responded, "Why not? Just to be contrary, you can do it. If you really want to be a rebel, honestly try and love something." But freak love and marriage were decidedly different from the lifestyles they rejected. Freaks solved what they perceived as the stifling nature of suburban marriage and the lie of love by rejecting monogamy and sexual inhibition. Paulekas and Szou offered a model: their marriage provided no obstacle to either party for extramarital sex. In fact, according to Des Barres, Szou's bisexuality often saw her competing with her husband for the same young women who attended parties at their studios. Zappa's 1967 marriage would prove similarly non-constraining. Zappa married Gail Sloatman when she became pregnant, mostly to satisfy the concerns of their Catholic parents; Zappa, at least, continued to have sex with other women while on tour. For his part, Franzoni simply avoided relationships altogether. And in this sense, the love-in orgies at

[62] Mothers of Invention, "I Ain't Got No Heart" / "Go Cry on Somebody Else's Shoulder" / "Who Are the Brain Police?," *Freak Out!*.

Paulekas's studio simply took this rejection of institutional monogamy to a community-wide level: if the public freak out was about dance, these love-ins were essentially private freak outs where the sexual urges that freaks expressed on the dance floor could be enjoyed.[63]

The basic outline of the freaks' rejection of commitment will seem familiar to readers of Barbara Ehrenreich's critique of the sexual revolution, *The Hearts of Men*.[64] But the idea of the family and familial obligations played a more conservative, sexist role in the way that freaks conceptualized the dominant order. Mothers were the villain of this conceptualization, placed at the root of familial obligations and framed as the gatekeepers of the dominant order's "outmoded and restricting standards of thinking, dress, and social etiquette." This was the reason that mothers were so prominent in Zappa's music, starting with the name of his band. Estrada recalls, "I think he was asking us for ideas for our name after a while. If memory serves, I suggested 'Muthas.' Later on he said the Mothers was all right." With the implicit but unspoken "-fuckers" implied, the name recommended a freak solution for this malicious maternal figure.[65]

The image of this mother was constructed as one of emotionless repression. On "Uncle Bernie's Farm," mothers refused to cry. On "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," the politician's fantasy life ends with a call from his wife to come home to dinner with his family. On "Mom and Dad," Zappa asked, "Ever take a minute just to show a real emotion / In between the moisture cream and velvet facial lotion? / Ever tell your kids you're glad that they can think? / Ever say you love them / Ever let them watch you drink?" And through the institution of marriage, wives were mothers in disguise: they were controlling ("Anyway the Wind Blows"), they treated men

[63] Zappa, *Age of Rock*, 260; Des Barres, *I'm With the Band*, 79-80.
[64] Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor, 1983).
[65] Estrada, *Necessity is…*, 23.

badly ("How Could I Be Such a Fool?"), and they preoccupied themselves with meaningless consumer items, as Zappa argued on "Harry, You're a Beast":

> You paint your head / Your mind is dead / You don't even know what I just said! / That's you! American womanhood!

Immediately after this section, Madge, the representative of "American womanhood," denies Harry sex. And even in less acerbic material like "Wowie Zowie" and "Go Cry on Somebody Else's Shoulder," the story Zappa prepared generally revolved around young men enslaved by their doomed-to-fail efforts to impress a potential girlfriend. In this sense, the freaks' rejection of familial obligations was a rejection of male commitment to women who represented the frigid and emotionless maternal face of the dominant order.[66]

Zappa's solution to the problem that this mother posed was the "motherfucker," the freak man willing to stand up to these repressive women. Returning to "Harry, You're a Beast," immediately after Madge spurns Harry, her words are followed by a sped-up tape-loop over which the band repeatedly sings, from Madge's perspective, "Don't come in me / In me" until, as the music climaxes, Madge lets out a satisfied post-coital laugh. The segment is played for laughs on the album, but the message remains that Harry—the "motherfucker," "freak," or "beast" —was finally exerting his power. In fact, even his need to overcome Madge's objections seems to legitimize her subjugation: Madge, the face of "empty," face-painted American womanhood, secretly wanted to be overcome. In a metaphorical sense, if the dominant order was gendered female, the power to overcome that order was inherently male. If men were presented as the victims of repression through their workplaces, lifestyles, and marriages, men became freaks by indulging their innate sexual dominance. In Zappa's mind, at least, the repression of

[66] Mothers of Invention, "Uncle Bernie's Farm" / "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," *Absolutely Free*; Mothers of Invention, "Mom and Dad," *We're Only in it for the Money*; Mothers of Invention, "Anyway the Wind Blows" / "How Could I Be Such a Fool?," *Freak Out!*; Mothers of Invention, "Harry, You're a Beast," *We're Only in it for the Money*; Mothers of Invention, "Wowie Zowie" / "Go Cry on Somebody Else's Shoulder," *Freak Out!*.

the dominant order was gendered as feminine and revolutionary power and pleasure was gendered as masculine.[67]

The freaks' rejection of monogamy and their gendering of the dominant order leads directly to the final component of freak identity: their revisioning of gendered and sexual expectations. This process happened on two levels: within the freak leadership and among the young women who filled out the ranks of the freak scene. On the first level, freak men adopted Zappa's vision of the "motherfucker" as a way to ease the loss of the more traditional masculine traits—work, wage, fatherhood, husbandry—that they rejected as part of freak identity. In fact, Zappa argued that the loss of virility that men had experienced in the post-war period was responsible for most of the nation's ills: "A lot of things wrong with society today are directly attributable to the fact that the people who make the laws are sexually maladjusted." Freak men were open about sex, they were anti-monogamous, and they looked to their sexual activities as a further legitimatization of their position in the hierarchy of freak ideology. For example, Franzoni's recollections of his time as a freak are as much about the power of his libido as they are about freak ideology. On Mary, the woman who introduced him to Paulekas: "She's beautiful; I'm interested in fucking her." On going on tour with the Byrds: "I was tormented about not having sex with anybody. All those guys were getting fucked every night." Franzoni soon quit the tour when his young girlfriend was not allowed on the tour bus: "I said, 'I'm just not gonna go. That's it. I'm going back up in the hotel room and ride her ass some more, that's what I'm gonna do.'" Zappa, again playing with the idea of "mother," wrote the song "Motherly Love," which

[67] Mothers of Invention, "Harry, You're a Beast," *We're Only in it for the Money*.

suggested that what young women needed more than their mothers was to experience the sexual abilities of freak men.[68]

This particular song raises another issue. Given the age of Paulekas and Franzoni—and even Zappa—the problematic aspect of this component of freak identity extends beyond simple sexism. Freak men most frequently affixed their attractions and virility to the bodies of young women. "Motherly Love" has Collins singing, "The mothers got love that will drive you mad / They're ravin' 'bout the way we do," followed by "Send us up some little groupies / We'll take their hand / And rock 'em till they sweat and cry." The implication contained in the modifier "little" is brought into relief when the thirty-year-old Collins sings directly to the listener, "It doesn't bother me at all / That you're only 18 years old." Moreover, this fetishization of the bodies of young women was sometimes violent. In "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet," Suzy Creamcheese's virginity is sacrificed as part of a freak ritual. In "Motherly Love," violence is first broached with the idea that freak men would rock these young girls until they "sweat and cry"; later, the song mentions heart attacks, back scratching, and neck-biting. Even if we ignore the intimations of violence and accept Zappa's promise of sexual prowess, this raises another issue: the suggestion of these older freak men who were interested in younger women that they could "rock 'em till they sweat and cry" parallels the suggestion that these men were "young" revolutionaries targeting the pearl-clutching matriarchs of the dominant order, in effect conflating sexual virility with revolutionary potential.[69]

The fetishization of the young female body did not end in the world of fictional songs. Des Barres chronicles several examples of male freaks expecting sex. Paulekas had a cot in the back of Szou's shop; he would often entice random shoppers onto the bed with him and expose

[68] Zappa, interview by Mike Bourne, "An Interview With Frank Zappa," *Down Beat*, 1971, 38; Franzoni, "Last of the Freaks"; Mothers of Invention, "Motherly Love," *Freak Out!*.

[69] Mothers of Invention, "Motherly Love" / "Return of the Son of Monster Magnet," *Freak Out!*.

himself. Des Barres also recalls an episode where Paulekas loaded up his van with young women, drove to a secluded location, and encouraged them to fellate one another while he studiously examined the proceedings in the rearview mirror. In another memory, she mentions a love-in that she and Miss Sparky attended:

> We pressed through the oglers to Szou and Vito's tiny bedroom, which consisted of a doily-laden four-poster on which two tenderly young girls were tonguing each other into shriek city.

Des Barres notes that one of the girls was only 12 and goes on to suggest that this sort of activity was a regular occurrence at Paulekas's parties.[70]

While the bodies of young women may have acted literally as markers of male virility and textually as the foundation for the kind of sexuality advocated by freak men, young freak women were often highly critical of the overly macho identity that freak men adopted and developed their own senses of gender and sexuality. In the most basic sense, freak women rejected the advances of Paulekas and Franzoni, which Des Barres notes were constant. In fact, Des Barres frequently cuts through freak ideology with frank estimations of their character. She dismissed Franzoni as "intensely unappealing" and noted that his high opinion of himself was unwarranted. Des Barres also recalls a party where Miss Lucy, "a Puerto Rican bombshell who was a regular around Vito's," "didn't seem to be enjoying" herself due to the aggressive advances of freak men. In another less critical but equally telling instance, Pamela Zubrica gently mocked Franzoni, saying that he had "an indescribable goatee that rivalled only his tongue in length." Freak women, and especially those who were also groupies, were as sexually active as freak men; however, they made their own choices about sexual partners and their participation in Paulekas's love-ins. Some, like Szou, also made choices about long-term relationships, arguing that Vito's "philosophy has always been that we learn from people younger than ourselves and

[70] Des Barres, *I'm with the Band*, 50-51, 80-81, 86.

an older person deserves respect who listens to a younger person and learns from them." From Szou's perspective, her relationship with Vito was not simply a one-way street.[71]

Freak women were also able to access the basic tenets of freak ideology and performance in their own ways. For example, Des Barres and her friends ignored Zappa's frequent criticism of makeup and hygiene products. Whatever Zappa had to say about face paint or other "plastic" hygiene products, Des Barres was emphatic that she and her make-up wearing friends were at the vanguard of subversive countercultural fashion. Consider the admiration in her recollection of her first meeting with Miss Mercy:

> Both her earlobes had been split down the middle, still managing to accommodate loads of spangly coin earrings that drooped down to her shoulders. Her mouth was a brazen crimson slash, and her fierce eyes poked me like a pointy red fingernail to the plexus.

Freak women looked to each other for inspiration. According to Des Barres, "The wives and girlfriends of my musical heroes were my heroines." These women also learned how to participate in freak activities while avoiding their less desirable aspects. Des Barres recalled fending off Paulekas's advances in the middle of a freak out:

> People would stand and gawk as Vito went into his usual routine of picking one of us up and slinging us across the room, preferably with our dresses up over our heads. I realized that it was no fun to wind up across the room in a heap with several hippies peering at my pubic hair, so I astutely avoided Vito when he came at me with outstretched arms. (He thought we should be *thrilled* at the prospect.)

Judy Raphael, a Los Angeles musician, once argued that Paulekas's choreography placed women "under his thumb." Miss Mercy noted, "You shouldn't be pushed into things." Des Barres's description suggests that she and other freak women enjoyed dancing as part of freak demonstrations—"The dancing was always fun"—but also that she and her friends were both

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[71] Des Barres, *I'm with the Band*, 80; Szou [Sueanne C. Shaffer], interview by Alan Whicker, in "Love Generation," *Whicker's World*, BBC, aired 9 Sept. 1967. For more on groupies in general, see Kathryn Kerr Fenn, "Daughters of the Revolution, Mothers of the Counterculture" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, Durham NC, 2002); Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009).

aware of Paulekas's predilections and capable of navigating around them. In this sense, freak women were able to selectively embrace liberating aspects of male-coded freak ideology to become activists for the liberation of women.[72]

At the same time, conservative notions about gender and sexuality also bound freak women to an alternative norm. One of the GTO's argued, for example, "Girls don't show emotion like they should":

> You know how it is when don't have a boyfriend and there's a girl there to hold you hand, to kiss you, to say nice things to you? It's so important.

The speaker, however, felt immediately compelled to qualify her statement: "That's not homosexual, it's just what I feel." Miss Mercy noted that "some people think we're dykes and they're disappointed when they find out we aren't." And while none of the songs on the GTO's album *Permanent Damage* are particularly critical of freak men, "Who's Jim Sox?" features the following complaint: "How embarrassing it is at only 13 / To have to take showers / In front of a dyke gym teacher?" Set against the complex and contradictory ways that male freaks defined their identity and ideology, freak women turned to homophobic language in an attempt to cast themselves as authentically heterosexual.[73]

Freak identity promised a new countercultural identity that could liberate an individual from the imperatives of the dominant order. In reality, however, this identity was an alternative norm, often conceptualized around conservative and contradictory assumptions about class, ability, race, gender, and sexuality. It was certainly radical in the sense that it offered an alternative style of life for men and women who sought to resist middle-class imperatives, but ultimately freak

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[72] Des Barres, *Let's Spend the Night Together: Backstage Secrets of Rock Muses and Supergroupies* (London: Helter Skelter, 2007), 122, 34; Des Barres, *I'm with the Band*, 80, 91; Judy Raphael, quoted in Walker, *Laurel Canyon*, 30; Miss Mercy [Mercy Fontenot], interviewed in Burks, "The Groupies and Other Girls," 16.

[73] Burks, "The Groupies and Other Girls," 16; GTO's, "Who's Jim Sox?," *Permanent Damage*, Straight STS1059, 1969, 33⅓ rpm.

identity and ideology regurgitated various conservative ideas and was geared primarily towards the bodies of white, middle-class, straight men. For a countercultural group that included women and freaks of color and that shared geography with Los Angeles's gay and lesbian population, freak identity and freak practice were not sufficient to capture and express the diversity of its potential countercultural public.

Pandora's Box

In late 1966, several events occurred in quick succession, ultimately leading to the demise of the freak scene in West Hollywood. First, the increasing influx of drugs into the city over the summer incensed freak leaders, who saw no place for drugs in freak ideology and did not approve of their use. In 1965, Paulekas attempted to explain this:

> I want to be as close to reality as possible and since I have some knowledge about what drugs have done to man in the past—how they have enervated man—I'm very much concerned.

The "reality" Paulekas spoke of is the true liberation offered by freak ideology. Freak leaders felt that freak music and dance—the avenues to freak liberation—required clean and sober minds not "enervated" by the effects of drugs. On 7 October 1966, the day after LSD became illegal in the United States, Franzoni wrote an open anti-drug letter to the *Free Press* where he argued that the effects of drugs could only simulate the euphoria of true liberation:

> Being treated as though … it was an intellectual experiment, as though the taking of drugs some how or other broadens … man's consciousness … is a lot of nonsense.

Zappa and Paulekas shared the view that this type of rationalization was preposterous and inimical to freak ideology. Franzoni continued:

> All the trips and experiences they have had, they should be able to have figured almost everything out by now. What have they come up with? How many hairs on a Bumblebee's back in a snowstorm at high noon in downtown New York!

Despite increasing drug use among freaks and other residents of West Hollywood, freak leaders held fast to their position that drugs could only serve to dilute the liberation that a sober mind could fully experience through freaking out.[74]

Second, local L.A. businesses and artists began to exploit the notoriety of the freaks to boost sales. Franzoni's letter appeared in an issue of the *Free Press* that also featured ads for Ziedler and Ziedler, a clothing company, and a Shrine Exposition Hall "Freak-In" that had not been planned by anybody in the freak hierarchy. Zappa became agitated with the attempts to co-opt the freak name and issued a statement in the very next issue of the *Free Press*. On the Freak-In:

> We find the ad itself, the promoter's attitude toward his audience (of freakers), and the unethical implications of this misguided attempt to corrupt something we, as a group, feel is valid … to be totally bullshit … that is to say: freak-ins (also freak-offs & turn-ons) don't make it.

On Ziedler and Ziedler:

> We are not … flattered or enthused by Baron von Zeidler's imbecile attempt to assert (!) his teen-age (in the deepest Dick Clark sense of the word) coolness by using our group name (with all its inherent rural cleanliness & protein value) to … Hustle Zeidler's mod monstrosities (with which we find it hard to identify).

Zappa even criticized the *Free Press* for misprinting Franzoni's affiliation with the band:

> Karl's worthwhile and well-intended letter to the editor was, unfortunately, incorrectly labeled as a public statement from a member of our group.… We, as a group, do not recommend, verily, we repudiate any animal/mineral/vegetable/synthetic substance, vehicle, and/or procedure which might tend to reduce the body, mind, or spirit of an individual (any true individual) to a state of sub-awareness or insensitivity. We are here to turn you loose, not turn you on.

Zappa's frustrations with these attempts to capitalize on freak counterculture are clearly evident throughout his response.[75]

As Zappa attempted to regroup, he began to look beyond Franzoni's proclamation to the tenuous social climate in West Hollywood. The area was increasingly filled with non-freak countercultural activists, student activists, and teens coming to town on the weekends to find a

[74] Paulekas, *Mondo Hollywood*; Franzoni, "A 'Mother' Against LSD."

[75] Zappa, "The Mothers are on Fire," *Los Angeles Free Press*, 7 Oct. 1966, 14-15.

good party. And while drugs played some role in this shift, the freaks' role in revitalizing West Hollywood clubs had helped foster a new atmosphere that offered sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll to whomever might choose to visit the Sunset Strip, which in turn had aggravated the police. Zappa had already written a letter advising caution to the freak's countercultural public in late September under the pseudonym "Suzy Creamcheese":

> The Mothers' music is very new, and as their music is new, so is the intention of their music. As much as the Mothers put into their music, we must bring to it. The Mothers and what they represent as a group has attracted all the outcasts, the pariahs, the people who are angry and afraid and contemptuous of the existing social structure. The danger lies in the "Freak Out" becoming an excuse instead of a reason…. "Freaking Out" should presuppose an active freedom, freedom meaning a liberation from the control of some other person or persons.

His fears proved to be correct. On 12 November 1966, many young freaks joined with student activists to protest enforcement of the Watts curfew in a demonstration outside the Pandora's Box nightclub. The police responded with punitive tactics in an attempt to disperse the crowd.[76]

For young freaks like Des Barres, the protest was a powerful moment when the young residents of West Hollywood stood together to fight back against corrupt authority. She noted her sense of accomplishment in her journal when protests against the police began, utilizing the language of freak performance-based protest:

> People *hate* too much, and we are living in a world of plastic. Until now, we weren't even noticed, but now (as the spirits predicted) the riots on the Sunset Strip have started. Unbelievable! It's great, we're being heard!! … The revolution has begun.

Zappa's response was vastly different: the event prompted him to write the cutting "Plastic People," a song that would open the second Mothers of Invention album *Absolutely Free*. Zappa's interpretation offers a far different view. After lyrics deriding President Johnson, the police, and the CIA, the next verse pointedly comments on the actions of the protesters: "Take a day and walk around / Watch the Nazis run your town / Then go home and check yourself / You

[76] Zappa, Untitled, *Los Angeles Free Press*, 16 Sept. 1966.

think we're singing 'bout someone else!" In kind with his assessment of the Watts riots, Zappa felt that this type of protest was meaningless in the face of the potential offered by freak liberation—it was a limited "excuse" of "plastic people" who would rather lash out than put in the effort to achieve true liberation.[77]

The politics of *Absolutely Free* and *We're Only in It for the Money* echoed elements of freak ideology, but by the late 1960s Zappa stopped using the word "freak" and much of the other language of freak ideology in his lyrics. The physical end of the freak scene occurred when Zappa gathered the Mothers of Invention and moved to New York City in early 1967 to spend a lengthy residency at the Garrick Theatre in Greenwich Village. Though he returned to Los Angeles in the autumn of 1967, what was left of the freak scene had dramatically changed. Paulekas and Szou spent the late 1960s in Tahiti. Franzoni suggested that Paulekas's absence left a "vacuum" in Los Angeles. Zappa initially reunited with Franzoni, installing himself, Gail, and their daughter at Franzoni's log cabin. Franzoni, however, was soon asked to vacate the premises. The Log Cabin played host to the remnants of the freak scene—the Laurel Canyon Ballet Company, the Mothers of Invention, Franzoni, and others—until Zappa and his family could no longer handle the constant unsolicited visitations of musicians, celebrities, and groupies. After the summer of 1968, Frank, Gail, and their daughter Moon Unit moved to a more secluded home in Laurel Canyon.[78]

Freak ideology lived on, however. Through his albums, his residency at the Garrick, and a 1967 European tour, Zappa gained the notice of several famous musicians, including Pete Townsend, Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, John Lennon, and Paul McCartney. By the time he returned to Los Angeles, and especially by the time *We're Only in it for the Money* was released

[77] Des Barres, *I'm with the Band*, 54; Mothers of Invention, "Plastic People," *Absolutely Free*.
[78] Des Barres, *I'm With the Band*, 80; Franzoni, "Last of the Freaks."

in 1968, Zappa and the Mothers of Invention no longer required the support of the freak scene, but his work carried on its spirit until the early 1970s. Through Zappa, the attitude and ideology of the freaks became a central part of the late 1960s counterculture, especially in its musical components. Consequently, their emphasis on the ways in which the imperatives of the dominant order sapped the creative and intellectual faculties of American citizens became a central part of countercultural and rock 'n' roll attitudes. And while the radical freak identity that Paulekas, Franzoni, and Zappa created was based on various conservative ideas about class, race, the family, gender, and sex, their efforts and strategies were a crucial template for countercultural activism in the United States. Their main idea, that living a different lifestyle by modifying one's body in style, dress, and movement, was revolutionary and liberating for millions of people who participated in or were influenced by the counterculture.

2: "Theater Is Territory": The Haight-Ashbury Diggers, 1965-1967[1]

31 October 1966 was a busy Monday evening for residents of the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco. Popular local rock 'n' roll band the Grateful Dead was performing a concert at California Hall on Polk Street. In honor of Halloween, the concert was called the Dance of Death Costume Ball. In response to California's recent classification of LSD as an illegal substance on 6 October, Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters were holding the Acid Test Graduation Party at a warehouse on Sixth Street. As residents of Haight-Ashbury—hippies, artists, radicals, and young men and women searching for a good time—left their homes to reach these events or other destinations, they joined the city's regular foot traffic, which on this particular evening was augmented by parents and children out for the evening to trick-or-treat.

The Diggers, a recently formed countercultural street theater group, had a plan in place to take advantage of the greater-than-usual foot traffic. They wanted to expand their influence in the Haight-Ashbury community and demonstrate their political vision for the neighborhood by shaking up its routine of daily and nightly migration between private homes and private businesses. To that end, they conceptualized the "Full Moon Public Celebration of Halloween," which would offer an alternative, communal celebration.[2] The event would challenge a diverse public to join in an extraordinary iteration of the everyday act of crossing the street, asking potential participants to resist the social and municipal conventions that governed public space by acting unexpectedly. They would gain control of the geography in which they lived by engaging in what Digger Peter Berg termed "life-acting," or acting as if the circumstance they

[1] "Theater is territory" appeared in a leaflet titled "Trip Without a Ticket" that the Diggers distributed in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood in late 1966. The full quotation reads, "Theater is territory. A space to exist outside padded walls." Peter Berg, "Trip Without A Ticket," reproduced in *The Realist*, Aug. 1968, 3.

[2] Unknown, "PUBLIC NONSENSE NUISANCE PUBLIC ESSENCE NEWSENSE PUBLIC NEWS," handbill, 29 Oct. 1966, Haight Street Diggers, Records, folder 1, North Baker Library, San Francisco, CA.

desired—one in which public space was truly public and not regulated by municipal convention—was already the reality.[3]

The Diggers had only been active in the Haight for a month or so. Their performance-based public actions combined elements of communitarian anarchism and radical theater, but they often expressed their ideas in public performance and in a series of broadsides that used contemporary slang. The name "Diggers" was a perfect example. Berg chose to adopt the name of the English agrarian anarchist group that had existed from 1649 to 1650, but the name was also a pun on "digging it," or getting it. The Diggers were formed over the summer months of 1966 by a small group of disenchanted members of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, including Berg, Emmett Grogan, and Peter Coyote. These men had each grown dissatisfied with Mime Troupe artistic director R.G. Davis's conceptualization of political praxis. Davis argued that the Mime Troupe should advance a social agenda by practicing "guerilla theater," which would "teach, direct towards change, be an example of change." Davis had outlined this approach in a manifesto in 1965, identifying radical theater as a pedagogical tool that could be used to unite the goals of radical art with those of the New Left.[4]

Grogan, Berg, and Coyote had three main points of contention with Davis's concept of guerilla theater. First, they believed that Davis's insistence on traditionally scripted and staged works was creatively and politically limiting. Second, they believed that his emphasis on theater as pedagogy was condescending to their audience. The architects of Digger ideology argued that performance-based public actions would be more effective if they involved the audience, that

[3] Berg, "Trip Without A Ticket."

[4] R.G. Davis, "Guerrilla Theater," originally published in the *Tulane Drama Review* (Summer 1966) and reprinted in *The San Francisco Mime Troupe: The First Ten Years* (Palo Alto, CA: Ramparts Press, 1975), 130. For more on the fissure between the Mime Troupe and the Diggers, see Michael William Doyle, "Staging the Revolution: Guerilla Theater as Countercultural Practice, 1965-1968," in *Imagine Nation*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 76-79.

liberation would be best achieved not by seated members of an audience separately mulling over the finite message of a scripted performance but by a collective experience of liberation produced by individuals involved in the performance itself. Finally, the Diggers were suspicious of Davis's commitment to the New Left, arguing that groups like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were too proscriptive: SDS told people how they should live their lives, providing a structure that Grogan, Berg, and Coyote thought was too similar to the structure the dominant order imposed.[5] Coyote later argued that SDS activists were so embroiled in the 1960s Cold War mentality that they missed the point: "We knew…the problem wasn't capitalism. The problem wasn't Communism. The problem was *culture*." Performance-based public actions like the Full Moon Public Celebration were intended to attack this problem head on.[6]

As the routes of unsuspecting parents and children, concert fans, hippies, and other pedestrians led them towards the intersection of Haight Street and Masonic Avenue, they were confronted with the spectacle of hundreds of men and women crossing the normally busy intersection at all angles, congregating mid-intersection to converse with one another, dance in public, and hold up traffic. Above the moving crowd loomed two nine-foot puppets borrowed from the San Francisco Mime Troupe. On one corner, the Diggers had erected the Free Frame of Reference, their giant, gold-painted wooden doorframe that acted as a symbolic entry point that passersby might use to "enter" a given performance and "change their frame of reference." Diggers moved through the crowd, passing out 75 lathe miniatures of the Frame, each fixed with string for people to wear around their necks. The event seemed to be a communal rejection of the rules of public space. If, as Berg suggested, life-acting was about making the choice to act out

[5] See Emmett Grogan, *Ringolevio: A Life Played for Keeps* (New York: Little, Brown, 1972), 239-254.

[6] Peter Coyote, interview by Robert Greenfield, in Bill Graham and Greenfield, *Bill Graham Presents: My Life Inside Rock and Out* (New York: De Capo Press, 1992), 184-186.

one's desires in public, the Full Moon Public Celebration offered everyone who happened upon it a choice: to join in this spontaneous community gathering or to continue on their way.[7]

The Full Moon Public Celebration provides us with a useful introduction to Digger performance and strategy in action. The Diggers' script for this territorial theater was deceptively simple, little more than a rejection of the painted lines and light cues typical of an American intersection. These were, as conceptualized in this performance, the rules and guidelines that contained and limited bodies within that space. Potential participants were advised by the Diggers' invitation that they should play the "Intersection Game," for which they were given an "object" and a "style." The object was, simply enough, walking around and across the intersection until they had paced out all of the various shapes that could be created by drawing intersecting lines from the corners of a square. A diagram was helpfully provided on the Diggers' invitation. The style of the Intersection Game was "don't wait don't walk," and the alternatives to walking were listed as "umbrella step, stroll, cake-walk, sombersault, finger-crawl, squat-jump, pilgrimmage, philly dog, etc." While the invitation presented this game as frivolous fun, the performance itself attacked deep-seated assumptions about social freedom. First, the intersection itself, normally a temporary stop during travel through a given urban space, became a destination where members of the community could interact with one another—it would become an intersection for the community, rather than traffic. Second, the invitation further elaborated on the role that the public was to play in this performance by noting that "the Public is any fool on the street" and "only a fool walks in traffic."[8] In both cases, "fool" was granted positive valence; he or she was a kind of outlaw who balked at even the most mundane rules,

[7] Unknown, "Diggers New Game: The Frame," *Berkeley Barb*, 4 Nov. 1966, 1.
[8] "PUBLIC NONSENSE NUISANCE."

seeing them for what they were: the most basic components of a much larger system of control imposed upon American citizens by the institutions of the dominant order.

An article in the *Berkeley Barb* article neatly captures the excitement and enthusiasm of those who participated in the Full Moon Public Celebration. By 6:00 p.m., 600 of these newly christened fools and outlaws swarmed through the Haight and Masonic intersection; their numbers only increased as people abandoned their cars or got off of buses to join in. As the crowd grew with passersby, including costumed adults and children, the puppets enacted an improvised skit that repeated many of the salient catchphrases from the invitation, directing people to walk in traffic. People were so excited that their enthusiasm was not dampened as a police cruiser, sirens ablaze, slowly maneuvered its way into the middle of the intersection. Participants continued to move around the car as the police officers, disoriented by the scene, searched for someone in charge to confront. The *Barb* article records an amazing scene where one officer, finding no clear leader, began questioning the two figures that seemed most in charge: the puppets. Eventually, the police arrested the men holding the puppets and the Frame: Berg, Grogan, Robert Morticello (the sculptor who created the puppets), and Digger friends Pierre Minnault and Brooks Bucher. Absurdly, they also arrested the puppets, throwing all seven figures into the police wagon.[9] Neither these arrests, however, nor the arrival of more police dissuaded the crowd. Many began to chant with those Diggers who had not been arrested, yelling "Pub Lic" and "Frame Up." The *Barb* article suggests that a sixth man who was not associated with the Diggers was arrested for telling the police, "These are our streets." With the puppets out of commission, the Diggers began to play records, people began to dance, and the remaining police officers left with little ceremony or conflict.[10]

[9] Unknown, "Diggers New Game," 1.

[10] Unknown, "In the Clear," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 30 Nov. 1966, 1.

While the *Barb*'s account makes the community spirit of the event palpable, the article does less to parse the meaning of this performance. The Full Moon Public Celebration was an ambitious project for the Diggers, who had to this point comfortably ensconced themselves in the Panhandle with a daily Free Food performance that involved a free community lunch. These Free Food performances were also built around a challenge leveled at municipal and social conventions, as will be explored more in depth later in the chapter, but their limited size drew only marginal scrutiny from municipal authorities. Transforming a busy intersection into a stage for life-acting was a much bigger risk than appropriating a shaded corner of the Panhandle, both for the Diggers and for their audience. Those who chose to participate were not just outlaws in an ideological sense; they were breaking the law. The choice "any fool on the street" made to join the Full Moon Public Celebration involved a complex dissection of the explicit, implicit, and often-mundane ways that the design of the urban environment helped to contain and order the bodies and impulses of Haight-Ashbury residents. Public actions like this were conceptualized by the Diggers as spaces where individual participants were encouraged to act out their desires in order to free themselves from the psychologically overbearing imperatives of the dominant order. As the crowd's enthusiasm for the Full Moon Public Celebration attests, it represents a moment when the Diggers were very successful at fashioning short-term praxis out of their long-term political goals.

The Diggers' event, however, also revealed the limits of the group's ideology. To begin with, the performance presented itself as spontaneous, but it was also necessarily choreographed: participants were asked to reject the imperatives of the dominant order that limited their creative expression and their relationship to public space, but they were asked to do so in this particular way. As was the case with other Digger actions, the promise that the Digger performance

extended to potential participants was not a blank check for the many forms that individual liberation might take. The Full Moon Public Celebration, for example, could only sustain individual autonomy so long as the form that each participant's autonomy took was complementary to the "object" and "style" of the performance itself—literally, each participant had to play the role that the Diggers had scripted for them.

Rarely did the Diggers make concessions to desires and modes of creative expression that existed outside the fairly narrow parameters that they themselves set. Consider another broadside released by the Diggers just before the Full Moon Public Celebration, which summarized the group's goals: "THE D I G G E R S demand an ERECTION!" The Diggers would accept any help "to quicken the rise of the ERECTION and give meaning to its eventual climax." Here the Diggers described their political goals with frank, sexual imagery; individual autonomy and communal revolution were both likened to the power of the male orgasm. While the promise extended by the Diggers to the public seemed inclusive, their style—this masculine metaphor for individual autonomy—exposed the limitations of Digger activism. This issue goes to the heart of the Diggers' ultimate failure to gain widespread support for their attempts to refashion the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood into a permanent stage for life-acting, which they called the "Free City." This chapter therefore argues that while events like the Full Moon Public Celebration of Halloween proved the Diggers to be adept at expressing complex political ideologies in new, hip language, they frequently described their own power in terms that excluded many from their vision of an alternative future.[11]

Given the Diggers' approach to activism and their distrust of the New Left, it is surprising that much of the work on the history of the Diggers has focused on trying to situate their efforts

[11] Unknown, "Where is PUBLIC at?," handbill, 1966, DP001, Digger Archives, www.diggers.org/bibscans/dp001_m8.jpg.

inside it. Less perplexing, perhaps, are efforts to situate the Diggers within the history of left wing avant-garde theater. Both approaches seem less useful than an assessment of the Diggers alongside other countercultural groups such as the freaks, with which they shared three important ideological commitments. First, Diggers and freaks shared an emphasis on culture as the central factor that defined the imperatives of the dominant order and performance-based protests against that order. Second, both groups valorized the body in public performance, understanding the body to be an incredibly potent weapon in the fight to resist restrictive social mores and cultural conventions. Third, just as the freaks deployed "freak" and "freak out" as key words in their struggles, the Diggers encapsulated their message by frequently invoking the concept of "free"; if one was free, one was the valorized fool or outlaw who lived unshackled by the imperatives of the dominant order.[12]

Digger Geography and Participants

This chapter traces the Diggers from late September 1966, when the group began to organize public actions in the Haight in the wake of the Hunter's Point Riots, to the end of the summer of 1967, when the Diggers found their ideology and practices no longer sustainable in the face of an increasing influx of youth prompted by the Summer of Love. During this short period, the Diggers were successful in forging a countercultural public that challenged the imperatives of the dominant order through a deceptively simple campaign that made ample use of the word "free": free food, free clothing, free medicine, free bodies, and free public spaces. Digger performances

[12] For examples of work that situates the Diggers in the radical traditions of the New Left, see Doyle, "Staging the Revolution"; Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Dominick Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past: The Sixties in American History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999). For work that situates the Diggers in the history of radical theater, see Bradford D. Martin, *The Theater Is in the Streets: Politics and Public Performance in Sixties America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004). For other work on the Diggers, see Tim Hodgdon*, Manhood in the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities, 1965-83* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

were deliberately built around the mundane occurrences of everyday life: eating food, going to the health clinic, shopping, wandering through the community.

The Diggers were not a formally organized group; nor did they have an official membership. Planning for public actions was informal, though Grogan, Berg, and Coyote were often at the center of these discussions. Still, as the group's ranks expanded towards the end of the summer of 1966 and into the fall, more men and women became indispensible to the Diggers' cause. Grogan's friend Billy Murcott became the primary architect of Digger language and frequently composed the text for the group's broadsides. Billy Fritsch, who would join the Hell's Angels in late 1967, often took a leading role in the execution of public actions. Berg's partner Judy Goldhaft was often involved in creating, organizing, and refining Digger performances. Women like Phyllis Wilner and Sienna Riffia were central to the daily Free Food performances that the Diggers put on in the Panhandle for months. Chester Anderson, a science fiction author, allowed the Diggers to use his silkscreen mimeograph machine to produce inexpensive paper copies and his electronic stencil cutter to produce their broadsides. This proved crucial to the Diggers' attempts to reach out to their community—the simple format removed the need for editorial or layout considerations that would have been necessitated by, say, a community newsletter, and any Digger could run to the flat where the machines were kept and replicate notices, announcements, and event advertisements in real time.[13]

The Diggers shared the belief that the imperatives of the dominant order were so insidious that even simple acts of communal bonding—having jovial conversations on street corners with strangers, sharing food with neighbors, enjoying community access to basic social services—could break down and dissolve the harsh restrictions placed on individuals, their bodies, and the

[13] Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall: A Chronicle* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1998), 133-40.

public spaces in which they existed. According to Coyote's 1998 autobiography, "People had internalized material values and cultural premises about the sanctity of private property and capital so completely as to have become addicted to wealth and status." He argued that "freedom," as Americans understood it, was "harnessed to the notion of enterprise" and that "it limited aspirations (to adult adjustment, for instance), created continual cultural upheavals, ignored interdependence, violated the integrity of the family and community, exhausted biological niches, and strip-mined common courtesy and civility from public life." The Diggers believed that "personal liberation" from these cultural imperatives would prove to be the "antidote to such addictions." American culture had turned the idea of "free" into an oppressive fiction; the Diggers saw true freedom as "inner wildness and personal expression" or the ability to truly express one's inner desires.[14]

Free ideology was, in effect, a complication or expansion of freak ideology. If the freaks' goal was to emancipate bodies in a visceral and immediate sense, it often seemed as if the challenge that those freed bodies posed to the dominant order was the end goal of freak activism. The Diggers, in contrast, saw free bodies as part of a broader renovation of the local community into the Free City, a loose local organization that would support free food, social services, basic necessities, and public space. For the Diggers, such spaces and services *should* be free as a moral imperative. They argued that "it's free because it's yours," a catchphrase that repeatedly advised residents of Haight-Ashbury that the capitalist privatization of food, health care, and other basic necessities created an oppressive and divisive culture that muted basic human impulses.[15] In this sense, if the freaks rejected capitalism as a kind of hegemonic tranquilizer that provided the middle-class with products that muted innate desires and doubled as tacky distractions from real,

[14] Coyote, "The Free Fall Chronicles: Playing for Keeps," 1997, Digger Archives, www.diggers.org/freefall/forkeeps.html.

[15] Digger broadside, reproduced in Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 247. This broadside has not survived in hard format.

authentic truths, and if the New Left attacked capitalism as an economic structure that deprived individuals of social and political rights, the Diggers viewed capitalism as a set of cultural and social beliefs that suppressed the natural tendency of humans to reach out to one another within the community.

The Haight-Ashbury community played a crucial role in the development of Digger ideology. In 1965 it was already home for many of the Diggers. Coyote notes, for example, that he and Grogan became such good friends in part because they lived across the street from one another, and therefore many of their early conversations directly concerned the social setting of the Haight more than San Francisco as a whole.[16] The Diggers also saw the growing community of hippies now living in the Haight as an audience likely to be receptive to their ideas. The hippies, themselves an amorphous group of men and women drawn to San Francisco by the increasing vitality of the artistic scene in the mid-1960s, had coalesced in Haight-Ashbury for a variety of reasons. The traditional North Beach territory of the Beats, a vibrant artistic community in the late 1950s, had been commercialized to the point where it was no longer a viable counterculture destination by 1962. In Haight-Ashbury, the inexpensive availability of large Victorian houses that had been vacated in the 1950s attracted ex-North Beach residents and new San Franciscans alike.

Within this context, the development of Digger countercultural activism was mediated by four local political, social, and cultural developments: the growth of the hippie population in the Haight, the ascendancy of the San Francisco Sound as a local and national phenomenon, the rising popularity of LSD, and the formation of the Haight Independent Proprietors (HIP) merchants association.

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[16] Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall*, 43.

First, the hippies shared many of the basic values of Digger activism: their mistrust of liberal capitalism; their embrace of new styles of dress, attitude, and etiquette; their emphasis on social responsibility; and their fascination with drugs and rock 'n' roll. The hippies had also inherited, through the beats and figures like Ken Kesey and Timothy Leary, the bohemian notion that transforming individual consciousness was an effective method of social transformation. The Diggers shared their faith in the value of individual reform as a preface to social change. Additionally, the presence of wildly attired hippies could only serve to enhance the necessary public visibility of Digger performances. But where Diggers expressed their reform goals and practices in terms that grounded them in the physical and social environment of the Haight, the hippies often looked to drugs and Eastern spiritual philosophy as means to explore philosophical truths. Guided by Berg's concept of "life-acting," the Diggers viewed self-exploration as an active—and sober—process that required investment in the serious act of living.[17]

Second, the rise of the San Francisco sound, branded by its promoters and critics as an essentially American response to the popular British rock 'n' roll that dominated the charts in 1965 and 1966, drew increased national scrutiny to San Francisco, hippy culture, and the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. In a broad sense, the media's fascination with the hippies and the colorful bands that made up the San Francisco music scene—including Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, Moby Grape, Big Brother and the Holding Company, and Quicksilver Messenger Service—led the Diggers to retaliate against both the commercial interests invested in exploiting elements of hip culture and the media's narrow and simplistic views of the alternative lifestyles associated with this music.

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[17] On hippies and hip lifestyle, see John Arthur Maynard, *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Francis J. Rigney and L. Douglas Smith, *The Real Bohemia* (New York: Basic Books, 1961); Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1983). On the Diggers' relationship to hippies, see Sherri Cavan, *Hippies of the Haight* (St. Louis: New Critics, 1972).

That said, the schism between the rock 'n' roll scene and the Diggers began earlier, in the summer of 1965, when Berg was still a member of the San Francisco Mime Troupe. The Mime Troupe had its license to perform in public parks revoked after complaints that its members employed "four letter words" to protest poverty and the Vietnam War.[18] In response, Bill Graham, the Mime Troupe's financial manager, organized a concert fundraiser at the Mime Troupe's South-of-Market loft to help pay for the company's legal defense. The event was so successful that Graham began to argue that the Mime Troupe's financial difficulties could be alleviated if the company were to use their loft to host a series of Mime Troupe-sponsored rock 'n' roll concerts. When the other Mime Troupe members disowned similar future events, Graham lashed out against their intransigence and argued that the success of his benefits proved that rock 'n' roll was more viable than theater to promote social change. A tense full-company meeting resulted in a vote in which only Graham and one other member voted in favor of the benefits. The rest of the troupe was aghast. Berg in particular recalls being dismissive of Graham's arguments: "It was something like, '…You can't do plays as though they're social weapons.' … That as an entrepreneur he could purvey more new culture than we as political activists could conceive or commit…. I mean, he said that to *us*, though." The Mime Troupe broke ties with Graham, but Berg's suspicions that the rock scene was more about profit than social change very much influenced Digger ideology.[19]

Third, the rising popularity of LSD in Haight-Ashbury and the intellectual discourse surrounding the drug conflicted with the Diggers' message. The Acid Tests, a series of events in

[18] Davis, quoted in *Bill Graham Presents*, 123.

[19] Berg, quoted in *Bill Graham Presents*, 156. To be fair to Graham, his early efforts to promote San Francisco culture seem to suggest that he believed he could achieve both aims: his efforts to forge cross-generational and cultural exchanges between artists and musicians would indirectly lead to the Artists Liberation Front, at the same time that he also maneuvered himself into a pivotal position in the community by forging contacts with venue-owners and most of the local rock bands.

which Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters presented LSD as a catalyst for expanding one's consciousness, became popular over the summer of 1966. The Diggers, like the freaks, reacted to the euphoria surrounding the use of LSD with a critical eye. Most of the Diggers tried acid; many enjoyed it. But most saw a critical distinction between the use of drugs for recreational enjoyment and the way many in the Haight-Ashbury community promoted faith in the cathartic power of this hallucinogen. Grogan suggested that while "the drug might facilitate understanding, or the process of doing something, it offered no moral direction or imperatives."[20] The Diggers felt that equating LSD with salvation was a cute media trick; they argued that "profit-driven" underground newspapers like the *SF Oracle* were eager to promote any aspect of Haight-Ashbury culture that would make it more fashionable. According to the Diggers, individuals could choose to try acid, certainly, but the expectation promoted by figures like Kesey, Owesley, and members of the Grateful Dead that LSD could help facilitate individual autonomy was farcical and distracted from the personal and communal experiences that the Diggers advanced as the path to true liberation from the imperatives of the dominant order. [21]

Fourth, the formation of the Haight Independent Proprietors (HIP) merchants association signaled a profit-driven investment in the commercialization of the hippy aesthetic, both locally and nationally, and this shift complicated the relationship between the Diggers and broader hippy culture. Young men and women attracted to the Haight by San Francisco rock 'n' roll and LSD proved to be eager to adopt local codes of hipness; consequently, the market for hippie clothing and other accessories expanded rapidly over the course of 1966. Members of HIP opened boutique stores throughout Haight-Ashbury to cater to this desire. The Diggers were incensed, arguing that the hippy lifestyle—and the associated drugs, clothing, and music—were not, in and

[20] Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 237.

[21] Berg, Draft Letter to an Underground Newspaper, 1966, Letters Collection, DP009, Digger Archives, www.diggers.org/pb_to_up.htm.

of themselves, radical, and declaring that "dropping out does not mean changing clothes."[22] They railed against HIP for knowingly codifying and promoting what they perceived to be an empty, cookie-cutter image for profit. Grogan notes that members of HIP often acted as self-proclaimed spokesmen for hippy culture, superficially situating themselves outside of mainstream commerce by expressing lukewarm criticisms of capitalist culture that were in fact contradictory to the profit these merchants were making.[23] The final straw for the Diggers was a 1966 campaign in which HIP merchants began placing signs in their shop windows that said, "Take a Cop to Dinner." The Diggers broke into the local SDS chapter office and mimeographed a series of broadsides that responded to what they considered HIP's naïve requests for community building. The broadside suggested that one should "take a cop to dinner and feed his power to judge, prosecute and brutalize the streets of your city." HIP remained a focal point of Digger criticism based on what they considered to be the lip-service that HIP gave to social change in exchange for profit.[24]

This was the community in which the Diggers took shape over the summer of 1966: a new, fascinating culture marked by what the Diggers saw as competing, contradictory, and self-interested messages that sold a particular idea of the Haight for public consumption while ignoring the ways in which the hip residents of the Haight, however alternative they seemed by their clothing, hair, or social calendars, were still chained to a cultural system maintained and deployed by the dominant order. As the summer ended, Berg, Coyote, and Grogan were joined by Murcott, and the four men began to hone in on the facets of the local community that they wished to challenge. A series of discussions led them to adopt a basic plan to retaliate. They

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[22] Ibid.

[23] Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 238.

[24] [Emmett Grogan and Billy Murcott], "Take a Cop to Dinner Cop a Dinner to Take a Cop Dinner Cop a Take," handbill, 20 Sept. 1966; reprinted in *The Realist*, Aug. 1968, 14. See also Unknown, "Money Is An Unnecessary Evil," ca. 1965, DP011, Digger Archives, www.diggers.org/bibscans/Dp025_m.jpg.

would perform three daily "spontaneous" stagings of Gregory Corso's play *Standing on a Street Corner* for Montgomery Street office workers; the idea, really, was to "perform" the play without letting on that it was a performance. Corso was a Beat poet and part of an influx of New Yorkers to the west coast in the mid-1960s; his sole play was one of Berg's favorites, often used in workshops during Berg's tenure with the Mime Troupe. Corso's script contained the line "standing on a street corner doing nothing is power"; Berg believed that this line encapsulated the whole range of political ideas the Diggers were groping to express. Berg often attempted to capture the meaning of the phrase in his writing. His assertions that "theater is territory" and "the public is any fool on the street" were obvious attempts to capture the spirit of Corso's idea: that power exists in an individual's choice to do "nothing," where nothing is a rejection of the social responsibilities demanded of the public by the dominant order. The Corso project, however, never made it past rehearsals; in late September, the Diggers were distracted by another event.[25]

The Hunter's Point race riots on 27 September 1966 profoundly affected the development of Digger ideology. As Grogan tells it, the riots set off a furious debate among San Francisco radicals about municipal authority and human rights. The riots were provoked by Mayor John Shelley, who, in an effort to control the enraged black community in the aftermath of the police shooting of 16-year-old Matthew "Peanut" Johnson, declared a 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. curfew to be imposed on Bayview-Hunter's Point and the Fillmore District. Shelley also declared a state of emergency, and, on the 28th, the National Guard was brought in to help enforce it. Outraged, SDS activists traveled around with megaphones, urging San Franciscans to take to the streets and confront the authorities. On the 29th this resulted in the arrests of many SDS activists. Grogan and Murcott wandered the streets in shock, annoyed by the oppressively restrictive actions of the

[25] Berg wrote a eulogy for Corso in 2001 re-emphasizing his fondness for the writer's ideas. See Berg, "Standing on a Street Corner Doing Nothing is Power," reprinted in *Poetry Flash*, Apr./May 2001.

municipal authorities but also suspicious of the cavalier directives of the SDS, which they saw as too eager to start up a violent riot and too ready to declare what the appropriate response to the mayor should be. In response, they wandered around the Haight posting scribbled pages advising individuals, as the Corso play advised, to not do what was expected of them, but instead do what they wanted to do. The Diggers wrote that individuals should ignore the curfew if they felt like it, or, if they chose to, stay at home. It was a simple message, but one that fueled Digger activism from that point on: "free" meant that all choices were the individual's to make.

Digger Influences

In formulating their ideology and conceptualizing their public actions, the Diggers were influenced by three broad epistemologies. First, a mixture of American and European radical traditions provided the framework for the Diggers' conceptualization of the world around them. Many Diggers had been exposed to certain strands of American or European radical traditions through the preoccupations of their parents. In a 1982 interview, Berg listed some of these family histories: Jane Lapiner attended Communist Party (CP) camps as a child; Nina Blasenheim's father was a member of the CP; Lenore Kandel's father was a noted communist writer; Billy Fritsch's Jewish, progressive family had links to the longshoreman's union and the CP; Judy Goldhaft came from a similar Jewish progressive socialist tradition; and Coyote grew up in a left-wing middle-class Jewish family. But while the political affiliations that various Diggers had been exposed to worked their way into their conversations, according to Berg it was the fact that most Diggers had not "read much political stuff," despite their upbringing, that was so incredibly enticing:

> Of the dozen initial protagonists of the Diggers, probably only myself had anything like a radical political historical sense. The other people weren't radical, political traditionalists, which is what attracted me to what we were doing. That's what pulled me into it—that people were accomplishing what radical traditionalists might want to accomplish without even knowing the

> background. So I was sort of a resource for that sort of stuff. I was the only one who had read Kropotkin, ok? Or the Situationist material thoroughly.

Berg argues that Grogan, in particular, forced Berg to rethink his approach to radical politics, because he had no interest in "actively trying to tie things into the historical tradition of left-anarchism."[26] Coyote clarifies the emphasis Diggers placed on anti-intellectual activism: "Our parents came out of the Depression and built this permissive loony bin of a culture and the kids grew up knowing they were being shortchanged." He continues, "Part of the energy for the Haight was this hunger for real experience."[27] Berg makes a similar argument, suggesting that what united intellectual and anti-intellectual Diggers was that in their search for something "real" they all felt dispossessed from both the dominant and radical traditions of American history. Even well-read Diggers like Coyote and Berg were reluctant to construct intellectual or philosophical explanations for their actions, as the language of the traditional left was not one which satisfactorily described their desires. That distinction, in particular, was quite clear for Berg: far from engaging "revelatory" philosophy that pondered "the inner truth and mystery of life" in order to construct a coherent political ideology, the Diggers willfully attempted to let their ideology be motivated by social concerns: "things were real when people did them, and what people do has to relate to food, shelter, economics, employment, creativity, etc."[28] In this sense, the Diggers saw no paradox in cobbling together a blueprint for their ideology from a variety of radical traditions while denying any allegiance to those traditions based on their assertion that what they were involved in was "real," "authentic," and immediate.

That said, Berg's examples clarify the role he played in formulating Digger ideology. Peter Kropotkin was a Russian advocate for anarchist communism; he argued for the dissolution of

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[26] Berg and Judy Goldhaft, interview by Marty Lee and Eric Noble, 29 Apr. 1982, San Francisco, Digger Archives, www.diggers.org/oralhistory/pb_jg_0482.htm.

[27] Coyote, *Bill Graham Presents*, 186.

[28] Berg and Goldhaft, interview by Lee and Noble.

central governments in favor of horizontal networks of voluntary association. The community-based networks of resource sharing that were the end goal of Digger activism—what they called the "Free City"—essentially replicated Kropotkin's proposed framework. The Situationist International, a radical group of European artists and political activists formed in 1957, advised their supporters to create situations for audiences to explore their own politics, clearly anticipating similar attempts by the Diggers to insist that there was no difference between everyday life and acting—or, rather, that both were performances.[29] Berg's intellectual background in these traditions was a driving force in Digger ideology, whether or not the group as a whole chose to acknowledge it.

Grogan notes that Coyote helped to bridge the gap between Berg's intellectual background and his own mistrust of structural reform—and, therefore, the New Left—in one particular moment of clarity during their discussions:

> These discussions…dealt with the freedom being assumed by young people in Haight-Ashbury and throughout the world. They agreed that the ultimate goal of the Haight community seemed to be freedom and a chance to do your thing, but they felt one could only be free by drawing the line and living outside the profit, private property, and power premises of Western culture because, as Coyote remarked, "The idea of changing anything from within has been exploded long ago."

Coyote's implicit dismissal of Old and New Left strategies of dissent would prove central to the performance-based activism of the Diggers. His emphasis on the ways in which cultural assumptions helped to maintain the legitimacy of the liberal order also seemed to provide a focal point for Grogan's working-class anti-authoritarianism and Berg's intellectual roots in Marxism and anarchism: they could follow both threads by working outside the system. Murcott also played a crucial role.[30] According to Coyote, it was Murcott's seemingly effortless ability to synthesize the sometimes erratic, free form discussions between the other members into

[29] Ken Knabb, trans., *Internationale Situationniste* 1 (June 1958): 23-26.
[30] Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 236-237.

accessible manifestos that proved essential to the group's early success. Murcott came up with the style and tone that dominated the Diggers' broadsides and consequently gave shape to the language the Diggers employed in their public actions.[31]

Second, the Diggers' conceptualization of the roles of the body and the audience in their performances owed much to the teachings of R.G. Davis. Davis was intimately connected to various radical theatrical traditions; he was openly allied with theater of the absurd playwright Bertold Brecht and had formed the Mime Troupe in 1959 after studying at the *Ecole De Mime* in Paris under mime expert Étienne Decroux. As artistic director of the Mime Troupe, Davis worked to unite three separate theories of performance and politics into a cohesive form of radical activist expression located in bodily movement and community organization: these were the mime theory of Decroux; the Italian theatrical tradition of commedia d'ell arte; and a tradition of American radicalism embodied by the journal *Studies on the Left* through the work of his friends and journal founders Saul Landau and Nina Serrano. Each of these theories had a profound effect on the way Berg, Coyote, and Grogan conceptualized their ideology and their strategies of performance as they participated in the Mime Troupe in 1965 and 1966.

The Diggers' view of the centrality of the body to creative expression and political liberation did not really deviate from that of Davis. Davis's teacher, Decroux, believed, quoting sculptor Auguste Rodin, that "the movement of the body is the passage from one attitude to another."[32] Decroux taught that the attitude and motivation of an embodied movement were more important than the movement itself and that movements that effectively conveyed attitudes were incredibly powerful. He further argued that the reliance of actors in traditionally-staged performances on words, hand movements, and facial gestures removed them from an authentic state to which

[31] Coyote, interview by Etan Ben-Ami, Mill Valley, CA, 12 Jan. 1989, Digger Archives, www.diggers.org/oralhistory/peter_interview.html.

[32] Ruth Butler, *Rodin: The Shape of Genius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 153-156.

audiences could relate. This concept of authenticity was crucial to a Digger performance: the subjects it dealt with had to be, in Berg's terms, "real," and the opportunities it offered had to be accessible by real people. Under Davis's tutelage, the Diggers learned to view Decroux's concept of the "corporeal mime" as an opportunity to unite theatrical bodily movement with an explicitly political project. In Grogan's typically hyperbolic terms, the Diggers created "a radical company" that had "developed their theater arts into a medium for revealing the lies on which the US Government based most of its foreign and domestic policies."[33] Hyperbolic, but also to the point: the Diggers believed that, through subverting the mundane ways that social convention ordered human bodies, a community could, in fact, deconstruct the imperatives of the dominant order. A Digger performance, therefore, was by definition a physical medium; the message lay in the ways the bodies of participants acted and performed unfettered by social concerns about etiquette or convention and not, as was the case in more traditional political theater, in scripted words. As Berg and Grogan developed the idea of the corporeal mime into the concept of life-acting, they dismissed more traditional methods of political theater, assuming, as Davis taught, that telling people how to act was less powerful than showing them.[34]

The Diggers also adopted Davis's belief in the power of the Italian tradition of *commedia d'ell arte*, perhaps even more explicitly than their teacher did. An Italian tradition, *commedia d'ell arte* flourished between the 14th and 18th centuries. Performers wore masks and often staged their productions in public locations. The masks allowed the performers anonymity, a way to relate with their audience as archetypes rather than actors, as well the opportunity to avoid arrest by the authorities. Davis translated the method of *commedia d'ell arte* by staging Mime Troupe performances in San Francisco parks; he was fascinated with the destruction of artificial

[33] Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 232-235.

[34] See Berg and Goldhaft, interview by Lee and Noble.

boundaries between public space and the private stage of a theater. The Diggers expanded this notion in several ways. First, they believed that any public space could be a stage, but also that any and all passersby could be actors. Ideologically, Diggers further argued that life itself was always a performance; choosing to abide by the rules of the dominant order or to shirk them was nothing more than a choice about how to perform a role. In this sense, Digger ideology was infused with an expanded concept of *commedia d'ell arte* that assumed that if all life was acting, the political purpose of public theater was to allow individuals the space to "change [their] frame of reference." If showing was more powerful than telling, then allowing the audience to experience change on their own terms would be more powerful still. The Diggers therefore advised participants, "You are your own alternative." Unsettling the boundaries between performer and audience was critical for the Diggers.[35]

Another component of Davis's vision became a sticking point. Davis's teachings about embodied movement and theatrical insurgence fascinated Grogan and Berg, but rarely did these future Diggers feel like Davis followed through on his own promise. The Mime Troupe performed in parks, certainly, but they still performed in a stage-like area with boundaries that separated the performers from their audience, they still relied on scripts to make their points, and they still did little more than recite their messages to an audience. Grogan and Berg, more interested in the theoretical foundation of Davis's approach than the actual way the Mime Troupe performed, began to believe that Davis clung to scripts for two reasons: he was afraid to abandon what society might still deem a legitimate form of art and he was too married to the idea of uniting the purposes of radical art and the New Left through scripted work.[36] For his part, Davis

[35] Berg, interview by Leonard Wolf, in *Voices from the Love Generation*, ed. Wolf (New York: Little, Brown, 1968), 251-57; Unknown, "You Are Your Own Alternative," 1966, Vertical Files, Counterculture—Hippies and Bohemians—Diggers, Labadie Collection, Harlan Hatch Graduate Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

[36] Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 236-237.

saw his goals and the goals of the New Left as parallel; he envisioned a place for the Mime Troupe in the vanguard of the revolutionary left and worked hard to accommodate New Left principles into the company's work. In order to achieve this goal, he asked *Studies on the Left* founders and Mime Troupe members Saul Landau and Nina Serrano to assume responsibilities for the day-to-day operation of the company. Landau and Serrano did not simply emphasize New Left politics, however; they also began to implement an SDS-style organizational hierarchy for the company, which alienated Berg, Coyote, and Grogan.[37]

Finally, the Diggers were influenced by Davis's outline of the concept of guerilla theater—the name of which was actually Berg's suggestion—in a manifesto he delivered to the Troupe in 1965. Davis believed that the Mime Troupe could use the template of Latin American revolutionary Che Guevera and argued that, like guerilla insurgents, the company's members could conceive of themselves as a small unit of individuals who could fight against incredible odds to reform or revolutionize the "system." Unlike the New Left, however, and as historian Michael William Doyle has pointed out, Davis's manifesto indicted society, "but curiously not the *state*." Whatever differences the Diggers had with their former employer and the relationship he tried to forge with the New Left, they shared with Davis a faith in the idea that it was society and culture that posed obstacles to true liberation. In the end, though Davis was unwilling to transform the Mime Troupe's activities to the extent that Berg and Grogan believed would merit the phrase "guerilla theater," his basic approach to performance left an indelible mark on the work of the Diggers in the coming year.[38]

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[37] Landau wrote a note for Davis in 1965: "We are dealing with amateurs [in the Mime Troupe] who do not act as professionals ... Amateurism is death to the growing theater." Typescript document by Davis entitled "1965 Notes/Letters," San Francisco Mime Troupe Collection, box 2, University of California Library, Davis.

[38] Davis, "Guerrilla Theater," 152.

The relationship between the Diggers, the Mime Troupe, and various American and European radical traditions was complex. That said, some scholars have insisted that the countercultural approach of the Diggers maintained deep continuities with more traditional forms of theatrical protest in the 1960s, and especially the Mime Troupe. Dominick Cavallo has noted that "[Digger] notions that the 'play' should be 'free,' that the gestures made by actors should jog the audiences' 'frames of reference' and that the purpose of acting was to inspire the audience to 'act,' were all Mime Troupe perspectives." Similarly, Bradford D. Martin has argued that the Diggers helped legitimize public performance as an aesthetic form when they took theater to the streets and that the brash, public actions organized by the Diggers were in the tradition of Mime Troupe shows. While it is true that the Diggers did not formulate their political ideology or performance strategies out of whole cloth, the critical point that these arguments miss is that the emphasis the Diggers placed on the "real," the "authentic," and the performative nature of life reformulated the threads they plucked from other modes of resistance into a strategy that viewed the struggles of the left in an entirely new way. This worldview was contentious enough that Davis disowned the Diggers' contributions to radical activism; this suggests that while there were links between the Diggers and their predecessors, the Diggers were as interested in reforming the left as they were in transforming the dominant order.[39]

Digger Ideology and Practice

Early in October 1966, in the wake of the Hunter's Point riots, the Diggers' plans to stage *Standing on a Street Corner* now seemed irrelevant to the problems their community faced. Instead, the Diggers set out to conceptualize a performance strategy that could galvanize the Haight-Ashbury community around Digger ideology. Grogan came up with the idea of obtaining

[39] Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past*; Martin, *The Theater Is In The Street*.

a selection of produce and meat from the San Francisco Produce Market in order to provide free community lunch. Grogan's genial personality, his working-class background, and his knowledge of Italian allowed him to woo market vendors and fill Murcott's '55 Ford station wagon with crates of fruits and vegetables. The two men also managed to get fifty pounds of chicken and turkey parts from a local poultry plant. Stealing two large milk cans, which Grogan realized was sizeable enough for the production of large quantities of stew, Grogan and Murcott began to produce the food while other Diggers spread the word to the Haight-Ashbury community by mimeographing and handing out several hundred leaflets:

> FREE FOOD GOOD HOT STEW
> RIPE TOMATOES FRESH FRUIT
> BRING A BOWL AND SPOON TO
> THE PANHANDLE AT ASHBURY STREET
> 4 PM 4 PM 4 PM 4 PM 4 PM
> FREE FOOD EVERYDAY FREE FOOD
> IT S FREE BECAUSE IT S YOURS!

When they arrived at the Panhandle with the stew, people were already waiting.[40] According to a *Berkeley Barb* article, "Word spread from mouth to ear that the Diggers would provide free food in the park panhandle. About 75 people showed up with bowls, spoons, and more food." The success of the event prompted the Diggers to conduct Free Food performances every day for the next few months, at least when the necessary foodstuffs could be obtained, bought, or stolen.[41]

The daily meal made Digger ideology accessible to potential converts in a variety of ways. First, there were practical advantages afforded by a community lunch that gathered local participants together in a highly visible public space and offered regular opportunities for bonding and discussions of a variety of political, social, and cultural topics. Second, daily

[40] The exact date for this first Free Food lunch is unclear, but Grogan suggests that he started working on the lunches almost immediately after he and Murcott defied the municipal curfew enacted after the Hunter's Point Riot on 29 September. Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 234-239. This would place the first free lunches in early October 1966.

[41] Unknown, "Burocops Probiscis Probes Digger Bag," *Berkeley Barb*, 3 Oct. 1966, 3.

iteration meant that the Diggers could easily adapt and modify these Free Food performances on a day-to-day basis to better suit their purposes. For example, the Free Frame of Reference was added to further enhance the idea of the lunch-space as a performance. Daily iteration also gave repeat-attendees the space and time to acclimate themselves to the purpose of the performance. This last element turned out to be critical. Consider, for example, Coyote's recollection of his first experience with a Free Food performance, which highlights the strategic way that Grogan deployed ingrained cultural expectations in relation to the men and women who attended the lunches. Coyote notes that he approached Grogan and the vats of stew, but his initial reaction to Grogan's attempt to offer him food was to decline. He recalls his instinctual assumption that there must be other attendees who needed the food more. Grogan immediately responded, "That's not the point." Coyote recalls that this offhand remark neatly transformed all the conversations he had had with Berg and Grogan over the summer into a very real and simple understanding of Digger strategy: "The point was to do something that you wanted to do, for your own reasons. If you wanted to live in a world with free food, create it and participate in it. Feeding people was not an act of charity but an act of responsibility to a personal vision." Like many who attended a Free Food performance, Coyote was forced to check his own ingrained assumption that free food must necessarily be a form of charity; this food, Free Food performances argued, was already his. But that deceptively simple message was accompanied by a deeper argument: the food might be free—indeed, the individuals present might already be eating it—but the performance demanded a crucial internal process whereby the idea of food would become unmoored from the economic, social, and cultural expectations of the dominant order. Coyote notes that the Diggers quickly realized that the countercultural space of

performance was crucial: "We were all products of…culture, and could not always be immediately certain whether or not one's ideas were truly inner-directed or not."[42]

If the simple transaction of giving and receiving free food could produce reactions or revelations that were similar to Coyote's, the meal itself became a synecdoche for the more complex array of social and cultural concerns that were the subject of Digger countercultural activism, an idea underlined once the Diggers erected the Free Frame of Reference next to the serving stations. Those who came to share the food were asked to queue though the doorway to "change your frame of reference." This had the dramatic impact of framing the Panhandle as a stage, highlighting the idea that a Free Food lunch was a performance and a demonstration. The act of eating and sharing food communally in public transformed the mundane and necessary act of eating into an extraordinary protest that worked on several levels. In the most immediate sense, the public's participation allowed the Diggers to brandish the economy of food as a critical example of the ways that capitalism, liberalism, and post-World War II American cultural assumptions about the prosperous society had failed the people of the United States by denying individuals equal access to necessary staples. But the pressure the Free Food events placed upon participants to re-imagine concepts of ownership, production, and community also made the Free Food lunches an attack on a host of other cultural assumptions. First, they complicated notions of what the use of public space should or could be and what types of community-building activities were valuable, as well as who exactly benefited from such activities. Second, they underlined the Diggers' fears about how isolated and alienating life had become in modern American communities while putting their solution into practice: if a combination of the price of food, work schedules, and social expectations—all imperatives of the

[42] Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall*, 56.

dominant order—had isolated meal time within private homes and restaurants and away from the community, the Free Food performances used meal time to expose the simple pleasures and transformative political potential of a daily community gathering. The Diggers believed that this active process of redistributing property on a daily basis was infinitely more accessible than attempts by either the Mime Troupe or SDS activists to educate citizens about the inequalities that private property created for society. In *Ringolevio*, Grogan suggested that "New Lefties" were probably jealous of Free Food, dismissively saying that SDS activists would have only done the lunches as a photo opportunity.[43] For Grogan, the Free Food performances were strategic but also about authentic experience: they transformed a potentially off-putting intellectual discussion into something real, immediate, and ready to eat.

The Panhandle itself played a crucial role in the meaning of the Free Food performances. A narrow extension of Golden Gate Park, the Panhandle divided the Western Addition from the Haight-Ashbury district to the south. Located in this narrow, uninterrupted green space—except by Masonic Avenue at its midpoint—the Free Food performances were highly visible to the vehicular and pedestrian traffic on either side, daring the public to engage with the event in all manner of ways. Furthermore, the presence of the Free Frame of Reference heightened the distance between those who chose to pass through the Frame to participate and those who did not. This was, in part, because of how the Diggers conceptualized the meaning of the Frame. Because they did not claim a substantive distinction between real life and their performances, passing through the Frame meant that an individual was merely passing from one way of acting to another. The implicit suggestion was that the attendees of a Free Food lunch now had the correct frame of reference—or, rather, that they were now acting the right way. But because

[43] Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 249.

acting "right" in this instance meant nothing more than "sharing food in a park," the Diggers were also able to gain audience support for their version of "right" when, inevitably, suspicious observers, police, and municipal authorities criticized Free Food performances. On 17 October 1966, for example, after news of the lunches raised the curiosity of municipal authorities, the Health Department, accompanied by the police, appeared to inspect the food. They were told it was a picnic. Because it essentially was, frustrated police officers cited Murcott's food-laden car for having its wheels on the grass of the Panhandle, enraging participants. More mundane interactions were also crucial to communicating the Diggers' sense of "right." Curious passersby were offered a meal and then treated according to their response. Those who accepted without remark were celebrated. Conservative critics who scoffed at the spectacle were jeered. Liberal witnesses who assumed the food was an act of charity often offered money to support the effort, only to see their cash burned before their eyes and their philanthropy mocked as liberal guilt.[44] Such interactions strengthened the bonds between the Diggers and the Haight-Ashbury public because they validated the Diggers' arguments about the ways in which the imperatives of the dominant order stunted meaningful human interaction. Based on the public nature of the Free Food performances in the Panhandle, the Diggers were able to formulate an important binary between community-invested Haight-Ashbury residents and anti-community municipal interlopers. For those who chose to join the Diggers on the "right" side of the Frame, it was as simple as "joining in and acting out."[45]

The success of the Free Food performances is only underlined by the difficulties the Diggers often faced when attempting to expand the ideals these performances embodied to other venues. The most notable attempt was the Free Store, a project initiated by Billy Frisch at the end of

[44] Coyote, "The Free Fall Chronicles: Crossing The Free Frame Of Reference," 1997, Digger Archives, www.diggers.org/freefall/freefram.html.

[45] Unknown, "Trip Without A Ticket."

1966. Having obtained various goods through legal and illegal means, Frisch opened a "store" where those goods were available for free. Because the Free Store relied on stolen merchandise, the Diggers found the concept difficult to sustain. Frisch rented an abandoned 6-car garage at 1762 Page Street for the Free Store. This location only remained open for three weeks before the authorities cited building code violations and the Diggers were forced to reopen at 520 Frederick Street on 8 January 1967. Police raids challenged the project, however, and then suddenly the building was condemned in February. At that point, Berg and Goldhaft took over the project and eventually rented an old building on the corner of Cole and Carl Streets. The store was renamed Trip Without a Ticket and, to avoid further police raids, the store began to accept donations, in large part to disguise whatever stolen merchandise might be present. The Diggers were also forced to take other precautions: policemen and others who asked for the person in charge of the store were told, "You're in charge! You be in charge!" Digger men and women took turns looking after the store. Leases were signed by friends passing through town and never by those who worked there.[46]

Despite these challenges, the Free Store and Trip Without a Ticket still managed to express the spirit of the intended Digger performance. Blank draft cards were handed out to soldiers who wanted to get out of the military. Goldhaft worked at the store five days a week making tie-dyed shirts and maintaining sewing machines that were available to anyone who needed them. Berg concentrated on developing interactions and games between "proprietors" and "customers," returning to the workshop methodology he had employed with the Mime Troupe. Beyond these basic services, there was also the fundamental fact that patrons were asked to accept that any and all merchandise currently in stock was free for anyone to take, adapting the lessons of Free Food

[46] John Curl et al., *The History of Collectivity in the San Francisco Bay Area: From Indian Times to the Present* (Berkeley, CA: Homeward, 1982), 34.

to clothing and other necessities. Coyote remembers working the store one day when he noticed a customer clandestinely placing articles of clothing in her bag. Coyote noted, "You can't steal here"; the woman said, "I wasn't stealing." Coyote smiled and responded, "You thought you were stealing. You can't steal here because it's a Free Store. Read the sign, everything is free! You can have the whole fucking store if you feel like it. You can take over and tell me to get lost." Coyote and the woman shopped for about an hour and then the next week she returned with a box of donuts that she placed on the counter before browsing the racks. The Free Store project forced customers to interrogate their assumptions about what ownership and property meant.[47]

The Digger Alternative Norm

Thanks in part to the notoriety of the Free Food performances in Haight-Ashbury, the word "free" gained utility as crucial shorthand for the Diggers' desire to live "outside the profit, private property, and power premises of Western culture."[48] Coyote notes that the Diggers understood "free" to mean "personal liberation," as opposed to a liberal definition that harnessed "freedom" to the expectations of capital enterprise. In other words, the emphasis of the dominant order on "free" labor and capital turned members of a community against one another as they competed for work, resources, and money. The Diggers instead advocated a "freedom of authenticity," according to Coyote, which meant "new ways of living and interacting together which were not predicated on the premises of capital and markets—imagining a culture you would prefer and making it real by acting out." The Diggers underlined the communal aspect of the freedom they promoted by denying the efficacy of leaders within this process. According to

[47] Coyote, "Crossing The Free Frame of Reference."
[48] Grogan, *Ringolevio,* 237.

Coyote: "We expanded the idea of freedom to include anonymity (freedom from fame) as well as eschewing payment for what we did, supposing that if one acted for personal recognition or wealth it was not really free at all."[49] In effect, this denied their own role in promoting freedom.

"Free" also signaled the differences that the Diggers perceived between themselves and those who defined themselves by the imperatives of the dominant order. In this sense, "free" was not simply about politics or ideology; "free" was a fundamental component of the identity the Diggers espoused. Male Diggers in particular staked their very identity on "freedom" in an attempt to solve the same conundrum the freaks had confronted: if countercultural manhood identified money, the market, and wage-earning as inauthentic markers of manhood, what was the real root of authentic American masculinity? The answer to this question came in spurts throughout October and November. Early broadsides simply attacked money; one declared those addicted to it to be "weak," claimed that it stopped the free flow of energy in individuals and communities and called it "evil." Male Diggers, because they rejected the power of money, could count themselves among the "strong" and be confident that their "energies" were free flowing. Digger broadsides also dismissing the idea of wage-earning as a true marker of manhood. One, titled "Cool Cranberry Horsehaired Mouth…," disparaged the role of wage-earning by noting the vast disparity between company profits and workers' wages:

F	striking results of guidelines—between 1960 and 1965	F
L	profits went up by 52% after taxes—dividend payments	L
A	to stockholders increased by 43%—the weekly after tax	A
S	take home pay of factory workers was up by only 21%—	S
H	oh yes—ho hum…	H

Other broadsides were more blunt. Headlined "Money is an unnecessary evil," one asked all people to "turn in their money." It continued, "No questions will be asked." Generally, however,

[49] Coyote, "Playing for Keeps."

these initial attempts to characterize Digger identity centered mostly on vague suggestions that it was different and more authentic than that of the wage-earners these broadsides skewered.[50]

Later in October the Diggers began to expand their depictions of what Digger identity was not with a broadside titled "A-Political Or, Criminal Or Victim Or…." It began, "You're born a citizen of a nation. A citizen of a nation with rulers who legislate rules commanding you to be free." The rest of the text composed an indictment of the various limitations placed upon "beings and bodies" by the imperatives of the dominant order: schooling, the draft, the military budget, marriage, low wages, the lack of political representation for youth, the bipartisan political structure, market and industrial monopolies, curfews, and, finally, the police, who the Diggers saw as arbitrary and reactionary arbiters of obscenity, loitering, nudity, sedition, subversion, marijuana, LSD, gambling, homosexuality, statutory rape, common-law marriage, abortion, and demonstrations against the police. In an article titled "The Ideology of Failure," which was published a few weeks later on 18 November 1966, Murcott was able to wrap these disparate ideas into a coherent argument about what effect these limitations had on individual bodies. Signed "George Metesky"—a common Digger pseudonym that referenced the infamous bomber who had planted explosives in New York City during the 1940s and 1950s—the article characterized adherents of the dominant order as individuals afflicted with *sanpaku*, a Japanese term that describes the visibility of the whites of an individual's eyes beneath their pupils. The Diggers employed *sanpaku* in its figurative sense: it suggested exhaustion, enervation, decreased sexual virility, and bad instincts. U.S. citizens who accepted the chains that the dominant order placed upon them were, in short, repressed.[51]

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[50] Grogan and Murcott, "Money is an Unnecessary Evil."

[51] Murcott, "A-Political Or, Criminal Or Victim Or….," handbill, DP004, Digger Archives, www.diggers.org/bibscans/dp004_m8.jpg.

The references to virility and the fear of sexual enervation highlights the basic character of Digger identity as its architects understood it: it was, at least metaphorically, virile, tough, and male. In confronting the same conundrum as the freaks, the Diggers essentially replicated their conclusions: that real, authentic masculinity lay in the needs and abilities of the male body. Liberation, in effect, was located in the ability of an individual to unleash the real, authentic desires of his body, which the dominant order sought to repress. Even more than the freaks, however, the Diggers asked for this active liberation to happen in specific ways. For example, Murcott's article, reacting to the commercialization of hippy culture, LSD, and HIP, made a plea to the hip residents of San Francisco: it was not enough to simply dress differently or live an alternative lifestyle, especially if that alternative lifestyle was made possible by a living wage. The article derided "salaried hipness" and offered specific examples that dismissed the work of many prominent Haight-Ashbury artists and vendors: making "music with mercenary groups" or carving "leather into sandals for twenty dollars a pair." The article noted that a simple contrast of alternative values—"macrobiotic diets, hallucinogens, eastern and western aesthetics, philosophies"—with middle-class "values, goals, reactions, and attitudes" proved that any difference between the two lifestyles was slight: the dominant order and the commercial hip order "offer different styles" but were essentially invested in the same result: "personal, national, or racial success."[52] In other words, the Diggers demanded that Haight-Ashbury residents understand the hippy lifestyle to be hollow and apolitical—it was nothing more than a new brand or a different way to sell the same old imperatives of the dominant order.

In response to this, the Diggers demanded that their adherents situate their own individual liberation within a narrow range of activities that the Diggers sanctioned as "free," regardless of

[52] Unknown (signed George Metesky), "The Ideology of Failure," *Berkeley Barb*, 18 Nov. 1966, 6.

the extent to which non-Diggers could afford to do so. In immediate terms, the ability to consistently life-act required a lack of familial and workplace commitments, as well as the willingness to operate on the boundaries of accepted social etiquette, whether that meant stealing food or clothing or being arrested for civil disobedience. Because the idea of male Digger identity was tied to the idea of virility, which in turn was tied to the idea of the social outlaw, the Diggers did not seem to believe in casual participation. An individual might participate in a Digger event and might even experience a moment of true autonomy in performance, but if they had a day job that liberation was not real.

The solutions offered by the Diggers also ignored the roles that race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion played in informing the decisions and desires of potential members of the countercultural public. They espoused a political identity that was overtly coded as male, and more subtly as heterosexual and white, and asked manly potential converts to accept the negation of their race, class, and religion, as if these things were nothing more than the calculated impositions of the dominant order. The only way these subjects were overtly addressed in Digger broadsides was the vague assertion that they would no longer matter once everybody had chosen to re-invent their life: according to Murcott and Grogan, "There are no more negroes, jews, christians. There is only one minority in America."[53] In other words, at the same time that real, authentic American identity lay in the power of bodily urges, it also lay beyond class, race, and religion. This attempt to define a universal Digger identity that privileged raceless, classless, and religionless masculinity is the clearest example that what the Diggers offered their potential countercultural public was an alternative norm and not a platform from which to explore any and all formulations of free expression. At the same time, and more importantly, the identity the

[53] Grogan and Murcott, "Let Me Live in a World Pure," handbill, ca. 14–20 Sept. 1966, DP-003, Digger Archives, www.diggers.org/bibscans/dp003_m8.jpg.

Diggers espoused was frequently complicated and undermined by several practical matters and internal anxieties that placed race, class, gender, and sexuality at the forefront of Digger preoccupations.

Perhaps because the Diggers were all white, race seemed to cause them the most insecurity and also seemed to be deployed in the most contradictory ways. First, race was frequently used to challenge and condemn the credentials of other activists. In the simplest sense, Diggers drew on race-based metaphors. For example, an early broadside penned by Grogan and Murcott labeled LSD-advocate Timothy Leary "Uncle Tim." This was a clear reference to "Uncle Tom," the icon of African American accommodation, and suggested that Leary was actively beholden to the tenets of the dominant order. The Diggers also dismissed hippies with implicit and explicit appeals to notions of race. The same broadside, for example, ended with a parody of Allen Ginsberg's famous poem "Howl." Ginsberg's version began as follows:

> I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by
> madness, starving hysterical naked,
> dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn
> looking for an angry fix.

Grogan and Murcott pivoted off of the elegiac quality of Ginsberg's words to paint a much different picture:

> Our bowels quake
> in constipated false alarms.
> We are often naked and nameless
> in boring rooms with tedious records.

White hippies were presented as being obsessed with hipness, which they ineffectually tied to hip-yet-conformist décor and record collections. They were not of the streets; they were afraid of them. Here, a specific kind of whiteness had no revolutionary potential.[54]

[54] Ibid.

Second, the Diggers frequently highlighted their own comfort with race in an attempt to legitimize their identity. This happened in several ways. In *Ringolevio*, for example, Grogan carefully and willfully cultivated a nonchalant view of black masculinity and sexuality, at one point glibly mocking white servicemen as being afraid to associate with black men because they were afraid to find "their women fucking a nigger in the backseat of the family Ford." Grogan's message can be read in a number of ways: that he was comfortable with interracial sex and with sharing his sexual partner; that he was confident enough in his own masculinity and sexuality that this would not happen; or that he was comfortable enough with his own racial identity to use the word "nigger" in a non-pejorative sense. In any reading, his word choice highlights his willingness to deploy racist language to further his own image.[55] Some Diggers were understandably less comfortable with Grogan's approach, unwilling to so directly invoke race as a way to shore up their own countercultural identity. The middle-class Coyote, for example, wrote an article in the *San Francisco Express Times* that asked guerilla "pales" and revolutionary "blacks" to suspend racial allegiances in favor of a new totalizing identity category labeled "street." Though this idea seemed to muddle Grogan's approach, Coyote's message hardly mattered, as most black activists ignored his article.[56]

At the same time, the Diggers *had* formed significant relationships with groups like the Black Panthers that even middle-class Diggers could point to as evidence of their "street" credentials. In reality these relationships were mostly due to Grogan's apparent charisma. Black Panther David Hilliard, for example, genially recalls Grogan's occasional food deliveries to

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[55] Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 222.

[56] William Bonney [Coyote], "Flower Power Smothers," *San Francisco Express Times*, 29 Feb. 1968, 8. On white activists employing race-based interpretations of their oppression, see Steve Estes, *I Am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Erika Doss, "Imaging the Panthers: Representing Black Power and Masculinity, 1960s–1990s," *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 23 (1998): 483-51.

Panther headquarters: "Groggan [*sic*.] sticks his head in the office…. 'Potatoes and beans today?' …Nothing of the eager-to-please liberal." The Diggers also helped the Black Panthers mimeograph their first newspaper and worked to coordinate efforts to minimize violence between black and white youth. Grogan's working-class background was likely important, here: Hilliard seems almost relieved at Grogan's easy-going nature and the absence of the types of difficulties that black activists typically encountered when dealing with middle-class white liberals and radicals.[57]

Third, the Diggers appealed to American notions of race to lend authenticity to the idea that the Diggers were oppressed. Coyote, in another article, discussed an incident where the police had humiliated his friend Ron Thelin:

> It's about manhood and it's about lameness. America kills black manhood by making black men slaves. She kills white manhood by turning pale brothers into "white men." The lames kill their own manhood doing things no man would do and pretending they HAVE to because they're afraid to take care of themselves. So one dude does something he wants to, WHEN he wants to and everybody goes crazy, and gives the cops the go-ahead to get what scares them the most: manhood, dignity, independence.

Coyote framed "white men" as a construct created by the dominant order; "white men" were not, in other words, real. Coyote argued that white men were in reality "pale brothers," simultaneously attempting to equate Digger masculinity with black masculinity and arguing that the authentic state of masculinity did not rely on race, but solely on the qualities that the Diggers valorized: "manhood, dignity, and independence." Men who allowed the dominant order to force them into doing things like earning a wage were the "lame" victims of the dominant order's intent to stop a man from attempting to do "something he wants to, when he wants to." Given the frequency with which the black male body was sexualized and situated as primitive in American

[57] David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, *This Side of Glory: The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), 158. On coordinated efforts to minimize violence, see "Warning to So-Called 'Paper Panthers,'" notice, Black Panther*: Black Community News Service*, 14 Sept. 1968, 10.

culture, this naked attempt to equate the white bodies of the male Diggers with those of their black "brothers"—and the claim that the default race of authentic masculinity was not white—was clearly an attempt to both legitimize the Diggers' own oppression and reify their claims to authentic, virile masculinity.[58]

The Diggers appealed to American notions of class in a similar fashion: the cultivation of a working-class image served to legitimize their credentials as activists and men and played a crucial role in the development of Digger identity. Given the presence of Diggers who could legitimately claim a working-class background, however, the most curious effect of the way the Diggers deployed notions of class was that despite their overt dismissals of hierarchy, this created internal hierarchies of hipness within the group. Working-class Diggers like Grogan, Murcott, and Fritsch were assumed to naturally have fewer hang-ups than middle-class Diggers like Berg and Coyote and consequently more legitimate claims to authentic masculinity. They were, in effect, more authentically "free." But middle-class Diggers like Berg and Coyote dealt with their inability to directly claim working-class allegiances in a few ways. Berg, for example, often set his own intellect in direct competition with the soft-spoken Murcott. When the latter eventually left for New York toward the end of 1966, Grogan grudgingly suggested that Berg had legitimately won the intellectual competition between the two.[59] Coyote, in contrast, was uncomfortable with such macho infighting. He was one of the few Diggers to keep his job with the Mime Troupe; participating in both groups allowed Coyote regular breaks from the exhaustion he often felt trying to keep up with Grogan's brash demeanor and Fritsch's imposing physicality.[60]

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[58] Coyote, "Hey! Let Go My Coat," *Berkeley Barb*, 10–16 May 1968, 6.
[59] Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 236.
[60] Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall*, 94-95.

The Diggers' allegiances to class-based identities are also curious for how much cultivation they seemingly required, even for working-class Diggers. For example, while recounting the soup preparations for the initial Free Food performance in *Ringolevio*, Grogan argued that "he worked harder than most blue-collar folks work for a living." The distinction seems important: Grogan *had* to work as hard or harder than the "blue-collar folk" for his exertion to mean something. In a similar sense, Coyote points out that Grogan enjoyed making up overly complicated stories about street fights and surprise adventures to explain why he was late for meetings or how he procured the goods for Digger events. In other words, despite Grogan's actual working-class background, he still invested as much energy into legitimizing his status as a working-class man as he did into forging real alliances with black activists. Grogan also worked to forge relationships with the Hell's Angels. According to Coyote, this was a prize Grogan very much wanted; what is most interesting, perhaps, is that even though Coyote seems at several points to recognize Grogan's posturing, he also fundamentally believes in the Diggers' perception of class. He describes the bikers as "fundamentally working-class" and "definitely authentic," and he even gives Grogan legitimacy when he recalls that after Grogan asked him to attend a Hell's Angel funeral, he felt hamstrung by his simultaneous fears about interacting with the bikers and being called a "punk" by Grogan if he refused to go. The Diggers attended the funeral and, though Coyote recalls being terrified, they gained the respect of the bikers, who subsequently agreed to participate in a major Digger event.[61]

This was the Death of Hippie performance, held on 17 December 1966. This performance was, in many ways, a clear attempt by the Diggers to give form to their cultural politics and to set it in opposition to the explosive fad of Haight culture. The performance was designed by

[61] Ibid., 96-98.

Berg and Grogan to look like a funeral and was meant to "celebrate the death and rebirth of the Haight-Ashbury and the death of money." The centerpiece of the parade was a coffin marked "Hippie—Son of Media," which was carried behind Hell's Angels on bikes with Diggers imploring the crowd to join in the celebration. To ease the transition from witness to participant, the Diggers compiled a selection of props to be given out at the event. A number of two-foot wide posters, red on white and emblazoned with the word "NOW!", were given to people at the beginning of the march. The Diggers organized the crowd into groups that performed a call and response routine. One side chanted "ooooh"; the other "aaaah"; the first "shhhh"; the second "be cool." Meanwhile, those joining the crowd were given penny whistles, which created a high-pitched whine that radiated from the group. Lilies, candles, burning incense, and car mirrors (looted from the local junkyard and meant to reflect the morning light) were passed around the crowd as well. As the crowd traveled, Grogan recalls one bus stopping; the driver got out and began to dance, and the passengers, curious, accepted flowers and joined with the other marchers. After only a short while, the Diggers and their friends had gathered over 4000 people; their presence stalled traffic. The local police, led by Haight Precinct Captain Keily, attempted to disperse the crowd, which had no permit to demonstrate, but the sheer number of people made the task difficult to accomplish.[62]

This event combined the political arguments typical of Digger performances—the use of public space, the power of a community in the face of municipal authority, and the importance of joining in and acting out—with a sense of what Diggers saw as their ideal community. The visual association of the Hell's Angels with the Diggers served a number of purposes. First, it suggested that a Digger was a type of person who was not afraid to hang out with Hell's Angels

[62] Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 258-260.

bikers in public. Second, it reified the notion that the Digger identity was an outlaw identity. And when two Hell's Angels—Hairy Henry and Chocolate George—were arrested during the performance by the police, the Diggers were further able to cement their relationship with the Hell's Angels by helping to raise a bail fund, which they did by asking participants in the performance to donate money. When the Diggers presented Pete Knell, president of the San Francisco chapter of the Hell's Angels, with the collected money, Knell was apparently shocked, remarking that nobody had really stood up for the Hell's Angels before. The Diggers believed that this public expression of cross-class communal bonds between the two groups could only serve to strengthen their own status in the Haight-Ashbury community.[63]

The Diggers' search for authenticity, whether defined through race or class, revolved not simply around denying the attributes assigned to men by the dominant order but also around negating the validity of real experiences of race and class difference. When the Diggers asserted that black men and working-class men were less corrupted by the dominant order than were middle-class white men, the implicit suggestion was that they were also less oppressed. At the same time, the Diggers' reliance on race and class to make specific political and cultural claims about the validity of their approach to liberating male bodies consistently betrayed them: clearly, race and class did matter. Consider the way Murcott stated their position in "The Ideology of Failure":

> We won't, simply won't play the game any longer. We return to the prosperous consumer society and refuse to consume. And refuse to consume. And we do our thing for nothing. In truth, we live our protest. Everything we do is free because we are failures. We've got nothing to lose, so we've got nothing to lose.

[63] Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall*, 83-89.

Digger men were absolutely willing to abandon the role the dominant order proscribed for them, but not at the expense of their own sense of manhood.[64] To solve this conundrum, they looked to groups like the Black Panthers and Hell's Angels as blueprints for an alternate norm of masculinity. That the list of attributes they adopted—independence, dignity, virility, autonomy—read like a laundry list of characteristics that might be attributed to traditional American icons—the cowboy, the biker, the soldier, or the outlaw—highlights the conservative roots of this alternative norm: it challenged the legitimacy of liberal institutions, yes, but it looked backwards to privilege forms of male power that had somehow been subverted and emasculated by the imperatives of the dominant order.

Digger women also played a role in the advancement of Digger ideology and the construction of Digger identity. Digger women often played critical roles in the design and implementation of Digger performances. For example, the sheer scope of the Free Food performances required Grogan to seek out help. Billy Fritsch became instrumental in helping to procure supplies, but the day-to-day cooking and serving quickly became the responsibility of several Digger women. As Grogan points out, "It was not long before a half-dozen young women…volunteered to take over the cooking indefinitely."[65] Coyote further notes that the role of these women was even more crucial: whatever Grogan's charisma, the male vendors at the San Francisco Produce Market proved to be far more responsive to Digger women's overtures for food donations. Digger women were responsible for creating props for larger Digger performances and running the Free Store day-to-day. They were also often involved in planning discussions for Digger events. At the same time, the opportunities for women to take leadership roles in Digger activities were far narrower. In part, this was because their time was often filled

[64] Metesky, "The Ideology of Failure," 6.
[65] Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 248.

performing domestic tasks—although Coyote maintains that the men occasionally did share in housework with their partners. In short, Digger women were only able to participate in a variety of creative endeavors at the same time that they performed more conventional domestic tasks and took care of children; Digger men, for their part, did not reciprocate more than "occasionally" in taking on unconventional domestic and child-rearing roles.[66]

Digger women faced other challenges that stemmed from their availability as potential sexual conquests for Digger men. For example, Coyote recalls his introduction to Phyllis Wilner, who joined the free food events as a server towards the end of 1966. When he asked Grogan about her, Grogan proprietarily responded, "Stay away from her." Coyote "guessed that he had already taken her under his personal purview, or was planning to, or might want to, or might want me to think that he had."[67] Coyote's recollection suggests that Digger men acknowledged, at least to each other, their willingness to unilaterally decide that certain women were off-limits to other men. This meant that in the opinion of Grogan and Coyote, Digger women did not have the same romantic and sexual options as their male counterparts—this component of autonomy was unavailable to them. Of course, countercultural women viewed their situation differently. According to Constance Trouble, the counterculture's permissive attitudes towards sex attracted her because the dominant order created "all this pent up energy and no place to channel it." It was not just free expressions of sexuality that the counterculture offered women, however; Trouble notes that women also gained new ways to navigate traditional relationships: "I definitely took advantage of the emphasis on free love to extract myself from confining relationships."[68]

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[66] Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall*, 133-132.

[67] Ibid., 91-92.

[68] Constance Trouble, interview by Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009), 62.

Some Digger women had children and were expected to take the primary parental role for those children while Digger men were out working in the community. Digger mothers found themselves in a strange position. These mothers were the primary breadwinners for the communal households of the Diggers due to the welfare checks they received; at the same time, what support they received was often used to finance the lives of many men and women. Still, these mothers did find the unconventional arrangement of communal living supportive in other ways. While many Digger mothers were in relationships, single mothers were supported and encouraged, freed from the moral scrutiny they might have faced outside this countercultural ethos. And unlike the freaks, the Diggers did not demonize the concept of motherhood across the board; just as Digger masculinity was held up as a coherent ideological response to wage-earning masculinity, Digger femininity was held up as a coherent ideological response to the matriarch of the dominant order. According to Maggie Gaskin, a Haight-Ashbury resident:

> There are women in the hippie community who are very, very female. There are children that are there because they're wanted, and the women are going back and doing very feminine things, like weaving and cooking with a lot of pride.

Countercultural women valorized their own maternal instincts, but also the quality of their domestic labor. Gaskin continues:

> Square women … have forgotten how to cook. Everything is frozen. … They've forgotten how to do anything that's all woman, you know … Making a nest, because their nest is all chrome and plastic.

In contrast to straight women, whose value as skilled mothers had been subverted by consumer culture, countercultural women were reviving authentic modes of feminine energy.[69]

Digger women also participated in the construction of male and female Digger identities. Digger women were valued for their maternal skills as well as, according to Coyote, their easy

[69] Coyote, *Sleeping Where I Fall*, 132-140; Maggie Gaskin, interview by Wolf, n.d., *Voices from the Love Generation*, 90. Eileen Ewing corroborates Coyote's account; Elwing, personal communication with Tim Hodgdon, quoted in *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius*, 126.

temperaments, their sexual abilities, and their social kindness. For the Diggers, each gender was complementary to the other. In Coyote's words:

> We're beautiful people. Our men are tough. They have style, guile, balls, imagination, and autonomy. Our women are soft, skilled, fuck like angels; radiate children, scent, and colors like the crazy bells that mark out time.[70]

Lenore Kandel, the female Digger who was most famous in her own right—her *The Love Book* was the subject of an obscenity trial in the summer of 1967—echoed Coyote's sentiments by arguing that while she was a writer, "I'm a woman. And I wouldn't sacrifice the woman part of it for the writing part of it." The "woman part of it," according to Kandel, included "washing dishes" and taking on other domestic tasks. Kandel argued that Digger men should feel comfortable doing things like washing dishes, but only if they did not lose their more masculine qualities, which included protecting their women.[71] Both Coyote and Kandel suggested that it was the complementary natures of Digger men and women that were powerful: "soft" Digger women were attracted to their "tough" Digger men while "tough" Digger men were readily capable of protecting their "soft" women. For Digger men and women, therefore, the idea of this *kind* of man or woman became, like their ideas about race and class, a critical component of their attempts to solidify their status as hipper, superior, and more authentic. Digger men and women could, in relation to this idealized notion of what Digger men and women were like, reify their own masculinity or femininity, trait by trait. Of course, this strict understanding of what men and women were like left little room for those who did not identify with these specific gender identities.

In short, Digger women found some avenues towards the pleasure promised by Digger ideology. Kandel was able to pursue a career as a poet. Judy Goldhaft often worked side by side

[70] [Coyote], "Flower Power Smothers," 8.

[71] Lenore Kandel, interview by Wolf, n.d., *Voices from the Love Generation*, 34-35.

with Berg, her partner, on a variety of Digger projects; she also taught dance classes and classes on tie-dying to other Digger women. Eileen Ewing, Coyote's partner, and Nina Blasenheim often danced with Kandel and Goldhaft in Digger performances. These opportunities, however, were mitigated by the inability of Digger men (and, perhaps, of the women as well) to accept the value of women's domestic work as being worthwhile. Women were encouraged and expected to take care of the home *and* participate in the liberating performances of Digger activism; men were not confined by the same expectations. It was only later, once some of the Diggers joined the back-to-the-land movement at the end of 1968, that the sexual division of labor became more of a focal point for these activists.

Gender also played a crucial role in the way Diggers conceptualized the imperatives of the dominant order. We have already seen Coyote's suggestion that the America that corrupted white manhood was a "she." This "she" was almost certainly a maternal figure, an image similar to that abhorred by the freaks. Murcott, for example, placed mothers alongside presidents, kings, generals, teachers, executives, and gangsters as beneficiaries of liberalism in his rambling "Mutants Asylum" article for the *Barb*. Similarly, a broadside that discussed the resistance of the dominant order to long hair begins with the question, "Are the mothers of America avatars of Delilah?"[72] Delilah represents a Biblical warning about female treachery for giving the secret of Samson's power—his hair—to the Philistines. In the popular consciousness of 1960s America, however, Delilah had become synonymous with emasculation; she cut Samson's hair, destroying his power. For example, Neil Sedaka's Top 30 hit "Run Samson Run" advised male listeners that the moral of the story was that "there's a little of Delilah in each and every gal." Ira and George Gershwin's "Sam and Delilah," a popular jazz standard by the late 1950s, presented Delilah as

[72] Murcott, "Mutants Commune," *The Berkeley Barb*, 18 Aug. 1967, 8–9; Murcott, "Are the Mothers of America Avatars of Delilah?" handbill, n.d., Haight Street Diggers, Records, folder 6, North Baker Library, San Francisco.

unsuitable for marriage; Samson's punishment was inevitable because "that kind of woman / she'll do you no good." Chuck Berry's 1958 single "Beautiful Delilah" portrayed the character as a woman who broke hearts just for fun.

While these tales of vengeful, Delilah-esque women frequently appeared in American rock 'n' roll, the Diggers' vision of Delilah seems to most closely resemble the version of Delilah presented in "Tombstone Blues," the song that opened Bob Dylan's 1965 album *Highway 61 Revisited*. Here, Delilah sits "worthlessly alone" in a corner, laughing so hard that there are "tears on her cheeks." Delilah is joined by Jezebel, another symbol of threatening female power, who is "furiously knitting," and a nameless bride to whom an entire verse is devoted. Dylan plays with sexual metaphors as solutions for the bride's problems: she must "swallow" her pride and have a nameless medicine inserted into her body. Dylan, who often used matriarchal figures to represent the dominant order—notably in "Like a Rolling Stone" where a once-rich society woman is advised to turn to prostitution by various working-class men—was frequently quoted in Digger broadsides. And like Dylan, the Diggers painted a portrait of a Delilah who no longer had any power over men. The same broadside concluded, "Shorn men are jealous because they think you're getting laid more. They're right, of course, but they must also realize it's your whole way of being and not just the hair or else they'd be home nights pulling at their hair instead of their dicks." In other words, the revolution that had resulted in Dylan's impotent and mentally deranged Delilah was the Diggers' "whole way of being." Their power was not simply embodied in their hair; their personal autonomy was so final that they had no such Achilles' Heel. All American mothers—excepting Digger mothers—might well be avatars of Delilah, but

neutered in the presence of true political, social, and cultural autonomy, that demonized matriarch could have no real power.[73]

Gendered images of sexual conquest became more important to Digger ideology in early 1967 when Digger broadsides increasingly featured photographs, drawings, and graphics; the reasons for this shift are not entirely apparent, but the timeframe essentially coincides with the loss of Murcott at the end of the previous year. Most notably, the Diggers began to deploy images of the female body to conceptualize the control they wanted to wield over public spaces. If autonomy was rooted in free public spaces, the Diggers explicitly linked the urban geography of San Francisco to the female body as well. One broadside, for example, featured a translucent woman, her body naked except for a leather belt that runs around her waist and between her thighs, standing in front of a map of San Francisco. Her face is obscured by her hair; her body is positioned somewhat like a classic pin-up girl. Where the leather straps of her belt meet at her crotch, a card hangs that reads "News," as if sexual conquest will release important information. This card also suggests that there is something to be gained by grabbing it; in this sense the Diggers' ultimate goal of refashioning Haight-Ashbury into a Free City was visually implied through sexual access. Conquest of the city itself, so central to Digger performances, is implied to be the result of male sexual virility.[74]

While it is clear that heterosexuality was a fundamental component of Digger ideology and identity, it is also true that homosexuality played a role in the way the Diggers conceptualized their ideology and identity. Superficially, the Diggers seemed sympathetic to gay men and lesbians; they often listed "homosexuality" among the urges the dominant order repressed. Just

[73] Bob Dylan, "Tombstone Blues," *Highway 61 Revisited*, Columbia CS9189, 1965, 33⅓ rpm; Murcott, "Are the Mothers of America Avatars of Delilah?"

[74] Unknown, "Free City," Counterculture—Hippies and Bohemians—Diggers, 1965-67, Vertical Files, Labadie Collection.

as often, however, male Diggers constructed their narrative of masculinity in opposition to gay men and gay men's bodies. For example, at the beginning of *Ringolevio*, when Grogan discusses his plans to get out of the army in order to move to San Francisco to join the Mime Troupe, he notes that he refused to engage in "some dumb faggot routine" to get discharged. On the next page, when Grogan explains the epiphany he had while waiting to be released to San Francisco, he maintains the forceful emphasis on his heterosexuality:

> Radicals were always too quick to identify themselves with progressive such-and-such and insurgent so-and-so … Set yourself up in clear view, and someone is bound to set you down. The one thing he learned, especially during the time he spent in prisons, was how not to satisfy anyone's curiosity.

His concluding line offers a political mandate that depends on homophobic sentiment. In both cases, Grogan sets his own political identity in opposition to those men who chose to act gay or to have sex with other men. Similarly, in 1968, Coyote argued that he did not "want to be another fag sucking the economic cock of the country." It is clear that however the Diggers supported an individual's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer identity, they were also entirely willing to define the power embodied in their own sexuality in oppositional terms to homosexuality and gender variance. Combined with the fact that the idealized images of Digger identity were relentlessly heterosexual and gender normative, the Diggers left scant room for gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and trans people to embrace the alternative norm that the Diggers promoted as the key to personal autonomy.[75]

As the Diggers became more and more comfortable with the idea that race, class, gender, and sexuality were nothing more than cultural stumbling blocks on the path to achieve real liberation, the undercurrent of aggressive male heterosexuality that drove the Diggers' alternative norm became less and less subtle. In this sense, the male Diggers at least were engaged in the

[75] Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 232-34; Coyote, *Voices from the Love Generation*, 137.

proliferation of an argument that suggested that true, authentic manhood—one that indulged in true, authentic pleasure—neatly trumped all other components of an individual's identity, as was the only true avenue to political liberation and revolutionary potential. In the most aggressive examples of this conflation of virility with autonomy, the subtext simply became the message. For example, one broadside showed two naked Asian women masturbating and under them a caption read, "Make your own dildo." Another, even more striking, showed a penis, the head replaced with a heart, over which a female figure was hunched. On the shaft of the penis was inscribed the following: "God's work must truly be our own."[76]

The Summer of Love

If the people, public spaces, and cultural institutions of the Haight-Ashbury community were central to the efficacy of Digger activism in 1966 and early 1967, the decline of the Diggers as the Summer of Love approached in 1967 was rooted in the changing face and demographics of the neighborhood. This shift began in late 1966, when members of HIP and the Beat Poets began to plan for a massive event called the Human Be-In that was geared to the exploitation of national media interest in West Coast freak and hippie cultures. The Human Be-in was intended by these community leaders to be a massive "happening," a celebration of Haight-Ashbury culture that would double as a kind of community cotillion to introduce the rest of the United States to the hippy lifestyle. The Diggers, however, saw the intentions of HIP and the Beat Poets far more cynically. Grogan dismissed the Be-in as a "costume party" to promote the "Love

[76] Unknown, "Make Your Own Dildo," Counterculture—Hippies and Bohemians—Diggers, 1965-67, Vertical Files, Labadie Collection; "God's Work Must Truly Be Our Own," Counterculture—Hippies and Bohemians—Diggers, 1965-67, Vertical Files, Labadie Collection.

Hoax," a publicity stunt meant to "develop new markets for merchandising…crap" and to exploit youth culture for the benefit of ageing hipsters.[77]

The Diggers peppered organizers Allen Ginsburg and Gary Snyder with concerns about the wisdom of holding such a large, publicized gathering. Their complaints boiled down to three major concerns. First, they were turned off by the format of the event itself. Plans to erect a central stage in Golden Gate Park would, in the Diggers' opinion, raise cultural luminaries, individual speakers, and musical groups above the gathered audience and effectively create hierarchies between performers and audiences. Second, Diggers argued against the work that HIP had done to ensure national media coverage of the event, arguing that the Be-In was more about HIP's commercial goals for hippie culture than it was about celebrating the local community spirit that had developed in the neighborhood. Third, the Diggers were concerned about the future of the Haight, arguing that the community infrastructure and culture simply could not sustain the influx of curious teens, tourists, and partiers that national coverage of the Human Be-In would inevitably provoke. On this point, it is likely that the Diggers were also keenly aware of the fact that Ginsburg, Snyder, and some members of HIP would never be in a position to have to deal with that influx; they always had the option of venturing to their homes in North Beach or elsewhere in the city. After failing to dissuade Ginsburg and Snyder, the Diggers made a last ditch attempt to distract attention from the gathering: they erected a massive sculpture of barbed wire and animal entrails as a comment on the Vietnam War. Unfortunately, they erected the sculpture in the wrong field in Golden Gate Park, making the statement ineffective. Out-maneuvered, the group grudgingly settled down on 14 January 1967 to glumly

[77] Doyle, "Staging the Revolution," 164-166.

dole out turkey sandwiches to hungry members of the audience as everybody else reveled in the experience of the event.[78]

The Diggers' fears largely turned out to be prescient. The media frenzy over the Human Be-In continued into the spring and young people around the country were captivated by the images and sounds that the Human Be-in produced. According to Grogan, the "newsmongery" of HIP had drawn "a disproportionate number of young kids to the district that was already overcrowded," but the organization had, just as the Diggers feared, given little thought to the reality of how a number of homeless teens would affect the neighborhood.[79] As more and more "kids" began to venture to San Francisco, the Diggers grew increasingly anxious about their environment, pointing to the physical and structural strain and noting the irony that the very form of public culture that was attracting these young men and women was increasingly hard to safely organize as the neighborhood's population increased. Soon, the Diggers found themselves by necessity entering into an uneasy alliance with more receptive members of HIP to attempt to deal with the strain on the community. The Thelin brothers, who ran the Haight Street Psychedelic shop, devoted a room in their store to a "calm center" to provide relief to individuals, on drugs or sober, from the heavily crowded streets. In April, members of HIP, the Diggers, and the Family Dog united to form a Council for a Summer of Love in the City of San Francisco to help organize community events.[80]

Ultimately, however, the Diggers made little headway as scores of people descended upon the neighborhood during the summer of 1967 and the obstacles they faced only increased. First, the influx of new people, combined with the area's commercialization, caused rents to rise,

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Grogan, *Ringolevio,* 267.

[80] Charles Perry, *Haight-Ashbury: A History* (San Francisco: Wenner Books, 2005), 137.

sending many of the neighborhood's inhabitants—including many who were familiar with and sympathetic to the Diggers' tactics and goals—fleeing to other areas of the city or communes outside the municipal limits. Second, as Michael William Doyle has argued, the committed effort of the Diggers to prepare the Haight for this influx of unprepared youth necessarily stratified their ranks as they were forced to deal with all manner of city groups and officials—many of whom had been on the receiving end of Digger criticism. It quickly became clear that some were better off operating through traditional municipal channels than others. Third, and out of the blue, the Diggers were suddenly faced with copycat collectives who, either inspired by the group or attempting to leech off their notoriety, began to post broadsides or host events under the rubric of "Digger" that only vaguely promoted Digger concepts and ideology. Fourth, the Diggers themselves were changing. Many of the couples now had children, and increasingly their desire to be out in the community conflicted with the need to support their families. By July 1967, the Diggers found it almost impossible to act in concert as several members began to look for new homes outside of the now-crowded Haight; as it became increasingly difficult to organize new public actions, they grew disillusioned with their work. Finally, the group abandoned the name "Diggers" in favor of the "Free City Collective."[81]

While the Free City Collective would remain active until 1968, Billy Murcott, who had returned from New York, encapsulated the sense of dissolution in his "Mutants Commune" article in August. In this document he referred to the political, familial, economic, religious, and educational institutions of the dominant order as "horizontal and vertical pyramid hierarchies." He urged people of all classes and races—though, perhaps unsurprisingly, not genders or sexualities—to abandon these hierarchies in favor of "one to one relation-novas," which he

[81] Doyle, "Staging the Revolution"; Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 275.

explained as "confronting each thing and situation as itself." These reflections reiterated the Diggers' call to maintain an interracial, interclass alliance in the struggle against the dominant order even as Murcott ended his treatise with this conclusion:

> The only thing that will make him free in nitty-gritty marrow soul is knowing that he can take care of all his needs himself. Alone. Only then will he have the alternatives of either being with someone or not.

Until this piece, all Digger broadsides had focused on the role of the individual within his or her community, but now in "Alone," Murcott seemed to shift the emphasis of Digger ideology. For the first time, Murcott codified the Diggers' countercultural commitment to the outlaw archetype: one man stands alone at the center of cultural and social revolution by stripping himself of the "horizontal and vertical" hierarchies that chained him to commitment and restrained his natural desires.[82]

Murcott's plea, made at the end of the Summer of Love, seems especially meaningful given the social and cultural changes that would soon remove the focus of the counterculture from the west coast and redistribute it around the country. As San Francisco, and to a lesser extent Los Angeles, were overburdened with young Americans searching, in varying degrees, for a new lifestyle in which they hoped to find meaning, the once amiable Haight-Ashbury neighborhood was overcome by drug dealers, rising costs of living, and increased local, state, and federal scrutiny. The Diggers' example, however, was central to the countercultural groups that rose up around the country in response to Murcott's implicit challenge: if even the Haight, which he termed a "mental asylum," could be a stunning example of how bohemian culture was bound to fail, the only alternative for radical artists was to challenge the cultural order itself.

When, finally, the Free City Collective enacted one more Digger-style event—the Death of the Hippie—and symbolically scheduled the event on 6 October 1967, a year after LSD had been

[82] Murcott, "Mutants Commune," 8–9.

made illegal and only a month after the end of the Summer of Love, its new, more aggressive masculine pose was made clear. The event featured mourners dressed in "death costumes" carrying a coffin filled with beads, feathers, flowers, and hair. The mourners marched down the length of the Panhandle in mock solemnity, one of them motionless inside the container. When they reached their destination, their passenger left the coffin and the hippie artifacts were lit on fire.[83] As the national media leapt to interpret this ceremony literally—that the Haight-Ashbury district had indeed died—Grogan reiterated their view: "The FREE MAN…flexes his strong loins of FREE and is gone again from the nets." In directly linking the most important catchword of Digger ideology to the penis, the architects of that ideology were not simply retreating to a more conservative stance. They were laying bare the masculine self-interest that had always been at the core of their complex and radical performance-based approach to community building and personal liberation.[84]

[83] Perry, *Haight-Ashbury*, 243; Earl Shorris, "Love is Dead," *New York Times Magazine*, 29 Oct. 1967, 27, 113-16.
[84] Grogan, *Ringolevio*, 412-416.

3: "Politics Is How You Live": The Lower East Side Yippies, 1968-1970[1]

The Yip-In, the first major Youth International Party (Yippie) performance-based protest, was conceptualized by the Yippies as a local, national, and international introduction to the burgeoning energy of Manhattan's hip Lower East Side, a celebration of the increasing prominence of hippie and countercultural lifestyles, and a party. According to the Yippies' mimeographed invitation—handed out in Union Square, Tompkins Square, and galleries, stores, and cafes across the Lower East Side—the Yip-In on 22 March 1968 would be "a spring mating service celebrating the equinox, a back-scratching party, a roller-skating rink, a theater, with you, performer and audience."[2] Participants were invited to Manhattan's Grand Central Station to join in the performance. As the language used in the invitation suggests, this style of performance-based activism was inspired by the activities of the Diggers from the previous fall, but also by San Francisco's Human Be-In in 1967, by Yippie Jim Fouratt's 1967 New York Be-In, and by the avant-garde street theater and artistry that was emblematic of the Lower East Side. The Yippies meant to use the Yip-In to push elements of countercultural performance-based activism into broader American consciousness.

Participants in the Yip-In would transform Grand Central Station from a place normally passed through on the way to other destinations to an extraordinary destination in and of itself.[3] The celebration that the Yippies and their countercultural public staged there would resist the social and institutional conventions that normally operated in buildings like transit stations, revolutionizing the space and highlighting the Yippies' belief that, as Yippie Abbie Hoffman would phrase it in his testimony during the Chicago Seven Conspiracy Trial later that year, "fun

[1] Jerry Rubin, *Do It!: Scenarios of the Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 250.

[2] Quoted in Don McNeil, "The Grand Central Station Riot Yippies Meet the Man," *Village Voice*, 28 Mar. 1968, 1.

[3] The choice of Grand Central Station has not been addressed by Yippie organizers; it seems likely that it was chosen over the larger and more busy Penn Station due to its proximity to the Lower East Side.

actually was becoming quite subversive."[4] The Yippies prioritized this politics of fun and pleasure; it was encapsulated in the name that Paul Krassner gave them on 1 January 1968: being "Yippie" was an irrational exclamation of joy and exuberance; it was a promise extended to the youth of the United States that by embracing absurdity they could transcend their humdrum, straight lives as children of the middle class.[5] According to Hoffman, "it was a direct rebuttal of the kind of ethics and morals that were being put forth in the country to keep people working in a rat race which didn't make any sense." As Yippie Robin Morgan put it,

> Humor is an extremely potent political tactic because it gives people a sudden and transforming insight into where they're at and where their society is at.

Anita Hoffman suggested a "straight" version of the meaning of "Yippie," "The Youth International Party," as a sop for unimaginative members of the Old and New Left and played upon audience expectations with similar results: husband Abbie enthusiastically noted that "everybody would think that we were this huge international conspiracy, but that in actuality we were a party that you had fun at."[6]

By 1968, the Yippies could point to a set of high-stakes subjects, debates, and events that were ongoing in the United States—the Vietnam War, black power, student activism, police repression, capitalist exploitation, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy—and argue that the situation was becoming so dire and people on either side of the debate were becoming so serious that the simple act of having fun in public was an incredibly potent political act. Yippie Jerry Rubin declared that activists should simply "do it!", short-circuiting the Diggers' emphasis on careful practice by arguing that irreverent, indulgent,

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[4] Abbie Hoffman, quoted in *The Conspiracy Trial*, ed. Judy Clavir and John Spitzer (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), 345.

[5] On Krassner coming up with the name, see David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 18.

[6] Robin Morgan, quoted in Peter Babcox, "Meet the Women of the Revolution, 1969," *New York Times Magazine*, 9 Feb. 1969, 87; Hoffman, *The Conspiracy Trial*, 345, 349.

extemporaneous, absurd, and fun performance-based protest was revolutionary because it was an expression of youth, vitality, energy, and power. For the Yippies, countercultural activism was the act of forcefully pushing the energy and enthusiasm of American youth into a mainstream consciousness that sought to contain and deny youthful emotions and impulses. In the Yippies' formulation, *any* youth gathering, concert, party, or festival was a form of performance-based activism, because a Yippie was a "long-haired, bearded, hairy, crazy motherfucker whose life is theater, every moment creating the new society as he destroys the old."[7]

The evidence for the arrival of that "new society" was all around the Yippies. The rapid social and cultural transformations of the late 1960s spoke to a deep-seated urge for change that young artists and radicals were expressing in a multitude of exciting and innovative ways. The Yip-In was intended to express these ideas in one calculated performance. By midnight, 5,000 people—far more than the organizers had anticipated—were packed into the station, singing, chanting, dancing, eating, and drinking. They carried portable radios, musical instruments, balloons, and a variety of foodstuffs, and they shared these things with each other. The large crowd, which according to *Village Voice* reporter Howard Smith was "primarily high school age," enthusiastically participated in this public performance, though the Yippies had given no clear sense of what they should do. The sheer size of the crowd vindicated the communal goals of the young countercultural group. They had invited representatives of the media, and the Yip-in seemed to be a staggering success, exposing a local desire for the kinds of politicized countercultural protests that had flourished in recent years on the West Coast and galvanizing a New York City countercultural public in front of reporters and photographers.[8]

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[7] Rubin, *Do It!*, 82.

[8] Howard Smith, "Scenes," *Village Voice*, 28 Mar. 1968, 7.

Of course, Grand Central Station, mundanely central to the lives of so many who lived and worked in Manhattan, was not a public space safely ensconced within the boundaries of the Lower East Side. In the preceding weeks, Hoffman had notified the appropriate city officials about the event, and at the Yip-In's outset about 50 or so tactical police seemed content to stand on the periphery and observe the proceedings. As the event progressed, however, the tenor of the room began to change. Anti-war activists began to chant in the direction of the police. Members of Up Against the Wall, Motherfuckers!, a Lower East Side anarchist artists' collective, shouted their name. Firecrackers exploded randomly. Transit officials were incensed because people had written "Fuck You" on the interior walls of the station. Tensions increased when two members of Up Against the Wall, Motherfuckers! climbed up to the giant clock in the middle of the atrium and removed the clock's hands. The police stormed the room.

According to *Village Voice* reporter Don McNeil, Grand Central Station proved to be a "box canyon." Smith explained that "the police never announced what they were going to do," giving the crowd no chance to get out of the way. From his vantage point, the police's actions seemed fairly arbitrary; they made "no attempt to keep clear the areas they had just fought to clear." For the next hour and a half the police stormed through the crowd. Those who resisted, as well as those who were merely unfortunate enough to get stranded as the large crowd pushed against itself, were assaulted and arrested. Many were trapped, incapable of moving. The police arrested 57 people for disorderly conduct. Hoffman and 19 others ended up in the hospital. By 3:30 AM the 1,000 or so remaining participants exited the station and, according to McNeil, who received five stitches for a head wound, relocated to Central Park to watch the sunrise.[9]

[9] McNeil, "The Grand Central Station Riot Yippies Meet the Man," 13-14; Smith, "Scenes," 7.

Only three months into their existence, the Yippies had already faced more vicious police repression than their counterparts on the West Coast had. The Yip-In provoked a dramatic response from all corners. Associated Press wires, the *New York Times*, and *Time* magazine all covered the event, though not all accounts mentioned the Yippies by name.[10] Hoffman was fascinated by the possibilities of exploiting mass media to extend a radical message. Because the Yippies assumed that their intended audience would "get it," they frequently obfuscated their actual goals in their writings and for the media, preferring instead to let shocked observers formulate their own opinions. Hoffman called this tactic the "blank space." He noted that "blank space, the interrupted statement, the unsolved puzzle, they are all involving." Rubin argued that it was important to remain mythical and obtuse so that the media would stay fascinated; as the media continued to ask questions, the Yippies continued to enjoy exposure.[11]

In this sense, the Yip-in was a great success. But despite or because of that exposure, various activists and commentators engaged in intense debates about the politics of the event. Yippies like Jim Fouratt and Keith Lampe did not see it as a successful venture, while Yippie associates like Allen Ginsberg grew increasingly distressed that Hoffman and Rubin were inviting further violence by celebrating the event's achievements. The Yippies also received criticism from local critics and from the Diggers and other countercultural and New Left advocates who felt that the Yippies were either willfully putting their adherents in danger or were simply not serious enough about planning their events effectively to avoid such violence. Some critics pointed to the fact that while the Yippies had ensured the presence of city officials and the press, they had not planned to have medical assistance or legal representation on hand. McNeil was largely critical, arguing that "the planning was weak" and dismissing the Yip-In as "a pointless confrontation."

[10] Michael Stern, Untitled, *New York Times*, 24 Mar. 1968; "Youth: The Politics of YIP," *Time*, 5 Apr. 1968.

[11] Hoffman, "The Yippies Are Going to Chicago," *The Realist*, Sept. 1968, 1; Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It* (New York: Dial, 1968), 80.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, the Yippies also found supporters: Julius Lester, a columnist for *The Guardian*, an independent socialist newspaper, argued that in contrast to picket protests, which were "respectable," the Yippies ignored "what a man thinks and grab him by the balls to communicate their message." John Moore, a writer for the underground newspaper *The Rat*, argued that theatrical protest required large numbers of participants and that the Yippies were arguing for both "'cultural' and 'political' consciousness."[12]

Reactions to the Yip-In were heightened due to the Yippies' well-known plan to stage a national countercultural action, which they called the Festival of Life, during the Democratic Party National Convention in August in Chicago. The first Yippie manifesto had been released in January; it was a national call for participants to attend the Festival of Life and demanded "the birth of FREE AMERICA in our own time." The manifesto continued, "We demand the politics of ecstasy…. We will create our own reality." This language expressed countercultural ideology in the form of a national protest.[13] In an article written before the Festival of Life but published in September, Hoffman argued that the Yippies had four major objectives: (1) to blend hippie and New Left philosophies, (2) to "tie as much of the underground together" as possible, (3) to develop "a model for an alternative society," and (4) to make a "revolutionary action-theater" statement about Lyndon Johnson and the Democratic Party.

Post-mortem discussions about the Yip-In became discussions about Chicago. Fouratt expressed concerns that the problems that occurred during the Yip-In were the result of Rubin and Hoffman devoting so much of their energies to planning for Chicago. Fouratt, a firm fan of the local protests of the Diggers, felt that the Yippies should focus their efforts on the Lower East

[12] McNeil, "The Grand Central Station Riot Yippies Meet the Man," 14; Julius Lester, "From the Other Side of the Tracks," *Guardian*, 30 Mar. 1968; John Moore, "Yippie," *Rat: Subterranean News*, Mar.-Apr. 1968, 5-6.

[13] Yippies, "An Announcement: Youth International Party (or Yip!) Is Born," Liberation News Service, 16 Jan. 1968.

Side. Rubin and Hoffman responded to Fouratt and other critics who shared his concerns by emphasizing that the Festival of Life was a national outgrowth of local organizing around the country; it would mark the culmination of a nationwide countercultural strategy. Hoffman argued that "you can use Chicago as a means of pulling your local community together," but "a huge orgasm of destruction atop a giant media altar" was required to find "reality in the face of the American political myth." Hoffman asked skeptics and supporters alike to use the Festival of Live as a means to "open up a dialogue between political radicals and those who might be considered hippies." Rubin took a less diplomatic approach, arguing in a letter to *The Village Voice* that violence was a predictable and necessary component of revolution. In *Do It!: Scenarios of the Revolution*, published in 1970, he asserted that "a movement that isn't willing to risk injuries, even deaths, isn't for shit." For his part, Hoffman noted that the Yippies did not want violence but were willing to accept that it was a possibility. Critics such as McNeil still feared that the violence of the Yip-In would prove to be "a prophecy of Chicago."[14]

The strategies of the Yippies simultaneously expanded upon and broke from the strategies of West Coast countercultural groups. The Yippies valorized bodies, performance, and action as crucial components in what they referred to as "the Revolution." However, the Yippies embraced drugs, hip lifestyles, mass media, and celebrity as tools that were complementary to countercultural goals, making a clear break from the proscriptions of the Diggers and freaks. And though the Yippies' less rigid interpretations of what constituted a countercultural performance-based action arguably made their ideology more open, they were far stricter than their West Coast counterparts were in the ways they defined their alternative norm: a Yippie was, quite explicitly, a young, white, straight, middle-class, male identity. Consequently, though the

[14] Hoffman, "The Yippies Are Going to Chicago,"1, 24; Rubin, "Letter to the Editor—Liberty or Death," *The Village Voice*, 18 Apr. 1968, 4; Rubin, *Do It!*, 4; McNeil, "The Grand Central Station Riot Yippies Meet the Man," 14.

Yippies declared their intent to exploit mass media and youth culture to provoke a revolution, they primarily reached out to young, white, straight, middle-class men. By valorizing particular forms of rebellion, the Yippies implicitly and paradoxically compromised their veneration of freedom and liberation. By associating revolution with youth, they participated in the distinct forms of ageism that were becoming hegemonic in this period. By associating revolutionary potential with masculinity, they participated in specific forms of sexism and did so as the radical feminist movement began to mobilize in opposition to male chauvinism in the movement. The Yippies were theoretically more open to mass participation than their predecessors had been, but in practice more closed to individuals with identities that sat outside a very narrow view of what an activist looked like.

Yippie Geography and Participants

The Yippies were formed in December 1967 when Rubin, Nancy Kurshan, and Paul Krassner were at the home of Abbie and Anita Hoffman. Rubin brought up a recent conversation he had had with Ed Saunders, a Lower East Side poet and lead singer for the rock group the Fugs. Sanders, admiring the choice of several major rock bands to perform at the Monterey Pop Festival for free, suggested that a similar free concert held in Chicago during the Democratic Party National Convention could prove to be a high-energy experience and present an alternative to the more traditional protests of the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (Mobe). The group discussed the idea extensively, not simply as an alternative to Mobe but as an alternative form of protest altogether. Drawing on Abbie Hoffman's increasing fascination with the Diggers and countercultural performance-based activism, on Krassner's penchant for satire, on Anita Hoffman's skill with shaping disparate ideas into a coherent whole, and on Kurshan's and Rubin's tactical skills, acquired over the course of several years in the

Berkeley student movement, the small group began to conceptualize a New York-based countercultural group that would work to organize New Leftists and hippies under a united rubric of performance-based revolutionary activism.[15]

The Yippies had no formal organization, no membership, and no clear hierarchy. Informally, Hoffman and Rubin were the primary leaders, but the Yippies adopted a democratic process by holding frequent meetings to discuss the purpose and planning of Yippie public actions. These meetings and Yippies activities in general included a variety of men and women who would prove crucial to the Yippie cause. Krassner, once a member of Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters, edited the underground paper *The Realist* and, as a Yippie with a steady income, helped to pay the rent for the Yippies' Union Square office. Kurshan and Anita Hoffman ran the group's office and spent much of their time helping to organize meetings and plan events. Judy "Gumbo" Albert designed the Yippie logo and she and her husband Stew helped plan Yippie actions. *Newsweek* reporter Kate Coleman, who like Rubin and Kurshan was a veteran of the Free Speech Movement, participated in Yippie discussions. Jim Fouratt, a local New York activist with previous experience organizing Be-Ins, became an indispensible ally to Hoffman in terms of planning local performances and serving as the communications director for the group, which meant taking responsibility for mimeographing and distributing Yippie handbills. Bob Fass, who hosted the underground radio program Radio Unnameable on WBAI, helped to promote the

[15] This account is based on Hoffman's recollections in *Revolution for the Hell of It*. Primarily due to their relationship with the New Left in 1968 and 1969, the Yippies have received more scholarly attention than the Diggers or Yippies. For work that situates the Yippies in the radical traditions of the New Left, see Michael William Doyle, "Staging the Revolution: Guerilla Theater as Countercultural Practice, 1965-1968," in *Imagine Nation*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002); Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Dominick Cavallo, *A Fiction of the Past: The Sixties in American History* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999); Farber, *Chicago '68*. For work that situates the Yippies in the history of radical theater, see Bradford D. Martin, *The Theater Is in the Streets: Politics and Public Performance in Sixties America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004); Suzanne Elizabeth Shawyer, "Radical Street Theatre and the Yippie Legacy: A Performance History of the Youth International Party, 1967-1968" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2008). See also Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987).

Yippie cause on the airwaves. Keith Lampe, a long-time civil rights activist, devoted his energies to helping to organize Yippie performances and provided a moderating voice of reason. Robin Morgan, notable for her evisceration of the Yippies for entrenched sexism when she later left the group, helped design Yippie performance-based protests. Folk musician Phil Ochs participated in many Yippie actions, as did Ed Sanders and the Fugs.[16]

The Yippies shared similar backgrounds. Hoffman and Rubin were both Jewish, placing them outside the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant veneer that was the public face of the middle class in the United States. While Hoffman came from a middle-class family in Massachusetts, Rubin's background was more mixed: his mother came from a middle-class family but his father was a working class teamster. Rubin and Hoffman were also close in age—Hoffman was born in 1936 and Rubin in 1938—and had similarly extensive backgrounds in academia. Hoffman had a degree in psychology from Brandeis University and had started graduate work at Berkeley before dropping out in 1960 to marry his pregnant girlfriend. Four years later, Rubin began the doctoral program in sociology at Berkeley. He dropped out after six weeks, but stayed in Berkeley to participate in the growing political movement there.[17]

Most of the rest of the Yippies were also Jewish. Nancy Kurshan was a red diaper baby born in Brooklyn in 1944. She had met Rubin at Berkeley, where she was enrolled in the doctoral program in psychology. During her undergrad years in Madison she had participated in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Anita Hoffman had a similar background to her husband, coming from a middle-class Jewish family. She had a Masters in psychology. Robin Morgan was the child of unmarried and separated Jewish parents; she had been guided by her mother into child acting in her youth, but

[16] See Sally Kempton, "Yippies Anti-Organize a Groovy Revolution," *Village Voice*, 21 May 21 1968; Farber, *Chicago '68*; Carl Moody, "Kate Coleman, Sixties Radical, Now Writes Her Battles," *Deadline*, 1984.
[17] Farber, *Chicago '68*, 5, 9.

by the 1960s had retired from commercial acting to devote her energies to activist writing for a variety of radical syndicals including *The Rat*, *Liberation*, and *The Guardian*. After leaving the Yippies, she would become an important figure in the women's liberation movement, founding both Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy (WITCH) and New York Radical Women. The latter group's most famous protest occurred during the 1968 Miss America Pageant. It involved tossing a variety of symbols of traditional femininity—bras, girdles, makeup, and clothing—in a trash can outside the pageant and was clearly a countercultural performance-based action. Paul Krassner and Bob Fass also came from Jewish backgrounds. Jim Fouratt, in contrast, grew up Catholic and, as a gay man, he valued the outsider status and seemingly inclusive nature of Yippie ideology, even as the other Yippies tended to ignore or dismiss his sexuality and Fouratt would later acknowledge that Hoffman and Rubin were often homophobic.[18]

The Lower East Side was a working-class neighborhood, home to Polish, Irish, Ukrainian, and Italian immigrants, as well as a sizeable Jewish population. By the 1960s, however, a demographic shift was occurring, especially in the area north of Houston Street—what is today known as the East Village—as the area came to feature "the imprint of three distinct and separate segments—the Puerto Ricans, the Ukrainians who entered the United States from Germany after World War II, and the New Bohemians." Artists, radicals, hippies, and others who wanted to live in Manhattan were attracted to the cheap rents that typified the East Village's five-story tenements. A poetry scene that was championed by beat poet Allen Ginsberg was centered around several coffeehouses, including Tenth Street Coffeehouse, Les Deux Mégots, and Le

[18] On Morgan, WITCH, and New York Radical Women, see Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Dell, 1999). On Fouratt, see Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Plume, 1993), 129-131.

Metro. The area was also home to a vibrant community of radical African American artists, writers, and musicians, including Ellen Stewart, Archie Shepp, and Amiri Baraka.[19]

The Lower East Side proved to be a generative environment for the Yippies to explore countercultural activism. Though the broad purpose of the Yippies was to "create a loosely organized mass youth movement," they still looked to their immediate surroundings for inspiration and found several templates for the style and aesthetic of their performance-based protests. The area played host to a variety of street theatre groups: the Open Theatre, an offshoot of the Living Theater; the Bread and Puppet Theater; Up Against the Wall, Motherfuckers!; and WITCH. Fouratt, who had participated in a variety of experimental theater groups like the Living Theatre, the Open Theatre, and Caffé Cino, also nominally drew the queer community of New York into the Yippies' orbit, though the Yippies' homophobia prevented any true alliance. Fouratt was also a frequent visitor of pop artist Andy Warhol's second Factory studio, which was located nearby at 33 Union Square West near the corner of East 16th Street. Not all of these denizens were interested or active in the Yippie counterculture and the Yippies were not invested equally in the various concerns of this diverse group of people. But as the Yippies began to survey the world around them from their vantage point in Manhattan, the alternative scene on the Lower East Side influenced their vision. The Yippies were formed amidst a host of radical American artists who were challenging the status quo of art, politics, and culture.[20]

The Yippies reached out to the community not simply to participate in their activities but also as a matter of process, because they aimed to be constantly engaged in discussions about the purpose of countercultural activism. Morgan recalled that the youth-oriented décor of their

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[19] Judd L. Teller, *Strangers and Natives: The Evolution of the American Jew from 1921 to the Present* (New York: Delta, 1970), 251-252. See also Lorenzo Thomas, "Alea's Children: The Avant-Garde on the Lower East Side, 1960-1970," *African American Review* (Winter 1993); Daniel Kane, *All Poets Welcome: The Lower East Side Poetry Scene in the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[20] Rubin, *We Are Everywhere* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 231.

Union Square office was attractive and inviting: "Affirming, myth-making, just beautiful!" They also maintained two large rooms in a loft on East 14th Street that they labeled "The Free University." Meetings between Yippies and their allies were held at the office or, in warmer months, outside in Union Square. Meetings were nominally chaired, often by Rubin, but tended to be freeform, allowing for extended debates over local organizing, planning for Chicago, and broader discussions of what exactly the goals should be for Yippie countercultural dissent. Some of these meetings drew 1960s luminaries into the orbit of the Yippies. At one, Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsberg put their stamp of approval on the Festival of Life.[21]

Internally the Yippies argued over whether organizing for Chicago was useful in terms of their local presence in New York. This was a contentious point: aside from criticisms in the left-wing press, the Yippies received criticism from the Diggers, who felt the group's focus on Chicago missed the centrality of local action to countercultural ideology. In *Playing for Keeps*, Peter Coyote argues that the Diggers perceived the Yippies to be espousing "politics-as-usual in hip drag" and recalls that Peter Berg once told Hoffman, after Hoffman suggested that Berg was upset that the Yippies had stolen and popularized Digger ideas, "No, Abbie. I feel like I gave a good tool to an idiot." According to Coyote, the Diggers thought that "Abbie and company were platforming their political ambitions on the cracked skulls and smashed kidneys of the nameless 'masses' that they had assembled." In the early months of 1968, Fouratt more mildly echoed these criticisms during Yippie meetings. After the Yip-In, which had "deeply shaken" Fouratt, he became increasingly concerned that the "transformation of consciousness" that should be the

[21] Morgan, "Meet the Women of the Revolution, 1969," 87; Farber, *Chicago '68*, 28-31.

focus of Yippie activism was being replaced with Hoffman's predictions that "there would be blood on the streets of Chicago."[22]

For pro-Chicago Yippies, however, acting nationally was critical to local improvement. They presented the opinions of their critics as too hesitant and argued that a national revolution would necessarily transform the communities that composed that nation, just as local communities would need to be organized to successfully achieve a national revolution. Rubin argued that "in reality it is national issues and actions that pump adrenalin into local areas." Hoffman observed, "You can use Chicago as a means of pulling your local community together." Hoffman also interrogated the obstacles that revolutionaries created for themselves when they separated themselves into "radicals" and "hippies" and argued that the two groups would do well to marry their goals. Rubin agreed: a Yippie was "a stoned politico" and "a hybrid-mixture of New Left and hippie coming out something different." The Chicago action, as an abstract idea, could provide a fulcrum for joint organization: a Be-in and a protest, side-by-side, but also an end-goal for radical communities across the country.[23]

Yippie Influences

Yippie identity, ideology, and strategy were formulated around four broad, interconnected shifts in American culture in the late 1960s. First, the Yippies pointed to the increasing primacy of teenagers and young adults in the popular culture of the United States as evidence of a revolution that was already in progress. For example, Rubin frequently granted causal status and revolutionary intent to various examples of mainstream pleasure that were popular with young Americans. In *Do It!* Rubin argued, "The New Left sprang, a predestined pissed-off child, from

[22] Peter Coyote, "Playing for Keeps," Digger Archives, www.diggers.org/freefall/forkeeps.html (accessed 12 October 2008); Duberman, *Stonewall*, 135; Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 91-92. On the general character of these meetings, see Kempton, "Yippies Anti-Organize a Groovy Revolution."

[23] Rubin, *We Are Everywhere*, 210; Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 108; Rubin, *Do It!*, 82.

Elvis' gyrating pelvis." In this framing, young dissent was as much a product of modern youth culture as it was a moral choice. Similarly, Rubin attributed the sexual revolution to the back seats of cars. He argued that affluent culture, in "producing a car and car radio for every middle-class home, gave Elvis a base for recruiting." He also asserted that Elvis "killed Ike Eisenhower" and emphasized several heroes of 1950s rock music as the progenitors of the Yippie revolution: Elvis, Buddy Holly, the Coasters, Bo Diddley, and Chuck Berry. Rubin found revolutionary sentiment in the cultural production of musicians who were already recognizable to American youth. Where other countercultural activists saw the surge of commercial goods produced for American youth as a further example of the insidious reach of the dominant order's intent to pacify real sexual, aesthetic, and political urges, the Yippies framed sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll as evidence of the fact that the youth of American were already in revolt.[24]

For the Yippies, this revolution was fundamentally generational. Rubin proclaimed to his young audience that "growing up means *giving up your dreams*." Parents were emblematic of the archaic and outdated institutions that should be eliminated from American society. Of course, Hoffman and Rubin, both in their thirties, had to fudge their definition of "generation" to mean "mindset" rather than "age." Rubin argued that "a pre-1950's child who can still dream is rare," implicating himself as a rarity, and then rooted his revolution in the very different lives that young people in the affluent era were leading:

> Kids who grew up in the post-1950's live in a world of supermarkets, color TV commercials, guerrilla war, international media, psychedelics, rock 'n' roll, and moon walks. For us *nothing is impossible*. *We* can do *anything*.

According to Rubin, "the *pre*-1950's generation has *nothing* to teach the *post*-1950's."[25] In demarcating children from their parents in such a stark way, Rubin was attempting to situate

[24] Rubin, *Do It!*, 17-19, 87.

[25] Ibid., 90-91. Rubin's use of "pre-1950's" and "post-1950's" is an incorrect rendering; he fairly clearly means "pre-1950" and "post-1950."

American youth not simply as the future of the country but as revolutionaries who intended to transform the outdated social structure of the pre-affluent era and lead the way to a Yippie-styled future. The Yippies insisted, over and over again, that their countercultural public consisted of everyone born after 1950 and anyone older than that who still got it. Indeed, they often cast this generational divide against the backdrop of Vietnam. As Lampe put it, "What's happening is that a whole generation is starting to say to its parents, 'You can no longer get us to kill & be killed for your uptight archaic beliefs.'"[26]

Second, the Yippies were influenced by the growing visibility of hippie lifestyles in the popular consciousness of the United States after the Summer of Love in 1967. Here, it is worth noting some differences between the cultural contexts in which the Diggers and Yippies were formed. The Diggers were formed before the Summer of Love, in the fall of 1966, and the summer of 1967 was in many ways the realization of their worst fears. The translation of the aesthetic of the Haight-Ashbury hippies from a community-based style to a product marketed to all young Americans after the Human Be-in resulted in a sudden influx of penniless youth in San Francisco that resulted in undue strain on municipal infrastructure. Consequently, the Diggers remained suspicious of any campaign, commercial or otherwise, that sought to celebrate the style of hippie culture as an end unto itself. The Yippies, in contrast, were formed at the very end of 1967 in a cultural context that suddenly looked very different: recreational drugs were more popular than ever, but most were now illegal; the hip lifestyle was now something that most Americans were aware of, even if only because of the media's coverage of events like the Human Be-in and Vietnam protests; and the San Francisco sound was now a relevant and viable response to the British Invasion. Additionally, hippie life was still largely seen as a West Coast

[26] Keith Lampe, "From Dissent Into Parody," *Liberation*, Dec. 1967, 20.

phenomenon, meaning that the Lower East Side did not face the same influx of teenagers or the infrastructural strain that beset San Francisco. For the Yippies, then, hippie style, even divorced from countercultural substance, seemed to herald a sea change in American culture that should be celebrated.[27]

That said, there is clearly a certain slippage that occurs throughout Yippie writings concerning the relationship between hippies and Yippies. In *Revolution for the Hell of It*, published in 1968, Hoffman noted, "When you meet another hippie in the street, especially outside the Village, you smile and say hello." Similarly, in *Do It!*, Rubin often styled himself as a hippie and wrote of "our culture, the hippie longhaired culture." Elsewhere, he described developments in the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley as "an early sign of the split between political radicals and the hippies/yippies." At other times, however, Hoffman and Rubin seemed to mark a distinction between "hippie" and "Yippie." For example, Rubin noted that "Yippies are Jewish Hippies." He also at several points tacitly rejected what he framed as a penchant among hippies for pacifism. A Yippie, according to Rubin, was willing to carry "a gun at his hip": "He didn't feel at home in SDS, and he wasn't a flower-power hippie or a campus intellectual." The message, though ambivalent, was that Yippies were and were not hippies, but also that hippies should be celebrated for bucking the social etiquette and codes of straight society.[28]

Third, the Yippies embraced the popularity of a variety of recreational drugs, as well as the declarations of countercultural luminaries like Timothy Leary and Ken Kesey that hallucinogenics were capable of unlocking authentic aspects of human experience. Krassner, for

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[27] On hippies and hip lifestyle, see John Arthur Maynard, *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Francis J. Rigney and L. Douglas Smith, *The Real Bohemia* (New York: Basic, 1961); Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1983); David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[28] Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 34; Rubin, *Do It!*, 89, 111, 176.

example, had first ingested acid at Leary's LSD research center in Millbrook, New York. Hoffman and Fouratt, while attending a Mobe conference, smoked "dope" instead of participating in the scheduled meetings because "America was already dead." Hoffman argued that accepting that "pot feels good" was the appropriate way to find a "new, positive, authentic frame of reference." Here, Hoffman very clearly invoked the language of the Diggers, though his equation of smoking pot with changing one's "frame of reference" was anathema to what the Diggers proscribed. Rubin argued, "Pot transforms environments. All the barriers we build to protect ourselves from each other disappear," and continued, "Grass destroyed the left … and created in its place a youth culture." According to Rubin, drugs allowed individuals to see the world as it actually was, which inevitably made them resist the way it was presented.[29]

For the Yippies, however, drugs played a more complex role than simply acting as a conduit to true experience; they were also a gateway for white activists to true revolutionary identity. In Rubin's words, "for whites, dope is a ticket out of the middle class"; drug use was therefore a central component of the Yippies' claim to subversion. In this sense, drugs were a method that the Yippies envisioned as way to transition between "straight" identity and Yippie identity. Drug usage was a marker that the Yippies assumed to mean that a person was hip, engaged, cool, interesting, and, most critically, communal. According to Rubin, "It's never 'my dope'—it's always 'our dope.' … The communist drug." In this formulation, a Yippie *was* a drug user and drugs marked a clear boundary between straights and the counterculture.[30]

Fourth, Yippie activism was formulated around the frustrations that Yippie activists experienced in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left. Though their individual paths

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[29] Paul Krassner, "LSD as Gateway Drug," *San Francisco Bay Guardian Online*, 19 Aug. 2009, http://www.sfbg.com/2009/08/18/lsd-gateway-drug (accessed 10 July 2006); Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 36-37; Rubin, *Do It!*, 98-99.

[30] Rubin, "The Yippies Are Going to Chicago," *The Realist*, Sept. 1968, 22; Rubin, *Do It!*, 98-99.

through the New Left were different, Yippies came to similar conclusions. Hoffman, in the early 1960s and at the expense of his relationship with his first wife and two children, had spent much of his time organizing the Worcester chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In the mid-1960s he also began to work each summer with SNCC. His marriage fell apart in 1966, after which he moved to New York to help SNCC set up Liberty House, a cooperative store that sold handcrafted goods from a collective in the South. Hoffman was initially desolate when SNCC asked white activists to leave the organization in the winter of 1966. After discussing the decision with Stokely Carmichael and reading Franz Fanon, however, Hoffman changed his mind. He located a community of his own on the Lower East Side and began to work with Fouratt to adapt some of the approaches of the Diggers.[31]

Rubin's experience was different. Hoffman had dropped out of Berkeley before the student movement really took root. Rubin made the decision to drop out of Berkeley in 1964 against the backdrop of the Free Speech Movement. He became involved with the antiwar movement and quickly rose to a position of leadership. He organized Vietnam teach-ins and, in 1965, formed the Vietnam Day Committee (VDC). His wide-ranging approach to tactical resistance was celebrated within the movement, largely because he was already experimenting with the performance-based tactics that would lead him to form the Yippies. For example, to protest the manufacture and distribution of napalm in Berkeley, Rubin and the VDC painted an old truck with a bright yellow sign that informed passersby that napalm was being transported through their streets. Then he had the truck follow a real napalm transportation truck on its route through the city. He also began to discuss tactics with R.G. Davis, head of the San Francisco Mime Troupe. In 1967, however, Rubin abandoned his leadership role in the Berkeley New Left to run

[31] Farber, *Chicago '68*, 5-7. See also Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*.

for the office of mayor in Berkeley. It was an attempt to push his gestating ideas about society and culture into popular consciousness, but very quickly his attempts to court a broad audience of constituents forced him to mediate and mitigate his more radical ideas; his distant second place finish in the race convinced him that the compromise was not worth all that much.[32]

Both Hoffman and Rubin gravitated towards performance-based protest due to their dissatisfaction with picket lines and protest marches, which they saw as increasingly standard—and therefore mundane—events that no longer possessed the power to foster revolutionary sentiment. The Yippies' dissatisfaction with the left was not simply about strategy, however: they were also highly critical of the Old and New Left's emphasis on ideology, which Rubin called "abstractions" and a "brain disease." Throughout *Do It!* Rubin discusses his view that the New Left's persistent belief that students possessed the power to lead a working class revolution was a fantasy, sarcastically suggesting that student radicals were in reality afraid of workers and were merely waiting for the working class to show up at their universities. Rubin also dismissed the left's claims that the Yippies were not "serious" by making two arguments. First, he argued that even if one accepted that New Left ideology was sound, the way it was presented was too boring and complex to truly energize revolutionary sentiment. Second, he argued that New Left ideology was not sound in the first place: that the left, given full reign, would force true revolutionaries to get haircuts, eschew drugs and sex, and avoid rock music. For Rubin, this was a fundamental rejection of the authentic desires and natures of real radical men and women and a clear sign that the New Left was in essence the same as the Old Left.[33]

The theories of intellectuals like Herbert Marcuse and Abraham Maslow (both of whom were Hoffman's professors at Brandeis) were a final influence on Yippie ideology and practice.

[32] Farber, *Chicago '68*, 9-11.
[33] Rubin, *Do It!*, 113.

Marcuse's concept of "repressive desublimation," which argued that the only way to expand one's critical faculties was to experience desires and pleasures that existed outside those sanctioned within the dominant order, seems crucial. Maslow's concept of self-actualization makes a similar case: that human beings were often provoked to self-betterment through an internal desire that motivated them to make use of their capabilities. In other words, countercultural activists were self-actualizing. Marcuse also argued that the true revolutionary "violates the rules of the game and, in doing so, reveals it as a rigged game." The actual arguments of the Yippies reflected all of these ideas: a Yippie was an artist and revolutionary engaged in exposing the outdated and constricting imperatives of the dominant order through exposing their own desires in public and demonstrating an alternative, better way of life. The Yippies would be leaders who demonstrated a new way to live.[34]

Yippie Ideology and Practice

On 21 October 1967—just over two months before the Yippies officially formed—Rubin asked Hoffman to help organize a demonstration to elevate the Pentagon three feet into the air and give it an exorcism. Rubin had been asked by Dave Dellinger, coordinator of Mobe, to act as project director for this event, part of a broader series of protests against the Vietnam War. Rubin wanted to adopt a style of countercultural performance-based protest, and though he felt the Diggers were too didactic, he found Hoffman and Fouratt's interpretation of their ideas incredibly attractive. Mobe obtained a permit for the performance, though it had to negotiate the actual height that Rubin and his fellow participants could elevate the building; his initial request had been 300 feet. The nascent Yippies were joined by Ginsberg, members of the Fugs, and

[34] Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), 257; Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50 (1943): 370-396, at 381.

Mobe. The Pentagon apparently did not actually leave the ground, but the event, with its fusion of New Left activism, hippie mysticism, and countercultural performance, provided a starting point for Rubin and Hoffman's collaboration.[35]

The Pentagon protest anticipated several of the central components of Yippie activism. It emphasized their belief that true radicalism lay somewhere between the devout ideological approach of the New Left and the iconography of the hippie lifestyle. The performance of levitating the Pentagon embraced various spiritual notions that hippies popularized: Eastern concepts of meditation and of the power of the mind and the idea that hallucinogenic drugs allowed individuals and communities to temporarily alter the physical world. It also emphasized the idea that protest should be fun because, as the Yippies argued, life should be fun. In Yippie formulation, the revolution was not about "abstract" concepts like participatory democracy, the redistribution of wealth, or the end of capitalism, racism, sexism, and homophobia. Rather, the revolution was an invitation for all Americans to shed the limiting, narrow perspectives of middle-class culture and embrace their own real desires. According to Krassner:

> No more marches. No more rallies. No more speeches. The dialogue is over, baby. Tolerance of rational dissent has become an insidious form of repression. The goal now is to disrupt an insane society. We've already applied for the permit.

The New Left could not be a revolutionary vanguard in this formulation because it was fundamentally a product of the dominant order—it applied for permits. As Robin Morgan put it:

> This may be the only political tactic short of sabotage and terrorism that is left to us now that the day of the mass march has passed.

The true revolutionary was a product of something new, something "post-1950's," something shaped in and framed by the new cultural forms of the post-World War II era. The Pentagon, representative of the military in the United States and ensconced as it was amidst buildings and

[35] Farber, *Chicago '68*, 12.

monuments that stood as testaments to the "old" American dominant order, was the perfect site to perform an exorcism as part of a Yippie ritual to give form to that new identity.[36]

The nascent Yippies led a crowd of 35,000 to the north parking lot of the Pentagon, where they were greeted by the Fugs playing music atop a truck. The national media was also present. Hoffman had already advised them that he had carefully measured the Pentagon and determined that it would take 1,200 activists to raise the building into the air and make it "turn orange," after which the exorcists would make it "vibrate until all evil emissions" were drawn out. Those exorcists would include "sorcerers, swamis, priests, warlocks, rabbis, gurus, witches, alchemists, speed freaks, and other holy men." To achieve this, participating activists wore beads and witches' hats and sported "cymbals, triangles, drums," and "leather bells," while Hoffman himself sported a set of Native American beads—which he typically wore—and a large Uncle Sam-style hat. The group began to chant, "Out demons out!", "Hare Krishna," and "Om." The visual impact of the Yippies' failure to levitate the Pentagon was intended to communicate a political message: this was a comment on the insurmountable power wielded by the American military and the futility of trying to fight against it. But it was the spectacle and the joy of the protest that fostered the greatest interest among representatives of the media.[37]

In this sense, the primary purpose of the Pentagon performance was to demonstrate that the counterculture was pleasurable, creative, and fun. According to Judy Albert,

> Yippie gave me the freedom to be theatrical and political, fun-loving and non-serious, a revolutionary who refused to accept restrictions.[38]

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[36] Morgan, "Meet the Women of the Revolution, 1969," 87; Krassner, *How a Satirical Editor Became a Yippie Conspirator in Ten Easy Years* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 306.

[37] "The Banners of Dissent," *Time*, 27 Oct. 1967, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,841090,00.html; Hoffman, *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), 134; Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, the Novel as History* (New York: New American Library, 1968), 124.

[38] Judy Albert, interview by Jonah Raskin, "Interview / Jonah Raskin: Judy Gumbo Albert, Yippie Girl," The Rag Blog, 17 Apr. 2012, http://www.theragblog.com/interview-jonah-raskin-judy-gumbo-albert-yippie-girl/.

The military power of the Pentagon might be out of reach; its serious respectability, however, was not. According to Rubin:

> The power structure automatically imposes a frame of reference which forces people to see things from the Man's point of view. When a policeman shoots a nigger, that's "law and order." But when a black man defends himself against a pig, that's "violence." The role of the revolutionary is to create theater which creates a revolutionary frame of reference. The power to define is the power to control.

That final clause summarizes the novel approach the Yippies took to countercultural activism. If the freaks and Diggers valorized the process of individuals achieving autonomy through performance, the Yippies sensed that there was a critical power in actively attempting to redefine the frame of reference of society at large. The Pentagon, imperious and powerful, was here rendered as a prop, a toy, and a punch line. But this performance did not simply redefine the Pentagon; it also interrogated the value the dominant order placed on the power wielded by the Pentagon. According to Rubin, "The goal of theater is to get as many people as possible to overcome fear by taking action." In dismissing this kind of institutional power, the Yippies argued for their own humanistic power as a viable alternative. Hoffman, for example, argued that all radicals were "runaways" from the mainstream. He rhetorically asked if "the runaways are going back?" and then answered his own question: "I'll tell you one thing—I sure as hell ain't, they'll have to kill me first." Yippie countercultural activism worked to promote this runaway society as one built around human interaction, not institutional power.[39]

At the core of Yippie activism was a set of moral concerns that mirrored those of their counterparts on the West Coast. The Yippies targeted middle-class or "straight" life, private property, and government and financial institutions as exemplary of the imperatives of the dominant order that kept the people of the United States in check. "Property hang-ups" in

[39] Rubin, *Do It!*, 142-143; Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 75.

particular were singled out as middle-class cultural baggage that prevented Americans from dealing fairly and communally with one another. The Yippies also interrogated the Old and New Left's approaches to political action, arguing that marches, picket lines, and formally organized protests were increasingly seen as respectable, routine actions that no longer had the leverage or power to provoke change or shock middle-class Americans out of their complacency. According to Rubin, "Straight people expect radicals to march in circles, carry picket signs, and shout slogans. Radicals have to put away their picket signs and start using their wits." Lampe put it this way: "We emancipated primitives of the coming culture are free to do what we *feel* now because we understand that logic and proportion and consistency, often even perspective are part of the old control system." The Yippies wanted revolutionaries to abandon this "old control system" and look to the possibilities inherent in unexpected forms of protest.[40]

Beyond these basic moral imperatives, however, Yippie performance-based activism diverged from that of the Diggers. According to Nancy Kushan, "Our use of the media, creation of myths, comedy, and appeal to artists was fabulous." The "unexpected" forms of protest that the Yippies favored were grounded in exploiting the increasing presence of mass media. Hoffman, in particular, was fascinated by the possibilities that simply presenting "the reality of our daily lives" in front of a camera afforded countercultural activists. Potential revolutionaries across the country would not need to imagine what a performance-based action looked like or even seek out an underground syndical for a description: the mainstream media, now so fascinated by hippie life in the aftermath of the Summer of Love, would do the broadcasting,

[40] Nancy Kurshan, interview by Jonah Raskin, "Interview / Jonah Raskin: 'Fearless' Yippie Pioneer Nancy Kurshan Battles Prison Behemoth," The Rag Blog, 28 Feb. 2013, http://www.theragblog.com/interview-jonah-raskin-fearless-yippie-pioneer-nancy-kurshan-battles-prison-behemoth/; Rubin, *Do It!*, 137; Keith Lampe, "The Honkie Rebellion," *Liberation*, Dec. 1967, 20.

amplifying the Yippie message across the country. Hoffman advised fellow activists, "Just do your thing: the press eats it up."[41]

Rubin agreed: "Television creates myths bigger than reality." To him, those myths were important: "Every reporter is a dramatist, creating theater out of life." He stressed that a radical's power lay in their "ability to strike fear in the enemy's heart." He identified "fear" in this context as arising from expressions and actions that defied cultural expectations and social etiquette. Rubin's loss of faith in the left's traditional forms of protest rested on his belief that U.S. citizens had simply become inundated with images of the New Left and were now immune to them. Rubin and Hoffman believed that the only way to rattle the worldviews of the population at large was to take radical countercultural performance into their living rooms. According to Hoffman, the Yippies wanted the media to advertise revolution "the same way you would advertise soap." They were critical of the Diggers' failure to grasp this potential for mass communication. On this subject, Hoffman described a revealing encounter with Emmett Grogan at a Michigan SDS meeting, where Grogan stood up on a table to announce that the movement should have no leaders. Hoffman responded by shouting that Grogan's face would end up on *Time Magazine* either way. That, to Hoffman, would be a powerful message.[42]

The Yippies thought carefully about how the media could best be manipulated. Hoffman argued that an absence of clarity would only serve to enhance the intrigue of the Yippies, suggesting that "distortion became the lifeblood of the Yippies." If a clever activist could exploit the media's hunger for examples of "hippie" life, Hoffman argued, countercultural activists needed to understand how to use that exposure as efficiently as possible. In Hoffman's eyes, the

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[41] Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 73.

[42] Rubin, *Do It!*, 106; Reverend Thomas King Forcade, "Abbie Hoffman and the Media," in *The Underground Reader*, ed. Mel Howard and Thomas King Forcade (New York: New American Library, 1972), 69; Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 43.

failure of the New Left to adequately gain the sympathies of American youth proved that speeches were not going to be effective. What was most effective, according to Hoffman, was an expression of the style, aesthetic, and attitude of the counterculture. Hoffman also believed that potential adherents would not give "a shit about words, lineal concepts"; he went so far as to argue that the youth of the United States could not understand speeches or words because television had taught them a different way to process information. Consequently, Yippie performances would have to be "exciting" and "alive," so that viewers would "feel" their dissent. At the same time, Hoffman argued, "confusion is mightier than the sword" and "if the straight world understood all the Digger shit, it would render us impotent." Keeping Yippie ideology obtuse would confuse the "straight" public and evince a sense of belonging to those who "got it" just by seeing it. It is also worth noting that Hoffman's argument that language was "the absolute in horseshit" seemed to dovetail with the Yippies' attitudes about drugs: what the Yippies offered their potential countercultural public was what Hoffman described as the power of experiences "beyond explanation." Rubin described Yippie ideology as a myth, but argued, "The myth is real if it builds a stage for people to play out their own dreams and fantasies."[43]

Consequently, the Yippies pointed to the power of the approach of the mass media, citing influences like Marshall McLuhan, even as they condemned the content. Rubin argued that mainstream consumer culture made words incomprehensible. In *Do It!*, for example, he asks how "love" could possibly be viewed as a comprehensible word between two people if advertisements proclaimed, "CARS LOVE SHELL." He then asks how "revolution" could be understood if toilet paper and mouthwash brands described their own new products as "revolutionary"? That basic point resembles the kind of criticism the Diggers and freaks made,

[43] Hoffman, "The Yippies Are Going to Chicago," 1; Abbie Hoffman, *New York Free Press*, Oct. 1968, 3; Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 26-27; Rubin, *Do It!*, 55-56.

but the Yippies were in fact fascinated by this ability to transform meaning. Hoffman spends a lot of time in *Revolution for the Hell of It* praising the ability of filmmakers and advertising agencies to capture and engage the interest of viewers. Hoffman cites a Dreyfus Fund ad that featured a lion roaming deserted streets and praises the ad's success at selling "cool images" and a "calm secure future" to middle-class viewers. For Hoffman, it was the content of the ad that was the problem, but that could easily be changed: "We are hot. In our ad the lion cracks."[44]

One example of this approach is an interview Rubin did with television talk-show host Phil Donahue in 1970. Donahue seemed keen to let Rubin provide a coherent countercultural ideological platform; Rubin deliberately and repeatedly avoided clear answers to Donahue's questions, instead repeating phrases that began, "young people know," each iteration followed by a critique of the dominant order. This technique is fascinating on a number of levels. Rubin's constant appeals to and praise for "young people" implicitly tied all American youth together as activists who "got it." At the same time, Rubin periodically replaced "young people know" with a dismissive "you know," directed at Donahue. This phrasing transformed this discussion from a debate between two valid political positions to an unequal encounter where Donahue was lying about reality while Rubin was expressing a set of clear and obvious truths. In this fashion, Rubin forced Donahue to come off as even more of an out-of-touch representative of mainstream culture than he actually was—though Donahue's repeated pleas that Rubin use this "opportunity" constructively probably did not help. The interview finally got away from Donahue as the audience started to shout and clap for Rubin's dismissive statements about the Vietnam War and President Richard Nixon; Donahue was visibly increasingly flustered, while Rubin spent the

[44] Rubin, *Do It!*, 109-111; Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 79-80.

entire interview looking bored, distracted, and irritated that he was being forced to explain natural and obvious ideas to this "plastic host" on this "plastic show."[45]

The Yippies became masters at exploiting cynical images of the dominant order. The most famous performance-based protest attributed to the Yippies—it actually happened on 24 August 1967, four months before the Yippies were formed—is notorious precisely because it provided such a powerful image: Fouratt and Hoffman threw money on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange from the visitors' gallery, and just as they expected, chaos erupted as stockbrokers began to cheer and attempt to grab it. Onlookers could certainly parse the performance: the Stock Exchange building featured exhibits that touted the industrial revolution and the development of modern American capitalism; Fouratt had told the security guards that their group was named the East Side Service Organization, or ESSO, which was a reference to John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil; and the performance itself was intended to highlight the abstract and immediate ways that money ruled both day-to-day life and American conceptions of middle-class identity. Those interested in performance could also note that Fouratt and Hoffman were keenly demonstrating that the civility that was typical of day-to-day operations on the Stock Exchange was itself a performance. But those specific elements were no *more* important than the broad argument the performance made about the vacuous and empty nature of the mainstream: paper money was more important than human relationships. Hoffman advised countercultural activists that their primary goal should be "community within our Nation, chaos in theirs." But events like the performance at the Stock Exchange made that phrase seem less a goal and more a

[45] *The Phil Donahue Show*, NBC, aired Apr. 1970, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgeonR275aA.

description: the dominant order was chaotic *because* it was vacuous. According to Robin Morgan, the Yippie counterculture, alternatively, fostered "a real feeling of *communitas*."[46]

The pleasure and fun that the Yippies offered their countercultural public was framed as a vital, powerful impulse. It was also portrayed as being freeform: Rubin remarked that the Yippies' "basic informational statement is a blank piece of paper." This notion of "fun" extended beyond the character of Yippie performances at the Stock Exchange, the Pentagon, and the Yip-in; it was essential that the life of an activist itself be fun. For example, in *Revolution for the Hell of It*, Hoffman argued that he wanted nothing to do with a movement "built on sacrifice, dedication, responsibility, anger, frustration, and guilt." Similarly, in *Woodstock Nation* (published in 1969), while deliberating on the upcoming Chicago 7 Conspiracy trial, Hoffman argued, "I want to be tried for having a good time and not for being serious." This statement hints at another aspect of the emphasis the Yippies placed on fun. Hoffman's statement speaks to the Yippies' desire to have their lifestyle and character be the object of attention for the straight world, but also their desire to have their own interpretation of that lifestyle be reproduced within the straight world. Just as Rubin mocked Phil Donahue's desire for him to be serious, Yippies frequently attempted to push the mainstream to accept their version of their own story: that being "serious" was not valuable or valid and that politeness, etiquette, and deference were tools used by the dominant order to deprive people of their faculties. Fun was not simply indulgent or personal; fun was—and Yippies were—selfless, communal, and celebratory.[47]

Partly because Yippies presented their ideas in starkly generational terms, their concept of Yippie identity was less rooted in the past than were the self-identities of the freaks or Diggers.

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[46] John Kifner, "Hippies Shower $1 Bills on Stock Exchange Floor," *New York Times*, 19 Aug.1967, 23; Farber, *Chicago '68*, 56; Hoffman, *Steal This Book* (New York: Pirate Editions, 1971), 1; Morgan, "Meet the Women of the Revolution, 1969," *New York Times Magazine*, 87.

[47] Rubin, *Do It!*, 84; Hoffman, *Woodstock Nation: A Talk-Rock Album* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969 100; Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 61.

The Yippies still dressed like cowboys and Native Americans, but ideologically they associated their concept of the "outlaw" with the notion that the youth of America were in revolt: their alternative model of living was new, emotional, and predicated upon the mass media and new cultural forms. Rubin, in *Do It!*, argued that a Yippie "is the sound of surging through the streets" and that he was a "longhaired, bearded, hairy, crazy motherfucker whose life is theater, every moment creating the new society as he destroys the old." It would be reductive to suggest that the freaks and Diggers were looking to the past while the Yippies were looking to the future, given their shared allegiance to contemporary cultural art forms, but it is undeniable that the Yippies presented "living the revolution" as a step into the future: "revolution meant the creation of new men and women." These people would shed the imperatives of the dominant order in favor of something entirely new.[48]

What that "new" society would look like became the focus of planning for the Festival of Life. In the immediate aftermath of the Yip-In, Hoffman and Rubin declared the action a success—as it had put the group "on the map"—and wanted to return immediately to planning for Chicago. Others, like Fouratt, were more interested in organizing additional local performance-based protests that would attempt to improve upon the successes, and avoid the violence, of the Yip-on. This debate was transformed when national political news intervened. Lyndon Johnson, the primary target of the Festival of Life, dropped out of the presidential race on 31 March.

Rubin and Hoffman initially attempted to reorient their ideas against a broader Democratic Party platform, but this floundered due to the presence of more palatable candidates like Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy in the Democratic primaries. McCarthy, especially, enjoyed wide

[48] Rubin, *Do It!*, 55-56.

support from student radicals and anti-war activists for his stance on Vietnam and he confounded the Yippies; Johnson's exit from the race seemed to stem directly from McCarthy's unexpected success in the New Hampshire primary on 12 March. Johnson's vulnerability had drawn Robert Kennedy into the race, and once Johnson dropped out, Rubin sarcastically noted, "We expected concentration camps and we got Bobby Kennedy." As the race for the Democratic nomination seemed increasingly more optimistic, Fouratt's assertion that the group should refocus its efforts locally swayed several pro-Chicago Yippies.[49]

The Yippies decided that they should avoid congesting another enclosed space like Grand Central Station; instead, they looked to get the city's official cooperation for an outdoor concert and fundraiser to be held in Sheep's Meadow, Central Park, an event envisioned as similar to the successful Be-In that Fouratt had held on Easter Sunday the previous year. When city authorities seemed reluctant to agree to the Yippies' plans, the Yippies staged a sit-in in Mayor John Lindsay's office. This resulted in getting the guarantee of cooperation they sought; the Yip-Out occurred on 14 April, Easter Sunday, and was attended by just over 10,000 young Americans. Bands took the stage, audience members wore outlandish clothing and shared food and drink, and between sets the Yippies advertised the Festival of Life and pleaded for donations to the Yippie cause. Yippies also circulated through the crowd soliciting donations and accepting canned goods for a food drive.[50]

The handbill that invited New Yorkers to the Yip-Out Be-In subtitled the event "Resurrection of Free," perhaps hinting at a revival of the politics of the Diggers. Diggers, of course, would have dismissed Be-Ins and food drives as suitable countercultural

[49] Rubin, *Do It!*, 78. On the Yippies' reaction to Johnson's withdrawal, see Farber, *Chicago '68*, 46-49.
[50] "Sit-In at Mayor's Office," Liberation News Service, 10 Apr. 1968; Farber, *Chicago '68*, 53.

practice; the Yippies, however, focused on the way a Be-In made countercultural ideas accessible to large audiences. According to Rubin, the "new consciousness" that was fostered at Be-Ins meant that "instead of *talking* about communism, people were beginning to *live* communism." As the handbill explained, "A be-in is an emotional United Nations. It works where the intellectual one enclosed in glass & concrete fails." When framed this way, Yippies could argue that Be-Ins transcended the commercial interests that critics dismissed; even compromised, Be-Ins were an effective performance-based protest that could be adapted to crowds of any size. And because *this* particular Be-In avoided any incidents with the police, despite the size of the crowd, it could be seen as a successful venture for the Yippies.[51]

The event still had critics. The Yip-Out was a municipally sanctioned outdoor spring concert, and in avoiding the spectacle of the Yip-In it seemed less a Yippie performance than a bohemian festival. Though participants shared drugs and elements of communal life were evident, the event sparked little enthusiasm from local youth, who expected the excitement and subversion of the Yip-In. The event also drew criticism from the local press. Sally Kempton of the *Village Voice* described the people in attendance as "flaccid" and "pale"; suggested that some participants were poseurs, noting "teenyboppers" in "baby-doll shifts and mini-skirts" and "acne scars under … day-glo face paint"; and asserted that those in attendance did not even look like they were "having a very good time." Kempton's dismissal of the event ended by observing:

> There was an obligatory quality about the scene, a sense that it had all been done before, and done better, a sense of malaise. … "Are you having a good time?" the girls asked the boys. "Do you want to split now?" People kept asking each other what was happening. And the answer, most of the time, was "nothing."

It is hard to read Kempton's words without remembering that the hearts of pro-Chicago Yippies were not really invested in the Yip-Out. The Yip-Out featured elements of a countercultural

[51] Rubin, *Do It!*, 82-83; Martin Carey, "Yip-Out: Resurrection of Free," Handbill, ca. 14 Apr. 1968, http://www.wolfgangsvault.com/yip-out-resurrection-of-free/poster-art/handbill/CPK680414-A.

event, but from a variety of perspectives there was no surprise. If it was not "a good time," it was not fun. Hoffman and Rubin were also disappointed for another reason: the mass media essentially ignored the event. Consequently, the Yip-Out was seen by many involved as fairly unrepresentative of Yippie countercultural activism.[52]

After the Yip-Out, the Yippies seemed largely in stasis, and Rubin and Hoffman seriously considered cancelling the Festival of Life altogether. Suddenly, however, the political fortunes of the Yippies changed once again. On 5 June Robert Kennedy was assassinated after winning the California primary over McCarthy and Herbert Humphrey. Humphrey was Johnson's Vice President and the representative of the status quo; with Kennedy out of the race, Humphrey's nomination suddenly seemed to be a lock. At the same time, colleges and universities let out for the summer, offering a pool of potential activists with free time. These developments gave focus to the Yippies' designs for Chicago, and they resumed working with local Chicago activists, many of whom were now operating under the rubric of the "Chicago Yippies," to gain the necessary permits to hold the Festival of Life. They also resumed promoting the action:

> If you have any Yippie buttons, posters, stickers, or sweatshirts, bring them to Chicago. We will end Yippie in a huge orgasm of destruction atop a giant media altar. We will in Chicago begin the task of building Free America on the ashes of the old…. It will be a blend of technologists and poets, of artists and community organizers, of anyone who has a vision.

Chicago was an open invitation to the Yippies' national countercultural public. Significantly, this invitation was framed as broadly as possible—"anyone who had a vision"—but the type of revolutionary identity that was promoted by the Yippies was, in fact, far narrower.[53]

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[52] Sally Kempton, "Sunday in the Park: Yip Out or Had Been," *Village Voice*, 18 Apr. 1968, 1, 18; Farber, *Chicago '68*, 94.

[53] Hoffman, "The Yippies are Going to Chicago," 24.

The Yippie Alternative Norm

The Yippies denied the security of "white middle-class suburban life" and portrayed themselves as "cannibals, cowboys, Indians, witches, warlocks. Weird-looking freaks that crawl out of the cracks in America's nightmare." However, the alternative norm promoted by Yippie leaders was based on conservative assumptions about class, age, race, gender, and sexuality.[54]

The Yippies often used the phrase "middle class" prominently in their critique of mainstream culture, but rarely did they mean it as a clear indication of a financial status or a political or social component of an individual or group identity. Rather, Yippies obfuscated the economic and social realities of class by transforming "middle-class" into a pejorative modifier and shorthand insult for both the mainstream *and* liberals or progressives who were suspicious of radical cultural activism. For example, in *Revolution for the Hell of It*, Hoffman dismisses Mobe as being "scared shitless of the mystery" because they were a "middle-class peace movement." He argues that "it is not necessary to say we are opposed to the ----. They already know." In this formulation, "they" was clearly the mainstream, but Hoffman's larger point was that New Left activists who felt compelled to explain themselves were engaging in the kind of ordered logic that the dominant order used to prevent "the mystery" or "America's nightmare" from occurring. In *Do It!*, Rubin lambastes both the "middle-class Peace Movement" and the "middle-class liberals who live high in the Berkeley hills." Yippies developed such language to transform the meaning of "middle-class" into a catchall dismissal of any individual who, by their standards, was too morally compromised or revolutionarily impotent. In this sense, "middle-class" was interchangeable with "uptight," "out-of-touch," or "conformist." To achieve this definition, the Yippies willfully stripped "middle-class" of its economic and social connotations.

[54] Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 80.

The Yippies also tended to use "middle-class" uncritically as a generational marker, simultaneously engaging in a form of ageism that assumed only youth had the potential to be revolutionary *and* a form of classism that assumed all "older" people had bought into the dominant order's myth of "middle-class" culture. Nancy Kurshan, for example, later reflected,

> We also represented a segment of American youth that was in militant rebellion. We didn't lead them. We were a part of them and we were not part of any official Left organization. Much of the Left dismissed the youth population. They criticized us for alienating older, middle class people. I think the youth movement was a vital engine of the anti-war movement, driving everything and everyone to the Left and forcing debate onto dinner tables.

Similarly, Rubin argued that the "middle-class peace movement" was populated with "first and second generation of New Lefters in their late twenties and early thirties who have remained 'straight radicals'"; he continued, adopting a mixture of ageism and classism, that those "straight radicals" were "as vital … as all those old men and women … who keep fighting over yesterday's Communist Party." Middle-class culture was, for the Yippies, not the culture of an economic class but rather the ordering principle of pre-1950s generations; consequently, it was a "dying culture" held onto by older, straight people who were afraid of "the technological revolution" and younger, straight people who were afraid of the countercultural lifestyle.[55]

In this context, the Yippie alternative norm denied the importance of class and financial status while emphasizing the importance of youthfulness and radical zeal. Of course, since almost all of the Yippies had roots in the middle class and most of them were older than the countercultural public they attempted to court, this "classless" language was a clear disavowal of the Yippies' own backgrounds. The Yippies did not quite frame it that way, preferring to present class as a category of identity that could be transcended. What the Yippies called "dropping out" was a choice to embrace a countercultural lifestyle. But consider, for example, the questions on a

[55] Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 26-28; Kurshan, "'Fearless' Yippie Pioneer Nancy Kurshan Battles Prison Behemoth"; Rubin, *Do It!*, 49, 78, 95; Rubin, *We Are Everywhere*, 230.

Yippie application form: while some questions could potentially provoke more philosophical answers—"What time is it?", followed by "Why?", for example, or "Do you own an Aardvark?"—most were more geared towards tastes and choices: "Length of hair," "Dope Used," "Favorite Music," "Do you work?", "Married?", "Do you own anything?", and "Have you ever been busted?" The form was obviously a lark, not meant to be taken too seriously; at the same time, the questions suggest that the Yippies perceived countercultural identity as a set of experiences that typified the process of rejecting the imperatives of middle-class identity: men growing their hair long, drug use, rock 'n' roll, not working, not getting married, sharing resources, and being incarcerated. But if this list was a set of experiences shared by middle-class American youth who were making the choice to abandon the lifestyles of previous generations, this process also suggested that these countercultural activists could, by doing these things, give up their class status.[56]

From the emphasis the Yippies placed on choosing class status—or at least behaviors they considered typical of the middle class—we can draw two conclusions. First, the Yippies implicitly rejected Digger Peter Berg's argument that "dropping out does not mean changing clothes"; for the Yippies, the countercultural bucket list offered a series of perfectly viable steps in living the revolution, as well as a viable way to transcend one's class background. Second, the Yippies argued that in "leaving the prison of middle-class America to live and create art on the streets"—in choosing exile from their class background—they were now something different. The meaning of this difference was shrouded by catchall phrases like "youth," "revolutionaries,"

[56] Unknown, "YIPPIE: application form # F-U-CKU-2," handbill, 1966, Vertical Files, Counterculture—Hippies and Bohemians—Yippies, Labadie Collection, Harlan Hatch Graduate Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

and "freaks," but the basic point was that this ability to give up a middle-class background was a crucial step in legitimizing one's own revolutionary credentials.[57]

Because the Yippies saw this repudiation of "middle-class America" as the essential component of revolutionary ideology, they also rejected the traditional left's argument that the working class should and would lead the revolution. The Yippies were plagued by the same question that preoccupied many white middle-class activists in the late 1960s: what was the role of white middle-class activists when left ideologies typically identified the working class as the critical revolutionary actors? For many student activists in the New Left, the answer was to organize the working class, but others tried to re-conceptualize colleges and universities as critical sites of oppression and students as the oppressed. For these activists, Marxists models that were based on the opposition of the bourgeoisie and proletariat in the nineteenth century had to be modified for the conditions of post-World War Two America. Hoffman's answer, once he had left SNCC, was to look to left-leaning artists and hippies on the Lower East Side. Of course, Hoffman's notions of the efficacy of artists as revolutionaries were bound tightly to the emphasis the Yippies placed on class as a chosen lifestyle. In *Revolution for the Hell of It*, he quotes Marshall McLuhan:

> What we call "jobs" represent a relatively recent pattern of work. When a man is using all his faculties we think he is at leisure or play.

Hoffman argues that "work was linked to productivity to serve the Industrial Revolution" and that Abraham Maslow's vision of the "Eupsychia," or a creative utopia, would be preferable. In Maslow's words,

> A psychological utopia … this would almost surely be a highly anarchistic group, a laissez-faire but loving culture, in which people (young people too) would have much more free choice than we are used to.

[57] Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 28; Rubin, *Do It!*, 82.

Throughout this line of argument, Hoffman essentially ignores the value of productive labor—as well, for that matter, of reproductive labor—in favor of valorizing a lifestyle that saw artists as the only potential instigators of revolution: "A revolutionary artist, which is shorthand for either Revolutionist or Artist, just does it."[58]

Where did the real working class fit into Yippie ideology? Because the Yippies assumed that any form of labor was an embrace of "middle-class" values, the Yippies could argue that Maslow's Eupsychia would benefit everybody. This emphasis tended to diminish the real, material struggles of the working class, but the Yippies also frequently doubled down on the notion that class was a choice by suggesting that the working class was, regardless of their material reality, choosing to live a middle-class lifestyle. In *Revolution for the Hell of It*, Hoffman asks, "Are you a garbage collector or an artist?", as if these were mutually exclusive choices, but *also* as if these were the only choices. The Yippies defended their narrow view of choice—to be a worker or a revolutionary artist—by using themselves as examples. In *Do It!*, Rubin argues that Marxists were wrong that the revolution would only come from economic exploitation, asserting, "Their theories don't explain us—a revolutionary movement that has come out of affluence, not poverty." Rubin also reiterates the value of fun to the revolutionary cause: "The romance of our revolutionary lifestyle, freedom, and fighting will draw the children of the working class to the revolution." In this formulation, the new revolution would transcend class because the generation gap was more important—"post-1950's" youth would unite across class lines. Rubin clearly privileges the pleasure inherent in a countercultural Yippie lifestyle over the economic struggles of the working poor, ignoring the economic realities that allowed middle-class Yippies to indulge in that very lifestyle. Moreover, Yippies took this formulation a

[58] Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 51, 85, 143, 175, 181-182.

step further; they saw "white middle-class youth as a revolutionary class." The Yippies rejected the notion that the white middle-class should merely "support" the working class and racial minorities because, in abandoning the middle class, Yippies themselves became an oppressed group and as revolutionary artists they were best positioned to lead the revolution.[59]

The Yippies made similar arguments about race. Though they struggled to situate their revolutionary identity in a radical landscape that increasingly resisted the attempts of white activists to conflate the struggles of middle-class whites with those of people of color, they suggested that race, too, could be transcended. Given the Jewish background of most of the Yippies, this was a double move whereby the Yippies simultaneously claimed and disowned their whiteness. Undoubtedly influenced by the long history of debates about whether Jews were white, the Yippies used Jewish ethnicity in a similar fashion as the freaks used Eastern European ethnicity and the Diggers used links to the working class in an attempt to authenticate their claim that they were an oppressed, "revolutionary class." At their most overt, Yippies referred to themselves as "niggers" or styled themselves with Native American feathers and beads. More typically, they referred to themselves as "the white niggers of Amerikan society—and the white niggers of the Peace Movement." According to this kind of rhetoric, being a Yippie was analogous to being black. This theme of being white-but-different extended throughout Yippie ideology. In *Do It!*, for example, Rubin wrote, "'White' was a state of mind. Hippies were seeking a new identity." As with class, a racial identity could be assumed and performed. Rubin fluctuated between referring to this identity as "longhair" (an identifier that only applied to men) and using more inclusive terminology. For example, he wrote that young white men and women of the counterculture were the "dropouts of white society fighting for their own freedom." In this

[59] Rubin, *Do It!*, 113-115. See also Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It.*

formulation, Rubin attempted to promote the notion that Yippie identity, while not necessarily black, was not the same thing as being white—it was something new and different. The Yippies dramatized this difference as a racialized transition from their pre-drop out upbringing as products of white middle-class culture to their post-drop out identity as Americans who rejected being white, middle-class, and conformist. This identity was founded on the argument that white men and women could somehow transcend race.[60]

The Yippies frequently attempted to legitimize their status as a "revolutionary class" by using discourses of race. This manifested in a variety of ways, but at their most blunt Yippies suggested that their own marginalization gave them keen insight into the feelings of alienation and oppression that people of color often experienced. For example, Rubin argued that Yippies, under surveillance, felt "like those primitive African tribes must have felt when Margaret Mead came popping in with her pencil and paper." Hoffman noted that while attending a "New Left-Old Left Conference," he felt so dissatisfied with what he saw as middle-class rhetoric that he was "getting to understand what a black person goes through on a level not even reached by getting kicked around in the civil rights movement for four years." The self-serving lines that the Yippies drew between their own struggles and the struggles of racial minorities were naked attempts to substantiate their claims that they were the true radicals of American society, but this denied their own privilege. The Yippies went to great lengths to solidify their "racial" status, pointing to the aesthetic qualities that defined them in opposition to the "white race." In particular, they pointed to their hair. According to Rubin, "*Long hair is our black skin*. Long hair turns white middle-class youth into niggers." Long hair had the power to transform Yippies: "We're outcasts. We, the children of the white middle class, feel like Indians, blacks,

[60] Rubin, *Do It!*, 195-196.

Vietnamese, the outsiders in Amerikan history." Hoffman agreed. In *Revolution for the Hell of It*, while providing his interpretation of the work of the Diggers in San Francisco, Hoffman argues, "Spades and Diggers are one. Diggersareniggers." Yippies did not just look different from middle-class white Americans; they also argued that their identities were similar to those of black, Asian, Latino, and Native activists.[61]

Yippies also suggested that they were "different" from other white activists by virtue of their comfort with activists of color. For example, Rubin, referencing the selection of Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver as the presidential candidate of the Peace and Freedom Party, dismissed the white activists who populated the party for accepting "a pot-smoking, gun-toting, ex-con nigger for president," but balked when Cleaver attempted to secure Rubin as his running-mate. Rubin presented this as evidence that these "white activists" were, unlike him, suffering from liberal guilt. At the same time, he argued that the Yippies' sense of marginalization, based on their willingness to dress and style themselves differently, allowed them to be guiltless: "We do not feel *guilty* because we're not black." From the Yippies' perspective, they were more radical than activists in the New Left for a variety of reasons, but here Rubin suggested another: they had no hang-ups about race. Of course, Rubin's formulation relied on the idea that privilege could be given away, which was naïve. Additionally, he also drew some incredible conclusions about the power of Yippie "racial" identity: "Amerika expects black people to reject it. But its own kids? No, no, heavens no." If black resistance was expected, here Rubin seemed to suggest that repudiating their whiteness gave the Yippies a greater claim to a subversive, revolutionary legitimacy than those who made the same claim from an already marginalized position.[62]

[61] Rubin, *Do It!*, 13, 94; Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 33-34.
[62] Ibid.; Rubin, *We Are Everywhere*, 92.

The Yippies also exploited discourses of gender to lend credence to their revolutionary legitimacy. Rubin, echoing Hoffman's notion that Yippies were "weird-looking freaks," argued that a Yippie or "freek" was "so ugly that middle-class society is frightened by how he looks." These associations played on similar appeals to discourses of ability that typified the freak alternative norm, but where freak leaders had only privileged male power, Yippie leaders directed their proscriptions almost exclusively at Rubin's "he," arguing, in effect, that the countercultural power they valorized resided in male bodies. Even their chosen slang for countercultural activists, "long hairs," only really applied to men. Yippies defined the style of countercultural masculinity as long hair, facial hair, and wild clothing; they argued that "the basic issue in Amerika today is clothes" and that "the Yippies try to liberate people by getting everybody to change their clothes." Clothing was both an ideological marker—"Make yourself a symbol"—and a rejection of middle-class attitudes about workplace and wage—"All you need for a job in Amerika is the clothes." Yippies also argued that "sex is better and more plentiful" for those that dropped out and that men from the "straight" world were simply on "a supermasculinity trip called Imperialism." These aggressive, but ultimately empty, displays were merely the simulacra of masculinity allowed by the dominant order.[63]

Yippies applied these criticisms to New Left men as well by arguing that the Yippies were the true heirs to Marxism because they understood it better than "intellectual radicals" who "arrogantly call themselves 'Marxists.' (Poor Karl)." This understanding was predicated on a distinction Yippies made between intellectual discourse and political action. Action, in this formulation, was clearly sexual: because "orgasm and revolution" went hand in hand, Yippies argued that middle-class masculinity, ensconced in the "middle-class peace movement," was

[63] Rubin, *Do It!*, 51, 70, 82.

neither real manhood nor truly revolutionary; it was simply intellectual arrogance. According to Rubin's description, the male activists of the New Left, concerned as they were with discussing rather than performing the revolution, were victims of "sexual insecurity," making them a hollow composition of inactivity, close-mindedness, and weakness. In contrast, Yippies were active, virile, powerful, and "superfreeks" who were capable of "fucking more chicks." Yippies got "sexually aroused by the word 'revolution.'" In Rubin's words, revolutionaries should trust their "own sense organs," a phrasing that, paired with his other appeals to sexuality, seems to implicate one particular organ. Because Yippie men were more virile, they were more in tune with revolutionary impulses and spontaneous action. They felt Marx, so they had no need to discuss his ideas; it was not intellectual discourse but a "community of joy" that had the power to "disrupt and dislocate all the major institutions of Amerikan society." Rubin even went so far to invoke rape metaphors to describe Yippie countercultural activism: "We're engaged in a sexual assault that's going to destroy the political-economic structure of American society!"[64]

Of course, in tying revolutionary potential to (at times violent) male heterosexuality, Yippie leaders further narrowed the inclusiveness of their alternative norm. The experiences of women, lesbians, and gay men in the Yippie counterculture are therefore illustrative. Yippie women played crucial roles in the maintenance and planning of Yippie activities at the Union Square office and Judy Lampe designed the Yippie logo. But though Anita Hoffman and Nancy Kurshan shared the academic backgrounds of their partners and Kurshan's keen attention to detail and administrative skills were fundamental to the operation of the Free School and the office, their influences are only hinted at in the books written by Hoffman and Rubin. The most overt discussion by a male Yippie of the role that women played comes from Rubin's account of the

[64] Ibid., 55, 111-115, 127-128, 185.

Chicago 7 Conspiracy Trial, where he acknowledged that it became problematic that most of the office staff were women: "We were on trial as revolutionaries—while at the same time we were oppressors of our own staff." He then noted, "Since it began, the movement has worked on exploited labor—the labor of women." Similarly, in 1971 Krassner admitted:

> Yippie leadership had a male image in the media, in reality much of the hard-core organizing was done by women—Nancy Kurshan, Anita Hoffman, Walli Leff, Judy Clavir, Ellen Maslow, Anne Ockene, and Robin Morgan.

The problem, of course, is that both Rubin and Krassner, even while acknowledging the problem, remained disinterested in explaining what this "hard-core organizing" entailed, preferring instead to focus on the actions of the male Yippies.[65]

Women's issues that were arguably distinct from the goals of Yippie activism were certainly not a priority for male Yippies. In *Sisterhood is Powerful*, Robin Morgan cites Hoffman: "The only alliance I would make with the Women's Liberation Movement is in bed." But the problem ran deeper. Morgan argued in 1969:

> Here was a group of young people with a new politics, a new life style, a new sexual honesty and freedom. And still, the notion of a liberated woman was someone who is indiscriminate about whom she sleeps with, not a realization that women don't want to be objects.

Corroborating Morgan's criticism, Rubin's only mention of the oppression faced by women in *Do It!* was to note that women, thanks to middle-class culture, were "uptight" about their bodies and taught that "self-assertion is unfeminine." Moreover, this is only mentioned in tandem with the argument that men were also oppressed by the imperatives of the dominant order: "Amerika creates a sexual prison in which men think they have to be supermen and have to see sensitivity as weakness." The context here makes it easy to imagine that what Rubin meant by "self-assertion" was, as Morgan suggested, a woman "who is indiscriminate." Morgan highlights—and Rubin corroborates—the notion that often Yippie men simply did not understand the contexts in

[65] Rubin, *We Are Everywhere*, 209; Krassner, *How a Satirical Editor Became a Yippie Conspirator*, 164.

which Yippie women were dissatisfied. Yippie men embraced the idea that the personal was political, certainly, but they also tended to assume that every Yippie's personal politics, regardless of background, were in line with their own. Alternatively, they were simply dismissive: none of the written material produced by male Yippies mentions that during the summer of 1968 Morgan and Kurshan were already planning to stage a Yippie-style performance-based protest that fall at the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City. What they talk about is Chicago, where they felt the stakes clearly mattered.[66]

Yippie women often felt suffocated by the narrow emphasis that male Yippies placed on certain forms of revolution. Kurshan later reflected on the sexism of the Yippies:

> Honestly, it was no worse than in the rest of the Left. Sexism was an Achilles Heel of the whole movement. Male supremacy was "normal." … At times, I went to work every day so that Jerry Rubin and the guys who were living at our tiny apartment could be movement activists! After work I shopped. Then I came home and cooked. Then the men treated us like gophers and we accepted it. It was hard to find one's own voice and it was easy to "stand by your man" when conflicts arose. Until the women's movement burst on the scene, there were awkward distances between women.

Judy Albert concurred with Kurshan's account:

> Yippie was no different from any other movement group. Women were ignored. We did menial tasks; we were not groomed for leadership. Yippie men loved the media spotlight; women were given access to the media at the men's discretion. I learned by observing Abbie, Jerry, and Stew, not as an equal partner.… I felt invisible.

By both accounts, male Yippies were no worse than other male-dominated groups on the left, but they certainly did not attempt to foster links between their ideologies and practices and the goals of women's liberation. At the same time, female Yippies were encouraged to deal with the

[66] Morgan, "Know Your Enemy: A Sampling of Sexist Quotes," in *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Morgan (New York: Vintage, 1970), 35; Morgan, "Meet the Women of the Revolution, 1969," 87; Rubin, *Do It!*, 96.

"hard-core organizing" while also performing domestic tasks, serving male Yippies, and working jobs to earn money.[67]

Albert, Kurshan, and Anita Hoffman were tied to the Yippies through their relationships with their partners. Morgan was not. She quit the Yippies in 1968. In 1970, she published "Goodbye to All That," a scathing 1970 critique of the New Left and the counterculture. In it, she argued that the counterculture "functioned toward women's freedom as did the Reconstruction toward former slaves"—that it abstractly suggested possibilities for women's political, social, and sexual freedom, but denied autonomy for women outside of their relationships with liberated men. Morgan also addressed Hoffman, Rubin, and Krassner specifically. On Hoffman: "Goodbye to the notion that good ol' Abbie is any different from any other up-and-coming movie star who ditches the first wife and kids." She ridiculed Hoffman's "double standard that reeks through his tattered charm." On Krassner, Morgan critiqued "his astonished anger that women have lost their sense of humor on this issue." On Rubin, Morgan simply suggested that Kurshan was just as responsible for all of his success, even though Rubin normally received the credit. The general brunt of Morgan's critique emphasized the "double standard": that male Yippies wanted to be perceived as supporters of women's lib but were not willing to give credit to the women in their lives or reduce their own privileged roles within the Yippie countercultural project; that these men in particular were obsessed with the celebrity that their positions brought them; and that they allowed Yippie women to deal with the day-to-day labor required to maintain the Yippies while they received all the recognition.

Morgan's piece also spoke to her fellow Yippie women, as well as women in general across the spectrum of the New Left and the counterculture. She asserted that the primary goal for

[67] Kurshan, "'Fearless' Yippie Pioneer Nancy Kurshan Battles Prison Behemoth"; Judy Albert, "Judy Gumbo Albert, Yippie Girl."

women should be to organize around women's issues, which the male-dominated left was simply not equipped to address, even *if* they could be made to acknowledge their validity. Kurshan recalls that "Goodbye to All That" played a role in her own decision to leave the Yippies:

> When Robin Morgan quit the Yippies and published "Goodbye To All That" in the underground paper, *RAT*, I was uncomfortable. I knew she was right about the big picture, if not everything. It was embarrassing and I didn't know what to do. Change can be confusing and uncomfortable. Morgan's piece and my 1970 trip to Vietnam really pushed me to fight male dominance and find my own voice.

An important, however, is that though Morgan's piece effectively criticized the male-dominated Yippies, the language she used was countercultural. She argued that women "are rising with a fury older and potentially greater than any force in history, and this time we will be free or no one will survive." Though Morgan had abandoned the Yippies, she had not abandoned the countercultural ideas that had attracted her to the Yippies in the first place. To express a vision for women's countercultural identity, Morgan framed hip masculinity as similar to the middle class masculinity it railed against; in her articulation, women were the ones who possessed a truly subversive identity that had the power to promote social change. This notion was more fully expressed in the performance-based protests that Morgan organized while working with other feminists in groups like New York Radical Women and WITCH. The most famous of these was the Miss America demonstration in Atlantic City on 7 September 1968—barely a week after the Yippie performance in Chicago—where Morgan and other female countercultural activists threw middle-class symbols of feminine beauty like girdles, make-up, hair curlers, wigs, high heeled shoes, and gendered magazines into a trash can set up on the boardwalk outside the pageant and crowned a sheep as the winner of the pageant. Like Yippie performances, this protest was a complex and layered attack on the middle-class and the patriarchy. It was also similar to Yippie

performances—and perhaps more successful in this regard—in that it attracted the attention of the national media.[68]

Jim Fouratt's involvement with the Yippies offers insight into the ways that the Yippie alternative norm was constructed with respect to sexual orientation. Despite the fact that one of the primary activists in the Yippie collective was a gay man, it is abundantly clear from both Yippie materials and from Fouratt's recollections that accommodations for non-straight sexualities were not a priority for Rubin and Hoffman. Both were certainly aware of Fouratt's sexuality—Hoffman met Fouratt's partner Howie Weinstein several times—but both also frequently used homophobic terms like "fag" in Fouratt's presence to describe non-Yippie activists, hippies, and straights. For Fouratt, that "macho, gay-bashing street hood" attitude—clearly meant as a style of language that would make straight Yippies sound less middle-class—was undesirable, but not a deal-breaker. Rather, the primary difficulty Fouratt faced when examining the conflict between his Yippie identity and his gay identity was the way he was personally treated, in particular by Hoffman. He considered Hoffman a close friend, but also a kindred spirit due to their shared passion for performance-based activism. It was disappointing, therefore, that Hoffman barely acknowledged Weinstein when he visited their apartment. Hoffman also awkwardly offered to set Fouratt up with women as if Weinstein was not even present—or, for that matter, as if Fouratt himself was not forthright about his own sexuality.

Given the reluctance of his fellow Yippies to recognize and affirm his sexuality *and* his opposition to Rubin and Hoffman's national agenda, it is somewhat amazing that Fouratt stayed true to the group for as long as he did. He stayed on through the Democratic Party National Convention, but the final straw came in early 1969 when he arrived home to find that Hoffman

[68] Morgan, "Goodbye to All That," *Rat*, 6 Feb. 1970, reproduced in *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Random House, 1978), 121-130; Kurshan, "'Fearless' Yippie Pioneer Nancy Kurshan Battles Prison Behemoth."

had stolen his mimeograph machine. Despite Hoffman's contention elsewhere that stealing from "brothers and sisters" was "evil," he justified the theft by arguing that the machine was "legitimately his by right of his superior understanding of the requirements of political organizing." Fouratt, who had felt that his dedication and expertise in communications was a highly valued asset to Hoffman, felt deeply betrayed. By late June 1969, Fouratt hardly seemed surprised when, during the Stonewall riots, a telephone call placed to his old-Yippie colleagues did not result in Yippie support for the gay men, drag queens, and other queers who took to the streets to protest unwarranted police raids of the Stonewall Inn.[69]

Non-straight sexualities were minimized in the construction of the Yippie alternative norm, a formulation that was defiantly straight and male. Moreover, there is at least one moment in *Do It!* when Rubin betrayed a deep sense of homophobia. He remarked that "the criminal record of a political activist" normally "reads like the record of a sex deviant—public nuisance, loitering, disorderly conduct, trespassing, disturbing the peace." Beyond his basic insensitivity, Rubin's phrasing suggests another source of anxiety for the Yippie norm. Rubin was critical of the idea that a "political activist"—the default for which was heterosexual—should have a criminal record that resembles that of a "sex deviant." Where Rubin's overtures to working class identities and the identities of people of color attributed a positive value to those identities—even if those overtures highlight the uneasy tension Yippies felt between their skin color and class background and their status as legitimate revolutionary activists—Rubin's flat rejection of the idea that the Yippies might embrace their association with gay men stands out in a monograph that otherwise eagerly attempted to substantiate Yippie legitimacy as an oppressed revolutionary force.[70]

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[69] Duberman, *Stonewall*, 129-131, 178.
[70] Rubin, *Do It!*, 129.

Both Morgan and Fouratt offer us insight into the ways that Yippies whose identities were at odds with Yippie alternative norms reacted as their commitment to performance-based activism was set in conflict with their gender and sexuality. Ultimately, they left the Yippies, but it is vital to recognize that they did not—entirely—leave the counterculture. Morgan's work with New York Radical Women and WITCH influenced other radical feminist groups like the Redstockings and New York Radical Feminists, all of which adopted the performance-based protests that Morgan termed "zaps," which clearly resembled Yippie performance-based protest. During 1968, Morgan even still identified as a Yippie while participating in feminist performance-based protests. Fouratt also adopted the term "zap" for various performance-based actions that he coordinated during his tenure with the Gay Liberation Front. Straight women, lesbians, and gay men who parted ways with the Yippies did not part ways with the strategies of the counterculture.

The Festival of Life

The Yippies' presence in Chicago during the Democratic Party National Convention resulted in a weeklong series of tense, violent encounters between political activists and the police. Critics accused the Yippies of using the Festival of Life to disguise their true intentions: open insurrection and violent action. Even more sympathetic members of Mobe—coordinators Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis had asked for peaceful, rational protest in Chicago—were suspicious that they had no real chance to control the actions of the Yippies. According to Hoffman, however, "no one who came to Chicago because of our influence had any doubts that they were risking their life." This statement alone captures the shift in Yippie ideology over the course of the summer of 1968. As it became increasingly clear that Chicago Mayor Richard Daley did not want protestors on hand for the convention—the appropriate permits for Mobe's demonstrations

and the Yippies' festival were never granted—Dave Dellinger and Mobe abandoned their plans to bring large numbers of protesters to the convention. As a result, Chicago became a venue only for the most dedicated, ardent members of the New Left and the counterculture. For those activists, however, soldiering on with their planned protests was crucial, as so much was at stake: they were increasingly disillusioned with liberalism and U.S. involvement in Vietnam, but also with Democratic Party politics.

In the days and weeks leading up to the Festival of Life, some Yippies—especially Krassner and Rubin—were thrilled as it seemed more and more likely that Daley would allow his police to punitively deal with protestors. They valorized their vision of the "superfreek" as an "actor" who could fight back against the violent and brutal repression of the "Pig state." Rubin argued that countercultural performances could and should be conceptualized to aggressively challenge and agitate police, authorities, and straights, both because that fight was morally just and because the national media would cover these conflicts. Rubin argued that he supported "everything which puts people into motion, which creates disruption and controversy, which creates chaos and rebirth." When critics, both Yippie and non-Yippie, expressed fears that Rubin's tactics would spark violent reprisals, Rubin responded, "Repression turns demonstration protests into wars. Actors into heroes." Here, Rubin took the "guerilla" part of "guerilla theater" literally: "Life is theater" and Yippies were "guerillas attacking the shrines of authority." They possessed the ability to become heroes, but only if they were willing to fight back.[71]

Hoffman, though he remained more measured than Rubin, also began to identify violence as a critical part of Yippie performance. Hoffman argued that violence was necessary because it was the only language that the media understood. He noted that the Yip-Out, a "non-violent"

[71] Rubin, *Do It!*, 247.

event, generated very little coverage. Similarly, a straight press conference for the Festival of Life went almost unnoticed. It was the violence that occurred during the Yip-In that had captured the imagination of the mainstream media. Perhaps it was only violent protest that could provoke authorities into suspending their performances to show their true face, as they had at the Yip-In. Rubin and Hoffman had different ideas about what Chicago should be—they apparently did not speak to each other for the whole week due to some ambiguous animosity—but they arrived at the same conclusion and they interpreted their role in Chicago in similar ways. Hoffman even went so far as to exculpate the Yippies from charges of using the Festival of Life to draw unsuspecting party-goers to a violent protest: "Not telling the truth is pigshit for a myth always tells the truth." The Festival of Life, with or without violence, was a vital protest. If Daley instructed the police to use violent force to suppress the Festival of Life, that, too, was part of the performance. In Hoffman's formulation, it was not the Yippies' role to advise others about the risks of protesting the "Convention of Death." Notwithstanding this disclaimer, as the summer drew on Hoffman finally agreed to talk about violence in specific terms—in a sense betraying the Yippies' emphasis on obtuseness—in order to prepare those who still planned to attend the Festival of Life to defend themselves against police brutality if necessary. In an article in *The Realist*, Hoffman encouraged potential participants to train for potential violence.[72]

The Yippies were determined to hold the Festival of Life without a permit, but the local Chicago Yippies, and notably Abe Peck, editor of *The Chicago Seed*, grew increasingly concerned about the goals of the Yippies, eventually warning people away from the planned action in August: "Don't come to Chicago if you expect a five-day festival of life, music, and love. The word is out. Chicago may host a festival of blood." Peck's warning did not deter

[72] Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 92-93; Hoffman, quoted in Daniel Walker, *Rights in Conflict: Chicago's 7 Brutal Days* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1968), 27; Hoffman, "The Yippies Are Going to Chicago," 21.

Hoffman or Rubin, but it did capture the growing sentiment of many countercultural musicians and activists who were scheduled to join the Yippies. Though Ed Saunders and Phil Ochs had worked to develop a roster of musicians to perform at the event and had even managed to build industry interest (Michael Goldstein, an industry public relations agent, spoke at a press conference to announce the event), as the convention drew nearer most of these groups abandoned the festival, both due to the missing permit and because they required "some assurance that the Festival of Life would not turn into a Grand Central Station riot." In the end, only Phil Ochs and the MC5, a Detroit-based radical rock group, agreed to perform at the event. Though the MC5 did perform in Chicago's Lincoln Park on the Sunday that the Yippies had promoted for the concert portion of the Festival of Life, it was a much smaller event than had originally been planned.[73]

The city authorities, Mobe, and the Yippies had predicted about 50,000 protesters during the week of the convention. In reality, the participants numbered in the thousands and most were Chicagoans who lived in the neighborhood surrounding Lincoln Park. Much of the initial tension revolved around an 11PM curfew that the police had instituted. Protesters argued that it was their right to sleep in the park and that if they were not allowed to sleep there they would have to spend the night out in the streets. Luminaries like Allen Ginsberg were able to minimize tensions for the first couple of nights, but as the week drew on the curfew increasingly became a rallying call for the protesters, until violence erupted once they refused to leave at the designated time. The rest of the week proceeded in similar fashion, as skirmishes between the police and protesters were marked by violence, though most of it was kept far away from the Hilton Hotel,

[73] Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 109; Hoffman, *Rights in Conflict*, 24-25; Farber, *Chicago '68*, 174-175.

located downtown, where the convention was being held.[74]

The Yippies celebrated several victories during the week. They obtained a pig they dubbed "Pigasus" and nominated her for president on 23 August at the Chicago Civic Center, across the street from City Hall, two days before the rock concert in Lincoln Park. At a press conference attended by a crowd of about 250, many of them members of the media, the Yippies announced their candidate amidst signs and placards that described Pigasus's platform as "garbage." Pigasus was in a nearby station wagon; the moment the door opened, the Chicago police arrested the Yippies, though the assembled press had largely gotten the point of the performance. Politically, the Yippies had just called into question the tedium of press conferences and political speeches, the interchangeability of political candidates, the incomprehensibility of political platforms, the false sanctity of the political process, and the intensive emphasis that modern politics placed on self-presentation where candidates were concerned. In terms of public exposure, the Yippies gained coverage in the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Chicago Tribune*.[75]

The bigger victory, however, resulted from the violence that erupted in the streets of Chicago between the protesters and the Chicago police. Though Mayor Daley had assured the American public that order would be maintained, crucial skirmishes between activists and police were broadcast live to approximately 89 million Americans. Though the most memorable moments of the broadcasts were of large crowds facing brutal police repression, or respected reporters like Mike Wallace being assaulted, or more than 250 activists and passersby being arrested, the Yippies had played a crucial role in setting the stage for this performance. The message was obvious: Daley's "order" was itself a performance; it was a lie agreed upon in a social contract sanctioned by the dominant order. Daley's willingness to use violence to suppress

[74] For more on the protests and police actions, see Farber, *Chicago '68*, 165-207; Frank Kusch, *Battleground Chicago: The Police and the 1968 Democratic National Convention* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).
[75] "7 Yippies, Their Pig Seized at Rally," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 Aug. 1968, A6.

any dissent, including the injuries and treatment suffered by reporters and other bystanders, called into question the central tenets of American democracy. In these respects, the Yippies had won, even if the scheduled performances of the Festival of Life did not really take place.[76] More critically, the Yippies were able to expand upon and mythologize the story of Chicago later. They could use Chicago to cement their legacy as true revolutionaries. Rubin noted that the protests were an incredibly effective Yippie action because "scenes of brave youth battling back flashed over and over again on every TV channel: *infinite replay of the Fall of Amerika*." Hoffman agreed, arguing that the demonstration was an unequivocal victory for Yippie activism, because the Yippies had made the headlines: "National Guard vs. The Hippies at Conrad Hilton." Hoffman situated this assessment in the context of his own Yippie identity: "I could only relate to Chicago as a personal anarchist, a revolutionary artist." Chicago had validated his identity as a "personal anarchist," regardless of how others felt. The Yippies framed Chicago—a crucial turning point for the New Left and an impressive, sustained protest—as being as much about culture as it was about politics. Or, to put it differently, the violence in Chicago, on American soil, laid bare their argument that mainstream American culture and mainstream American politics were deplorable. [77]

At the same time, it is impossible to ignore the ways in which Rubin and Hoffman emphasized their own roles as "guerillas," "heroes," "superfreeks," and "actors" in Chicago. Their attempt to use Chicago to emphasize their own revolutionary credentials did not negate the power of the event or diminish its status as a countercultural performance-based protest, but it highlights their tendency to place themselves at the center of the Yippie narrative. The radical ideology and alternative norm promoted by the Yippies was revolutionary and suggested a host

[76] John C. McWilliams*, The 1960s Cultural Revolution* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000), 55.
[77] Rubin, *Do It!*, 173; Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, 114-115.

of possibilities for exploiting absurdity on a national scale to challenge and subvert the expectations of the dominant order. At the same time, as the primary architects of Yippie countercultural politics, Rubin and Hoffman at times seemed more concerned with explaining their own actions than they were in accommodating the experiences of others, a tendency which limited the scope and accessibility of Yippie politics, especially after the events in Chicago seemed to validate their belief in the primacy of *their* views of countercultural revolution.

4: "Each of Us An Actress": The Lesbian Nation Olivia Collective, 1973-1975[1]

In 1975, Olivia Records, a fledgling Los Angeles-based independent record company that had recently relocated from Washington, D.C., released their second album: Cris Williamson's *The Changer and the Changed*. The music on the album was produced, recorded, and performed by women; the members of the Olivia Collective were feminist activists who believed that lesbianism was not merely a sexual preference, but was also a consciously political and feminist identity. The album represented both a celebration of lesbian feminist culture and an important moment in the Olivia Collective's practice of countercultural activism, which was directed against the dominant order of the United States in the 1970s. Without the benefit of typical music industry support, *The Changer and the Changed* sold 40,000 copies that first year, 50,000 the next, and by the late 1980s had gone through several pressings and sold over 250,000 copies. In 1975 the success of the record legitimized Olivia's belief that a vast and enthusiastic countercultural public composed of women and lesbians existed for this kind of feminist music.

The Changer and the Changed, as a cultural document and political statement, is one example of the ways that the Olivia Collective adapted the ideologies and practices of the late 1960s counterculture to generate a female-centered vision of performance-based protest in the 1970s. The album, like all Olivia records, was presented not simply as a product, but as a document that could be exchanged between women to share the pleasures and experiences of lesbians around the country: to reach, as Olivia co-founder Judy Dlugacz later joked, the "only gay person in Montana." In concert or at home, Williamson's music was the soundtrack for a performance-based protest in which women were asked to openly express and engage with the intensely personal—and feminine—yearnings that the Olivia Collective valorized. Williamson

[1] Meg Christian, "Hello Hooray," *I Know You Know*, Olivia Records LF902, 1974, 33⅓ rpm

and other Olivia artists worked to give these yearnings form and language: her liner notes for *The Changer and the Changed* described its songs as celebrations of "the deep, cyclical waters of life"; "the beautiful strength of women"; "sensuality" and "the sweetness of actually feeling good in my body"; and "spiritual" quests. With her frequent invocations of "desert" and "water" as lyrical imagery, Williamson played with notions of longing and belonging: finding water meant finding community. Williamson later reflected,

> I didn't mean to make this big piece…. I was making a small piece and it was big because the need was so great. Necessity is the mother of invention. There's something about it that goes beyond me. I tried to ask people what it is about that album and some just say it changed them.

Meg Christian, an Olivia Collective co-founder and musician, corroborates this "necessity":

> As I have grown increasingly more political, my music has grown increasingly more political, and for the same reason: out of necessity, so that both my music and I could survive.

The Olivia Collective's invitation to women who experienced this record articulated a new countercultural identity that was out, open, sensual, beautiful, strong, and powerful.[2]

Unlike the male-dominated countercultural groups of the late 1960s, the women of Olivia did not tend to use the word "performance," especially in regards to their own identity. Lesbians, having come out but also having abandoned an economic structure that assumed a woman should be dependent on a man, were giving up social privilege and economic security. According to Olivia founder Ginny Berson, "Everything we do, everything about our lives, is political." While the Olivia Collective's countercultural ideology echoed the emphasis that 1960s countercultural groups had placed on the liberating experience of feeling and expressing pleasures that were denied by the dominant order, they were concerned exclusively with women's pleasure and formulated their ideology through the lens of a broader trend among lesbian feminists in the

[2] Judy Dlugacz, interview by Patrick Lettelier, "Judy Dlugacz: Olivia President and Founder Talks About Women's Music, Lesbian Travel, Retirement Resorts and the Job of a Lifetime," *Lesbian News*, 31 June 2006, 22; Liner notes, Cris Williamson, *The Changer and the Changed*, Olivia Records LF804, 1975, 33⅓ rpm; Williamson, interview by Andrea Poteet, "Cris Williamson Reminisces on Almost 50 Years in the Music Industry," *Between the Lines*, 11 Aug. 2011, 18; Christian and Ginny Berson, "Keeping Our Art Alive," *Lesbian Tide*, 1 Nov. 1974, 5, 27.

1970s that called for all women to come out. According to Dlugacz, Williamson's music let women know that "it was great to be a lesbian" and perhaps "they would consider coming out. The music would help change the way women thought about themselves." Like many lesbian feminists, the Olivia Collective assumed that all women should assume the political identity of "lesbian feminist" and that regardless of sexual preference all women had the potential to love other women.[3]

The Olivia Collective celebrated the notion of a female-produced and -articulated counterculture not simply as the creation of a category of music—"women's music"—but also as a revolutionary program to subvert the power of the patriarchy and carve out a cultural space for women and lesbians. As Christian made clear, there was no room for a distinct class of actors in this ideology; "each of us" was an "actress," and this performance-based protest was a "play" about "women." Olivia's "audience," composed entirely of women, was "coming here to stay." Olivia focused primarily on the oppression lesbians faced as women; Christian's "here" was a counterculture where women could be free of the imperatives of the dominant order.[4] Reviewers of *The Changer and the Changed* recognized the achievement of both goals. Marlene Schmitz, writing for *off our backs*, noted that Williamson's "loves, hopes, and desires are centered on women and music," but that "her prime quest" was "personal freedom, growth, and enlightenment." The record's emphasis on same-sex love reaffirmed Schmitz's belief in "one's capacity to feel intensely," a capacity she believed was crucial to change "the socialization which

[3] Christian, "Keeping Our Art Alive," 5; Dlugacz, "Judy Dlugacz: Olivia President and Founder Talks About Women's Music," 22. On debates about the definition of lesbianism, see Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 94.

[4] Christian, "Hello Hooray," *I Know You Know*.

keeps us from ourselves." Alone or in groups, the experience of this and other Olivia albums was for many women focused on pleasure *and* politics.[5]

To support the album, Williamson performed on the 1975 Women on Wheels tour with Christian, Margie Adam, and Holly Near. Women who attended these concerts often found themselves in women-only venues—sometimes with audiences 2000-strong—where open expressions of same-sex intimacy, sexuality, and pleasure were encouraged and commonplace. In a review of a 1975 women's music weekend festival stop on the tour, Frankie Farrell noted a scene that struck her *after* the festival had ended:

> At 4:40 at an Arco station off Route 8 three women in a truck were getting gas. One hugged another, and for the first time in three days it looked out of place.

The lyrics of the songs performed by women's music artists told stories about same-sex attraction and intimacy, childhood experiences of coming to terms with sexuality, coming out, falling in love, and dealing with breakups. Vicky Pullman, a reviewer for *Body Politic*, argued that "there is an inherent sense in this music of female solidarity, Sapphic love, smoothness, and freedom." The songs were "free, warm, sensual, and gay" and celebrated the formation and sustenance of a community of women who together could challenge the dominant order, or what Christian termed "the hive." "The hive" was often expressed through imagery that invoked the ritual and reality of heteronormative middle-class culture of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s: office cubicles, parking lots, wedding dresses, religious altars, and the consummation of marriage. In that world, the "real" desires of women had been repressed. Audience members were asked to reject the imperatives of the dominant order, including familial obligations, gendered expectations, and enforced heteronormativity, in favor of these real desires.[6]

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[5] Marlene Schmitz, "The Changer & the Changed," *off our backs*, Dec. 1975, 14.

[6] Frankie Farrell, "Women's Music," *Lesbian Tide*, 1 Nov. 1975, 22; Vicky Pullman, "The Changer and the Changed," *Body Politic*, 1 Apr. 1976, 5; Christian, "The Hive" / "Scars," *I Know You Know*.

To ensure that tours like Women on Wheels could translate and amplify the personal experience that a woman might have with an Olivia record into a liberating, communal event, the Olivia Collective worked to ensure that their audiences were composed entirely of—and that their concerts were staffed and performed exclusively by—women. Men were excluded primarily because their absence allowed for greater freedom to express lesbian feminist desires, but also because Olivia activists found that male venue staff usually attempted to take over, negating crucial opportunities for trained female sound technicians to teach other women. Audience participation was also conceptualized as being a fundamental component of women's music. Women were invited to sing along, to speak with each other and with the performers, and to share in each concert's celebration of femininity. According to Holly Near, "We have to … break down the fact that just because we're on a stage with lights that means we're something stronger, better, more important." Olivia artists often sat on the same level as their audience members. It was expected that during these concerts some women would for the first time experience pleasures and desires that had been denied to them by the dominant order; some might even spontaneously come out. Women were given an opportunity to be, as Williamson put it, "one among the family," and to feel the "shine in your soul" that came along with being the "sister" of all the other women in this "family." According to one concertgoer, "That moment did change my life 'cuz I think it was the first time I had been in a big enough group, and it was only a hundred or something, where I felt that sense of 'I'm okay,' and there are other people like me that are okay too, and we can all be okay together." This was the countercultural identity that the Olivia Collective offered to their "sisters": a woman who was out, liberated, and enjoying the support and love of like-minded women who could support each other in resisting the dominant order. This identity was buttressed by the Olivia Collective's argument that women

could band together to create communities that would allow them to live free of the influence of men. According to Berson, women's music "was so moving to them that it was releasing something in them and they were crying."[7]

The lyrics of *The Changer and the Changed* encapsulated these political ideas with spiritual and natural imagery, giving character and style to the Olivia countercultural identity. Schmitz argued that Williamson's use of pastoral imagery in various songs—"fire and rain, desert, shooting stars, birds"—suggested a femininity that was not rooted in urban, suburban, or industrial life. Williamson also employed animal imagery: "wild" animals revolting against their masters, doves and other birds flying, and phoenixes rising from fire. This last image comes in the song "Dream Child," which is explicitly about sexuality and pleasure; the implication was that liberation and rebirth were directly connected to sexual experience. More broadly, Olivia audiences were asked to conceptualize their bodies outside of "the hive"; in songs like "Wild Things," Williamson suggested that a woman's natural state was outside. The "natural" state was expressed through nature; this style left no room for unnatural products like artificial cosmetics, constricting clothing, or high heels. Many feminists had already abandoned such items in the late 1960s; Williamson presented this choice not simply as a rejection of middle-class consumer culture but also as the acceptance of an authentic female beauty, enhancing the countercultural valorization of "natural" women. The transformative idea inherent in the title was reiterated in the song "Waterfall," where the energy and creative expression of an Olivia activist is "An endless waterfall / Filling up and spilling over, over all." In this sense, audience members who

[7] Near, quoted in Farrell, "Women's Music," 20; "Sister," Williamson, *The Changer and the Changed*; Havens Levitt, interviewed in *Radical Harmonies*, DVD, directed by Dee Mosbacher (Woman Vision, 2002); Berson, interviewed in *Radical Harmonies*.

attended Olivia concerts were the changer *and* the changed, engaged in a reciprocal relationship with their fellow women where ideas, emotions, and politics were exchanged.[8]

But the Olivia Collective also struggled both internally and in conversation with their audience and with feminist critics to practice this countercultural ideology. In the context of a broader lesbian feminist movement, they adhered to what scholars Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp have called the three central ideological foundations of lesbian feminism: separatism, alternative culture, and essentialism. But despite the reciprocal relationship that they suggested should be at the core of lesbian feminism, at times the ideology they produced in relation to each of these three foundations seemed very one-way.[9]

First, the Olivia Collective broadly supported the creation of women-only spaces, but not exclusively. In part this was because Olivia acknowledged that women's music artists could not yet make a living performing solely for women and in part this was simply due to the fact that many venues refused to accommodate this request.[10] Consequently, Olivia grappled with its own and its audiences' expectations that women's music and women's music venues be uncorrupted by men. Corruption could occur on a variety of levels. For example, the opening track on Christian's *I Know You Know*, Olivia's first full-length LP release from 1974, was "Hello Hooray," a song written by Rolf Kempf and popularized by Alice Cooper in 1973. Through Christian's cover of the song is thoughtful, parodic, and subversive—and though this subversion is clearly the point—some critics balked at Christian performing a man's song. When Linda Hamilton reviewed Christian's sophomore album, *Face to Face*, she almost immediately

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[8] Schmitz, "The Changer & the Changed," 14; Williamson, "Dream Child" / "Wild Things" / "Waterfall," *The Changer and the Changed*. Sara Evans notes that this feminist style of dress developed through the experiences of many feminists within the 1960s counterculture. See *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 122.

[9] Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp, "Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 19 (Fall 1993): 573-578.

[10] Christian and Berson, "Keeping Our Art Alive," 29.

mentioned the lack of "male-written" songs as an improvement. The Olivia Collective was therefore forced to navigate a narrow path between the demands of certain segments of their countercultural public who believed that *any* male-involvement was problematic and their own vision of women's music as a style that could be satirical and subversive.[11]

Second, the Olivia Collective engaged in the promotion of women-produced lesbian feminist culture by modifying countercultural and lesbian feminist ideology with the idea that a business structure—a feminist business that catered to lesbian feminist audiences—would allow lesbian feminists to devote their lives to countercultural activism in a way that was not possible otherwise. This approach overturned the free ideology of the Diggers and Yippies. It also came under attack from feminist critics, who argued that any form of business was an intrinsically male institution. In response, the Olivia Collective argued that the sustained production of a lesbian culture required sustained labor and the ability to pay female musicians, artists, engineers, and producers. According to Berson, "To feel like you're being ripped-off because you're putting money into a women is a very unrealistic way of looking at how women are ultimately going to get power." They also challenged countercultural and feminist ideas about "business" in a variety of ways. Sandy Stone, an Olivia engineer, later remembered:

> You didn't really "go to work" for Olivia…. I didn't feel … that I was being hired, so much as that I was joining a family, one in which we shared common goals and beliefs, the primary set of those goals being to make music and politics at the same time.

The Olivia Collective used impressions like this to argue that they were not a profit-orientated business; rather, their goal was to sustain their own role in the reciprocal relationship of lesbian

[11] Linda Hamilton, "Face to Face with Meg," *Lesbian Tide*, 1 Nov. 1977, 32. On separatism, see Charlotte Bunch, "Lesbians in Revolt," *The Furies*, Jan. 1972, 8-9; Bunch, "Learning from Lesbian Separatism," in *Lavender Culture,* ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (New York: A Jove/HBJ Book, 1978), 435; Revolutionary Lesbians, "How To Stop Choking to Death: Or Separatism," *Spectre*, May-June 1971, 2-5.

feminist culture. Despite their critics, they maintained that, like energies and politics, their point was to keep money circulating inside the women's community.[12]

Third, the Olivia Collective advocated for a universal lesbian feminist identity. The imagery and lyrics employed by many Olivia artists suggested that there was a pure, universal femininity that could potentially exist if freed from the corruption of patriarchy: according to musician Kay Gardner, men "tried to take our music from us." By suggesting that women's music was an obscured but shared language of lesbian feminism and by blurring the lines between music, language, and identity, many Olivia artists suggested that they were uncovering and sharing an authentic identity for lesbian feminists—one that had a long history that, according to Gardner, included Artemis, the Sirens, and Pandora. When performed, women's music possessed the power to unleash that authentic identity and allow women to "know the flow of life and our universe, the whole One." According to Gardner, "This is ecstasy. This is the power of Music—to release our souls from the cages of centuries."[13]

In other words, women *should* come out, but out into *this* formulation, which tended to prioritize gender and sexuality over class, race, and ability as the foundational component of an individual's identity. And because the Olivia Collective's critiques of the dominant order often focused on images that evoked the culture of the white middle class, the countercultural identity that Olivia artists espoused rarely seemed that universal. Though black, Asian, Latino, Native, working-class, and disabled lesbians and transsexual women might have had commonalities with

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[12] Christian and Berson, "Keeping Our Art Alive," 29; Sandy Stone, interview by Davina Anne Gabriel, "Interview with the Transsexual Vampire: Sandy Stone's Dark Gift," *TransSisters: The Journal of Transsexual Feminism* (Spring 1993): 15-27, at 17. On lesbian feminist consumption, see Lisa Ransdell, "Lesbian Feminism and the Feminist Movement," *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, ed. Jo Freeman (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1995), 641-53; Bonnie Zimmerman, *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction, 1969-1989* (Boston: Beacon, 1990); Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Penguin, 1991); Heather Murray, "Free for All Lesbians: Lesbian Cultural Production and Consumption in the United States during the 1970s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16 (May 2007): 251-275.

[13] Kay Gardner, "Sing What You Know of Life," *Lesbian Tide*, 1 Nov. 1975, 6-7.

the experiences of white middle-class lesbians in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, their experiences were hardly represented by the Olivia roster of musicians. The label would attempt to diversify that roster, but the primarily white middle-class audience that Olivia attracted was less interested in music that deviated from the acoustic folk that characterized *The Changer and the Changed* and *I Know You Know*. This friction impeded attempts to promote musical acts like rock group BeBe K'Roche, black artists like Linda Tillery and Mary Watkins, or even white artists like Teresa Trull who chose to deviate from this particular aesthetic. The Olivia Collective is a useful example of what happened when those who had been marginalized in the 1960s counterculture led countercultural initiatives in the 1970s: the Olivia Collective worked with and modified countercultural traditions as part of the creation of the "lesbian nation," but in the end failed to fully avoid the problems that had affected the earlier male-dominated countercultural groups. The identity they espoused was an alternative norm, rather than an alternative to norms.[14]

Olivia Geography and Participants

This chapter traces the struggle of the Olivia Collective to engage their audience and critics from late 1972, when Williamson suggested that the women of the Olivia Collective should start a record label, until 1975, when the success of *The Changer and the Changed* drew Olivia into intense debates surrounding the ideology and practice of lesbian feminist countercultural activism.[15] During this period, the women involved with Olivia promoted a lesbian feminist countercultural identity with a distinctive celebratory style. Olivia started producing records in 1973 as radical lesbian feminism was changing. The initial stage of lesbian feminism, from 1970

[14] "Lesbian Nation" is an idea proposed by *Village Voice* journalist Jill Johnston. See *Lesbian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

[15] On the Olivia Collective, see Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 273-276; Judith A. Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 163-194; Murray, "Free for All Lesbians," 270-273.

to 1973, was motivated by women who, by the end of the 1960s, had come to feel that the interests of straight women dominated the feminist movement and the interests of gay men dominated the gay movement. Disillusioned by the sexism they experienced from gay men and the heterosexism and homophobia they experienced from straight women, radical lesbian feminists began to organize their own autonomous movement. Lesbian feminists involved with this movement in the early 1970s experimented with a range of resistance strategies, alternative living arrangements, and political platforms that reflected broader countercultural impulses like back-to-the-land communes and separatist cooperatives.[16]

This transition from the 1960s into the 1970s also dramatically shifted the landscape of radical and countercultural politics. Countercultural activists in the 1960s had acted in part against ascendant New Left social movements. But after the political traumas of 1968, the radicalization of the New Left, and the end of the Vietnam War, those social movements were on the defensive as many young radicals—especially black, Asian, Latino, Native, female, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and disabled activists—turned away from New Left politics.[17] Some of those people turned to countercultural politics. At the same time, a conservative backlash against more than a decade of political, social, and cultural ferment

[16] On heterosexism in the women's liberation movement, see Dana Heller, *Cross Purposes: Lesbians, Feminists, and the Limits of Alliance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). On sexism in the gay rights movement, see Toby Marotta, *The Politics of Homosexuality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981). For broader looks at 1970s lesbian feminism, see Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*; Shane Phelan, *Identity Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*. On lesbian back-to-the-land movements, see Catriona Sandilands, "Rainbow's End? Lesbian Separatism and the Ongoing Politics of Ecotopia," in *Feminist Utopias: Re-visioning Our Futures,* ed. Margrit Eichler et al. (Toronto: Inanna, 2002), 37–50.

[17] See Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 111-186.

coincided with the growth of the New Right, composed of conservative grassroots organizations around the country, many of which resisted the mobilization of gay and lesbian rights activists.[18]

By 1973, the economic growth rates that the United States had enjoyed since World War Two began to slow considerably. Because many lesbians were unduly affected by this economic downturn, many lesbian feminists argued for the efficacy of feminist businesses as a means of sustaining political work. Critics of this notion argued that *any* business was an extension of the patriarchy, and—interestingly, following the logic of the 1960s counterculture—that the emerging lesbian feminist culture should be free and shared without barriers to access. The members of Olivia made the opposite argument: without a subsistence wage, how could politically engaged lesbians devote the required energy to the cause? How could feminist culture be sustained and developed? How could networks of lesbian feminist enterprise be formed and maintained in order to allow lesbian feminist culture to function at some future point without needing to rely on the involvement of male-owned or staffed businesses? If a lesbian counterculture was a desirable goal, that counterculture could not be free, not because it should make profit, but because, as the women of Olivia argued, the only sure way to sustain and expand the women-only spaces their audience members preferred was to invest money in the women's community. That process was not just material, but also psychological: as Olivia activist Jennifer Woodul argued, "A major premise here is that the material improvement of the lives of women … represent CONTROL and that control means POWER." Essentially the women of Olivia adapted the methods of the late 1960s counterculture to the changing economic and political realities of the early 1970s, arguing that lesbian cultural expression and lesbian economic development could work together: movement-based jobs would support and sustain

[18] On the New Right, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). On the relationship between the New Right and the lesbian and gay movement, see Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 115-142.

new forms of lesbian culture, which in turn would support and sustain lesbian economic development.[19]

Olivia was also different from 1960s countercultural groups in that its countercultural public was not confined to a specific locale; their "geography" was instead a complex network of lesbian territories—bars, bookstores, cafes, classes, coffeehouses, dances, galleries, etc.—that became a foundation for lesbian feminist culture in the mid-1970s as it developed in hundreds of urban, suburban, and rural areas across the United States. The growth and substance of Olivia ideology was therefore not bound to a specific neighborhood in the same way that it had been for earlier countercultural groups. Instead, Olivia's geography was a vast and diverse network of lesbian feminists who were tied together through newsletters, books, poetry, music, and other media. Stone viewed their relationship with this community in symbiotic terms:

> I think that we were actually at that time a fairly close-knit community that communicated in part through publications and through meetings and festivals, to which very much the same people went, and … news traveled very fast in that way.

Despite the geographic dispersal of this community, therefore, Olivia still perceived it to be a close-knit network that they were consistently engaged with, and therefore the contours of that community affected the development of Olivia just as much as the physical neighborhoods of West Hollywood, Haight-Ashbury, and the Lower East Side had affected the developments of the freaks, Diggers, and Yippies.[20]

The women involved with the Olivia Collective had all played central roles in the emergence of lesbian feminism. On 1 May 1971, for example, Woodul had been one of forty lesbians who interrupted the opening night of the National Organization of Women's (NOW) Second Congress to Unite Women to raise the issue of lesbianism in the women's movement;

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[19] Jennifer Woodul, "What's This About Feminist Businesses?," *off our backs*, June 1976, 7.

[20] Stone, "Interview with the Transsexual Vampire," 19.

this New York-based group soon called themselves Radicalesbians. The group's position paper, "The Woman-Identified Woman," was a key document that motivated many lesbian feminists to organize independently of NOW and the women's movement. In the next few years, local Radicalesbians groups formed around the country, as did similar groups with different names. Other Olivia Collective activists, including Dlugacz, Kate Winter, Cyndi Gair, and Carol Ginsburg, had been involved with Ann Arbor Radicalesbians and had published *Purple Star: Journal of Radicalesbians* in 1971. Woodul went on to join Berson, Helaine Harris, and Lee Schwing as a member of the Furies, a Washington, D.C., lesbian-only separatist commune. Started in May 1971, the commune housed eight women who shared chores, clothing, money, and childcare for three children; the commune dissolved in 1972, but the women published their influential newsletter, *The Furies*, from January 1972 to June 1973. Christian, the final member of the Olivia Collective, was a touring musician, a political activist, and an associate of the Furies; she had connections with other female artists who were beginning to write music that celebrated lesbian feminism, as well as straight and gay female musicians who, while not necessarily identifying as lesbian feminists, became crucial to the production and sound of the material released on the Olivia Records label.[21]

When these nine women formed the Olivia Collective in 1973, they did not plan to form a record company. Rather, the women decided that they wanted to work together to apply their short-lived—and at times frustrating—experiences in Radicalesbians and the Furies to something different. According to Woodul:

> Our experiences with each other led us to envision an economic institution in which women worked co-operatively. We felt that in a really creative structure, the collective would be the vehicle for each woman to have a voice in determining her own working conditions, acquisition of skills, or salary.

[21] Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 214-216, 228-240.

With that basic structure in mind, the group set about finding a name and a project. Christian provided both. The name "Olivia" came from a popular Dorothy Bussy pulp novel, *Olivia*, that chronicled a lesbian relationship in a girls' school. The project was the result of serendipity. In 1973, Christian invited fellow lesbian musician Cris Williamson to perform at a concert in Washington, D.C. After the show, Berson and Christian interviewed Williamson on a local radio show called "Sophie's Parlor." According to Dlugacz, after a brief discussion about the trials that Christian and Williamson had faced in recording their music, Williamson noted, "sort of off-the-cuff—'Gee, maybe *you* all should start a *women's* record company.'" Berson and Christian soon gathered the other members of the Olivia Collective together so that they could explain the idea. Woodul later captured the group's reaction: "A women's record company.… Clearly the perfect teaming up of women's politics and women's culture. None of us could resist the excitement."[22]

This group of nine women soon was pared down to five, as Gair, Ginsburg, Harris, and Schwing left the Collective. Two of the women quit fairly immediately. Berson suggested that their level of "personal commitment" was not intense enough to withstand the lengthy and frequent meetings the women in the Collective held. Two more declined to commit to a move across the country when the Olivia Collective made the decision to shift its base of operations from Washington, D.C., to Los Angeles after the 1974 release of their first album, Christian's *I Know You Know*. The 1975 move allowed the Olivia Collective to be closer to the music industry, and the women who went—Woodul, Winter, Dlugacz, Berson, and Christian—became the primary architects of the Olivia Collective's countercultural identity.[23]

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[22] Woodul, "Olivia Records," in *The New Women's Survival Sourcebook*, ed. Susan Rennie and Kirsten Grimstad (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 177; Dlugacz, "If It Weren't for the Music: 15 Years of Olivia Records," *Hot Wire: The Journal of Women's Music and Culture*, July 1968, 29; Woodul, "Olivia Records," 177.

[23] Ginny Berson, "Olivia: We Don't Just Process Records," *Sister*, Dec./Jan. 1976-1977, 4. Berson does not identify the women by name, but presumably Gair and Ginsburg left first, as Harris and Schwing were still writing press releases for Olivia in 1974.

The five women shared similar backgrounds. All were white women who grew up middle-class, though Berson was descended from middle-class Jewish immigrants who had come to the United States in the early 20th century. The experiences of these women in Radicalesbians and the Furies also influenced their ideology. Woodul and Berson, at least, had participated in the Furies' "struggle sessions," where the members of the collective had commented on each others' classism, racism, and heterosexism. Harris, who had also participated, later reflected, "There was not a lot of genuine struggle or discussion because people were afraid to be wrong. People's most creative instincts were squashed." The Olivia Collective was founded on the shared notion that "creative instincts" *should* be fostered, that the hermetic isolation of the Furies had mitigated its potential to influence broader strains of lesbian feminism. The women of the Olivia Collective agreed that the emphasis on consensus-driven decision-making that had typified the Furies and Radicalesbians should be balanced with opportunities to allow an individual woman to be "assertive" within her "area of expertise." In line with this, Winter designed the Olivia logo and was responsible for most of Olivia Records' graphic design. Dlugacz took a leadership role with the administrative challenges of distribution and dealing with outside businesses such as record plants. Berson and Woodul liaised with the lesbian feminist press; Berson dealt with the company's distribution network; and Woodul oversaw the company's finances. Christian was a touring musician and, consequently, the face of the company, though she also coordinated musicians for recording sessions. In 1975, Teresa Trull joined Christian as a second musician who also participated in the day-to-day activities of the company, as did Stone, an engineer who became largely responsible for the sound and aesthetic of Olivia's music. In fact, after listening to the original version of *The Changer and the Changed* and thinking, "Oh, this music is so

beautiful, but wow, the mix is awful!" she remixed the album. According to Stone, "Olivia was always run on a consensus basis," but there "was a pretty reasonable give-and-take."[24]

The creation of a lesbian feminist counterculture would provide a coherent public style and cultural sensibility to complement the desires, values, and political commitments of a countercultural public of women with identities that did not conventionally fit the mold proffered by the dominant order. But when the Olivia Collective formed in 1973, they were simply one example of this emerging torrent of lesbian feminist creative expression that included writing, art, and music. The group gained early publicity due to the pedigree of its members and its emphasis on women's music. According to Christian, the Olivia Collective embraced music because it was a "beautiful thing" that "can create lots of energy, help women understand their lives better," and "create a bond among women." She argued that her political framework and the music she wrote and performed were indivisible:

> I can't separate culture from politics. I see myself primarily as a musician, but I am a woman and a lesbian and a feminist and therefore a political person, and my music has to reflect that. So, my music is political even though it has value outside of the message it conveys.

For Christian and her fellow Olivia Collective activists, culture was political. The Olivia Collective felt that the shared experiences of concerts and albums—its "value outside of the message it conveys"—would give language and form to their political arguments for a lesbian feminist countercultural public of activists.[25]

More controversially, the Olivia Collective argued that there was an immediate need for a lesbian-produced feminist consumer culture in order to provide new economic and creative

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[24] Berson, "Slumming it in the Middle Class," *The Furies*, Mar.-Apr. 1972, 12-13; Helaine Harris, interviewed in Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 235; Stone, "Interview with the Transsexual Vampire," 16, 18. Dlugacz notes that in later years, as the collective expanded, this style of company meeting was often exhausting given the time it would take to come to consensus. See "If It Weren't for the Music: Part II," *Hot Wire*, Jan. 1989, 22-23.

[25] Christian, interview by Joan Nixon, Leigh Kennedy, JR Roberts, and Mary Oberly, "Meg Christian + Ginny Berson," *Lavender Woman,* Feb. 1975, 1.

opportunities for women across the country. This, too, was about a lesbian feminist geography: lesbian feminists could continue to support one another emotionally and intellectually at concerts, meetings, and festivals, but in creating networks of lesbian feminist businesses, politically-engaged lesbians could also enter into a reciprocal relationship of economic support with other feminist businesses. Given the suspicions that many gay and lesbian activists had about capitalism and consumption, advancing a consumer-based approach to liberation was not an easy argument to make. Young gay and lesbian activists who were part of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and various radical lesbian groups argued that capitalism was oppressive, sexist, heterosexist, racist, and classist; the most ardent argued that lesbian feminists who assumed that they could remain "feminist" while adopting capitalist and patriarchal practices were naïve at best and corrupt at worst.

Many young gay and lesbian critics of capitalism asserted that homosexuals, like the working class and people of color, were marginalized due to the economic and social structure of the United States. As Allan Warshawsky and Ellen Bedoz argued in the newspaper *Come Out!* in 1970, "We are one of many oppressed groups, the roots of whose oppression lies within a diseased capitalist system." On the same page "Red Butterfly," a Marxist gay collective, argued, "None of us shall ever know peace nor freedom, justice nor happiness until the root evil of our society has been destroyed—Capitalism." Another staff member of *Come Out!* argued, "A capitalist heterosexual society is the root of all of our problems. We think competition and producing to earn money is the root of a lot of our problems." The women of the Olivia Collective argued that statements like these—and especially that last clause—echoed the beliefs of the late 1960s counterculture not simply because they identified capitalism as an oppressive structure, but also because they ultimately situated individual oppression in the competition to

earn a wage—a site of oppression that, at least among the middle class, was relegated primarily to men. Against these critics of capitalism, who focused on wage earning as a dehumanizing feature of capitalist society, the Olivia Collective argued that providing jobs to women *was* subversive. To other women, the Olivia Collective argued first that there was a reciprocal relationship between current lesbian feminists to nurture and second that there was also the long term to think about. Woodul argued that "if we're to depend on each other in order to make a strong economic community, we can't squeeze our own pockets too hard." Institutions like Olivia, she continued, could bring "new money into the feminist community—not just circulate what we have among ourselves again and again."[26]

The women of the Olivia Collective had been struggling with these issues even before they formed Olivia Records. Writing for *The Furies* in 1972, Berson argued: "The base of our ideological thought is: sexism is the root of all other oppressions," and "lesbian and woman oppression will not end by smashing capitalism, racism, and imperialism." A June 1973 article by Harris and Schwing, written after the Furies commune had ended because so many of its participants had to devote "forty hours a week of our energy…to the man," argued that the ability of lesbian feminists to be full-time activists was compromised by the reality that many women had to take a "straight" job to survive. The Olivia Collective could therefore argue, based on the experience of several of its members, that cloistering separatist communes away from the rest of the world was not a sustainable political project. Women involved with groups like the Furies still required some kind of income. Harris and Schwing argued that only self-created opportunities for employment would allow women to sustain the lesbian feminist movement and

[26]Allan Warshawsky and Ellen Bedoz, "G.L.F. and the Movement," *Come Out!*, Jan. 1970, 4-5; "Red Butterfly," *Come Out!*, Jan. 1970, 4-5; Unknown, quoted in Rodger Streitmatter, *Voices of Revolution: The Dissident Press in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 245; Woodul, "What's This About Feminist Businesses?," 7. For more on the gay and lesbian press and their view of capitalism, see Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1995).

make separatism a viable option. The production of a lesbian feminist counterculture could provide such opportunities for women; women's music would create demand for satellite feminist businesses: distribution networks, performance venues, concert promotion, lighting and sound staff, audio production and engineering, record plants, photography and graphic design, music criticism and magazines, and stage and costume design. These were distant goals, but Olivia hoped to generate music and extend the promise that this network of mutually supportive industries would provide lesbian feminists with financial independence from male-dominated capitalism and new avenues for creative expression.[27]

The role of feminist business in lesbian feminism proved to be the subject of an ongoing debate with the Olivia Collective's prospective countercultural public. In June 1973, while still with *The Furies*, Harris and Schwing pulled their punch by labeling the businesses they proposed "feminist institutions." In a first for the consensus-driven Furies, who had to this point only published articles that all members of the collective supported, an opposing view was printed in the same issue. Loretta Ulmschneider and Deborah George argued that "feminist institutions" would have the opposite of the intended effect: rather than provide economic independence for all women, they would in fact widen the divide between middle-class lesbians, who could afford to consume these new feminist products and to get training for any new jobs that developed as a result of these businesses, and working-class lesbians, who would remain trapped in low-paying jobs outside the new lesbian feminist culture.[28]

This was a criticism that would plague the activities of the Olivia Collective throughout the 1970s. In 1976, for example, in an article in *off our backs* entitled "God, Mom and Apple Pie:

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[27] Berson, no title, *The Furies*, Jan. 1972, 1; Harris and Lee Schwing, "Building Feminist Institutions," *The Furies*, June 1973, 2-3.

[28] Harris and Schwing, "Building Feminist Institutions," 2-3; Loretta Ulmschneider and Deborah George, untitled response to "Building Feminist Institutions," *The Furies*, June 1973, 3. See also Brooke Williams, "The Retreat to Cultural Feminism," in *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings (New York: Random House, 1978), 79-83.

'Feminist' Business as an Extension of the American Dream," Hannah Darby and Brooke Williams lampooned the work of the Olivia Collective by suggesting that "feminist business" was an oxymoron—that women could not participate in capitalism, because it was antithetical to feminism. Woodul responded with a lengthy article that dealt with the conflicts between patriarchal capitalism and feminist enterprise as well as the status of Olivia recordings as consumer products:

> I think it's important to point out that feminist businesses are not just "selling products which promote the idea of equality," as "God, Mom and Apple Pie" defines them, and they are not just "alternatives." Feminist businesses are the mainstream, the wave of the future. They are woman-designed to meet our own needs and to become what we want. They are superb inventions which test our feminist principles in crises of the everyday decisions which are momentous because they have everything to do with our survival—politically and economically.

Critics argued that the Olivia Collective was splitting hairs, but Woodul's assertion that "feminist business is an invention" and not, as Darby and Williams seemed to suggest, a naïve replication of the sexist capitalist institutions of the dominant order, is critical to understanding the Olivia Collective's position. Olivia countercultural activists did not conceptualize "feminist business" as a replication of capitalist business; rather, the former was a distinctly lesbian feminist countercultural practice to mitigate and survive the oppression of the latter.[29]

While the members of the Olivia Collective did not concern themselves with the pleasures or desires of women who refused to come out, they adopted the position first popularized in the Radicalesbians' 1970 manifesto "Woman-Identified-Woman," which in characterizing "a lesbian" as "the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion" argued that lesbians should necessarily be at the forefront of the woman's liberation movement. This argument assumed that if heterosexuality was the root of male supremacy, then lesbian feminists were in

[29] Hannah Darby and Brooke Williams, "God, Mom and Apple Pie: 'Feminist' Business as an extension of the American Dream," *off our backs*, Jan.-Feb. 1976; Woodul, "What's This About Feminist Businesses?," 7.

the best position to subvert the dominant order. It also suggested that women who might not identify as lesbians might still identify as lesbian feminists. According to Berson, "Lesbianism is not a matter of sexual preference, but rather one of political choice which every woman must make if she is to become woman-identified and thereby end male supremacy." Lesbian feminists argued that while straight feminist women were willing to fight against the restricting imperatives of gendered expectations, private domesticity, and familial roles, they still largely accepted that relationships with men were necessary for personal happiness. Or, as a letter submitted by "Barbry" to *The Furies* in March 1972 put it:

> We live in a male supremacist shitpile. At its most basic level this shitpile is upheld by fucking, marriage, and breeding. Straight women serve this system by serving their men. Lesbians reject it by saying we won't fuck, we won't marry, we won't breed, and we'll damn well do as we please.

Many lesbian feminists suggested that if straight women were willing to love women platonically as part of a sisterhood of feminists, perhaps they might also accept intimate and physical relationships with other women, fully divorcing themselves from the need for male companionship. Underlying this concept was another suggestion: perhaps lesbian feminism was, in fact, the authentic identity of all women that the patriarchy worked to repress. Lesbian feminists who promoted this idea pointed to examples of their own extended history, referencing the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), the lesbian organization of the 1950s and 1960s, and historical figures like Sappho. Fury Rita Mae Brown claimed, "The Lesbian movement is older than the New Left and has little to do with fashionable radicalism among white, middle class youth." In part, this statement highlights the increasingly critical view that many young activists had of the once ascendant New Left. But Brown also implicitly suggested that while the New Left was merely "fashionable," lesbian feminism was deep and meaningful. Lesbian feminists who believed that all women, no matter how they identified in terms of their sexuality, could become

lesbian feminists saw the goal of lesbian culture as a mass coming out for all women. In a sense, lesbian feminist countercultural identity was about reclaiming that identity for *all* women. Olivia's promotion of this idea was profoundly countercultural: their performance-based protests offered all women a chance to experience a lesbian feminist identity, to come out, and to embrace their countercultural, authentic femininity. Olivia's role in this process was to put "their lives and their livelihoods on the line in order to invent a way to gain actual power for women." But at the center of their ideology was the notion that the growth and maintenance of a lesbian feminist counterculture was a critical step in broader lesbian feminist activism: according to Berson, "women's culture and the women's movement are indivisible—they are reflections of and statements about each other."[30]

Olivia Influences

The Olivia Collective's approach to performance-based protest was influenced by three emerging trends in the early 1970s. First, the Collective drew upon elements of the 1960s counterculture. In many respects, their argument for a lesbian feminist counterculture echoed the argument of Digger Peter Coyote: the problem was not capitalism; it was culture, or rather, for the Olivia Collective, the sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia that permeated mainstream culture. In practice, the Olivia Collective adopted two compelling strategies from the 1960s counterculture. They advocated for a lesbian feminist counterculture and a related countercultural identity that represented the personal and political concerns of lesbian feminists. They also argued that moments of lesbian feminist creative expression should occur in

[30] Berson, no title, *The Furies*, Jan. 1972, 1; Barbry, "Taking the Bullshit by the Horns," *The Furies*, Mar.-Apr. 1972, 8-9; Rita Mae Brown, "Roxanne Dunbar: how a female heterosexual serves the interests of male supremacy," *The Furies*, Jan. 1972, 5; Woodul, "What's This About Feminist Businesses?," 6-7; Berson, "Keeping Our Art Alive," 27. For another example of members of the Olivia Collective explaining self-sustainability, see Nixon et al., "Meg Christian + Ginny Berson."

performance-based protests that offered an opportunity for those who participated to explore their individual and collective identities and find their authentic, autonomous, and liberated selves. According to Williamson:

> Nine women can partake of the same cultural situation, say they all attend the same musical happening where one of us is doing what she does on stage, and all nine, including the artist, will see it quite differently—or rather, *see themselves reflected* differently.

Because these spaces were women-only, lesbian feminists also argued that the tone of performance-based protest would be dramatically altered: gone was the overt emphasis on expressions of shocking sexuality and aggressive machismo in public, instead replaced with the idea that the acoustic intimacy of women's music could knit together lesbians from all walks of life by politically and aesthetically expressing universalizing concepts of sisterhood, understanding, love, and equality. Reviewers responded to these ideas. One noted that Williamson's music reflected "her mountain upbringing. She is involved in her music with transmitting feelings of beauty for spirituality, nature, and women." The Olivia Collective's performance-based protests relied on the intimate connection that could be forged between a performer and the women in her audience and between the audience members themselves. There could be power in these performances—another reviewer of *The Changer and the Changed* noted that Williamson "loves to use [her voice] powerfully" and that it was infused with a "passionate feeling of joy"—but in broad terms Olivia artists were cast as conduits for the shared desires of every woman present. Significantly, the acceptance of this aesthetic by audiences who gravitated to these performances soon became more of an expectation; consequently, the onus was placed on Olivia artists to protect and maintain the artistic standard for how an Olivia performance *should* sound: acoustic, inclusive, intimate, and affirmative.[31]

[31] Pullman, "The Changer and the Changed," 5; Schmitz, "The Changer & the Changed," 14.

Despite these continuities with the 1960s counterculture, the Olivia Collective remained staunchly critical of the elements of male-centric counterculture that they perceived to be destructive to the lesbian feminist movement. Harris, who had spent time in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement and the West Coast counterculture, identified many of these unwanted elements. The male-centric counterculture was heterosexual, a "perfect solution for the aimlessness and uselessness that all men must face," but harmful to Lesbians, who "must create their own culture." The 1960s counterculture was also middle-class, exploiting the assistance of parents to finance "dope" and unemployment; this, to Harris, was a mockery of the hard work that was required for revolution. The prevalence of drug use also had disappointed Harris; she felt it numbed the minds of the oppressed. Finally, the 1960s counterculture was predicated on a "do your own thing attitude" that undermined a more valuable "collective revolution." Based on the previous chapters, we might quibble with some of Harris's arguments, but all seem entirely reasonable coming from the perspective of a lesbian feminist whose desires and pleasures were denied by the male-centric countercultural ideologies that were the object of her critique. On that subject, Harris was far more blunt:

> If you are an alone woman on the streets the hippy man is just as much a threat as the straight one; the only difference is that the straight man expects to have to rape you, the hip man expects "free nookey" and brands you uptight if you refuse him.

Even after coming out, Harris still felt compromised:

> I still identified as a freak. … I was still dressing in overalls and workshirts; my hair was long and bushy. On the street I looked like any other freak woman—heterosexual. Who wants to look like a "man-hating dyke"? I had stopped wearing bras and dresses but still dressed in accordance with male standards—not looking uppity.

The need for a lesbian feminist counterculture was clear to the Olivia Collective; it was critical to the liberation and autonomy of lesbian feminists around the country and the world.[32]

[32] Harris, "Out of the O Zone," *The Furies*, Feb. 1972, 2-3. See also Tasha Peterson, "Gimme Shelter," *The Furies*, Feb. 1972, 5-6.

The Olivia Collective argued that the "alternative institutions" of the counterculture had failed "due to the classist and sexist ideology that formed them." Harris, for example, recalled her experience with a "free community" while she lived in Berkeley:

> Before I left home I believed that somewhere I would find other young people who would help me survive. In simple terms, I believed the "free community." And it was true, there actually was a freak community, but what I soon found out was that it was only free for straight, white male members in it…. Men…controlled all the free services (food co-op, free store, etc.). Men expected you to fuck with them when they wanted you to (called free love—free for the men). Women had to be on the pill, medically unsafe, or bear the responsibility of children. The freak man could always leave town, leaving the woman with the child.

Beyond the sexism Harris had faced in the free community, she saw deeper problems with free ideology. Even if men could be made to confront their own sexism, heterosexual relationships were themselves an obstacle to the practice of free ideology:

> Later, when freak men got more "political" they begged women to stay with them and help them struggle with their sexism. And the women who stayed with them are still struggling … and will for eternity. These women are kept from working for a women's revolution by putting their energy into individual men.

The Olivia Collective also denied that free ideology, at least as practiced by groups like the Diggers, would work if men were simply removed from the equation. There had been earlier attempts by lesbian feminists to more explicitly adopt the ideology of the Diggers and Yippies. For example, the Feminist Lesbian Intergalactic Party (Flippies), a Chicago-based radical lesbian group formed in 1970, in name alone referenced the Yippies. The group listed "free music" in its platform in the first issue of *The Killer Dyke* in 1971. The rest of the 10-point list also reads like a typical Digger/Yippie list that was simply augmented with additional material about gender and sexuality. But Harris and Schwing had this to say:

> To run free stores you need free labor and to be free labor you have to have economic security. Middle class people had the means to survive without a salary…. Money and survival have never been dealt with in an extensive, concrete way in our movement. This hurts mainly the working-lower-class, young, and Third World woman.

This potential inequality could only be dealt with by creating "institutions where we could work for ourselves and other women," but that would also "afford a situation where there were concrete reasons to deal with class, race, and age." For the Olivia Collective, strict adherence to free ideology was a luxury of the privileged classes and therefore not revolutionary in any meaningful sense.[33]

Second, the Olivia Collective joined an increasingly trenchant critique of male-dominated rock music and culture that was developed by feminists and lesbian feminists in the early 1970s.[34] This critique emerged in tandem with the rise of the women's liberation movement. The emphasis that feminist critics placed on rock music as a subject for dissent is not surprising given the musical genre's status at the forefront of popular culture. Most of these critiques addressed rock bands and performers that were popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Led Zeppelin, and the Doors. For many feminist commentators, the rebelliousness of rock music had played some role in the initial stages of their rebellion against the imperatives of the dominant order. For example, Marion Meade, writing in the fall of 1970, noted:

> The trouble is, I like rock. Most of the women I know like rock; still, I have yet to hear any of them criticize the music for its blatant celebration of male supremacist attitudes. This seems to be an area where we are reluctant to confront reality, despite the fact that rock's messages couldn't be more clear. That message is that it's a man's world, baby, and women only have one place in it. Between the sheets.

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[33] Harris, "Out of the O Zone," 3; Unknown, *The Killer Dyke*, Sept. 1971, 2; Harris and Schwing, "Building Feminist Institutions," 3.

[34] Feminist and lesbian feminist syndicals devoted to music included various local newsletters, *Musica* being the largest, as well as *My Sister's Song*, *Plexus*, *Hot Wire*, and *Chrysalis*. Lesbian feminist syndicals that began to devote a large portion of their copy to women's music included *Her-Self*, *Lavender Woman*, *off our backs*, and *Sister*. For more on rock music and gender in this period, see Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality," in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodman (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 374-379; Sara Cohen, "Men Making a Scene: Rock Music and the Production of Gender," *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (London: Routledge, 1997); Unknown, "A Closer Look at Lyrics," *Her-self*, Mar. 1973, 5-6.

Rock music played a crucial role in the formative stages of both women's embrace of rebellious youth culture, despite the fact that they felt alienated and demeaned by its overt celebration of male supremacy.[35]

A teacher, Gael Shapiro, preparing notes for a proposed course she was designing in the mid-1970s—Sexism in the Pop Media and Feminist Alternatives—struggled to explore the reasons that women were attracted to rock in the first place. She asked, "Why do conscious ♀ continue to listen to rock's sexist lyrics?" She attributes the attraction to "the big beat of rock," which "was a universal code that meant 'free our bodies.'" And then, a quick revision: "To ♀ it meant free our bodies; to ♂, to imprison our bodies in short skirts. High schools. Cosmetics." Shapiro also noted that in the late 1960s young women interested in rebelling against the dominant order or exploring their sexuality had few models to emulate. Therefore, "♀ expressed their rebellion vicariously by identifying with male outlaws. Rock was the best thing going + if we had to filter out certain indignities, well, we had been doing that all our lives."[36]

Feminists and lesbian feminists had several primary complaints about rock 'n' roll, which Shapiro mused were all musical variations on a prevalent sexist theme: the myth that "♂ work, ♀ wait." The gendered assumption was that technical skill and the power of creation were the purview of men; women in the rock scene could only watch and inspire. In other words, women were incapable of being skilled technicians or artists. At the same time, the image of the lifestyle that rock culture offered women did not resemble to the reality of their experiences. As Woodul argued, "the idea that women … have to try to glean what meaning we can from the art of the dominant culture" was not sufficient. In response, feminists and lesbian feminists argued against the accepted notion that men should perform while women watched or that men should control

[35] Marion Meade, "Women and Rock: Sexism set to Music," *Women: A Journal of Liberation* (Fall 1970), 34.

[36] Gael Shapiro, Untitled and undated course notes, Notes: Sexism in the Pop Media and Feminist Alternatives, file 4, Gael Shapiro Papers, Gay and Lesbian Historical Society Archives, San Francisco, CA.

the narratives and aesthetic of popular music. They argued that the dearth of female artists, musicians, and technicians was the result of entrenched sexism that denied women the ability to access and explore the potential for creative expression provided by rock music. This was especially egregious for feminist and lesbian feminist commentators given that women—and especially the female body—were so frequently the subject of rock lyrics. Meade argued, "None of the popular arts presents a more consistently degrading image of women than the lyrics of rock music." Shapiro argued:

> ♀ emerge as sex-crazed animals or all-American emasculators (whore or madonna). ♀ in romantic rock 'emerge' as passive, spiritless (or 'spiritual' + spacey) self-less sad-eyed ladies propped up on thrones as someone's private property, motherly madonnas. Pathetic.

In the December 1972 issue of *Ms.,* Naomi Weisstein, an associate professor of psychology at Loyola, and Virginia Blaisdell, head of the Advocate Press in New Haven, both of whom were members of all-women bands, challenged the image of mid- and late-sixties male-dominated rock culture in "Feminist Rock: No More Balls and Chains"—the "no balls" surely meant to be literal. If rock 'n' roll created spaces where women could only be "back-street girls" (a Rolling Stones reference) or "Suzie Creamcheeses" (a Frank Zappa reference), then rock music "despises" and "mocks" women, telling them to stay in their place, to "shake [their] hips and keep them weak." Shapiro, circling passages and scribbling notes on the *Ms.* article for her course, acutely summed up the various ways that rock musicians constructed female roles: "she has no face, no brain, no profession, or work, nothing except perhaps her willingness to put out for anyone who happens to come along."[37]

Feminists and lesbian feminists also railed against the inability of men to accept seriously the idea that women could act as musicians, technicians, or engineers. Acknowledging that

[37] Shapiro, Untitled; Woodul, "Olivia Records," 177; Meade, "Women and Rock," 34; Naomi Weisstein and Virginia Blaisdell, "Feminist Rock: No More Balls and Chains," *Ms.*, Dec. 1972, 25-27.

gendered socialization probably left many women ill-equipped to combat this impression, early radical feminist and lesbian syndicals featured numerous articles on technology and self-repair. For example, in March 1971 *Ain't I A Woman?* ran a piece that explained how a turntable might be cleaned and repaired. The article was not simply a do-it-yourself explanation; it also advised readers how to deal with salesmen in electronics stores and how to obtain (in some cases, illicitly) the best materials for speaker repair. It also noted that the very language and design of electronics was "a very male thing—all those screws + sockets." Articles like this clearly intended to strengthen the relationship between women, technology, and music. Weisstein and Blaisdell made a similar argument:

> To break the sexist order, we have to do more than sing different lyrics. We have to demystify the priesthood of the instrument and the amplifier. We have to be the instrumentalists, too, and the technicians, and move the equipment, set it up, find the fuses, fix the feed, mike, monitor, run it, play it, control it.

At the same time, many women were already skilled with technology. Shapiro noted that these women also faced discrimination:

> Women in rock music are not taken seriously. They are (♀ sound techs, writers, agents, photographers) seen as groupies w/ a gimmick. Agents play roles (the little girl who takes care of everything quietly, the good time lady, the mother hen). They may be talented ♀ but they are not in control. Their clients determine who they are.

Women, according to Shapiro, were constantly faced with the burden of proving their rock 'n' roll legitimacy at the same time that they were offered very few opportunities to do so, outside of sex. This argument was echoed in the experiences of women's music artists who had participated in the rock music scene. Patches Attom, guitarist for the non-Olivia Records act Lavender Jane, noted that when previously playing in male-led rock bands she was expected by male audience members and fellow musicians to express herself with her "flesh" and not her instrument.[38]

[38] Unknown, "Sisters Smash Sexism, Technocracy, & Planned Obsolescence," *Ain't I A Woman?,* Mar. 1971, 10-11; Weisstein and Blaisdell, "Feminist Rock"; Shapiro, Untitled; Patches Attom, interview by Fran Moira and Anne Williams, "Lavender Jane Loves…," *off our backs*, Apr. 1974, 6-7.

Feminist and lesbian feminist critics also interrogated the culture associated with rock 'n' roll. Shapiro notes that women who looked to rock culture as a space for rebellion were bound by an even more stringent gender role that the ones they rebelled against: not a girl, a woman, a mother, or a wife, but a "chick." Hip or countercultural men, who often labeled themselves "wolves" and "cats," expected "bunnies," "pussies," and "chicks" to provide both traditional domestic labor and a sexual access that was freed from monogamy or responsibility. This double-damn of sexual politics for women made rebellion impossible, according to Shapiro: "Chick is the free-fire zone, [a] mindless, soulless, tease for whom no punishment was equal to her crime of independence. The bitch deserved everything she got and more." In other words, women who embraced the role of "chick" entered a self-fulfilling prophecy, where, according to Shapiro, if women must free their bodies to "be socially acceptable to ♂," men often turned around and accuse them of "causing [their] own rapes." Here, Shapiro echoed a famous phrase from Robin Morgan's "Goodbye to All That": "at Woodstock or Altamont a woman could be declared uptight if she didn't want to be raped." Words like "aggression" and "rape" were frequently invoked in these critiques and Weisstein and Blaisdell offer insight into the reason why: "Rather than seeing sexism wind down in the sixties, we saw it heat up: a male cultural/political counterinsurgency has developed around rock." According to Weisstein and Blaisdell, that counterinsurgency focused viciously on women's sexuality: "We are Suzie Creamcheese, stupid enough to get pregnant"; women were subject to "gang rapes at the Sky River rock festival"; Jimi Hendrix's iconic destruction of his instrument at the Monteray Pop Festival garnered him praise for "raping and burning his guitar." Throughout, the authors insinuate that male supremacy in rock culture, or the counterculture, was the primary legacy of the 1960s: "This 'revolutionary' challenge to the old ways is instead the place where male

supremacy develops new modes and invents new tactics to respond to our struggle for humanity."[39]

Of course, feminists and lesbian feminists rejected these depictions of women, of the female body, and of female sexuality. In one notable example, in the November 1972 issue of *Her-self,* a faux-ad graphic—placed innocuously enough at the bottom of a page of real ads and labeled a "public service announcement"—declared, "Women are not chicks." A casually sketched upside-down bird hangs from the "c" in "chicks," and at first the drawing seems to support a simple and literal reading: the graphic is merely intended to reject the popular countercultural epithet for women. However, the text and image in the graphic undeniably echo the typeface and dove of the iconic Woodstock logo; the graphic, with no text indicating this is the case, ties its literal rejection of the word "chick" to a figurative rejection of the counterculture by mocking its most famous moment. The graphic is fascinating; it highlights the magazine's assumption that Woodstock—as countercultural moment, as symbol, as social and gendered space, and as graphic image—was so prevalent in feminist consciousness that a simple visual cue would allow readers to follow the magazine down the rabbit hole. Perhaps it was: Shapiro noted that the Woodstock nation's vision of women was unsatisfying: "barefoot, sometimes barebreasted, sprawled erotically on the grass, looking after babies, dishing out meals (an agrarian version of a Shriners picnic)." Meade agreed, dismissing "the myths of Woodstock 'nation,' a country where no self-respecting feminist would feel at home."[40]

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[39] Shapiro, Untitled; Weisstein and Blaisdell, "Feminist Rock"; Robin Morgan, "Goodbye to All That," *Rat: Subterranean News*, 6 Feb. 1970, reproduced in *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Random House, 1978), 121-130. The Shapiro quotation is actually a misquote of Weisstein and Blaisdell; their rendition reads, "We were the chick in the free-fire zone, the mindless, soulless tease for whom no punishment was equal to her crime of independence. The bitch who deserved whatever she got, and more."

[40] *Her-self*, Nov. 1972, 23; Shapiro, Untitled; Meade, "Women and Rock," 34.

Third, the definition and aesthetic of the women's music produced by the Olivia Collective reflected the arguments of cultural feminists who asserted that women needed to form their own culture. To begin with, these critics simply desired more music that was produced, composed, and performed by women. Though many female musicians and singers had been popular throughout the 1960s, in 1970 a writer for *Ain't I A Woman* asked, "Think of a rock group with a female instrumentalist (not a sexy lead singer): I thought of only Sly and the Family Stone." As for "sexy lead singers," feminist and lesbian feminist commentators argued that the success of women such as Grace Slick and Joni Mitchell was based on their ability to fit into the patriarchal structures of rock 'n' roll and the rock industry, rather than defy them. According to Gael Shapiro, Mitchell's love songs were "illusionary." Even Janis Joplin, celebrated within rock culture for her aggressive performances, gave Shapiro reservations. She wondered if Joplin reinforced the image of emotionally vulnerable women: "Janis was aggressive—but never threatening. Janis was vulnerable."[41]

For lesbian feminists who wanted examples of women who sang about lesbian sensibilities and desires, the picture was even more dire. They found few openly lesbian artists. They could point to historical examples like Lisa Ben and Ma Rainey and more contemporary examples like Dusty Springfield, who had come out as bisexual in 1970. Maxine Feldman had started to perform "Angry Atthis" in 1969, though the song would not be recorded until 1972. Pauline Oliveros had released music on a variety of experimental compilation albums and Meredith Monk released her first album *Key* in 1971, though both women would gain greater fame later in the 1970s and in the early 1980s. These touchstones, however, were not linked to the lesbian feminist movement. Lavender Jane Loves Women (Alix Dobkin, Kay Gardener, and Patches

[41] Unknown, "What Have They Done to My Song?," *Ain't I A Woman?*, 30 Oct. 1970, 4; Shapiro, Untitled.

Attom) was formed in August 1973. Gardner, a flautist, came from a classical background, while Dobkin, like Feldman, had played folk music through much of the 1960s. Dobkin noted in an interview in *off our backs* in April 1974, "Lesbian groups I've heard recently at gay bars are still not doing their own material—they're not secure enough. Maybe they're changing the 'he's' to 'she's' but they're still singing the same violent sex." This view reinforced the notion that women's music had to be different than *any* music, no matter how radical, that had been produced in the dominant order. Dobkin's assertion echoed the arguments of many lesbian feminists that rock music itself was an incontrovertibly male and misogynist form of creative expression; it could not possibly hope to capture the character and spirit of lesbian feminism.[42]

The Olivia Collective defined women's music in similar terms. It had to be produced, performed, engineered, and distributed entirely by women. It had to speak to an essential femininity that existed outside the imperatives of the dominant order. Olivia also adopted the idea that women's music should sound different. Though in superficial terms the primary aesthetic of the music of Christian and Williamson resembled folk music, the simple, sparse arrangements and pastoral sounds of *I Know You Know* and *The Changer and the Changed* hardly resembled the work of contemporary female folk artists such as Joni Mitchell, who turned to ambitious jazz-inflected fusion experiments in the mid-1970s; Olivia associate Bonnie Raitt, who was already celebrated for her electric guitar virtuosity; or Kate & Anna McGarrigle, who were adopting trends in world music. Rather, women's music emphasized a very specific sound early on: acoustic guitars and piano, minimal percussion, the absence of electric guitar, and several female voices in harmony. According to Frankie Farrell, "women are exploring their musical personalities and presenting alternatives both in content and form to the dominant music

[42] Alix Dobkin, interview by Moira and Williams, "Lavender Jane Loves…," 7.

culture." Women's music artists favored open chords and eschewed excessive experimentation and electric instrumentation; their goal was to capture an essence that was denied by the dominant order by developing a very specific soundscape.[43]

Olivia Ideology and Practice

With their plan to start a feminist record label conceptualized, the Olivia Collective placed an open call for a female engineer to help them record their albums in 1973. Joan Lowe, who was living in Vida, Oregon, wrote the Olivia Collective and offered her services as engineer, advisor, and teacher. Lowe had the experience the Olivia Collective required: she ran her own record company, Pacific Cascades Records, employing her recording and engineering expertise to produce children's educational records. Lowe's experience with the industry as a skilled woman was typical. She had finished her academic work in electrical engineering at the age of 32 and entered freelance engineering work in 1967. Employment opportunities for sound engineers were already sparse; her gender only made them sparser. In 1977 she noted, "The only way to learn studio techniques is to observe, serve as 'gofer,' and put up with a great deal of dirty work, no matter what technical expertise one may have."[44] Lowe volunteered for almost any assignment that she could get, producing film sound and working with pop, country, and folk labels. Lowe convinced the Olivia Collective to record a promotional 45 and use the single as a vehicle to

[43] Farrell, "Women's Music," 20.

[44] Joan Lowe, interview by unknown, no title, *Musica*, Spring 1977, 6. There is not, unfortunately, very much material that deals with the roles that women played in recording, producing, and engineering music in the 1960s and 1970s. Gillian C. Gaar briefly discusses Cordell Jackson, who began Memphis's Moon Records, but then admits, "It's a lost history. I wonder how many women there were putting out small records that we don't know about?" See *She's A Rebel: The History of Women in Rock and Roll* (New York: Seal, 1992), 20-21. Even a bankable star like Joni Mitchell who produced her own records was initially forced to have David Crosby ghost-produce her albums. An unknown producer like Sandy Stone—who produced *Tupelo Honey* for Van Morrison, as well as material for Jimi Hendrix and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young—was forced to use pseudonyms. See Stone, "Interview with the Transsexual Vampire," 16. On the climate of the industry towards performers and fans, see Norma Coates, "Teeny Boppers, Groupies, and Other Grotesques: Girls and Women in Rock Culture in the 1960s and 1970s," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 15 (June 2003): 64-94.

fundraise for future projects. The single that was produced featured Olivia Collective member Meg Christian's cover of Carole King's "Lady" on the A-side, backed with Cris Williamson's "If It Weren't for the Music" on the B-side. Hopes were high, according to Dlugacz:

> We were going to send out the 45 … to all the rich and famous people we could think of, predominantly women—actually everyone but our relatives was *all* women—and then they were going to send us lots of money and we could start this company. We got back about $250.

While the 45 did not work as a fundraiser, it sparked the interest of women around the country. As requests came in from those who had not received a promotional copy, the Olivia Collective began to sell it through mail order and at concerts. According to Dlugacz, the Collective was able to sell 5000 copies and raise enough revenue for a full-length LP.[45]

Lowe's contributions to the early success of Olivia Records did not end with her skills as an engineer. Dlugacz later remembered that Lowe's letter essentially read:

> I live in Oregon, and I will drop everything to help you. At any point you need an engineer, I will be there, because I think what you're doing is very important.

The Olivia Collective often deployed Lowe's story as an anecdote. Women like Lowe would, if asked, come out of the woodwork to help develop lesbian feminist culture. In early press releases, the Collective requested that female musicians and other artists respond to an open call. These releases solicited demo tapes, but recognized the reality that many women might not have access to recording equipment: "just write to us and tell you what you do." Ultimately, through a combination of requesting assistance from friends (Williamson, Margie Adam, Shelly Jennings, Anneke Earhart, and Lilli Vincenz) and hiring women who had responded enthusiastically to their press releases, the first full length album that Olivia Records released, Meg Christian's *I Know You Know*, was able to feature a diverse array of instrumentation and vocal arrangements

[45] Dlugacz, "If It Weren't for the Music," 29.

from a variety of female musicians. As a product, the album seemed to legitimize the presence of this enthusiastic network of committed lesbian feminist artists and musicians.[46]

Lowe also helped the Olivia Collective confront the problems of recording women's music in an environment where studios were invariably owned, run, and staffed by men. According to Berson, in an interview published in *Lavender Woman*: "Every problem that we have had has been caused by one thing, and that thing invariably has a penis." In one instance, Lowe asked a studio's male engineer to give her a tour of the local system and equipment. When the tour concluded, she told him that his services were no longer necessary. According to Berson:

> He just got hysterical. He wanted Meg's voice to sound exactly the same on all the songs. So we told him (politely, of course—it was his studio) that we were going to do it our way. He proceeded to make life very difficult for us in lots of subtle and not so subtle ways.

In almost every interview with members of the Olivia Collective between 1973 and 1977, the women noted their desire to build their own studio; this would never happen for financial reasons, but beyond their ideology the Olivia Collective had pragmatic reasons for creating separate facilities for women's music.[47]

The Olivia Collective's conceptualization of women's music was formed from a marriage of intense collective discussions about their countercultural ideology as lesbian feminists and their personal interpretations of their experiences at Meg Christian or Cris Williamson concerts. During their extended discussions, the Collective debated the ways in which women's music, the concert experience of women's music, and the company itself should respond to and reflect lesbian feminist countercultural identity. In terms of making headway into an untested market, this debate was at least partially about marketing a lesbian cultural product to an audience that

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[46] Ibid.; Olivia Records, 1973 Press Release, Women-Culture-Music-Olivia Records, file 1, Labadie Collection, Harlan Hatch Graduate Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

[47] Berson, interview by Joan Nixon, Leigh Kennedy, JR Roberts, and Mary Oberly, "Making a Feminist Record," *Lavender Woman*, Apr. 1975, 12. See also Berson, "Olivia: We Don't Just Process Records"; Woodul, "Olivia Records Talks About Collectivity, Part II," *Sister*, Feb. 1977, 11, 15.

was inherently suspicious of consumer culture. They tried to address this issue in a variety of ways. The company's logo, designed by Kate Winter, was decidedly different from the post-psychedelic art that graced most rock albums; a mix of lavender and pink, the graphic hinted at both neon bar lights and the old 1950s logos of independent record labels, suggesting a mix of bar-scene lesbian identity and underground music. They also flooded lesbian syndicals with a series of press releases. An early version enumerated the Olivia Collective's four main goals:

> 1. To make women's music … available to the public. 2. To provide talented women-orientated musicians with access to the recording industry and control over their music. 3. To provided training for women in all aspects of the recording industry. 4. To provide jobs for large numbers of women, with reasonable salaries and in unoppressive situations.

Other press releases avoided this dry administrative tone. One stated, "We are a group of lesbian/feminists who understand the need for music that speaks from all our experiences and towards our thoughts and emotions." Another read, "We have formed Olivia because we believe that women must control our own culture, our own businesses, and our own media." In either phrasing, the message was clear: Olivia Records was a business, yes, but it was a business organized around lesbian feminist countercultural identity and it was invested in the maintenance and expression of that identity.[48]

The Olivia Collective wanted to hire diverse musicians for session recording and to compensate those women through a pay-by-need plan. The artists who performed on *I Know You Know* were all paid, according to Berson, but "for middle and upper class women, you have the know the difference between what you need and what you're used to. For working class women you have to know the difference between need and reparations." Christian herself decided to forgo payment; she was making a living off concerts. The rest of the Olivia Collective, according to Berson, had "outside straight jobs"—later they, too, would live off of Christian's touring

[48] Unkown (likely Berson), "Olivia Records," *Her-Self*, June 1974, 13; Berson and Harris, "More About Olivia Records," *Musica*, 8 May 1974, 2; Olivia, 1973 Press Release.

wage—so they also chose not to take any money. Interestingly, one of the session musicians also refused her check; Berson recalls, "We had to convince her that long as she has to pay for rent and food she should be paid for her work. That the concept of volunteerism had been used to keep women from having their own source of income, thus making them dependent on men."[49]

The Olivia Collective also debated how to market and sell their albums, especially to different demographics. For example, while much of the early Olivia press and advertising copy was explicitly feminist, the word "lesbian" was only used for explicitly lesbian syndicals. In non-lesbian feminist newsletters and newspapers, the Collective was less overt: according to Berson, "If you advertise a record as a lesbian record, the only people who will listen to it are women who are already lesbians or who are close enough to be interested." Berson and the rest of the Olivia Collective were convinced that the most important part of selling the record was getting women who identified as straight or lesbian but not as lesbian feminist to attend a concert, as they had all witnessed the effect that Christian's concerts had on the uninitiated: "We want to reach them. We want everyone to be a lesbian." The Collective also struggled to balance pricing and production costs to ensure that the record was accessible to women with less disposable income. Five thousand pressings of the record, along with studio and musician costs, meant that the Collective spent $12,000 on the record. Their budget had been for $11,500, with a projected sale price of $5.50. This broke down to $2.25 per disc to pay off production costs, 75 cents profit for the collective to put towards future projects, 30 cents for the distributors, and $2.20 for retail store profit. This meant that the Collective predicted making $3750 profit on the record if they sold out. Extra studio time, however, cut their profits to 60 cents an album, which meant that they would make $3000. In this context, the Collective debated whether $5.50 was a reasonable

[49] Berson, "Making a Feminist Record," 12.

price for working-class women. Would this price, which was essentially going rate for most LPs in the mid-1970s, turn them off?[50]

The Olivia Collective was also forced to confront questions about what women's music might sound like. Clearly, it could not sound like rock music. Feminist critics like Weisstein and Blaisdell made this abundantly clear. Consider their argument against a suggestion by Lester Bangs, a prominent critic for *Rolling Stone*, who had joked that the best way to combat the gender disparity of rock 'n' roll culture was "an all-woman rock 'n' roll band that can create the kind of *loud*, *savage*, *mesmerizing* music that challenges men on their own ground." He continued, "It might even take over some of the more blatant affectations of the lions of Cock Rock, the almost *totalitarian* charisma which strides onto a stage and says that it can *rule the world*." Weinstein and Blaisdell snarked, "Someday, *mein fraulein*, all ziss vill be ours," before listing all the problems they perceived with this stance: the anonymity of the audience ("the lights are out…because, after all, who wants to see *them*"); the lights onstage are flashing as the star singer "undulates" to show women what they should want; the entire performance, even if women-led, is about a band "getting off on their power over" the audience. The authors were clear: "Not one inch of this do we want to imitate." Instead, they suggested that to remove sexism from music, women would have to "change the *total experience* of rock performance." They continued, "We have to involve our audience as equals, include rather than insult them, respect rather than degrade them, play for them rather than at them, acknowledge that our audience is our life, our understanding, our spirit." The Olivia Collective agreed with this summary and worked to transform the performer-audience relations that had typified the performance-based protests of 1960s countercultural groups by presenting their performances not

[50] Olivia, 1973 Press Release; Berson, "Making a Feminist Record," 12.

as a group of individuals performing for a community but rather as a community of engaged, like-minded individuals who performed for themselves and for others, whether as musicians or as their audiences.[51]

The actual performances and stylistic character of Olivia musicians like Christian and Williamson fulfilled Weinstein and Blaisdell's list of demands. Christian and Williamson encouraged their audience to sing along, especially on ebullient songs like Christian's "Ode to a Gym Teacher." They presented their lyrics as personal expressions that were simultaneously meant to capture the shared experiences of the women around them. At the same time, the Olivia Collective understood the utility of depicting the sound of their musicians as unique relative to the rest of popular music and even the sound of folk music, which it so closely resembled. They emphasized Christian's guitar style as "classical," rather than "folk" or "acoustic." Christian *had* been trained as a classical guitarist, but the music on *I Know You Know* was hardly "classical"; the semantic trick, however, suggested that women's music was rooted in a legacy of traditional, pre-electric music. And, indeed, the acoustic, intimate sound employed by Christian and Williamson appealed to many of the lesbian feminist critics of rock music, who argued that the increasing volume and distortion of rock music was nothing more than an amplification of the aggressive male posture that rock promoted. A critic for *Ain't I A Woman?* deployed folk singer Melanie Safka's line "what have they done to my song?" for feminist purposes. Safka's version commented on Bob Dylan's infamous electric set at the 1965 Newport Music Festival. But the *Ain't I A Woman* article suggested that women could not perform effectively in the environment of a traditional rock show where loud amplification, elevated stages, proscribed seating

[51] Weisstein and Blaisdell, "Feminist Rock."

arrangements, extravagant light shows, and the presence of men would necessarily mute the feminine intimacy that was integral to women's music.[52]

The Olivia Collective also differentiated women's music from popular music by emphasizing the character, values, and identity of the lesbian feminists who produced it. Women's music was not simply music by women, but rather a careful articulation of the desires and pleasure of all lesbian feminist women. This was a position that other women's music artists shared. Alix Dobkin of Lavender Jane, for example, argued for self-written material that attempted to redefine the style and expression of lesbian feminism in 1974:

> I can't separate my politics and my music: they are completely symbiotic. One of my purposes in music is to show that there is an alternative, that we don't have to go to men to be entertained, that we have our own culture, our own everything, that we can be independent of men. And when women do get together for women's theatre, women's music, women's culture. That's a revolutionary experience.

For Dobkin, the point and the attraction of women's music was the ability to "say something…that just talking can't express." In this conceptualization, musicians such as Christian could claim that her identity and her method of expressing it were "inseparable to me and are totally vital to each other." Furthermore, it created the sense that if lesbian feminism was, as the Olivia Collective countercultural activists believed, pure, unadulterated feminism, then women's music was the pure, unadulterated expression of lesbian feminist countercultural consciousness. This was certainly the suggestion made by Kay Gardner's *Mooncircles*, an album Olivia began to distribute in 1975. The album's liner notes described Garder's classical-inspired compositions as an excavation of an atavistic women's culture that had existed in the past that had been interrupted and destroyed by the patriarchy. In other words, women's music was

[52] Meg Christian, liner notes, *I Know You Know*; Unknown, "Whatever Happened to My Song?," *Ain't I A Woman?*, Oct. 1970, 4.

actually something old, something that had been taken away from women by capitalism, rock 'n' roll, and the patriarchy, something that Olivia Records was helping to revive.[53]

The Olivia Alternative Norm

The emphasis that the Olivia Collective placed on an essential lesbian feminist identity was echoed in the aesthetic of Olivia Records' brand of women's music. The liner notes for *Mooncircles*, for example, described Gardner's composition as "nothing more than sinking yourself totally into your environment, pulling out and organizing the sounds that are already there." Those sounds included the mixolydian mode, "an almost obsolete scale which according to Plutaarch, Sappha invented"; various instruments like flutes and finger cymbals that women were typically shown to be playing in Egyptian and Greek art; music inspired by contemporary lesbian composers, including Jeriann Hilderely, Laurel Wise, and Pauline Oliveros, as well as ancient women like Aphrodite; song keys that aided in meditation; and music that was an "affirmation of female biology." The clear suggestion was that these particular female rhythms and scales were inherent in every woman and had been for ages; the music Gardner was excavating was "already there" in those women. It was part of what Gardner elsewhere called "the inviolate personal self." It was already the language of expression for lesbian feminism.[54]

In another example, Christian, in "Song to My Mama," portrays her mother as both a representative and victim of the dominant order. Her mother is in deep denial about Christian's sexuality: "Mama / Mama / Well I know you know / But you couldn't survive if I told you so." At the same time, Christian still offers to "Write some cryptic thank yous for giving me the strength to fight / Some safely unspecific things." While the song broadly deals with the

[53] Dobkin, "Lavender Jane Loves…," 7; Christian, "Meg Christian + Ginny Berson"; Gardner, *Mooncircles*, Urana/Olivia Records ST-WWE-80, 1975, 33⅓ rpm.

[54] Gardner and Kirsten Grimsted, liner notes, *Mooncircles*; Gardner, "Sing What You Know of Life," 7.

difficulties lesbians faced in coming out to their parents, this line offers a hint that Christian perceived connections between the parts of her mother's subdued feminine strength that were worth thanking in song and her own powerful lesbian feminist countercultural identity. In a more celebratory example, Christian's cover of "Hello Hooray" argues for the pleasure of coming together as a community: "I've been waiting so long for another song / I've been thinking so long I was the only one." Christian did not describe her music with the same formalism as Gardner—and her use of the modifier "another" does not suggest an ancient quality—but her metaphor of "song" as a transcendent language to unite lesbian feminists or communicate difficult ideas to women still bound within the dominant order resonates with Gardner's assertion that this "song" was "already there" in all women. The notion that this song was comprehensible to all women, even in the mitigated form that Christian described in "Song to My Mama," reinforced the essentialist argument that default femininity was, in fact, lesbian feminism.[55]

At one end of the spectrum, Christian contextualized this notion of "song" in fairly immediate, though powerful, political terms: the song could be used to communicate lesbian feminist countercultural identity to a prospective countercultural public. At the other end of the spectrum, Gardner took this notion to an extreme. The liner notes for *Mooncircles* argued that women's music:

> Resonates with the atavistic place in time of our origins, before the advent of patriarchy …. The music itself was a vehicle for attaining ecstasy…, a journey into awareness of the strength and wholeness in our heritage, which fortifies women for the present and gives impetus to our struggle to regain, come what may, that lost wholeness in our future.

In this description, the Olivia Collective's countercultural activism was framed as a project of recovering the "wholeness" that had been stripped from women by the patriarchy. Gardner

[55] Christian, "Song for My Mama" / "Hello Hooray," *I Know You Know*.

argued that she saw the circular structure of women's music as inimical to the linear structure of rock music because each was, in effect, an expression of male and female biological difference:

> The orgasmic climax in men is a release at the end of a buildup of tensions and energy.… The orgasm for women is in the middle of her sexual expression with the afterplay being as important as the foreplay, and with the potential of beginning the again immediately, this creating the circular form.

Women's music was a natural expression of the female body. It was biologically pure.[56] Of course, it must be noted that the other artists on Olivia Records and the Olivia Collective itself did not necessarily emphasize essentialism with Gardner's expansive, historical narrative or her emphasis on biology. It must also be noted that many lesbian feminists were nonplussed by Gardner's emphasis on the biological/political power of her own music: after listening to the record, which Gardner argued could "transform the elements of sound itself into an authentic vehicle for female content," reviewer Ilona Laney asked, "So what happened? From my point of view, nearly nothing…. The overall effect is close to monotonous."[57]

Still, the Olivia Collective *did* support Gardner's notions in less elaborate ways. For example, during "Song to My Mama," Christian asks, "Are you aware that my women friends / Are filling my life with beginnings and ends?" That is likely not sexual innuendo—though it could be read that way—but the lyrics' cyclical depiction of female relationships echoes Gardner's emphasis on circular rhythms as a reflection of female biology. Even humorous songs like the live cut "Ode to a Gym Teacher," which explicitly told the story of Christian's crush on her gym teacher, hinted at the notion that many women in positions of authority were secret lesbian feminists—the story Christian tells before performing certainly suggests this—or at the very least were crucial mentors that were worthy of celebration. Christian's symbolic gym teacher was clear evidence of the repressed lesbian culture that lay beneath the conservative

[56] Gardner and Grimsted, liner notes, *Mooncircles*.

[57] Ilona Laney, "Mooncircles," *Body Politic*, 1 May 1977, 18; Gardner and Grimsted, liner notes, *Mooncircles*.

veneer of post-World War Two suburban life. Elsewhere, Williamson's use of natural imagery—waterfalls, shooting stars, fire—suggested that the power and strength that these women sought was embedded and available in the natural environment around them. This association of the female body with nature resonated with earlier countercultural definitions of femininity. It also provided an imagined landscape for lesbian feminism: though Williamson's natural environment and Gardner's "atavistic place" were not quite the same thing semantically, the two ideas resonated with one another and gave form to the idea that the essential lesbian feminist countercultural identity was natural, universal, and ancient. In effect, while straight male countercultural agents had constructed notions of "difference" through problematic invocations of class, race, and disability to define themselves as "natural," lesbian feminist countercultural agents emphasized the natural characteristics of their bodies and their relationships to natural environments.[58]

The essentialism of the Olivia Collective's alternative norm did prove constricting, especially for working-class women and women of color. In broad terms, the Collectives's countercultural public was asked to accept specific depictions of a lesbian aesthetic that valorized very specific styling choices: no makeup, natural hair, simple clothing, and harmony with the natural environment. Christian appears barefoot on the cover of *I Know You Know* in flared blue jeans and a simple long-sleeve cotton shirt, surrounded by foliage. Williamson appears barefoot on the cover of *The Changer and the Changed* in a grey tank top and overalls, surrounded by cacti and mountains. Both images subtly reinforced the undercurrent of nature-synced essential femininity.

Such images, in class terms, denied the backgrounds of Christian and Williamson, both of

[58] Christian, "Song to My Mama" / "Ode to a Gym Teacher," *I Know You Know*; Williamson, "Waterfall" / "Dream Child" / "Shooting Star," *The Changer and the Changed*.

whom came from the white middle class and both of whom produced music that reflected middle-class concerns. Christian's work in particular attacked the post-World War Two affluent sensibilities of the middle class. Born in 1946, she offered a nightmarish depiction of the period in "The Hive": a woman dressed in white, while "whitely music" plays, marching towards a sacrificial altar. Elsewhere, Christian seemed to echo Gardner's historical approach when she referenced "ancient loneliness and ancient pain" in "Scars." The "ghosts" that haunted her dreams in "Scars" were the specters of "The Hive"; the ways that postwar gendered expectations and consumer culture denied her sexuality were the scars she now bears. These images resonated with many of the core members of the Olivia audience, who were also largely white and middle-class. The fact that the *subject* of these songs was white and middle class, however, limited the inclusivity of women's music. At the same time, the fact that the image of the subject of these songs was barefoot in nature for both albums underscored a notion of lesbian feminism as an authentic state that transcended class and race. Combined with their emphasis on a folk aesthetic, which traditionally had roots in the labor movement and the working class, we might even be more cynical: the preeminent aesthetic of Olivia's women's music was a metaphor for a fantasy of downward mobility for middle-class women.[59]

At the same time, the women of the Olivia Collective were, in some ways, more mindful of class and race than the counterculture of the 1960s was. With class, they struggled with implementation; the Olivia Collective's alternative norm was transparently middle-class in aesthetic and ideological terms, as were the arguments of Olivia countercultural activists that suggested that lesbian feminist countercultural identity trumped class identity. Woodul and

[59] Christian, "The Hive" / "Scars" / "Song to My Mama," *I Know You Know*. On folk music, see Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).

Berson had both experimented with "downward mobility"—essentially a lesbian feminist term for the Yippies' "drop out"—during their tenure with the Furies. But while middle-class lesbian feminists might attempt to erase class difference (and legitimize their own revolutionary potential) in this way, most still fundamentally believed that social classes *were* different. Consider an illustrative example where Berson, still writing for *The Furies* in 1972 and searching for an appropriate analogy to explain class difference, settled on the following anecdote: "If Mary Lou likes the Rolling Stones and you think they're sexist pigs, but liking the Stones doesn't interfere with her political work or growth, why try to get her to change? How important is it?" Because this passage appears in an article that is *entirely* about Berson's proscription for middle-class women to defer to working-class women in political movements and consciousness-raising sessions, it highlights issues that would plague the Olivia Collective's attempts to deal with class. Berson clearly assumed in 1972 that liking the Rolling Stones was incorrect, despite her contention that working-class women should be allowed to have incomprehensible opinions; her advice was not to accept Rolling Stones fandom as a valid position, but to ignore it. She emphasized that middle-class women *should* ignore such offenses, but only if they were not "detrimental to the functioning of the group."[60]

Of course, Berson and her fellow middle-class activists in the Olivia Collective never seriously entertained the idea that liking the Rolling Stones would ever become a valid strain of lesbian feminist ideological practice. In terms of music, the Olivia Collective suggested to all lesbians, regardless of class background, age, or race, that their particular women's music aesthetic would be the predominant soundtrack to the lesbian feminist political project. They further argued that this soundtrack was, in fact, the natural and ancient sound of all women, an

[60] Berson, "Only by Association," *The Furies*, June-July 1972, 6. On class issues in the lesbian movement, see *The Furies*, Mar.-Apr. 1972, 2-3, 12-13; Unknown, "A Beginning—Ramblings on 'Class,'" *Spectre*, July 1971, 10-12.

argument that denied a vast array of musical tastes and emotional responses that women from any background might have had with music from any number of genres. At the same time, Berson's choice to use this particular anecdote seemed to suggest that liking music that she deemed sexist was a choice that only a working-class lesbian would make and a choice that was frequent enough that it seemed to be an important distinction between middle-class and working-class lesbian feminists. The Olivia Collective denied a diversity of experiences, even between lesbian feminists with similar backgrounds, and marginalized working-class lesbians who were not willing to embrace the Olivia alternative norm.

The Olivia Collective even internalized these concepts in their marketing plan. They divided their potential market into different focus groups:

A) Lesbian-feminists
B) Lesbians who are moderate feminists
C) Lesbians who are not feminists
D) Moderate feminists (het)
E) Non-feminists

These groups were understood in a way that divided the lesbian community into feasible market groups. A discussion of each group offered the following conclusions: moderate lesbian feminists were more likely to have more money than true lesbian feminists; "bar-dykes" were "lesbians who are not feminists," betraying, despite Olivia's official anti-classist stance, a class-defined interpretation of what lesbian feminism looked like; and "moderate feminists" were heterosexual women who needed to be convinced that women's music was not "dyke music (sisterhood crap)." Consequently, despite the emphasis that the Olivia Collective placed on intra-organizational discussions about class, race, and privilege, their actual marketing plan outlined

the clear differences that they perceived between segments of their countercultural public, even as the product they produced denied that diversity.[61]

If the members of the Olivia Collective talked about class, they seemed far more hesitant to speak directly about race. In part, this was due to the fact that there was a lack of racial diversity among the women who were involved with Olivia (for example, the group image of all the women who performed on *I Know You Know* featured only one women of color, the African American singer Aleta Greene), as well as among Olivia's countercultural public. Consider Christian reflecting on a tour in 1979:

> It was an important tour because it featured the music of women of color—it was an important outreach to Third World women in the women's community. The audiences who came were a much broader cultural representation than you see at a lot of women's concerts, and it's really important to Olivia to produce music that is relevant to as many different women as possible.

But while the Olivia Collective might have worked to expand their audience, the promotional images and album covers used by the Olivia Collective, focused as they were on the current members of the Collective and the current artists on Olivia's roster, reinforced the notion that Olivia's countercultural identity was white. It was not until 1978 that Olivia would release an album that featured a woman of color on the front cover: Mary Watkins on *Something Moving*. Linda Tillery *had* recorded a self-titled solo album the year prior, but that cover was an artistic image. And lack of representation remained an issue. According to Tillery, later reflecting on women's music:

> If you were to gather together all of the albums which have been released under the guise of "women's music," you would probably find there has been limited involvement on the part of black women…. Very few black feminists have been recorded, which doesn't mean that there are not black women making music.… These women are out there and because of lack of money it's harder in the beginning for us to be noticed, to be recognized as who we are.

[61] Olivia Collective, "Possible Markets," Olivia, series 2, folder 162, Holly Near Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Black women like Watkins and Tillery did diversify Olivia's roster, but a general absence of women of color, both as performers and as subjects of Olivia imagery, did not serve to expand the countercultural public of women's music.[62]

Consequently, the Olivia Collective struggled to market albums by their white artists to communities of color. In fact, certain attempts only seemed to exacerbate the distance between the Olivia Collective and specific audiences. For example, Teresa Trull's first Olivia album, *The Ways a Woman Can Be* (1977), featured Olivia's mission statement, the lyrics of the album, and Trull's biography in English and Spanish. The Olivia Collective printed their rationale for doing so prominently on the jacket: to "make the concept of this album accessible to a broader spectrum of women." The explanation continued, however, "The lyrics are translated for sense only," before requesting that a native-Spanish speaker might provide a more musical rendering. On the one hand, this type of exercise showed the determination of the Olivia Collective to interact with and build dialogue with women outside of their present audience. On the other hand, the fact that the initial translation was hasty and "for sense only" suggested that Olivia did not already have a relationship with those who could provide a more appropriate translation.[63]

At the same time, the Olivia Collective had trouble promoting albums by artists of color to their predominantly white audience. Tillery's first involvement with the Olivia Collective was to produce BeBe K'Roche's self-titled, sole album (1976), which featured elements of Latin American percussion and several songs written by keyboardist Virginia Rubino. This was Olivia's first electric band, and the album met with criticism from lesbian feminists who disliked electric music. According to Tillery:

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[62] Christian, interview by M.A. Karr, "Meg Christian's Musical Message," *The Advocate*, 12 July 1979, 43; Linda Tillery, interview by Michele Gautreaux, "Sweet Linda Divine: An Interview with Linda Tillery," *Hot Wire*, Mar. 1985, 2-5, 60.

[63] Liner notes, Teresa Trull, *The Ways a Woman Can Be*, Olivia Records LF910, 1977, 33⅓ rpm.

> I get extremely angry when people tell me that rock—really what they're talking about is rhythm-based music—is not a good way for a woman to go. The music I grew up with and that I understand most is music created by my ancestors, my family…. That's telling me I shouldn't express my own culture, that some other tradition would be more appropriate for me. And that, to me, is racist.

Despite signing bands like BeBe K'Roche and artists like Tillery and Watkins, because the Olivia Collective had chosen to emphasize the style of Christian and Williamson as the authentic form of women's music, they had helped to foster resistance to music that deviated from that aesthetic, and especially music that adopted elements of popular rock music, like electric guitars. The lack of sales for *BeBe K'Roche* meant that by the end of 1978 the company did not have enough money to re-press *The Changer and the Changed*, by far their most popular album, and it went out of print. And though Olivia would finance Tillery and Watkins, in general the company's tenuous financial state forced them to focus on recording albums by big name musicians rather than take risks on lesser known artists who had to potential to further diversify Olivia's roster.[64]

Race also played a role in the Olivia Collective's conceptualization of their alternative norm. Williamson, for example, appears in the gatefold of *The Changer and the Changed* sporting a poncho with fringed sleeves that hints at a Native American style of clothing that had been popular with activists in the 1960s counterculture. Because so much of Williamson's music is based on natural imagery, it is hard not to read that image as a further attempt to forge a connection between her lesbian feminist countercultural identity and nature by invoking stereotypical assumptions about Native Americans. In a similar sense, Garder's archaeological explanation of her inspirations for *Mooncircles* traced the lineage of lesbian feminism and women's music back through a history that included examples of various races and, presumably,

[64] Tillery, interview by Mary S. Pollock, "The Politics of Women's Music: A Conversation with Linda Tillery and Mary Watkins," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 10, no. 1 (1988), 18. On their financial troubles, see Dlugacz, "If It Weren't for the Music: Part II," 22-23.

extended to every race. In other words, the history of lesbian feminist countercultural identity was diverse and inclusive even as its current manifestation was perceived by many lesbian feminists as having a fairly narrow definition: white, middle-class in taste, and one with nature. The members of the Olivia Collective invoked racial imagery, though it should be said only in subtle and limited ways, to extend legitimacy to the constructed history of the lesbian feminist identity they espoused, but while they expressed an interest in diversity in practice, they remained largely agnostic about the interests, tastes, and aesthetics of lesbian feminists of color.[65]

These issues with class and race were exacerbated by the emphasis that the Olivia Collective placed on audience participation. That audience had power. As Christian noted in *Lesbian Tide* in 1974, "In a concert situation, both the musician and the women in the audience have to make a conscious effort to create a new relationship with one another…. This means sharing our music, rather than presenting it." At the same time, the power the Olivia Collective extended to their audience created problems, especially when external circumstances compromised their perception of what the experience of a women's music concert should be like. For example, certain venues refused to accept Olivia's women-only stipulation. One YMCA threatened to sue the label for asking about it. While the Olivia Collective did their best to avoid open-concerts (where men could purchase tickets and were not barred from the venue), critics declared such shows a betrayal of the values and culture promoted by the Collective. The activists of the Olivia Collective were torn: it was true that the occasional open-concert was unavoidable, so the matter was somewhat out of their hands, but they was also convinced that straight women, moderate feminists, and lesbians of different class and racial backgrounds were far more likely to attend

[65] Williamson, *The Changer and the Changed*; Gardner, *Mooncircles*.

open-concerts. After Olivia-associate and musician Margie Adam did an interview for *Plexus* in February 1976 declaring that women's music should be for lesbians only, the Olivia Collective was forced to write a long letter to the newspaper to reassert their stance. They argued that "LESBIANISM IS POLITICAL" and agreed that women "do need places and events which are total woman spaces." At the same time, they clarified their position that true feminism *was* lesbianism; expanding the ranks of their lesbian feminist countercultural public required interacting with women who had not yet come out or were uncomfortable with gatherings of lesbians who were largely white and middle-class.[66]

The Olivia Collective's relationship with its countercultural public was tense in other ways. The Collective found it difficult to navigate an audience that seemed to either accept their work without criticism or lash out against it. Christian noted that most of the criticism she and Williamson received focused on how much it sounded like what the reviewer thought women's music should sound like. She noted that this made it difficult for the Olivia Collective to think critically about the quality of their music or expand its aesthetic. She had advice for women looking to review music:

> Did all the songs sound the same? Were the rhythms interesting? The melodies? Did the moods of the songs vary? Were individual songs repetitious? Were they incohesive? Did she use her voice well?

This sounded vaguely condescending, but it is true that many reviews of *I Know You Know* and *The Changer and the Changed* simply gushed at their lyrical content. A few dissenting comments only focused on unwanted elements, like the presence of a mildly distorted electric guitar on Williamson's "Hurts Like the Devil." But this dissent would grow as Olivia Records expanded its palette. Tret Fure, a white rocker on tour with Williamson, found herself asked by

[66] Dlugacz, "If It Weren't for the Music," 29; The Olivia Records Collective, "Olivia Records: Lesbianism is Political," June 1976, 7.

audiences to stop playing because her music was "too loud." Teresa Trull's decision to wear lipstick onstage and in the photograph for Kate Winter's cover for *Let It Be Known* prompted many lesbian feminists to argue that Trull's image was far too sexualized. It seems likely, however, that lipstick was not the only point of contention. The cover of *Let It Be Known* was the first Olivia Records album to feature a white woman who was styled differently than the image that had dominated those mid-1970s record covers: she was not in sync with the natural world around her. Instead, with her bright red lipstick, Trull is whispering something into the ear of a black woman whose face cannot be seen. Albums like *Bebe K'Roche*, *Linda Tillery*, and *Something Moving* could be dismissed by certain segments of Olivia's audience as one-off excursions; *Let It Be Known* revamped the image of one of the primary representations of Olivia's mid-1970s style. It seemed a complete rejection not just of the label's previous aesthetic, but also of the Olivia Collective's countercultural identity.[67]

Women's Music

In 1975 the addition of sound engineer Sandy Stone to the Olivia Collective unexpectedly challenged the tenuous relationship it had formed with its lesbian feminist countercultural public. Stone identified as a lesbian feminist and she has noted that she was "quite open" with the group "about being a transie." As it turned out, "they already knew, but I didn't know they knew." She continued, "What I didn't tell them was that I was still in transition" and for the first year or so "actually preoperative." Stone's skills as an engineer updated the sound of Olivia's "garage-quality music" and expanded the genre of music they could capably record, but public controversies about her work with Olivia suddenly situated the company at the center of broader debates in the lesbian feminist community surrounding gender dissent and the place of

[67] Dlugacz, "If It Weren't for the Music: Part II," 22-23; Christian, "Meg Christian + Ginny Berson," 1; Stone, "Interview with the Transsexual Vampire," 17.

transsexual women. This was an issue that the lesbian feminist community was divided on, but had been a subject of intense debate between pro- and anti-trans lesbian feminists and trans activists since 1973, when several major clashes had disrupted Stonewall commemorations and the West Coast Lesbian Conference.[68]

Comments on Stone's hiring began to appear in the lesbian feminist press in the late 1970s. One 1977 article, simply titled "Women: Please Read," criticized Olivia for believing that "he" was a woman and warned, "Man has learned to change his sexual characteristics, and has been so successful that we can not even tell a natural woman from an altered man. Don't be confused by the convincing performance." It cautioned, "We must learn to recognize the wolf in sheep's clothing." The article concluded:

> We must not be so eager for skills and knowledge that we rationalize away our doubts and sacrifice the integrity of our woman-made culture. … Paternal science falls short. It will never be able to synthetically create women's spirit, women's energy, or women's wisdom.

Lesbian feminists who invoked terms like "synthetic" adopted transphobic notions of Stone's imagined male gender. They believed that the alternative norm that the Olivia Collective had helped to create, which advanced the notion that a lesbian feminist countercultural identity was actually the natural, default state of femininity *and* feminism, was at stake. Transphobic commentators set the imagined lesbian feminist body that was rooted in the imagery of Gardner and Williamson—where lesbian feminist power had developed from a historic, essential femininity; from the specific and natural rhythms of a female body; and from the connection female bodies had with nature—in opposition to Stone's body, which they framed as a synthetic anathema to lesbian feminism: constructed, lab-produced, and nothing more than a disguise. Transphobic logic assumed that to accept Stone as she was—a lesbian feminist—was to accept

[68] Stone, "Interview with the Transsexual Vampire," 17. See Susan Stryker and Stephen White, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 95, 112-133.

that the "natural" aspect of the aesthetic of lesbian feminist femininity was in fact reproducible. The Olivia Collective also began to receive letters from women that "took the form of trashing" their new albums "in terms of the quality of the engineering." Stone noted that some of the letters "made distinctions between what they called 'male' and 'female' styles of recording and mixing." The Olivia Collective was, according to Stone, "stonkered," bewildered that listeners would make that particular argument.[69]

Stone notes that it eventually became clear that the source of such articles was Janice Raymond, a writer who had been sending out drafts of *The Transsexual Empire* (which would be published in 1979), a vituperative transphobic text that singled out Stone as an example of "Sappho by surgery" and a "male-to-constructed female transsexual." In response, Olivia drew up its own press release:

> Persons like Sandy, who have undergone sex reassignment surgery, are technically known as male-to-female postoperative transsexuals. A simpler term for this is "woman." To us, Sandy is a person. Not an issue.

Despite this stance, Stone notes that "this absolutely intractable, small, but extremely 'moral majority'" began to "threaten boycotts" According to Stone, "anything that interrupted our cash flow" would have threatened the company "and so I left." This "scandal" helped to redefine the lines between Olivia and its audience. The alternative norm they had produced together stood in the way of the Olivia Collective's attempts to move forward.[70]

This was not the only issue the Collective faced. In the late 1970s, Berson and Woodul insisted on responding to all criticisms and debates about the Collective's actions personally, which often left them exhausted. Christian felt increasingly suffocated by the pressures that

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[69] Pat Miller, Susan Kahn, Susan Liroff, Diane Edison, "Women: Please Read," 1977 / Olivia Collective, no title, Trans-Scandal, file 7, Gael Shapiro Papers; Stone, "Interview with the Transsexual Vampire," 17.

[70] Stone, "Interview with the Transsexual Vampire," 18; Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1979), xxii.

audiences placed on her to perfectly represent the values of lesbian feminism. Berson argued that "women in the audience" should not "expect that the performer is going to have perfect politics." Constantly under scrutiny and exhausted by the time spent with little money and little else in their lives, the original members of Olivia began to drift away. By 1984 Dlugacz, who had always taken on the administration of the operation and therefore had the least public persona, continued to produce women's music as the only remaining original member of the Olivia Collective.[71]

Still, the Olivia Collective played a central role in the development of a lesbian feminist countercultural ideology in the 1970s. These countercultural activists were successful at linking lesbian feminist politics to creative expression by adopting the vision of a lesbian feminist identity that transcended class, race, and sexuality. That alternative norm, however, caused problems as the Olivia Collective worked to expand their initial aesthetic and diversify their roster of musicians. These struggles offer us insight into what happened when activists who were marginalized by the male-dominated countercultural ideologies of the 1960s attempted to adopt and adopt countercultural practices in the 1970s. The Olivia Collective may have had a more coherent understanding of the value of diversity in a countercultural public, but it replicated many of the limitations of their predecessors.

[71] Dlugacz, "If It Weren't for the Music," 29; Christian, "Meg Christian + Ginny Berson."

Conclusion: "Because We Wanted to Change the World"[1]

"You Are Your Own Alternative" demonstrates that the counterculture offered powerful political and performative challenges in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States. The primary focus of countercultural activism was middle-class culture; countercultural activists believed that the dominant order used that culture to protect the post-World War II social order by suppressing authentic identity and authentic modes of human interaction. Countercultural activists argued that the structural revolution called for by the New Left might well reorganize society, but it could not truly subvert the imperatives of the dominant order—private property, workplace and wage, and familial obligation—that prevented these natural forms of human interaction. Countercultural activists responded to this notion in different ways. Some, like those involved with the Diggers, advocated for "Free" paradigms. According to Emmett Grogan,

> The people need to see other people giving it *all* away before they can dig the basic absurdity of this goddamn parasitical society! It heightens the human contradictions of existing within this inhuman capitalistic system…. It heightens the human contradictions of surviving within or under any system of government that's now maintaining some form of social order in the world today. It heightens the human contradictions to such a degree that a person, if he's really a good man or a good woman, will have to refuse to acquiesce to any society that doesn't fulfill its social responsibility to every human being in it!

Others, like those involved with the Olivia Collective, argued that for new, alternative cultures to be powerful activists should also focus on ways to sustain them. According to Jennifer Woodul,

> Capitalism is a patriarchal development. As such, it's been characterized by two elements which made it especially repugnant to feminists. They are: 1. exploitation of the labor of workers for the accumulation of profit that goes to an elite, providing them with living standards unavailable to workers, and 2. exploitation of the consumer by selling overpriced, low quality, useless, and unnecessary products…. That's where we get interested as feminists. We do need money. Is it possible to use the basics of that system to our advantage, while avoiding 1 and 2 above? And, going even further, can we actually prepare ourselves for a feminist world at the same time?

These approaches were distinct, certainly, but they were directed at the same problem and towards the same goal. In rejecting the emphasis of the dominant order on private property and

[1] Judy Dlugacz, quoted in "Olivia: If It Weren't for the Music," *Lesbian News*, 27 Dec. 2012, http://lesbiannews.com/2012/12/27/olivia-40-years/.

the false choices and desires of middle-class consumerism, countercultural activists looked to create performative spaces where Americans could experience real pleasure. This was a political argument: these activists argued that in cutting their own bodies off from real pleasure Americans were limiting themselves as political, social, and cultural beings, stunting both individual development and the development of communities around the country. In response, countercultural activists valorized free expressions of sexuality; outlandishly adorned bodies; complex music; theatrical celebrations of community; and free access to collective resources like food, clothing, and health care in participatory performance-based protests intended to seduce passersby into experiencing new paradigms of human interaction and expression. In joining in to act out, countercultural activists argued, new converts would discover, through performance and pleasure, their authentic selves.[2]

But while "You are Your Own Alternative" emphatically argues that each of the four countercultural groups it examines was radical, progressive, political, and thoughtful about the way it conceptualized the dominant order and the performance-based methods of activism that could be used to resist that order, taking the counterculture seriously also necessarily means critically interrogating the politics of the counterculture. My approach throughout this dissertation has attempted to highlight the radical political ideas and practices of these groups without eliding their failure to move beyond narrowly advocating for what I call "alternative norms," which countercultural leaders suggested were simultaneously authentic and universal.

The emphasis that countercultural activists placed on this authentic, universal identity tended to assume a number of things that could be alienating to potential converts. They frequently based their ideologies and practices on contradictory and simplistic views about

[2] Emmett Grogan, *Ringolevio: A Life Played for Keeps* (New York: Little, Brown, 1972), 400; Jennifer Woodul, "What's This About Feminist Businesses?," *off our backs*, June 1976, 6-7.

performance and embodiment and conservative notions about race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ability. The freaks, Diggers, and Yippies all conceptualized countercultural identity primarily around that of their primary architects, who were straight white men. Some of those men had ethnic identities that placed them outside or at the margins of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture of the American middle class and some came from working-class backgrounds, but all possessed and wielded privilege in a variety of ways. Because their critique of the middle class relied on their own autonomy from the dominant order, these activists clearly and vocally drew a line in the sand. That line, however, was often drawn in problematic ways. Countercultural activists used ableist and racist language to describe themselves, granting positive valence to pejorative terms as evidence of their revolutionary credentials. At the same time, they invoked homophobic and gender-normative pejoratives to describe the ways they were treated by local police, municipal authorities, and straight people. These investments and obsessions with bodies that were different from their own extended beyond language, at times influencing the ways that countercultural activists interpreted their identities and the world around them. When these countercultural leaders tried to define what a liberated individual looked like, they produced images that were male, white, straight, and able. It *was* a radical alternative, certainly, but it was *also* an alternative norm.

Countercultural leaders rarely seemed interested in accommodating the identities and interests of black, Asian, Latino, Native, female, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and disabled people, unless those individuals were willing to submit to proscribed roles in the group. For example, though many white women *were* involved in these countercultural groups, they often—though not always—were expected to interpret gender in ways that assumed the immutability of the sexes, sex differences, and sex roles. This point should not elide the

experiences that many women had in these groups. Some argued, as Constance Trouble has in speaking to historian Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, that countercultural life allowed them "to freely express … energy without emotional strings, without guilt." In this sense, women embraced countercultural ideology as a means to express their own pleasure. Consider Miss Pamela and Cynderella joking with one another while giving an interview in London in 1970. One sarcastically jokes, "I opened the window yesterday in Chelsea with my boobs flopping out, and would you believe, the entire London mounted police force was riding past!" The other immediately reiterates the politics of freak activism: "What we want to do is travel around and watch people's reactions." Such an exchange demonstrates that female countercultural activists not only embraced the liberating impulses of countercultural ideology but also played a crucial role in the design and promotion of that ideology. Digger Judy Goldhaft later reflected, "I don't think the Digger movement was a sexist movement. I did a lot of stuff that I wanted to do: I was one of the leaders." Goldhaft notes that perhaps some of the *language* used by the Diggers was sexist, but adds, "It was 1966."[3]

Still, the role of women in these groups was constrained because of the efforts of their male counterparts. Women were often left to perform the routine, behind-the-scenes work of the counterculture: planning for protests, creating outfits and props, cooking meals, and caring for children in "alternative" domestic situations. Their bodies were often exploited in countercultural imagery: conquering the female body sexually was frequently a metaphor for revolution, for liberation, and for the virility of male countercultural activists. Countercultural leaders routinely assumed that their alternative norm was phrased broadly enough that it *could* encompass anyone.

[3] Constance Trouble, interview by Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009), 67; Miss Pamela [Pamela Des Barres] and Cynderella [Cynthia Cale-Binion], interview by Unknown, "A GTO is an Average," *IT*, 18 June 1970, 5; Judy Goldhaft and Peter Berg, "The Diggers," in *The History of Collectivity in the San Francisco Bay Area*, ed. John Curl, Judy Berg [Goldhaft], and Allen Cohen (San Francisco: Homeward Press, 1982), 34–35.

This, of course, did not turn out to be the case, and we have several examples of countercultural activists who eventually left and critiqued these groups because of their normative investments. This is not to suggest that the counterculture was immune to debates between white and black radicals or the seismic shifts that occurred in 1968 and 1969 with the advent of the women's liberation and gay liberation movements. Straight white male countercultural activists simply did not handle these debates particularly well, often to their detriment.[4]

There is a broader critique that this dissertation has offered as well, concerning the fact that the formulations of these groups explicitly or tacitly accepted the notion of the authentic self that required liberation. This concept of "authenticity" is worth interrogating for a variety of reasons. It assumed that all Americans would be happier if they were freed from the expectations of the dominant order. An authentic identity as the counterculture understood it more often than not tended to resemble something from the past. For male countercultural activists, images of cowboys, outlaws, bikers, and criminals were often used as representative examples of what "modern" liberated individuals looked like. Similarly, female countercultural activists involved with the Olivia Collective argued that coming out meant embracing a pre-capitalist atavistic femininity that had been corrupted by the patriarchy. In both cases, this reliance on romantic notions of the past tended to belie the counterculture's emphasis on new identities and new forms of creative expression. More critically, this emphasis on authenticity and an authentic self often situated countercultural activists in a paradox. On one hand, their argument that the dominant order was inauthentic and their willful use of collage, disruption, and juxtaposition in their

[4] For some examples of these critiques, see Stokely Carmichael, "Berkeley Speech," in *Contemporary American Voices: Significant Speeches in United States History, 1945-Present*, ed. James R. Andrews and David Zarefsky (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1991), 100-107; Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 94-142; Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 103-138; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 129-137.

aesthetic style anticipated postmodern and poststructural critiques of the New Left's structuralist approach to activism. On the other hand, the counterculture's firm belief in an authentic self that could be liberated from the imperatives of the dominant order—and therefore not be "a product of plasticity"—would be seen by those same postmodern and poststructural critiques as "a myth, an illusion, a sham." Over and over again, countercultural activists called for freedom of individual expression and liberation for the authentic self; in practice, however, they routinely instructed countercultural publics about how to be free and they regularly venerated and valorized particular forms of liberation.[5]

The Legacy of the Counterculture

Airing 8 July 2012, the third episode of writer Aaron Sorkin's television show *The Newsroom* features main character Will McAvoy, an anti-Tea Party Republican news anchor for the fictional ACN network, delivering a speech to his news division president. In it, he argues that the Yippies were to the Democrats in the 1960s what the Tea Party was to Republicans in 2010:

> In 1968, when Rennie Davis and Hayden and their guys organized the SDS, it was specifically to end the Vietnam War. But that movement got eaten by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin and the Yippies…. It was impossible to define what the Yippies were protesting. They were about giving the finger to anyone over thirty, generically hating the American establishment, dropping out and getting high…. That's how the progressive movement would be painted for the next forty years. People passing out daisies to soldiers and trying to levitate the Pentagon….[6]

There are several historical inaccuracies here and the speech *is* fiction, but the more important point is that McAvoy's basic argument is a very recent example of the same old narrative: the

[5] Mothers of Invention, "Plastic People," *Absolutely Free*, Verve/MGM V-5013, 1967, 33⅓ rpm; Henry Abelove, "The Queering of Gay/Lesbian History," in *Deep Gossip* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 42-55. Abelove discusses his students' repudiation of identities like "gay," "lesbian," and "bisexual," in favor of "queer," and their rejection of the notion that there is an authentic gay self that needs to be liberated. Applied more broadly, that notion neatly captures a postmodern interpretation of the counterculture's notion of self.

[6] Aaron Sorkin and Gideon Yago, *The Newsroom*, "The 112th Congress," HBO, aired 8 July 2012. Though this is merely one example of a reference to the counterculture in recent popular culture, it is worth noting that a Sorkin script dealing with the trial of the Chicago 7 is currently in development with Dreamworks, suggesting that Sorkin has positioned himself as the current authority on this subject.

Yippies were illogical and extreme and valorized a set individualistic urges that were arbitrary, indulgent, and "impossible to define." Sorkin's writing fits into a prominent narrative in the history of the 1960s, where 1968 marked the beginning of the end of the "beloved community" of the New Left and the Movement shattered into movements as Marxist, feminist, LGBTQ, and other groups of activists abandoned SDS. In a move that is typical in such accounts, Sorkin lays the blame for this rupture solely on the counterculture, ignoring the failures of liberalism, the limitation of the New Left, and the complexities of countercultural activism.[7]

Sorkin's script is one instance of the counterculture's image in popular memory today and it is a good example of how scholarly narratives of the counterculture from pre-1990s histories of the 1960s have persisted in popular culture. It also demonstrates the fact that both popular and scholarly interpretations of the counterculture have largely been shaped by what happened at the end of the 1960s, rather than what various countercultural groups actually did. The traumas of the late 1960s were not, of course, inevitable, even *if* one does agree that the counterculture was largely responsible for the fracturing of the New Left. And while not all popular accounts are quite as dismissive as Sorkin's is, reflections on the counterculture of the late 1960s, broadly defined, generally tend to follow a similar pattern: extolling the personal, liberating experience of the countercultural lifestyle before arguing that countercultural activism was shallow, apolitical, and easily co-opted by the very culture industries that it sought to subvert. In the moment, it was fine; with a sober second thought, it was clearly naïve and short-sighted.[8]

This view is quite evident in two recent *New York Times* articles, one published to mark the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Summer of Love and the other published to mark the 40th

[7] Historians have begun to challenge this narrative. For example, see Van Gosse, "Postmodern America: A New Democratic Order in the Second Gilded Age," in Van Gosse and Richard Moser, *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 1-36.

[8] This is a view that is often evident in memoirs from countercultural activists. For example, see Osha Neumann, *Up Against the Wall Motherf**ker: A Memoir of the '60s, with Notes for Next Time* (New York: Seven Stories, 2009).

anniversary of the 1969 Woodstock Music Festival. Concerning the Summer of Love, journalist John Leland argues, "In went adolescent idealism and creative energy; out came a lifetime of ads for cars, Pepsi, and retirement plans." Though Leland asserts that "there were other narratives within the Summer of Love" that were more meaningful, ultimately his article seems ambivalent about whether it is "possible to extract the Summer of Love from the distorting filter of narcissism." On Woodstock, music critic Jon Pareles, who was in attendance, argues, "As the buzz wore off, the utopian communal aura of Woodstock, which he calls "one of the few defining events of the late 1960s that had a clear happy ending," gave way to the reality of a Woodstock market." Pareles ends the piece with a kind of eulogy: what the counterculture, which he describes as a "sweetly dated term," proved at Woodstock "was fleeting and all too innocent; it couldn't stand up to everyday human nature or to the pragmatic workings of the market." We might quibble with the analysis in these pieces, but I think the more salient point actually has to do with their tone: the counterculture, in all of its complexity, has been reduced to an obvious punch line for humorous thought pieces: unwashed and unkempt kids stoned at a music festival. In hindsight, how could they *ever* have posed a real threat to the dominant order? This culture of this way of talking about the 1960s counterculture only works because it tries to read the counterculture backwards from the 1970s instead of taking it on its own terms.[9]

This notion seems to owe a great deal to writer Tom Wolfe's description of the 1970s as "the 'me' decade" in a 1976 piece for *New York Magazine*. Wolfe's argument encompasses a variety of topics, but part of his analysis suggests that the intense focus of countercultural activists and other radicals on "the Real Me" in the late 1960s led to a fundamental reevaluation of priorities: in turning their attention to the liberation of the self, 1960s activists succumbed to

[9] John Leland, "Welcome Back Starshine, Marked for Sale," *New York Times*, 20 May 2007, Arts & Leisure, 6; Jon Pareles, "A Moment of Muddy Grace: For a Generation, Woodstock Remains a Community in the Consciousness," *New York Times*, 9 Aug. 2009, Arts & Leisure, 1, 22.

selfishness and abandoned their commitments to social justice, equal rights, and community empowerment. According to Wolfe, "In the long run historians may regard the entire New Left experience as a religious episode wrapped in guerrilla talk." Here, in a passage that implicitly presents the counterculture as part of the New Left, he references LSD, Eastern spirituality, the sexual revolution, women's liberation, rock music, and the hip lifestyle as examples of "experiences" that defined this generation. Similarly, according to journalist Thomas Frank, "The counterculture may be more accurately understood as a stage in the development of the values of the American middle class, a colorful installment in the twentieth century drama of consumer subjectivity." These formulations, both of which judge the counterculture of the late 1960s and early 1970s through the prism of later developments in middle-class culture, are possible only because they assume that the counterculture itself was an "episode" or "stage." It was ephemeral and therefore does not merit critical analysis on its own terms.[10]

One explanation for the emphasis on the ephemeral and transitory nature of the counterculture might be the individual stories of countercultural luminaries. For example, Frank Zappa abandoned the freak scene in 1967 and later disbanded the Mothers of Invention in 1969 to pursue his own music career. Vito Paulekas eventually settled in Cotati, California, and established the Freestore street theater group. Szou participated in the Freestore until she left Vito at some point after the birth of their fifth child in 1974. Miss Pamela became a full-time groupie, and later, after marrying rock star Michael Des Barres, the successful author of several memoirs. Her fellow GTO's left the scene for straight jobs; the exception was Miss Christine, who tragically committed suicide in 1972. Emmett Grogan became addicted to heroin and, at the age of 35, was found dead in a New York City subway car in 1978. Peter Coyote first joined

[10] Tom Wolfe, "The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening," *New York Magazine*, 23 Aug. 1976, 13; Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 29.

several communes and later became a successful actor; he argues that the deaths of several friends in the late 1960s and early 1970s became cautionary tales for ex-Diggers, so "a lot of people got well."[11] Peter Berg and Judy Goldhaft founded the Planet Drum Foundation in 1973 to advocate for bioregionalism. Jim Fouratt abandoned the Yippies and shortly thereafter played a crucial role in the formation of the Gay Liberation Front; he has remained a prominent gay activist. Robin Morgan has remained a committed feminist activist. Jerry Rubin retired from political activism in 1973 and invested in Apple Computer; by the end of the 1970s he was a multimillionaire and had begun to repudiate his 1960s politics in favor of embracing his new status as a Yuppie. Abbie Hoffman remained committed to radical activism to the point of exhaustion, living underground in the 1970s—while Anita Hoffman took care of their son and dealt with a variety of financial difficulties—and eventually died of a drug overdose in 1989.[12]

These stories vary in their details, but most can be interpreted as Wolfe suggests: most of these activists, though they gathered together in the 1960s and 1970s around countercultural politics, eventually became obsessed with personal liberation. For some, artistic and commercial success assumed primary importance. For others, activist politics remained important, but their goals were more focused and less reliant on performance. In the most tragic cases, the intense desire for the notoriety that these activists enjoyed during the heyday of the counterculture led to personal ruin: Coyote suggests that Grogan turned to heroin to fill a void left by the dissolution of the Diggers; Paul Kantner notes about Hoffman, "He probably died of a broken heart…. He felt he wasn't getting enough attention."[13]

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[11] Peter Coyote, "The Free Fall Chronicles: Playing for Keeps," 1997, Digger Archives, www.diggers.org/freefall/forkeeps.html.

[12] See Anita Hoffman's letters in Anita and Abbie Hoffman, *To America with Love: Letters From the Underground* (Los Angeles: Red Hen Press, 2000).

[13] Coyote, "Introduction," Grogan, *Ringolevio* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1990), vii-viii; Paul Kantner, quoted in James S. Kunan *et al*, "A Troubled Rebel Chooses a Silent Death," *People*, 1 May 1989, 100.

Of course, these are *just* interpretations. They assume, for example, that Rubin's transformation into a securities broker in the 1980s is clear evidence that his politics in the late 1960s were insincere and superficial. But what if we offer a different interpretation? Consider an editorial advertisement for a concert to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Olivia. In it, Judy Dlugacz, the sole remaining original member of the Olivia Collective, concludes,

> How many people have this opportunity to change people's lives and also have the opportunity to be acknowledged for having done that? It's a pretty cool position to be in and I have worked really, really hard for this community for all these years. People think, "Oh, she's such a great business woman." No, people have the wrong idea. That's not who I am, it's a game, you have to play it. Did we do this without money? Yes. Did we do this out of sheer will? Yes. Why? Because we wanted to change the world.

While much has changed in the 40 years since the Olivia Collective founded Olivia Records in 1973—including the transformation of Olivia into a cruise line for lesbian vacationers—Dlugacz's explanation of her work still fits into a broad definition of what the counterculture set out to accomplish: the creation and maintenance of alternative countercultural publics and public spaces where activists could feel free to express desires and experience pleasure. More importantly, her words emphasize the notion that even if the world has changed, the basic impulses that motivated her have remained consistent.[14]

Let us apply that notion to other countercultural activists. For example, Zappa became a highly successful recording and touring artist who released more than 60 albums before his death in 1992; though he no longer expressed his politics exclusively through freak ideology, he remained committed to pushing the boundaries of performance and uniting politics with artistry throughout his career, translating strains of his early countercultural ideology to millions of fans around the world. Paulekas might have narrowed his focus to a much smaller community, but he continued to experiment with performance-based protest. As the Diggers disbanded in 1968

[14] Dlugacz, "Olivia: If It Weren't for the Music."

some members looked to rural communes as a better space to explore alternative living arrangements and countercultural ideas; in these back-to-the-land projects, they often were forced to more directly confront the sexual division of labor.[15] Berg's philosophy with Planet Drum was not so different from his notion that one should "create the condition you describe": the mission statement on Planet Drum's website still reads, "What approach can we take to move beyond environmental protests and actually begin living sustainably wherever we are located?"[16] And though the paths of Rubin and Hoffman diverged in the 1970s, Hoffman remained committed to political activism and Yippie ideology. The political ideas that they both articulated in various memoirs lived on to influence new generations of activists. Many positive and negative accounts that see the counterculture as ephemeral all hold fast to the notion that the lifespan of the counterculture was simply a moment in the late 1960s where certain male activists experimented with countercultural ideologies and practices before moving on to more coherent, more realistic, and more focused endeavors. But did they ever really give them up?

Moreover, the above paragraph does little more than join these ephemeral interpretations in their typical privileging of the men who played leadership roles within the counterculture of the late 1960s. But here too we can offer a different interpretation. The women of the GTO's remained active in the rock 'n' roll scene into the 1970s; their ideas about fashion, gender, and sexuality played a role in defining the style and sensibilities of rock culture. For example, Miss Christine is often credited with designing her boyfriend Alice Cooper's signature look. Cynderella was, from 1971 until 1975, married to ex-Velvet Underground musician John Cale. Morgan and Fouratt remained committed to performance-based protest, though their focus was redirected into the women's liberation movement and the gay liberation movement. They did not

[15] Tim Hodgdon, *Manhood in the Age of Aquarius: Masculinity in Two Countercultural Communities, 1965-1983* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[16] Planet Drum mission statement, http://www.planetdrum.org/images/welcome.html.

abandon the ideas of the counterculture; they abandoned the sexism and homophobia. Morgan's countercultural practices became crucial to New York Radical Women and WITCH, while Fouratt's countercultural practices became influential in the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance. These links are clear, but perhaps because these individuals and movements have been marginalized in broader accounts of the 1960s and the counterculture, their adherence to certain strains of countercultural ideology have gone unrecognized.

As have the vast array of groups that adapted and adopted countercultural ideologies after the 1960s, of which the Olivia Collective is only one example. We can clearly see the legacy of countercultural practices in a wide variety of direct action groups: for example, WITCH (formed in 1968); Ann Arbor's White Panther Party (formed in 1968); New York's Gay Activist Alliance, Art Workers Coalition, and Guerrilla Art Action Group (all formed in 1969); the Residents (formed in 1969); West Virginia's Eco-Theater (formed in 1970); Chicago's Feminist Lesbian Intergalactic Party (formed in 1971); Los Angeles' Chicano ASCO (formed in 1972); Chicago's Lionheart (formed in 1979); New York's Guerilla Girls (formed in 1985); ACT UP (formed in 1987) and Gran Fury (formed in 1988); Boston's Theater Offensive (formed in 1989); New York's Circus Amok (formed in 1989); Women's Health Action and Mobilization (formed in 1989); The Five Lesbian Brothers (formed in 1989); Queer Nation (formed in 1990); Church Ladies for Choice (formed in 1991); San Francisco's Transgender Nation (formed in 1992); New York's Lesbian Avengers (formed in 1992); Transsexual Menace (formed in 1994); New York's Sex Panic! (formed in 1997); Oakland's Deep Dickcollective (formed in 2000); Chicago's Pink Bloque (formed in 2001); Maryland's Rhythm Worker's Union (formed in 2001); and Occupy Wall Street (formed in 2011).

Beyond these groups, elements of countercultural ideology and practice are readily apparent but not generally seen in the history of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s: public performances and zap actions; notions of countercultural identity and authenticity; critiques of the artificial nature of middle-class culture; gender dissent; DIY practices; the use of movement, the body, music, and theater as political protest; and collage aesthetics. These elements are visible in a variety of contexts: in politically-engaged music scenes like free improvisation, glam rock, punk, postpunk, hardcore, no wave, industrial, queercore, hip hop, riot grrl, and indie music, as well as elements and aesthetics of those genres that have made their way into mainstream pop music; in progressive and avant-garde theater and performance companies; in fringe festivals and community gatherings; in all manner of performance-based protests employed by a vast array of political activists; in D.I.Y. ideologies; and even in less directly-political actions like Pride parades and flash mobs. Countercultural ideologies and practices are mirrored in many distinct (though parallel) worlds. For example, one can clearly see elements of countercultural ideology in performance artist Adrian Piper's explorations of race, gender, and social etiquette in *Catalysis* (1971) and *Mythic Being* (1973); in the music and choreography of Meredith Monk (once a roommate of Peter Coyote), which focuses on the relationship between bodies, communication, and subconscious desires; and in *RuPaul's Drag Race*, which examines the fallacy of straight-gay binaries, the performative nature of gender, and the problem with strict interpretations of authentic identity. These three examples may admittedly seem anecdotal, but I would assert that they are the tip of an anecdotal iceberg.

Elements of countercultural ideologies and practices are apparent in aspects of the Black Arts Movement, the Red Power Movement, and the Asian American Movement, as well as elements of the activism of the Gay Liberation Front, Greenpeace, and People for the Ethical

Treatment of Animals. We can see these elements in explicit, public protests: for example, the *Wall of Respect*, a 30' x 60' mural that stood at 43rd and Langley on Chicago's south side from 1967 to 1971. The mural, erected by members of Chicago's Black Arts Movement, challenged notions of the ownership of public space, of the vocalization of African American history in public, and of the role of the community in shaping itself and the lives of its inhabitants.[17] We can see these elements in community work: for example, the conceptualization of Women's Advocates, a St. Paul women's shelter that focused on what historian Anne Enke terms "a radical takeover … of *domestic space*" that would allow battered women an opportunity to reframe their own identities in relation to the domestic environment.[18] We can see these elements in new countercultural interventions into old countercultural spaces: for example, musician Animal Prufrock's musical adaptation of the *Hothead Paisan* comics that was performed on 13 August 2004 at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, one in a series of moves away from the festival's roots in the folk aesthetic of 1970s women's music.[19] We can also see these aspects of these elements in protests that, on the surface, seem more traditional: for example, on 5 March 2014, Greenpeace activists draped giant banners on the Procter and Gamble towers to protest the company's destruction of the rainforest and the habitat of tigers. One of the protestors who climbed out onto the front of the building was dressed in a tiger suit.[20]

The embrace of the counterculture's set of tactics in the 1960s was not ephemeral, but rather an important template for countercultural activism (and beyond) in the United States. A diverse

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[17] See Margo Natalie Crawford, "Black Light on the *Wall of Respect*," in *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, ed. Lisa Gail Collins and Crawford (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 23-42.

[18] Anne Enke, "Taking Over Domestic Space: The Battered Women's Movement and Public Protest," in *The World the Sixties Made*, 163-190.

[19] See Sara Werner, *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 139-162.

[20] See Carrie Blackmore Smith et al., "Greenpeace Activists Identified, Hail from All Over the Country," Cincinnati.com (blog), 5 Mar. 2014, http://www.cincinnati.com/article/20140304/NEWS0107/303040064/Greenpeace-protesters-hang-banners-P-amp-G-building.

selection of groups that vary in context and chronology—some of them groups that would not typically be considered "cultural"—were arguably influenced more by countercultural modes of protest than they were by the very different modes used by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, or Students for a Democratic Society. The first question, it seems to me, is not whether the counterculture was important; it is how we, as historians and students of history, should begin to address the historical legacy of the counterculture as it extends into the present. How do political, social, and cultural history look different if we consider the counterculture not as a temporary moment, not as nihilistic and apolitical, and not as a major contributor to the collapse and fragmentation of political activism in the 1970s, but as the proving ground for several powerful and consistent themes in mid- and late-20th century political, social, and cultural activism? How can we insert the counterculture of the late 1960s and early 1970s into new narratives in U.S. history, the history of the body and sexualities, cultural history, and political history? "You Are Your Own Alternative" has attempted to chart one trajectory of countercultural impulses over time in the United States, joining more recent work that has begun to address the diversity, the specificity, and the politics of countercultural groups in the late 1960s by extending that analysis into the 1970s. As more work on the history of the countercultural is published, the profound ways that ideas first inculcated in the late 1960s have become commonplace elements in the radical toolkit of U.S. activists should become more evident.

Second, while this dissertation has provided an in-depth look at four countercultural groups, the freaks, Diggers, Yippies, and Olivia Collective were all urban and coastal and there is a vast array of other countercultural groups that have not been studied by historians. Exploring the experiences of back-to-the-land or separatist communes might be a valuable next step in this

analysis. Additionally, historians might work to bridge the gap between countercultural groups and more traditional organizations that embraced avant-garde and unconventional methods of performance. The counterculture's embrace of such techniques outside the realm of formally organized avant-garde cultural institutions was novel in 1960s; the legacy of this embrace, however, is that the use of such techniques has become more commonplace and therefore less obviously remarkable. We must address this issue by following such techniques across time, genre, and context.

Third, historians must do more to address the political nature of the counterculture and do so by pulling the methodologies of political, social, and cultural history together to examine the often willfully obtuse but complex critiques that these groups made about the dominant order. A full accounting of the ideologies and practices of the counterculture requires attention to the language and style they preferred; though many critics have dismissed these as "impossible to define," countercultural activists assumed that their countercultural public would understand their message and feel a sense of belonging built upon shared lingo, clothing, and attitude.

Fourth, countercultural activism was not simply a series of extraordinary performances, but rather a committed lifestyle that was based on evolving ideas about authenticity and acting. Everyday examples of countercultural resistance reveal a vast array of choices made by countercultural activists that would barely register when placed under the lens of conventional political and social history. For all of the grief that countercultural activists have received for being attention seekers—thanks to the emphasis placed on their most astonishing performances—most clearly believed that the most powerful form of resistance was the simple choice to live differently. This choice led to a series of pragmatic and material decisions that are themselves evidence of a deep commitment to political activism in everyday contexts: whether

stealing to survive or striving to fashion alternative businesses, countercultural activists did not leave their politics on the picket line.

Taking the counterculture of the late 1960s and early 1970s seriously means interrogating its emphasis on authenticity and the ways in which that emphasis contributed to the maintenance of various conservative ideas about class, race, gender, sexuality, age, and ability. But with that said, the ideas of the counterculture are still worth closer examination for the ways that their emphasis on performing pleasure—and the diverse interpretations different activists might have of "pleasure"—have inspired, motivated, and given shape to a variety of everyday and extraordinary forms of activism in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. The simple idea that "you are your own alternative" had profound ramifications as activists began to embrace the notion that the personal was political.

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IT

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